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*AN ARGUMENT FOR THE VERBAL INSPIRATION OF
THE BIBLE.*

By the REV. PRINCIPAL H. S. CURR, M.A., B.D., B.Litt.

THE verbal or plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture may be concisely, if crudely, defined as the Word of God in the Words of God. The Bible thus contains a corpus of truth regarding God, and man, and the world at large, unattainable by research or reasoning. Such wisdom can only come down from above. There is a general agreement amongst Christian theologians that the claim just stated is valid, a claim, which it should be very carefully noted, that the Bible makes for itself. When its authors have occasion to refer to what they may have said or written, they never hesitate to asseverate that they are the spokesmen of God. Flesh and blood have not revealed the things which they speak or write. Their origin must be sought in the ministry within their hearts and minds of that Divine Spirit Who has been appointed by God to lead the spirit of man into the knowledge of all truth. A claim so tremendous must be true, or it proclaims its authors as irresponsible individuals. The latter hypothesis seems to be barred by the nature of the teaching for which such exalted claims are made. If its ultimate source be not God Himself, it is certainly worthy to be so described. It may be fairly said that this contention regarding the Bible as the vessel containing the truth of God, and the demonstration which such a claim furnishes by its very audacity, would be freely conceded by all orthodox scholars even in this present age.

When we turn to consider the records of Divine revelation, there is considerable divergence of opinion. The majority of modern Biblical students would doubtless accept Dr. Stanley

Cook's brief description of Holy Writ as man's story of God's doings. The substance is Divine, but the narration is human. The soul is of heaven but the body of earth. This implies that the written account of the revelation is attended with all the limitations and drawbacks associated with the work of man, especially in such ancient times as saw the production of the literature which has been incorporated in the Bible. In fairness and justice, it ought to be added that this definition leaves room for human genius. The achievements of the race in the literary sphere must also be considered as well as its handicaps. It is then regarded to be a sufficient explanation of the literary miracle which we know as Holy Scripture that it represents the human story of God's dealings with the sons of men along certain lines with redemptive intent for the whole human family. In any case it must be admitted that this story is told by individuals of such spiritual and intellectual eminence that they constitute a class by themselves. Lord Macaulay has said of Boswell's Johnson that we do not compare other biographies with it. We test and estimate the lives of famous men by reference to Boswell. In the same way, the books of the Bible are not compared with other books. Other books are evaluated by reference to them. I do not think that sufficient emphasis is laid on the natural ability of the Biblical writers, quite apart from all supernatural considerations. Plato and Shakespeare are unspeakably great, but even they must be placed in a different category from the authors of the Old and New Testaments.

The doctrine of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture, however, is based on the conviction that no human genius could ever have produced such a body of writings as the Bible comprises. The purpose of this paper is to adduce evidence based on the actual words of Scripture to prove that a supernatural explanation will alone fit the facts. Before that is attempted, it may not be inappropriate to refer to the relation of ideas and words. In some quarters it is maintained that we think in words. I have no intention of arguing that point. It is merely mentioned as an illustration of a dictum which cannot be gainsaid that the relation of thought and language is as intimate as that of body and mind. Whether ideas can exist without words, it is impossible to say. We are on surer ground when it is asserted that the supreme method for the communication of ideas can only be words. Signs, and sounds, and sights, and

colours are all capable of serving as channels of communications, but only as aids and auxiliaries to words. Without verbal assistance other methods are futile. They serve as an admirable commentary on the text, but they can never be substitutes for the text itself. These observations emphasise the importance of words. Indeed, the protagonist of verbal inspiration would argue that the words in which the Word of God is conveyed to the mind of man are not far removed in importance from the truths which they embody. In that connection, reference may be made to an unexpected and unsuspected confirmation of that proposition. I refer to the science of textual criticism. It is remarkable that while the doctrine of verbal inspiration is largely discarded, the investigation of the text of the Old and New Testaments is prosecuted with a thoroughness which would not misbecome those who still think that the diction of the Bible is such as to demand a superhuman origin. Particles and prepositions are considered worthy of minute study. The jots and tittles of the law are studied in a fashion which might even make the Massoretic scholars envious.

The argument of this paper is that the wording of the Bible is in itself evidence of the Divine authorship. That observation takes full account of the unsatisfactory state of the text, a problem which is not confined to Holy Scripture by any manner of means. It is shared in common with all ancient literature, and, in lesser degree, with the words of authors whose careers only date a few centuries before the present hour. The difficulty is not disputed. It is only urged that the text of the Bible maintains an adequate average for certain conclusions to be based upon it. The validity of these is independent of textual uncertainties.

One such argument is that the Bible exhibits an example of the creation of a special vocabulary for the conveyance of certain truths. That is most easily and clearly perceived in the New Testament. When its twenty-seven books were written, the Greek language had become the finest vehicle for the expression of abstract ideas ever known. The problem of the authors was to find words in which to clothe unique ideas. That was accomplished not by coining new terms, except in a very limited degree, but by performing the literary miracle of putting new wine into old bottles without spilling the precious fruit of the vine. Reference need only be made to such a key-word as

“ grace ” to appreciate that point. Whatever good and gracious significance it had for philosophical paganism, it was transfigured before it appeared in the pages of Romans or Ephesians. Another striking illustration is the idea which is represented in English by such words as “ meekness ”, “ humility ”, “ lowliness of mind ”. The Greek expressions, used by the authors of the New Testament to indicate this virtue of which Augustine said that it was the first, and second, and third thing in true discipleship, is found in classical writers but with a very different significance. For them the term does not refer to the habitual self-abasement which is the result of walking with God, but its caricature. Thus Aristotle employs some of these characteristic New Testament expressions, signifying meekness and lowliness of heart, to describe servility of the most contemptible kind, the behaviour of the sycophant cowering and cringing before some exalted personage. That has neither part nor lot in that true humility with which all believers are bidden by the Bible to be daily girded. The reclamation of the word, and its adaptation for the highest uses, thus furnishes another instance of what is meant when it is said that the writers of the New Testament had practically to create a vocabulary in which to convey the heavenly truth, as it is contained in the Gospel of Christ.

I am not unmindful of the debt which the New Testament authors owe to the Septuagint, the great translation of the Old Testament into the Greek, completed not less than one hundred and fifty years before the Advent of Our Lord. It is often quoted in the New Testament, and there can be no doubt that it materially aided in the solution of the problems presented by the clothing of Christian doctrine in words ; but when full allowance has been made for the debt under which it placed the New Testament writers by providing them with a terminology, it must be acknowledged that there is still left ample room for a literary miracle. The doctrines of Christianity were stated in language which leaves nothing wanting in adequacy or felicity. That observation will be more deeply appreciated if the task of a missionary who is trying to translate the New Testament into some rude and barbarous tongue be called to mind. The narratives can be rendered with more or less ease ; but when it comes to finding an equivalent for such a phrase as “ justification by faith ”, the difficulty becomes most acute. But the task of the New Testament writers was incomparably harder, since the Gospel of Jesus Christ was then a new thing in the world.

Their success in achieving what verged on the impossible is surely evidence that it was due to the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit.

Turning to the Old Testament, it is much more difficult to speak with confidence. It is written in Hebrew and Aramaic, although the amount which appears in the latter tongue is so small as to be negligible for our present purpose. Unlike the New Testament, which was written during the life-time of the Apostle John, the Old Testament occupied several centuries in its composition. Our knowledge of the history of the Hebrew language is not sufficient to warrant any statements regarding the sanctification of words by their use in connection with Divine things, as in the case of Greek, the tongue of a pagan people, and there is no need to go more deeply into this aspect of the subject. The evidence furnished by the New Testament is amply sufficient to justify the claim made that the creation of a Christian vocabulary is a feat, so mighty and marvellous, as to require supernatural aid.

The arguments, which have so far been urged, will not perhaps carry the same conviction as those based on the use of the words which have been chosen to serve as the means whereby the message of salvation could be imparted to the minds of men. The words had to be made into sentences, and paragraphs, and books, and when we begin to contemplate the literary fabric, we are so struck with its simplicity and felicity that the verbal inspiration of the Bible does not seem to be so incredible as many are disposed to think. The combination of limpid simplicity with literary excellence, offered by Holy Scripture, is of such a kind as to demand that the inspiration of its writers must differ in degree and in kind from the inspiration of all other authors. They must have been inspired by the Spirit of God Himself. There is a passage in Mr. Gladstone's book, *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, which puts the argument very effectively. "John Bright has told me that he would be content to stake upon the Book of Psalms as it stands, the great question whether there is or is not a divine revelation. It was not to him conceivable how a work so widely severed from all the known productions of antiquity and standing upon a level so much higher, could be accounted for except by a special and extraordinary aid calculated to produce special and extraordinary results; for it is reasonable, nay needful, to presume a due correspondence between the cause and the effect. Nor does

this opinion appear to be otherwise than just. If Bright did not possess the special qualifications of the scholar or the critic, he was, I conceive, a very capable judge of the moral and religious elements in any case that had been brought before him by his personal experience" (page 131). If such a claim can be made on behalf of an Old Testament book, how much more does it apply to the New Testament which surpasses the Old as gold to silver, or the sun to the moon.

Both the simplicity and felicity of diction which characterise the pages of Holy Writ in such abundance and variety as to demand a supernatural explanation, are illustrated in the Psalter, especially in those psalms which are known and loved by all believers. Attention, however, may profitably be concentrated on its simplicity, a feature which it shares in common with all the Books of the Bible, most notably the Johannine writing. As a general rule, the language of Holy Scripture is so simple that anybody of intelligence can understand something of what the words mean. This point may be exemplified in a very effective way by reminding ourselves that, in learning a foreign language, there are few easier texts for the beginner than the translation of the Bible into the tongue which is in question. The Scriptures have been rendered into an enormous number of languages and dialects, and they serve the double purpose of providing the reader with that knowledge of God and Christ wherein standeth the secret of everlasting life, and also of furnishing simple sentences with ordinary words whereby the learner can gain an acquaintance with them.

The exquisite simplicity of the Bible's language is indeed a thing to be wondered at, and all the more so because it is the vehicle of truths whose sublimity and profundity must ever defy adequate analysis, or even appreciation, on the part of men. In a few artless words the Bible will convey information whose full significance it is impossible to grasp. It is only necessary to mention such passages as "God is light" (I John i, 5), or "I am that I am" (Exodus iii, 14) in demonstration of that claim. In the pages of Scripture the most familiar words are made the channels for the conveyance of the most unfamiliar ideas. Indeed, one can apply to the words of the Bible, often so common and commonplace, the lines of Wordsworth:—

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

If anybody feels disposed to doubt this contention, let him read the Parable of the Prodigal Son, either in Greek or in English, and he will find again the simplest words used to tell the love of God which passeth knowledge in a way that cannot be bettered.

The felicity of the Bible is even more remarkable. Not only do we find in its pages the truth of God set forth in words which even the wayfaring man can understand and remember, but the beauty of the words and sentences and passages is like nothing on earth. The opening verse offers an excellent instance. George Gilfillan wrote that when he first read the first words of Genesis in Hebrew, he was almost speechless with wonder and delight. To him not only the words used but their sound when pronounced seemed to be wholly worthy of the fact of which they testify. That is saying a good deal, for the reader is informed in the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, a discovery unattainable to the mind of man except by revelation from God, and yet the Bible states the fact in a way which of itself bears the imprint of a Divine source. All through the scriptures similar passages may be found. It is invidious to compare them as to their majesty or sweetness, for one star differeth from another in glory. There are, of course, sections where the style does not soar to such heights, but those in which it does are so many that the reader must be troubled in spirit to find an adequate explanation of such verbal wizardry apart from such a theory as plenary inspiration by the Holy Spirit.

This argument is all the more telling because the Bible is the work of several authors. It was composed in three languages. Its facts were committed to writing in different centuries and in vastly different places. Jerome only did it justice when he referred to the Scriptures as the Divine Library. It is a literary museum, and still one finds amidst their bewildering diversity of date and origin evidences in the language which seem to prove conclusively that those who were responsible for literary monuments of such enduring glory must have been aided from above in a unique way, and in a unique measure.

In passing, it may be observed that this is an outstanding case of God's loving wisdom. It might have been His good pleasure that the Bible should have been written in the simplest words, but in a fashion which lacked distinction or literary power, or charm. Students of the Koran inform us that its pages are as

dull as the desert to all but Arabs, who seem to find pleasure as well as profit in its perusal. It is far otherwise with the Bible. The truth that cometh down from heaven is clad in a vesture of words which may be compared to the lilies of the field in all their glory. The golden apples are preserved in baskets of silver. The Bible is not only profitable to read but also enjoyable, and that is due to the supreme skill with which the old, old story of Jesus and His love is told.

It only remains to emphasise one other aspect of this line of argument for the verbal inspiration of the Bible. I refer to the influence which the latter has exercised through its translations. Indeed, the suggestion might be hazarded that Holy Scripture has accomplished more in its renderings into divers tongues and languages than in the original. The mere mention of some great translations should suffice to give colour to that observation. There is the Vulgate, the celebrated rendering of the Bible into Latin. Its influence has been almost immeasurable. Great although it has been, it pales before the Authorised Version of the Bible so far as its effects on the minds and hearts of men go. To my thinking, one fact alone needs be mentioned by way of evidence. The supreme English classic is the Authorised Version, and yet it is not an original work. It is only a translation, and there is a Spanish proverb that translators are traitors. Nevertheless, the language which was native to Shakespeare, and in which he wrote, boasts as its supreme achievement the incomparable translation of the Bible, known as the Authorised Version. That is no free paraphrase of the originals but a rendering which is as close as is compatible with the literary excellence for which it is so justly famous. I am perfectly well aware that exceptions to that statement must be admitted, and that a multitude of minor reservations and qualifications must be made, but in the main it can be said that the Authorised Version is a faithful translation of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. When we think again of its inexhaustible grace and truth, it is surely impossible to deny that there is more significance in the words of the Bible than attaches to those of any other literary composition.

In conclusion, it may be noted that the Bible itself has something to say about its own diction. That observation applies both to the Old and New Testaments, more especially to the former where there are several passages in which the experience

of Divine inspiration is described in a way which seems to leave little room for dispute that it consisted in something more than instilling certain truths into the mind of man. Not only the thoughts but the words in which they are clothed and conveyed are ascribed to Divine agency. *A propos* of Mr. Gladstone's reference to the Psalter, these verses in the second book of Samuel are worthy of quotation. "Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesus said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my mouth" (xxiii, 1-2). In the same strain, we may recall the mysterious saying of Our Saviour that the words which He spoke were spirit and life (John vi, 63). Even more clear is the testimony of the Apostle Paul when he declares that the things which he spoke, were not in the words that man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth (I Corinthians ii, 13). These and similar passages appear to lend support to the theory that even the words of the Bible were inspired of God. That is corroborated by the nature of the words themselves in their breadth, and length, and depth, and height. Buffon's dictum that style is the man himself is often quoted. It can be verified from the Bible. The style of Amos accords well with the herdsman of Tekoa, and that of Luke with the beloved physician. But the style of the Biblical books accords still more with the Divine author so that we may vary Buffon's remark and say, "The style, it is even God Himself".

DISCUSSION.

Colonel A. H. VAN STRAUBENZEE wrote: Our Lord has told us Satan is the Prince of this Age, his enmity being specially directed against the word of God as "written"; he has always set men's minds against the inspiration and divine character of Christianity while there is no such enmity shown against the religion of Mahomet, and no such anxiety to disprove it.

Many men make the great mistake of supposing the "Word" is made to satisfy man according to his thoughts, and not to communicate to man God's will and thoughts. Many things are related in the Scriptures, such as the malice of Satan, the mistakes and evil thoughts of men. All these are given by inspiration, that we may

know man, and the ways of God. At the same time God's own thoughts are communicated to us, to enable us to judge all this according to His judgment.

When men spoke by inspiration, they uttered a revelation which was absolutely true because from God. This did not make them infallible, but only perfectly true and divine in what they utter, because inspired.

What does the Scripture say for itself? Let us read 2 Peter i, 19-21: "And we have more sure the prophetic word, to which ye do well that ye take heed (as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the Day dawn and the Morning Star arise) in your hearts, knowing this first that any prophecy of Scripture never came of its own unfolding (or sending forth) for not by the will of man was prophecy at any time brought, but, being moved by power from on high, men spake from God."

Many teachers tell us that prophecy is a dark place and we do well to avoid it, but this Scripture declares that the world is (spiritually) a dark place, and we do well to take heed to the prophetic word, as being the only light that shines in it, and illumines us in the darkness.

The Scope of this passage does not speak of what Scripture *means*, but whence it came. It refers not to the sense of Scripture, but its source; not to its interpretation, but to its origin.

Scripture never came from its own sending forth, because it never at any time came by the will of man and therefore not from the prophets' own inner consciousness.

The word "God" is emphatic here and points to the fact that He Himself is the sole source of Holy Scripture.

2 Tim. iii, 16: "All Scripture is God breathed, and it is God who spake by the prophets—the words were God's, the mouth and the pen were the prophets'; and as trees under a strong wind each give forth their own peculiar sound, so men under the power of the heavenly wind gave forth things which were typical of the writer.

On at least seven occasions the Christ of God between His Baptism and Crucifixion, stated clearly that His Words, all of them in the fullest sense, were the words of God:—

1. John vii, 16. "My doctrine is not mine but His that sent me."

2. John viii, 28. "As my Father hath taught Me, I speak these things."
3. John viii, 47. "Why do ye not believe Me? He that is of God, heareth God's words."
4. John xii, 49. "The Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment what I should say and what I should speak."
5. John xiv, 10. "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself."
6. John xiv, 24. "The Word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me."
7. John xvii, 8. "I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me."

So in the Old Testament to Moses, Deut. viii, 18: "I will put my words in his mouth," and to Is. ii, 16: "I have put my words in thy mouth."

How did individuals like Hezekiah, Joseph, David, Isaiah, Daniel, Mary, Simeon, treat the Word and act in the face of Scripture, which must have been hard to understand, though clear now to us? We are told in 1 Peter i, 10-12, "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow . . . which things the angels desired to look into."

Dr. J. BARCROFT ANDERSON wrote: The word "inspiration" is a Latin word, and means "blown-into." It is used only twice in "The Bible," that is the Authorised Version of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

In Job xxxii, 8, the words spoken by Elihu, the Buzite, are given as: "The inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." But the Hebrew word here translated "inspiration" is the ordinary Hebrew word for breath, a Hebrew word that occurs exactly 24 times, and is 17 times translated "breath."

The other place where the word "inspiration" is found is in 2 Tim. iii, 16, where The Bible says: "All Scripture is given by

inspiration of God." But in so translating the Greek, it completely misrepresents the Greek, the translation should be "entire writing god-spirited." Words written by Paul of the Hebrew Old Testament words that describe, not how the Hebrew Old Testament came to be, but which describe the nature of its words. Even as in John vi, 63 we find: "The sayings I have spoken to you, they are Spirit."

Consequently I think we would be wise to get rid of the word "inspiration" when speaking of what is written in the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. All these Scriptures themselves explain how they came to be. In Ezra vii, 6, The Book of Moses (Mark xii, 26) is stated to have been given by Jehovah, God of Israel. Its entire structure implies this. Its permanent place was beside the Ark, inside the Veil, where the sons of Aaron alone were allowed to enter. It contains words spoken on this planet before its solid matter was raised above sea level. Not a mere translation of such words. Words exclusively divine. A language from which all other languages have come. Josephus records how, when the King of Egypt in exchange for great wealth was allowed to borrow this book to be translated into Greek, he was surprised at the quality of its papyrus. All its letters were gold. The Author of this book guaranteed it correct to the smallest letter and to every one of the horns that were on some of the letters, when He said: "Until the heaven and the earth may have passed, one I and one horn by no means may have passed from the instruction (nomos) until all may have come to be" (Matt. v, 18). Ginsburg, in the marginal notes on the Hebrew manuscripts of this book, found 1,722 letters of this "Book of Moses" recorded as having 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 7 of these horns attached to them. And a record of the particular part of the letter to which each horn was attached. A record which seems to imply that the original form of Hebrew letter used, was the same as that of printed Hebrew to-day. This belief is not now held by the theologians. They presume that the creator of All-things, must, in His Tabernacle in the Wilderness, to which He admitted nothing of human initiative, have used an alphabet of human design.

One recent exhaustive Hebrew English dictionary distinguishes throughout, between the Hebrew of the Sacred Scriptures, and all other Hebrew.

AUTHOR'S REPLY.

I have to thank Colonel van Straubenzee and Dr. Barcroft Anderson for their communications. They hardly deal with the precise phase of inspiration which it is the purpose of the paper to discuss, but they are none the less interesting and instructive as throwing light on a large subject. The list of seven sayings of Our Lord, bearing on the whole question, is specially welcome.