

INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

A TREATISE ON THE
INSPIRATION
OF
THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

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PREFACE.

THE author who publishes a work acknowledges by the very act that he believes such a work to be needed. There is certainly great need at present of correct views on the subject of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Whether this treatise will contribute in any way to promote these views, others, not the author, must judge. He claims nothing original. The same topics, though, so far as he knows, not in the same order, have been discussed elsewhere more thoroughly, and by abler minds. He has merely collected into a small compass matter distributed through many books, which seldom come under the perusal of common readers. This treatise is intended for such readers, and not for the learned. If it shall tend to disseminate sound views on the important subject which forms its theme, to Him be the praise to whose grace we are indebted for the inestimable gift of His Holy Word.

The statement made concerning the popular aim of the work will render unnecessary any explanation of the fact that many questions, necessary in an exhaustive treatise, but out of place in one intended for popular use, have been omitted.

Due acknowledgments have been made to writers

whose works have been used. These will be found in the body of the treatise. Sometimes, however, quotations have not been indicated by inverted commas, for the reason that the author was obliged to abridge the passages cited and employ his own language.

THE AUTHOR.

EDINBURGH, 1877.

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PART I.



CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

A VERY remarkable book, entitled the Bible, exists in the world. This book is not of recent origin: it has come down to us from remote ages. It consists of sixty-six small books, differing from one another in various particulars, according to the authorship and design of each; the oldest of which were written about fifteen hundred years before the birth of Christ, and the last near the close of the first century of our era. A book whose composition extends over so long a period must of course have been the work of various authors, and written at different times.

This book claims to be a revelation from God, and in this character it has been received by the Church from generation to generation until the present time. Men of the highest intellectual endowments, of every rank and of every profession, have acknowledged its claim, and submitted to its authority. Others, eminent for their science and erudition, have exercised their talents and ingenuity to make it utter contradictions, and prove it false; but it still remains the Incomparable Book, and its evidences derive fresh lustre from every assault. The very means used to destroy it have been turned to its support. A divine power resides in it,

which has shivered, with godlike ease, the armour of its most powerful enemies. 'He that sitteth in the heavens' has laughed at their temerity, and brought their foolish counsels into contempt.

The Bible professes to give the history of our world, so far as that history is connected with the scheme of redemption, during the period of four thousand years. This period begins with a miracle and ends with a miracle. The first is the creation of the world; the second the appearance of the Eternal Word in our flesh. These two miracles, of the creation and incarnation, stand out distinct from all others; the former constitutes the beginning of the world's history, the latter its central fact. All history revolves round the person of the God-man. Between these two great epochs lies the era of sacred history, distinguished by God's progressive revelation of Himself. It exhibits to us theophanies, miracles, and prophecy. These are not spread uniformly over its whole course, yet they are essential to it, and it ceases to be sacred when they disappear.

If we take the Bible for what it professes to be, we cannot eliminate the miraculous element from sacred history. The union of this element with what, for the sake of convenience, may be called the human element of Scripture history, is so intimate and essential, that any attempt to disunite them would result in rejecting both. This is not because of the number of miracles, but because their connection with the sacred record is of such a kind as to make them inseparable from it. They are not embellishments that can be spared from the narrative without injury to its continuity and completeness, or excrescences that can be cut off, or a foreign element that can be sorted out from its proper teaching, and set aside as no part of it. On the contrary, the shape and movement of events in the Bible

are dependent on the supernatural action; and the results of the human history which it records are ruled and coloured by the superhuman influences that predominate in the midst of them. The natural and the supernatural in the narratives of the sacred volume are blended so as to form one organic whole, which cannot be analyzed into its component parts, but must be accepted or rejected in its integrity and as it stands.

‘Even were it possible to separate between what has been intimately joined together in Scripture, without destroying the substance of the text, it could not be done without fatally destroying the moral character of the religion. Christianity bears upon its front a profession that it comes from God, and is attested by His miraculous attestations; the Author of Christianity pointedly and frequently appealed to the works that He did as evidence that He bore the commission of His Father, and He was contented to abide the decision which such an appeal involved, when He claimed from His enemies to be believed, if not for His own, yet at least for His work’s sake. To answer this appeal by the denial or rejection of the miracles of the Bible, is to destroy at one blow both the outward evidence to which it points, and the moral character of the religion which it records. The claim made to the power of working miracles, and the appeal to them as the test and witness of His authority, leave no alternative but either to receive the teaching as a revelation from Heaven, or to reject the Teacher as One that has untruly said that he comes from God. Either the works on which he built his doctrine were supernatural, or that doctrine has wrongfully claimed a divine authority over the conscience.’¹

¹ *Inspiration: The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures.* By James Bannerman, D.D. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. 1865. Pp. 12, 13.

Naturalists and rationalists deny the supernatural, and consequently reject the miraculous element of the Bible. The former explain the phenomena of the universe by a blind force acting necessarily. The latter consider reason our sufficient and only guide, exclusive of tradition and revelation. Supernaturalism is opposed to both these, and teaches that there are in nature more than physical causes in operation, and that in religion we have the guidance not merely of reason but of revelation. It holds the doctrine of a divine and supernatural agency in the production of the miracles and revelations which the Bible records, and in the grace which renews and sanctifies men.

Questions pertaining to the supernatural lie at the foundation of the subject under discussion; but as they belong properly to the department of apologetics, or evidences of Christianity, we pass them over, and assume what in that department we would be required to prove.

We assume the existence of a personal God, the creator of all things visible and invisible. The assumption that the universe was created by God necessitates the assumption that the laws which govern it are His appointments. They are uniform and permanent merely because He wills it, and not by reason of any inherent and necessary immutability; for there was a time when they were not, and a time may come when the present constitution of things may be changed, and the present laws be modified in adaptation to that change. Geological periods furnish abundant proof of such changes from time to time in the constitution of the earth, and in the laws that govern it.

The creation of 'the heaven and the earth,' with which the history of the Old Testament begins, was a supernatural act. It forms the distinctive article in the creed of those who are properly and strictly called

theists, and is denied by none but atheists and pantheists. Those who admit it must necessarily admit the possibility of the supernatural.

There is, therefore, no presumption against miracles, for the beginning of the world was miraculous; and there is nothing in the constitution of things to prevent the recurrence of them, provided exigencies arise to require them. Indeed, there is a presumption in favour of their recurrence, in case such exigencies should arise; for the universe, being under the government of an Almighty Being, possessed of will and freedom, may frequently be modified to accomplish His plans and purposes.

If there is no presumption against miracles, it follows that there can be none against revelation considered as miraculous. There is none against it, as Bishop Butler remarks, at the beginning of the world; for as there was no course of nature then, or at all events we are not acquainted with it, the question about a revelation at that time is but a common question of fact. The power which was exerted to make the world, whether called miraculous or not, might just as easily be further exerted to make a revelation. We may receive, therefore, the testimony of history and tradition on this as on any common matter of fact of the same antiquity. This testimony is that religion originally came by revelation, and this has a tendency to remove any prejudices against a subsequent revelation.

There is no presumption against revelation considered as miraculous after the settlement of a course of nature, as has been already intimated; for the present course of nature is involved in so much darkness, that there seems no improbability in supposing that five or six thousand years may have given occasion for miraculous interpositions. Taking moral

considerations into view, we see reasons for them. Our world is morally very much deranged. Ignorance and sin abound everywhere. The cause of this derangement, the Bible tells us, was disobedience to God on the part of our first parents. By their sin death and all our woe entered into the world. Now, suppose a plan of redemption and restoration, such as the Scriptures reveal, to have been provided by God, the communication of such a plan to man must have been made by revelation; and the only manner of authenticating this revelation, so far as we can see, must have been the working of miracles by those who were commissioned to announce it. This assumes that revelation, supposing it to have been given, was not universal, but imparted to a few, who were chosen by God for the purpose of publishing it to the world. This method is in harmony with the natural constitution and course of things under which we exist; for we see that God, in numberless instances, bestows that upon some which He does not upon others who seem equally to need it. Indeed, He bestows all His gifts, such as health and strength, capacities of prudence and knowledge, among His creatures with the most promiscuous variety, and yet He exercises a natural and moral government over the world.¹

So far from there being any presumption against revelation considered as miraculous, there is, prior to any proof of it, a probability in its favour. This probability arises from the fact that we would remain in ignorance of truths that vitally concern our highest interests were they not revealed to us.

Some affirm that God has revealed Himself to all men by means of a spiritual or rational revelation. Such a revelation is, of course, without miracle. It implies, neither in its nature nor in the manner of its

¹ Butler's *Analogy*, Part II. chap. ii.

communication, any departure from the ordinary course of providence.

The existence of religious faculties in man is admitted, and also the existence of what is called universal religion. But this universal, subjective revelation is proved by experience and historical evidence to be deficient both in completeness and clearness. It has never been found to supersede a supernatural revelation, and render it superfluous and vain. On the contrary, the history of our race has clearly proved that natural religion in its best estate, without a supernatural communication from God, has left men in darkness, doubt, and uncertainty. 'Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools' (Rom. i. 22).

The very fact of this deficiency of a universal, subjective revelation, or natural religion, as shown by the state of religion in the heathen world, by the doubts of the greatest men on the most important subjects, and by the indifference and ignorance of mankind in general, affords an *a priori* argument in behalf of a supernatural revelation; for, seeing that God has revealed Himself in the external world and in the constitution of man in some measure, yet not in a degree adequate to satisfy our religious wants, it is probable, judging from His goodness, that He would reveal Himself more fully and more clearly. This Christians believe He has done in the Holy Scriptures, which they receive as containing an authoritative publication of natural religion, with increased light, together with an account of a dispensation of things not discoverable by reason—a scheme of mercy and of grace which, from its very nature, could be made known only by supernatural revelation.

On the supposition that a revelation has been given, the only method of attesting it, so far as we know, is

by miracles. Belonging to the supernatural, it requires supernatural confirmation. Hence a history of revelation must be expected to contain narratives of supernatural events. This is a striking peculiarity of Bible history, which distinguishes it from all other history. It contains a large miraculous element interwoven with what we have styled the human, and it is so interwoven with it that the two elements cannot be separated. They form parts, equally entitled to credit, of the same narrative. In some instances the natural forms the framework of the supernatural.

Supernatural narratives throw discredit upon profane, but not upon sacred history, which the Bible claims to be. The reason of this is well stated by Horace in his 'Art of Poetry':

'Nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit.'¹

In sacred history, which proceeds from the combination of the action of God and the action of the creature, we naturally expect the miraculous. It is, indeed, demanded in a book professing to be a revelation from God. So far, therefore, from forming an argument against the credibility of the Bible history, it furnishes an argument in its favour, provided miracles are capable of proof.

If it be granted that miracles are possible, which every one who believes in a personal God, the creator of the world, must admit, and that they may occur as facts, then no one can defend the position that they cannot be proved to be facts unless on principles that subvert the fundamental laws of human belief. It cannot be urged that 'all experience and analogy are against them, for this is either to judge from our own narrow and limited experience of the whole course of

¹ Nor let a god interfere unless a difficulty present itself worthy of a god's unravelling.—Vv. 191, 192.

nature, and so to generalize upon weak and insufficient grounds; or else, if in the phrase "all experience" we include the experience of others, it is to draw a conclusion directly in the teeth of our data, for many persons, well worthy of belief, have declared that they have witnessed and wrought miracles. Moreover, were it true that all known experience was against miracles, this would not even prove that they had not happened, much less that they are impossible.'¹

As revelation professes to be from God, and to teach us concerning His nature and character, some ask—How can He reveal Himself? The Infinite, they affirm, is incognizable by the finite, and hence a true and proper revelation of God in human language is impossible. This conclusion makes the science of theology impossible. Christians, therefore, like the Athenians, have been worshipping an unknown God. The human mind cannot represent the infinite; it cannot form an idea commensurate with it, but it has an apprehension of it, and believes that there is and must be something beyond our power of conception. It is a necessary attribute of God that He is incomprehensible; if He were not so He would not be God, or the being that comprehended Him would be God also. But it also belongs to the idea of God that He may be apprehended though not comprehended by His rational creatures: He has made them to know Him, though not to know Him all; to apprehend, though not to comprehend Him. We represent to ourselves the Divine Being with certain attributes, and we think of God as possessing all these attributes to such a degree that no addition can be made to them. We conceive of Him as absolutely perfect. The idea of the perfect is that of something to which nothing can be added; or,

¹ Rawlinson's *Historical Evidences*. Boston: Gould & Lincoln. 1868. P. 43.

as Aristotle describes it, that which has nothing beyond. We conceive of Him as infinite. The idea of the infinite is that of something to which something can ever be added; or, as the same philosopher describes it, that which has always something beyond. These two views are not inconsistent, but supplementary the one to the other. Our conception of the infinite, therefore, is not merely negative, it has a positive side. Our knowledge of both the infinite and finite is incomplete. We apprehend both under a few, and not under all, of their properties and relations. But in each case there is real knowledge; the mind apprehends it as real, and applies it as real. All human knowledge must be partial in reference to the object known, but it may be true as far as it goes. The knowledge of a child is partial and limited compared with that of a philosopher, but it is not the less real and true within its proper limits. Indeed, the philosopher is sometimes obliged to fall back upon the native convictions of the child as proofs of his doctrines. Whatever difficulty there may be in our knowledge of God, because it is partial and incommensurate with His nature, and in a revelation of Him that is not infinite as He is infinite, is a difficulty that is found in all human knowledge. We must rest in the belief that a partial knowledge of anything may be true and valid so far as it goes, and therefore available for all the practical purposes of knowledge.

Christians believe that the knowledge of God contained in the Bible is certain and sufficient for all practical purposes. They believe, moreover, that all the teachings of the Bible are communications from God to mankind, and consequently infallible. For this belief they appeal to the most convincing evidence.

This evidence, which is of an objective and historical character, cannot be invalidated by preconceived notions of what a revelation ought to be, or of what

it ought to contain, for all such objections are founded on our ignorance. 'We know not beforehand,' says Bishop Butler, 'with reference to natural information, what degree of it God would afford to men; what means or disposition to communicate it He would give; what degree of evidence it would have; whether it would be imparted with equal clearness to all, and whether knowledge would be given at once or gradually; so we are ignorant of the same things in regard to revelation. The true question is, whether the Bible contains a real revelation, not whether it is such a one as we might have expected. Hence no valid objections against it can be founded on obscurity or inaccuracy of style, on various readings, on alleged discrepancies and disputes about authors, unless it had promised the contrary.'¹

The Church has received the Holy Scriptures from the time that they were written as a revelation from God, as an authoritative and infallible standard of truth and duty. These Scriptures do not merely contain such a standard; they are such a standard. They are peculiarly inspired. 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness' (2 Tim. iii. 16).

That the Scriptures are inspired in the fullest sense, it is our purpose, with the help of God, to prove. After a few observations on the importance of the question, we will consider, (1) the canonicity and integrity of the Scriptures, their historical credibility and scientific accuracy; (2) the proofs of inspiration drawn from the character of the Scriptures themselves, their own testimony, and the testimony of the Church; (3) the various theories of inspiration, the distinction between inspiration and revelation, and the nature and extent of inspiration.

¹ Butler's *Analogy*, Part II. chap. iii.

CHAPTER II.

IMPORTANCE OF THE QUESTION.

THE very least truth is important, for all truth constitutes a grand harmony, which the admission of the most trifling error disturbs. Every error is a discord; every truth an accordant note in the music of the universe. But as some errors are more hurtful than others, so some truths are more important than others, on account of their central character in relation to systems of truth. If such truths be subverted, the centripetal force, which maintains in their orbits all revolving truths, is destroyed.

Of those truths of paramount importance to the Christian system is the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, for with them the ultimate decision of all questions of doctrine and of practice rests. This is the position held by Protestants. The very essence of Protestantism, and the whole creed of the Protestant Church, may be summed up thus: 'None but Christ, and nothing but Holy Scripture.' Salvation is found in Christ alone, and the authentic record of this is contained in the Bible. This declaration was made with clearness and decision at the time of the Reformation. The authors of that glorious movement—that return to apostolic teaching—were convinced that the remedy for all the corruptions of ecclesiastical tradition lay only in the judicial authority of God's Holy Word. They restored this word to its proper position as the teacher of the Church, the umpire in all matters of Christian faith and practice, from which there could

be no appeal, for its words and teachings are the words and teachings of the Holy Spirit.

The inspiration of the Scriptures has never been denied by the Roman Catholic Church, but the admission of tradition to co-ordinate authority with them renders them of no effect. When they are robbed of sole authority in matters of faith, their power is gone. The fallible and varying tradition of the Church is put on a level with the infallible and enduring word of God.

To maintain the infallible authority of this word is essential, if not to the very existence, at least to the well-being of the Church. It cannot maintain its purity and abate one iota from the declaration of the apostle, that 'all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;' for the spiritual culture of its members depends upon a proper estimate of the sacred volume. It is by means of it that the 'man of God' is made 'perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works' (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17).

Especially at this time, when rationalistic criticism and 'science, falsely so called' (1 Tim. vi. 20), are employing all their energies to demolish the defences of Christianity, and raze its temple to the very foundation, is it important to have correct views of the nature and extent of the inspiration of the Bible; for the word of God is the sure defence of the Church in its warfare against the powers of evil. The word is both living and written. The living word leads the armies of heaven, 'clothed in fine linen, white and clean' (Rev. xix. 14). The written word is the sharp two-edged sword which goeth out of His mouth, that with it He should smite the nations (Rev. i. 16, xix. 15).

The doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures derives, moreover, importance from the fact that

it is inseparably connected with the proper idea of Biblical interpretation. Plenary inspiration, rightly understood, implies that the Holy Spirit, in a sense explained in the sequel, is the author of the entire Bible ; that a perfect unity of plan and purpose pervades the whole, and that consequently there must be consistency of parts. One who believes in the inspiration of the Scriptures will, therefore, not approach them and treat them as he would any other book, but as the oracles of God, and as such he will study and expound their contents. Thus he will be preserved from the rash and destructive methods of rationalism. In order to study and elucidate any book with success, it is necessary to apprehend its true character. To ignore the inspiration of the Scriptures in our investigations of them must therefore lead to the most egregious errors.

What books are inspired ? Or, in other words, what books constitute the Holy Scriptures ? The discussion of this question will form the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER III.

CANON OF SCRIPTURE.

THE discussion of the canon is distinct from that of inspiration, and preliminary to it. Its object is to determine what books are entitled to be received as inspired. On this point Romanists and Protestants differ. The former say that all those which the Church has decided to be divine in their origin, and no others, are to be thus received; the latter affirm that, so far as the question pertains to the Old Testament, those books, and those only, which Christ and His apostles recognized as the written word of God are to be regarded as canonical. The recognition of these books is given in the New Testament in a two-fold manner. First, many of them are quoted as the word of God, and the Spirit is said to have uttered what is recorded in them. Secondly, Christ and His apostles refer to the sacred writings constituting the volume which the Jews regarded as divine as being what they claimed to be—the oracles of God.

As to the New Testament, only those books which can be proved to have been written by the apostles, or to have received their sanction, are to be recognized as of divine authority. The reason of this rule is obvious. The apostles were the duly authenticated messengers of Christ, of whom He said, ‘He that heareth you, heareth me’ (Luke x. 16).¹

The books received by the Protestant Church as

¹ Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, vol. i. pp. 152, 153. New York: Charles Scribner and Company. 1872.

canonical and inspired are the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, written in Hebrew, and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, written in Greek. The canonicity and inspiration of these books are acknowledged by both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches; though the former, since the time of the Council of Trent, which commenced its sessions A.D. 1545, has admitted into the canon several apocryphal books, which were from the first rejected by the Jewish Church, and also by the Christian Church until the meeting of that council.

As the evidence of the canonicity of the Old Testament depends in part upon the testimony of the New, the consideration of the canonicity of the latter properly precedes that of the former.

It is probable that the idea of a collection of the writings of the New Testament arose at a very early period among all the Christian communities. It originated soon after those communities received from the apostles memoirs of the Saviour's life and teaching, together with the epistles. They were prepared for it by having in their hands the Old Testament,—a collection formed centuries before,—of the inspiration of which there was only one opinion among both Jews and Christians. This collection was venerated by Christ, who called it *the Law* and *the Prophets* (Matt. v. 17, xi. 13; Luke xvi. 16); *your Law* (John x. 34); *the Scripture* (John x. 35); *the Scriptures* (Matt. xxii. 29; John v. 39). It was venerated by the apostles, who called it *the Oracles of God* (Rom. iii. 2; Heb. v. 12; 1 Pet. iv. 11). It was venerated by the Christian Church, in whose assemblies it was read. Such a collection would naturally lead to the idea of a similar collection of the sacred books of the New Testament.

Accordingly we find that the writings of the apostles were successively gathered into one collection, which

was received by the primitive Christians equally with the Old Testament, was read in the religious assemblies, and was called *the Scriptures, the Book, the New Testament, the Divine Instrument, the Sacred Digest, the Divine Oracles, the Evangelists and the Apostles*.

The custom was early adopted of calling this collection the Canon or the Rule, and of denominating the books which constitute it canonical books.¹

The books composing the canon of the New Testament were written at various times, and in different places, during the latter half of the apostolic century, by eight inspired authors. The canon, of course, was completed gradually, and was closed toward the end of the first century or the beginning of the second. It was regarded from the beginning as a complete whole, having God for its author, and destined throughout to reveal Jesus Christ; just as ancient Israel had regarded the collection of books forming the Old Testament, received in the same manner, as a single harmonious unit, having the same God for its author, and destined, throughout all its parts, to reveal to the Jewish Church the counsel of God for the redemption of the world.

Of this high regard for the divine oracles Professor Gaussen quotes two examples, taken from the first century of the Church or the beginning of the second. 'Let every one read,' says Professor Gaussen, 'how in the beautiful Epistle to Diognetus, the author, who styles himself one of the disciples of the apostles, presents *the Law and the Prophets, the Evangelists and the Apostles*, as acting together to bring into the Church grace and joy. He says: "Thus the fear of *the Law* is proclaimed, and the grace of *the Prophets* is comprehended, and the faith of *the Gospels* is founded, and the instruction of *the Apostles* is preserved, and the grace

¹ *The Canon of the Holy Scriptures*. By Professor L. Gaussen. Published by the American Tract Society. Pp. 18-22.

of the Church leaps for joy." Ignatius also, about A.D. 107, in one of his epistles, said to the Philadelphians (chap. v.): "Your prayer will secure my completeness in God. . . . Giving me refuge in *the Gospel*, as in the flesh of Jesus, and in *the Apostles*, as in the presbytery of the Church. And cling also to *the Prophets*, because they have themselves announced the gospel, hoped in Christ, looked for His coming in the unity of Jesus Christ, and found their salvation in Him by faith."¹

Twenty books of the New Testament—viz. the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the first thirteen epistles of Paul, counting the Epistle to the Hebrews as his, the First of Peter, and the First of John—were immediately received by all Christians, without having, from the beginning and for eighteen centuries, their divine authority called in question by the Church. These books Eusebius calls *homologoumena*, or undisputed. Professor Gaussen designates them the *first canon*.

The five brief later epistles—viz. James, the Second of Peter, the Second and the Third of John, and Jude—were not received immediately by the whole Church, though they were received by the majority of the churches. The reason of this, according to Professor Gaussen, was that they were written a short time before the deaths of their respective authors, and distributed after their deaths in a distracted period; and that consequently their authors could not be appealed to to confirm them. After some hesitation on the part of some of the churches, they were universally received. These books Eusebius calls *antilegomena*, *contested*, because, although recognised by the majority of the churches and ecclesiastical writers, they were not at first universally received, or received with some reservation and hesitation. They constitute, according to Professor Gaussen, the *second canon*.

¹ Gaussen on the *Canon*, pp. 23, 24.