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## INSPIRATION: ITS NATURE AND EXTENT.

BY  
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It is quite impossible to over-estimate the deep importance of this great subject, for on our conclusions respecting it must depend our confidence in all the great mysteries of the Gospel. There is a sphere within which the human mind is capable of astonishing achievement, and I would be the last to undervalue human intellect. It has done vast things already, and is doing great things now. But there is a limit beyond which it has no power to pass; a world in which it has no means of investigation; an unseen kingdom which lies quite outside its range. Yet, though unseen, this kingdom is all important; and, though an undiscovered country, it is one in which we are all most deeply concerned, for we are all rapidly hastening thither, and He who is our Father, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Lord, our life, is the great and unseen Head of it. Thus, no science can ever inform us as to the nature of the Godhead, the plan of salvation, or eternal life; and it is altogether unphilosophical and unscientific to attempt to reduce such subjects to the ordinary rules of science and philosophy. God's plan of salvation can only be known from God Himself; so that, if He has not imparted to us all needful knowledge respecting it, there is no human power that can ever supply the deficiency, and we must live and die convinced of the soul's immortality, but still in utter ignorance of the plan which God has arranged for its safety. Hence the inexpressible value of the inspired word of Scripture. It is the communication from God to man respecting the deep things of the unseen world. It supplies that which lies beyond the reach of human investigation, and gives us exactly that information which dying man requires. It unfolds to us the eternal nature of God, and the plan of salvation which He has prepared in tender mercy for a fallen world. If therefore our Bible fail us, our whole hope fails with it, and if we cannot rely on its sacred statements, we are left without any trustworthy information as to all those great truths which most deeply concern us. If we cannot rely on Scripture as a communication from God we have nothing to take its place; and all our present joy, as well as our future hopes, must melt away into utter ignorance respecting all that lies beyond the range of science, and utter hopelessness as to all beyond this present world.

p. 2

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It is not my present object to attempt to prove the inspiration of Scripture. It is a great and noble subject, and one which I should rejoice to investigate. But it is not the subject of this paper. My object is to examine the extent and nature of inspiration, and to that I must exclusively confine myself. I take it for granted therefore that inspiration is an admitted fact, so that my only business is to consider how far it carries us, and what security it gives us for certain, reliable, infallible truth, in all the statements of the inspired word.

It has been said that 'Inspiration is that idea of Scripture which we gather from the knowledge of it,' <sup>[5a]</sup> and an attempt has been made to show how by such a definition all difficulties are overcome. I freely grant that such a theory does present a very easy and ready method of getting rid of difficulty, for, if we decide on reducing the authority of Scripture to our own ideas respecting it, it is not likely that there will be much left to embarrass us. There is however one difficulty, and that a most important one, which it cannot solve. It can give no solid foundation for the anxious soul to rest on, and must leave us floating into eternity with no better support than a vague idea of our own creation.

p. 5

St. Peter differs very widely from the author of that essay; for though the author boldly asserts that <sup>[5b]</sup> 'for any of the higher or supernatural views of inspiration there is no foundation in the Gospels or Epistles,' St. Peter broadly and plainly asserts that 'Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' (2 Pet. i. 21.) Here then we have the Apostolic definition of the work of inspiration, and by that definition we are taught that there are two distinct elements to be considered, the divine and the human; the divine, for the Holy Ghost moved the writers; and the human, for the communication did not come as a direct voice from heaven, but holy men spake as they were moved.

p. 6

In order therefore fully to investigate the subject, it will be necessary to examine (1) the divine element, (2) the human element, and (3) the combination of the two; after which we may consider some of the difficulties which have been thought to lie against the doctrine.

## THE DIVINE ELEMENT.

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I NEED scarcely say that this divine element is the great subject of modern controversy. But I hope we may meet the points more especially agitated, by considering four questions.

- I. Does it extend over the whole book?
- II. Is it equal?
- III. Is it verbal?
- IV. Does it render the word infallible?

I. Does it extend over the whole book?

Our first inquiry, then, must relate to the area covered by it; or, in other words, to the question,

Is the whole inspired? Were all the writers of Scripture thus moved by the Holy Ghost? or merely some of them, and those in certain books only? p. 8

Now, taking the language of St. Paul in 2 Tim. iii. 16, as our guide, we have a clear and decisive answer; for it is here written, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.' It is stated by Dr. Lee<sup>[8]</sup> that the word 'Scripture' occurs either in the singular or plural no less than fifty times, and in every single instance it is employed solely with reference to that collection of writings which were regarded as the oracles of God. Everything therefore included in that collection is here declared to be θεοπνευστος, or given by inspiration.

The only possible question therefore is, How much was included?

Now, whatever men may think of the doctrine of inspiration, all must admit as an historical fact, that when St. Paul wrote these words, the whole of the Old Testament was included in the Jewish canon. The Jews, notwithstanding all their faults, were admirable guardians of Scripture, and there was no doubt in the mind of any pious Jew as to what books together formed his Bible. He was much clearer on that subject than many of our modern writers. When therefore St. Paul spoke of 'All Scripture,' there is no doubt in the world that he included in his statement every line and letter of the Old Testament, and he taught us in those words that the whole, from first to last, from the first of Genesis to the last of Malachi was given by inspiration of God. p. 9

In saying this, I make no exception whatever with reference to the historical books. I think it has been clearly shown that those historical writings which are not in the Pentateuch are included in that part of Scripture called the Prophets. In which case the language of St. Peter, already quoted, refers to history as well as prediction. Nay, more! I do not hesitate to say, that if I were called upon to prove inspiration, there is no portion of the whole volume on which I should be better pleased to meet an opponent than the historical portions of the Old Testament. So strong is the argument in their favour, that although by so saying I may startle some, I am prepared, after the most careful deliberation, to affirm that I cannot separate them from the word of God without at the same time abandoning the whole of my Christianity. My reason for this statement is, that our Lord Himself in His own teaching has most distinctly sanctioned them. Men cavil at the strange miracles recorded in them, but, while men cavil, He refers to no less than nine of these miracles as facts. The flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the death of Lot's wife, the burning bush, the manna, the brazen serpent, the cure of Naaman, the preservation of the widow of Sarepta, and the rescue of Jonah, are all endorsed by His divine authority. To the books of Moses, which are chiefly historical, He perpetually refers as to the word of God, describing their testimony as more worthy of credit than that of men risen from the dead. And as for the much-despised first chapter of the book of Genesis, the speculation, as we are now taught, of some ancient Hebrew Descartes, He actually quotes the 27th verse as descriptive of the fact of creation. I am brought therefore to the conclusion that if there is any portion of the whole volume which may pre-eminently be said to have the broad seal and stamp of our Lord's authority placed upon it with His own hand, that portion is the Pentateuch. All, therefore, I am thoroughly persuaded, must rise and fall together. If we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must receive the books of Moses as inspired Scripture; and never can we abandon them till we are prepared to admit that in His own sacred teaching the Lord Himself has misled His people, or, in other and plainer words, till we cease to be believers in Jesus. p. 10

But are we to limit this language of St. Paul to the Old Testament? I think it has been clearly shown that we are not. For although the canon of the New Testament was not complete when St. Paul wrote these words, we must remember that the second Epistle to Timothy was one of the latest epistles, and that, according to Horne's list, the whole of the New Testament, or very nearly the whole, except the writings of St. John, were written at or about the time of its publication. The only question is, whether these writings were then regarded as Scripture: for, if they were, they were clearly included in the declaration that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Now, one thing is perfectly clear, namely, that St. Paul claimed the authority of Scripture for his own epistles: for after having carefully drawn the distinction between his private opinions and inspired decisions, he distinctly says, 'Yet not I, but the Lord' (1 Cor. vii. 10). It is equally clear that St. Peter classed the apostles with the prophets, 2 Pet. iii. 2. It is equally clear again, that the Gospel of St. Luke was already admitted as Scripture, for in 1 Tim. v. 18, St. Paul quotes two passages, one from Deuteronomy and one from St. Luke, declaring of both equally that they were taken from Scripture. 'For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.' (Deut. xxv. 4; Luke, x. 7.) It is equally clear again, that St. Paul's Epistles were included by St. Peter in the canon; for he clearly regarded them as Scripture when he wrote his second epistle. He saw some difficulties in them, but that did not affect his opinion of their admitted inspiration, when he said (2 Pet. iii. 15, 16), 'Even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.' p. 11

New Testament therefore, as well as Old, was included in the declaration, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God;' and the conclusion to which I am irresistibly brought is, that we have no right to pick and choose amongst the various portions of the word of God. I believe the whole to be arranged as a whole for the accomplishment of God's great purpose, that the whole is included in 'the Scriptures,' and that the parts are so interwoven one with another, and so beautifully fitted into each other by God's divine hand, that there will be found ultimately to be no intermediate path between receiving the whole as the word of God, or sweeping away the p. 12

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whole, and launching forth on a sea of scepticism, without a Bible, without a Saviour, and, as the last step, without a God.

## II. Is it equal?

I need scarcely say that many persons, and some of them most excellent men, have entertained the idea of a graduated scale of inspiration, and hence the great importance of the question. Is it equal throughout? Or is it variable? p. 16

In attempting an answer to this question, it is essential that we observe the wide distinction between the authorship and the subject-matter of the book, for, if not, we shall soon get into confusion.

Now Christian brethren must not be startled by my stating that in the subject-matter there are the widest possible distinctions. It appears indeed to consist of three distinct classes of subjects, or rather three distinct kinds of matter.

In the first place, there are direct communications, communicated from heaven without the use of the mind of man. Of this class are the ten commandments, the words, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,' and the discourses of our Lord. Such words were not given by inspiration, for they did not pass through the medium of the human mind, but came direct from heaven. In them there was no inspiration, but communication. p. 17

There is a second large class of passages which were given by inspiration. The human mind was employed as the medium for conveying God's will and purpose. This was the case with the prophets, the Psalms, and other similar passages. Here was inspiration, and the words so uttered were divine words, though given through the human medium, and not in direct communication.

But there is a third large class of passages in which there is neither inspiration nor communication. There are various sayings and doings of uninspired men, good actions and bad actions, good words and bad words, interspersed with miracles and other wonders of God's hand. Now no one supposes that all these persons spoke by inspiration, and it is utterly unfair to quote such passages as inconsistent with the inspiration of Scripture, for no one asserts that they are inspired. It is utterly unfair, for example, of Mr. Coleridge to quote the language of Job's friends, and to attack the inspiration of the book by the assertion that it is impossible to believe them to be inspired. Of course it is, for, if we believed them to be inspired, we should be flying in the face of the inspired book itself which records the divine communication, 'Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right' (Job, xlii. 7.) We do not claim inspiration for those words, but for the authorship of the book which declares that the speakers spoke those words, and that in doing so they were wrong. p. 18

In the subject-matter then we have three divisions, direct communications, inspired writings, and the miscellaneous sayings and doings of uninspired men. But in addition to this there is the question of authorship, which is clearly totally distinct from the matter, and it is the inspiration of the author which makes the book the word of God. Whatever the matter be if the author is inspired the book becomes inspired scripture. The sayings of uninspired men may be put on record by an inspired author, and our Heavenly Father may have shown just as much mercy in directing His prophets to record the sins of bad men for our warning, as the actions of His chosen servants for our guidance and encouragement. Now, so far as the authorship is concerned, we find no distinction whatever. All alike is called 'Scripture;' all 'the word of God;' all is included in the statement, 'Whatever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scripture might have hope;' and all is stamped by divine authority in the words, 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God.' p. 19 p. 20

## III. Is it verbal?

I am now approaching a difficult subject, and I should be sorry to speak rashly. But at the same time, I must not speak with hesitation, for the more I have studied the subject the more firmly am I brought to the deliberate and fixed conviction that the whole book, including words as well as thoughts, is to be received by the believer as the word of God. Let me briefly state my reasons.

1. I can draw no other conclusion from the title given to it, viz. 'The word of God.' When I find it especially mentioned as God's *word*; when I meet with such a passage as 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,' I find it hard to believe that the *words* are not included in the act of inspiration, and that the divine inspiration extends no farther than to the thoughts. If the expression were 'the truth of God,' or 'the will of God,' I could understand a reference to His mind without the necessity of applying inspiration to the language; but I cannot exclude the idea of inspired words from that book whose title is 'the *word* of God.' p. 21

2. I find certain quotations, the whole value of which entirely depends on verbal accuracy. In Gal. iii. 16, St. Paul quotes from Gen. xii. 7, and his whole argument turns on the distinction between the singular and plural number in one word contained in the promise made to Abraham: 'He saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.' So in Matt. xxii. 32, our Lord quotes the words spoken to Moses in Exod. iii. 6, and rests his whole p. 22

argument on the present tense of the substantive verb: 'I *am* the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living,' proving by that present tense that Abraham was at that time an existing person awaiting the resurrection. It may perhaps be said that both these instances occur in direct divine communications; but we must remember that we have to consider the inspiration of Moses who recorded that communication, and surely the quotation proves that the historical inspiration of the author might be trusted for verbal accuracy.

3. There are many passages in which the words are quoted quite independently of the thoughts of the context. As an illustration, refer to our Lord's quotation of Isa. lvi. 7. The whole of that passage refers simply to the admission of the sons of the stranger into the covenant. The emphatic words of the prophecy are 'for all people,' and the one idea of the context is the admission of all people to the covenant. But, in unfolding this truth, the prophet was led to express the prophecy in the words, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer;' and this expression our Lord extracts from the prophecy, and makes it the groundwork of His stern rebuke when He cleared the temple. p. 23

4. Once more. It seems perfectly clear that the prophets in many cases did not understand their own writings. We are sometimes told that we must only understand the prophecies as the prophets themselves did. But if we were to act on that rule, it must follow that in many cases we could not understand them at all; for we know, in fact, that Daniel had to pray for an understanding of the prophecy just conveyed through his own lips, and we are distinctly taught by St. Peter that the prophets inquired and searched diligently into the meaning of their own prophecies. (1 Pet. i. 11.) '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.' This also I have no doubt is the meaning of the expression, 'No prophecy is of any private interpretation' (2 Pet. i. 20), ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται, 'Has not arisen out of private interpretation,' and is not the result of the writer's own thoughts, 'but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' But, if this were the case, the whole prophecy must depend on verbal accuracy. If they were employed to speak words which had a certain deep, hidden meaning, unknown to themselves, and intended by God to remain unknown until their meaning should be made manifest by fulfilment at the coming of the Lord, surely we must admit that it was the words and not the thoughts which God inspired. The thoughts were actually withheld from the prophets, but they were moved to utter words which required events then unknown to bring out their true meaning. p. 24

5. But it may be said that this applies to the predictive portions of Scripture only, and not to the historical. It possibly may, and the last argument clearly does. But have we any thing to lead us to suppose that there is one kind of inspiration for the predictive, and another for the historical portions? Are they not all spoken of as one book? Are not many of these verbal quotations included in the historical portions, as *e.g.* the promise made to Abraham? Unless, therefore, it can be proved to me that there is such a distinction drawn by divine authority, I feel it my privilege to regard the whole as one, to receive the whole with equal reverence, and to accept the whole, prediction, psalm, history, facts, thoughts, and words, as the inspired Word of the living God. p. 25

But after some measure of careful study, I have been led to the conviction that the question of verbal inspiration is not the one really at issue. For no one believes that, if there be any inaccuracy, it took place in the words only. It must have taken place in the thoughts, in the matter, in the facts. If, *e.g.*, there is a variation between St. Matthew and St. Luke, no one supposes that they meant to convey the same thoughts, but made a mistake in accidentally selecting different words. The real point of the controversy is the infallible accuracy of the matter. And this leads to my last question. p. 27

#### IV. Is it infallible?

On the answer to this question must depend our confidence in Scripture. Some excellent men tell us it is infallible in so far as divine truth is involved. But I freely confess that this does not satisfy my own mind. I do not like that limitation. I am prepared to receive the whole book as invested with infallible accuracy from God Himself, and in taking this view of the subject, I feel the great satisfaction of believing that I am in harmony with the mind of St. Paul, St. Peter, and our great Head Himself.

For St. Paul's mind, I would refer to his words in Acts, xxviii. 25, and Heb. x. 15. In the Acts he is quoting from Isaiah, and says, 'Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet,' and in the Hebrews he is quoting from the prophet Jeremiah; but instead of saying, 'whereof Jeremiah is a witness to us,' he says, without mentioning Jeremiah, 'Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us,' taking the word, as it were, out of the hands of fallible man, and placing it in those of the infallible Spirit. These passages place inspiration on an equal footing with direct communication. But if inspired writings were spoken of as the actual words of the Holy Ghost just as much as if they had been direct communications; if inspiration was of such a character as to render the words of the Spirit Himself, can we believe that those words were capable of error? p. 28

For St. Peter's testimony, I would refer to his language in 2 Pet. i. 19, in the context of which passage he is assuring his hearers that he had not followed cunningly devised fables. And now p. 29

mark the threefold evidence which he produces. First, there is vision, 'We were eye-witnesses of his majesty.' Secondly, there is hearing, 'The voice from heaven we heard.' But lastly, there is an evidence more clear, more true, more trustworthy, than either the sight of his own eyes, or the hearing of his own ears. That evidence is Scripture. 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy.'

For the testimony of our Lord Himself, refer to two passages, the one referring to a nice point in a quotation from the Psalms, John, x. 35; the other to the whole word in its sanctifying power, John, xvii. 17. Now what is His language? In the one, 'The scripture cannot be broken.' In the other, 'Thy word is truth.'

p. 30

With these statements of our blessed Lord, I am content to leave this portion of our subject. In these words of Scripture, I believe that God Himself has spoken to man, and therefore in the midst of all the world's disappointments, and in all the failures of even the Church of God, we have here that on which the soul may calmly, peacefully, and fearlessly repose. And whether we look at history or prediction, at promises or judgments, at prophecies understood by those who uttered them, or language veiled in mystery until the divine purpose is developed in history, we receive the whole as inviolable truth, for all has the stamp of the Spirit Himself, and all is given by inspiration of God. We receive it, we honour it, we submit to it, we acknowledge its divine authority, and welcome with heartfelt thanksgiving its infallible promises. Yes, we receive it not merely with the deepest conviction of our most deliberate judgment: but we welcome it to our soul with all the deep feelings of a thankful heart, and say with the inspired Psalmist, 'Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.'

p. 31

## THE HUMAN ELEMENT.

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BUT there is a human element in the book as well as a divine. 'Holy men spake as they were moved.' We shall take, therefore, a very partial view of the whole subject if we neglect to consider the action of the holy men as well as the moving of the Holy Ghost. What then are the plain, obvious facts of the case? Are they not that the books contain as much evidence of human mind, and human character as if they were uninspired books? The human authorship is as prominent and conspicuous as the divine, and any theory of inspiration which excludes it is, I cannot but think, opposed to the facts of Scripture.

1. There is distinctive *character* in the different writers. Compare St. Paul and St. John, St. Peter and St. James, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and you see the most transparent variety, a variety which renders it impossible to suppose that they were merely pens, machines, or copyists.

p. 33

2. There is the use of *natural powers or gifts*. St. Paul was a well-educated, intellectual man, with great reasoning powers, so he supported truth by argument. David was a poet, so he breathed out as the sweet psalmist of Israel the hallowed outpourings of a sanctified heart.

3. There is the use of *feeling*. All the emotions of the human heart may be found in Scripture. There is no deep feeling of which man is capable which is not expressed there. There is love, sorrow in some of its most tender and touching forms, depression of spirits, joy, hope, longing desire, deep contrition, calm faith, and perfect peace. All these you find, not merely described by the inspired authors, but forming part and parcel of the inspired word. They are the very word itself, and are expressed as naturally as if there were no such thing as inspiration.

p. 34

4. There is the use of *memory*. Our Lord's promise to His Apostles in John, xiv. 26, applies clearly to this point, and shows that the gift of the Holy Ghost, so far from superseding memory, would quicken it, and give it the power of recalling with accuracy the words intrusted to it. 'He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.'

5. There was also the use of *personal experience*, as, *e.g.*, when St. John said, 'The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory' (John, i. 14); and again, 'That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.' (1 John, i. 1, 3)

p. 35

And lastly, and it is a very deeply interesting point, there was the diligent *use of collected information*. See Luke, i. 1-3, where Luke does not claim to write original matter, but to have received it from those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word. It was because he had a perfect understanding from them that he undertook to write out in order the events of the narrative.

It is clear, therefore, that in the composition of Scripture there was the free use of the human mind. The Pentateuch is the word of Moses as well as the word of God, for when our Lord quotes the fifth commandment in Mark, vii. 10, He introduces it by the words 'Moses said;' although when He condemns His hearers for the breach of it, he says, they were 'making the Word of God of none effect by their tradition.' (Mark, v. 13.) The human element is therefore as plain as the divine. We have not in our Bible a voice speaking from heaven in accents so strange to human ears that it could only serve to amaze and terrify; but we have God's will presented to us through the medium of human language, human feeling, human thought, and human inquiry; human in all respects but one, and that is, as we have already found, that it is free from human error.

p. 36

I TRUST, then, that I have shown clearly the existence of the divine and human elements in Scripture, but it still remains for us to consider the third point, namely, THE COMBINATION OF THE TWO.

How is the union between the divine and human to be explained?

1. Not by supposing that the writers were mere pens, or machines. This is sometimes termed the mechanical theory, but it is clearly inconsistent with facts. Pens never think, argue, remember, weep, or rejoice, and all these things were done by the writers of Scripture.

2. Not by supposing them to be mere copyists or amanuenses employed to write down the words of the Spirit, as Baruch took down the words of Jeremiah. This may have been the case when they received direct communication, as when Moses wrote out the ten commandments at the dictation of God: but it will not apply to inspiration, as it gives no scope for variety of character. The one dictating mind would be the only one to appear on such a theory.

p. 38

3. We will not attempt to explain it by constructing any artificial theories as to the action of the Spirit on the mind of men. Some have endeavoured to classify the modes in which they consider the Spirit may have acted, as, *e.g.*, supervision, elevation, direction, and suggestion. All this may be right, and it may be wrong; for we are taught (Heb. i. 1) not merely that God spake in divers times, but in *divers manners* unto the fathers by the prophets. But all such distinctions are unsupported by Scripture, and therefore we may leave them.

p. 39

My own belief is, that the safest course for the believer is to take the word as he finds it, and to attempt no explanation at all. The fact is, that the question lies in the midst of a class of subjects which have always baffled man's inquiry, I mean those relating to the points of contact between the mind of God and the mind of man. The real point is, how has the mind of God acted on the mind of man, and how can there be union in one book between his mind which is infinite and infallible, and the mind of man which is finite and fallible? That question I cannot solve. But I cannot there leave the inquiry; for it appears to me that we have an analogous case of the deepest possible importance, I mean the corresponding union in the person of our blessed Saviour.

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Remember, then, that there are two channels through which God has manifested His will, viz., the incarnate word, and the written word; and surely we are justified in expecting that there will be something of the same character in the two manifestations.

Now, how is it with the incarnate word? In Him there is a perfect Godhead and a perfect manhood, so that He becomes the perfect daysman between God and the sinner. His Deity does not neutralise His humanity, for, though Himself the Creator, He was wearied, He wept, He prayed, He trusted, He died; and so He can be touched with the feelings of those who in this suffering world are called to weep, to suffer, to pray, and to die now. But neither, on the other hand, did His humanity neutralise His Deity, for in the midst of His weakness He could rise in His omnipotence, and bid the dead arise and the waves be still. If you ask how it is that the one did not neutralise the other, I cannot say. All I know is that God so ordered it, and that He so formed the union that the perfection of the Godhead did not destroy the manhood, nor the perfection of the manhood take one jot or one tittle from the attributes of the Godhead. And if men reply that they cannot understand it, I can only say that they have no right to expect to do so, for are we not assured in Scripture, 'Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh?'

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But now, passing from the first manifestation of God's will to the second, *i.e.* from the incarnate Word to the written word, are we to be surprised if we meet with a similar union and a similar difficulty? If, in short, we find the self-same combination of the divine and human elements? Can I wonder if it is presented to us in a form so divine that it is infallibly true, and yet so human that it is full of the workings of the human intellect and human heart? No, I wonder not, and I speculate not. But, as I thank God for an incarnate Redeemer, who has all the omnipotent and infinite attributes of God, while at the same time He has so true a manhood that I may appeal to His sympathy on the ground of His experience of all the trials of the flesh, so I thank God also that He has given us a Bible so perfect, so divine, so authoritative, so infallible, that I may trust it without the shadow of a doubt as the unerring word of the living God, while at the same time it is so completely human, and thereby so exactly adapted to the human heart's requirements, that I can welcome it as a word spoken for myself, and admire the love of our Heavenly Father who has been pleased to combine in one book a perfect divinity and a perfect humanity, the infallible truth of a perfect Godhead combined by God's mysterious power with the heart-touching utterance of a true and perfect manhood.

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## DIFFICULTIES.

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BUT, while we rejoice in the great doctrine of a complete, plenary, and infallible inspiration, we should be wanting in Christian candour if we were to ignore the existence of certain difficulties

connected with the subject. There are difficulties we freely acknowledge, some of which have been felt, not merely by sceptical, but by devout and Christian minds; and these difficulties I now propose to consider.

1. The first of these has been already met. It arises from the variety of mind and character in the inspired writers. This is thought to be inconsistent with the divine inspiration of the whole book by one inspiring Spirit; and it would be a difficulty if we believed, according to the mechanical theory, that the writers were merely pens, machines, or copyists. But on the principle that there is a perfect manhood combined with a perfect Godhead, instead of remaining a difficulty, it becomes one of the chief beauties of the book, and is the very thing that renders it so pre-eminently suited to the wants of the human heart.

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2. A second difficulty arises from the idea that the language of Scripture is opposed to modern science. The principle of this difficulty is contained in the words, 'Any true doctrine of inspiration must conform to all well-ascertained facts of history or of science.'<sup>[45]</sup>

Now, in the first place, we enter our solemn protest against the Scripture being regarded as a scientific treatise. Its object was no more to teach us science than to teach us medicine. It is therefore utterly unfair to bring its language to the test of scientific experiments. If the allusions of Scripture to surrounding nature were not altogether in harmony with the discoveries of modern science, it would not in the least affect my own idea of inspiration; for in making use of men to convey His own divine message, I could not expect anything but that our Heavenly Father should make use of such language as men understood at the time the book was written; and it seems utterly unreasonable to suppose that He should render His revelation unintelligible to those to whom it was given, by going out of His way to anticipate discoveries which were about to be made some thousands of years afterwards. But, though the Scriptures are not given to teach science, and no one has a right to doubt their inspiration because he does not find scientific accuracy in their language, we are still prepared to meet the scientific man on his own ground, and fearlessly to affirm that there is nothing in Scripture opposed to the well-ascertained discoveries of science.

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For mark well. There is nothing in a miracle opposed to the laws of science. Science refers to those laws of nature which are within reach of our investigation; but if, at any time, the Creator should displace them, either by the action of higher laws unknown to us, or by the simple power of His will, science knows nothing of that displacement. It is the office of science to investigate existing laws; but science knows nothing of any interruptions of those laws by the sovereign will of Him who founded them. Such interruptions lie altogether beyond its province. All, for example, that science can say is, that we know of no law which could cause the sun to stand still on Gibeon. But does Scripture ever assert that it was done by any law within our knowledge? Is it not represented as the act of God's omnipotence suspending known laws? And is not that suspending power altogether beyond the reach of scientific inquiry? The miracle therefore, lies beyond the reach of science, and cannot be opposed to it.

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But as for the well-ascertained laws of nature and well-established scientific facts, we fearlessly assert that there is nothing in Scripture opposed to them.

Let us consider for a moment the two cases most commonly quoted as involving contradiction: the description of the sun standing still on Gibeon, and the Mosaic account of the creation.

With reference to the former there are two objections urged. The first is that of the infidel who denies the possibility of the miracle, but with that I have nothing to do, as I have already shown that miracles are not within the range of science. The second is founded on the language of the narrative, which is thought to imply an ignorance of the earth's rotation on its axis. But really this is so childish that it is scarcely worth our notice. Is there any one in his senses who would have expected Joshua to say, 'Earth, suspend your rotation round your axis;' or to have framed his language in any other way so as to describe that rotation? And if Joshua ought to have so expressed himself, why do not astronomers and other learned men alter their own language now according to their own science? Or are we to suppose that after all they know nothing about astronomy, because they speak like ignorant men, and say, like the rest of us, 'the sun rises and the sun sets?'

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The other case, however, is more important, for it is the object of the first chapter of the Book of Genesis to give an account of creation, and it is perfectly reasonable therefore to expect to find it in harmony with geological facts. But mark. There is a great difference between being in harmony with geological *facts*, and in harmony with every geological *theory* that is started. We must confine the argument to what is known, and we have nothing to do with what people think. True science is a rigid thing, and relates to facts, not opinions. When, *e.g.*, people tell us that there could not be light before the sun, they are thoroughly unscientific in so saying, for they know nothing of the kind. There is a vast amount of light at this present time quite independent of the sun, and the idea that there could be none before it is nothing more than an unscientific conjecture. No! we must keep rigidly to facts, to facts really established by trustworthy evidence; and, keeping stedfastly to such facts, I have not the least shadow of anxiety respecting geological discovery. On the contrary, I believe that the first chapter of Genesis will furnish us, and is even already furnishing us, with one of the grandest arguments ever yet produced for the divine inspiration of the book of Scripture. I cannot but think that that first chapter is placed in the forefront of the book in order to present us, at the outset of the whole, with an unanswerable evidence of the divinity of its origin.

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For what is the present position of geology? In the first place, it is a very young science, one of scarcely more than fifty years' growth. The most profound geologists are most convinced how much there is still to be learned, and they are learning more every day. No really wise man therefore would give up the inspiration of Scripture in deference to these present conclusions, even if those conclusions should at first sight seem to be opposed to the inspired word.

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But they are not opposed to it. There may be a difference of opinion among Christian men as to which is the right principle of harmony, but there is no difficulty in harmonizing all geological facts with the plain, literal, straightforward, honest interpretation of every sentence of the sacred record. Nay more! There is one remarkable point of harmony clearly established, viz., this, that in its great outlines the order of events recorded in the book of Scripture is the same as the order as exhibited in the record of the rocks. Moses describes a certain order in creation. Three thousand years after Moses, learned men began to investigate the earth's crust, and in the rocks which form that crust, they have discovered the outlines of a certain order. They have come to the conclusion that certain great events must have succeeded each other in the creation of the world. Here therefore you have two records, one from the rocks, and one from Moses: one only just now discovered, and one given more than three thousand years ago. But place them side by side. Do not be afraid of comparing them, for truth is never afraid of investigation. But in comparing them what do we find? That the order in the rocks in all its broad features corresponds step by step with the order in the Mosaic record; and though there are still some minor difficulties, still in the great, grand, broad facts there is a magnificent harmony. But whence did Moses learn that order? The events must have taken place millions and millions of years before ever man trod this earth. There were no geologists in his day to teach him. How then could he have known the order of events which took place ages before man's being? There is only one answer to be given, and that is, that he must have been taught it by God Himself. Thus we may thank our modern geologists, as many of them delight in believing, for having in these days of infidelity dug out from the bowels of the earth a fresh and noble proof, which had lain buried there for centuries, that the first chapter of the Book of Genesis was given to Moses by inspiration of God.

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But we may go further still with reference to science, and remark that there are many expressions in Scripture remarkably in harmony with it, and which almost appear to indicate a mind far in advance of the knowledge of the day. Take, *e.g.*, the distinction drawn by Moses between rain and dew in Deut. xxxii. 2, 'My doctrine shall drop as the rain, and my speech shall distil as the dew.' Or the language of Job respecting the weight of the atmosphere, a scientific truth unknown till the days of Galileo: 'To make the weight for the winds.' (Job, xxviii. 25.) Many similar passages might be quoted, but these are sufficient to show that, although it was not the purpose of the book to teach science, there lay hidden within the book the germs of the truest science, waiting there unobserved till scientific men should discover the facts, and so by their science bring to light a fresh evidence of the divine inspiration of the book.

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3. It is alleged that the sacred writers differed in some instances from secular historians. The favourite instances adduced are the date of the governments of Cyrenius in Syria, and that of Lysanius at Abylene. The one is placed by Josephus about eleven years after the birth of our Lord, and the other about the same distance of time before the commencement of John the Baptist's ministry. It is a real pleasure to find men fixing on such minute points, and to see them obliged to leave unassailed the vast amount of accumulated evidence to the accurate fidelity of the sacred records. I confess that the simple fact of their fastening on such points proves very clearly to my own mind that they have nothing very substantial on which to fasten. Suggestions have been thrown out, which, if true, may meet the difficulty; but with our limited information, after an interval of one thousand eight hundred years, it is impossible to be sure that they are correct. But suppose there is a difference. Suppose the chronology of Josephus is at variance with that of St. Luke. Suppose that one or the other is in error. Is it impossible, I ask, that Josephus may be wrong? Is he infallible? Are his writings guaranteed from error? And why should the Christian tamely surrender the point, and quietly submit to the conclusion that St. Luke is wrong and Josephus right? I protest against such a surrender, and, till there is clearer evidence than we have obtained at present, I shall venture to believe that Josephus is mistaken if in anything he really differs from the inspired word.

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4. But I have left to the last that which to many minds is the greatest difficulty. I mean the variations, or as some would call them, the apparent discrepancies, between the sacred writers themselves.

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Now I have no wish to deny the existence of such variations, though I dislike the term 'discrepancies,' for I do not believe there is discrepancy. And in dealing with this difficulty, there are, I conceive, three principles to be kept clearly in mind.

1. The narratives are very short and fragmentary in their character. They never attempt to record the whole. Hence one gives one fragment, and another a second, and these fragments are often like the fossil bones of a skeleton. Ignorant men, which we all are, cannot fit them together; but we must not on that account assert them to be contradictory; for when the structure of the whole is once discovered, they will all fit into their proper places, and all the scattered fragments be combined in perfect symmetry.

2. There is the widest possible distinction between variation and contradiction. If two writers give an account of the same event, they will each regard it from their own point of view, and describe it as it impressed themselves. Hence one will bring into prominence certain facts which

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are altogether omitted by another. But such a variation is totally different from contradiction. An excellent illustration of this is found in the case of the inscription over the cross, a case which Dean Alford considers decisive against verbal inspiration. Now I am quite ready to admit that, if there were contradiction, it would be decisive. But I deny that there is any contradiction whatever. There is variation, but nothing more. All agree in the emphatic point—‘The king of the Jews,’ and the only difference is that some give in addition a few more words than others. But these added words are not at variance with each other. On the contrary, they all combine in one sentence, which probably formed the real inscription. That sentence is Οὗτός ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζαραῖος ὁ Βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων. ‘This is Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews.’ Now, supposing that to have been the real sentence, so that each of the evangelists omitted some of the explanatory words, while all preserved, ‘The king of the Jews,’ which was the real point of the inscription, there was no discrepancy or contradiction in such omissions, nor anything to affect our full and complete reliance in the verbal accuracy of all the four evangelists.

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3. It is also most important for us to remember that such variations are essential to the value of a fourfold testimony. If God had seen fit to impart His truth by direct communication only, then I freely grant that I should have expected a *verbatim* agreement in the narratives. But in that case there would have been no employment of the human element. Nay more; if the life of our Lord had been so reported, the evidence would have become single, instead of fourfold. Even, as it is, it has been argued that the resemblance is so accurate as to show that the evangelists copied from one common tradition, and must not be regarded as independent witnesses. The variation therefore becomes almost as important to us as the agreement, and, instead of shaking our convictions, confirms them. That blessed Redeemer is the corner-stone of our hopes, and therefore, instead of two witnesses, which under the law were sufficient, He has given us two pair of witnesses. And in the inspiration of their words He has given so much scope to the human element that there are all the variations inseparable from independent testimony; while, on the other hand, He has so guided, directed, and controlled the whole, that, notwithstanding all the cavils of sceptics, there is no real contradiction in their statements. There is variation enough to prove the independence of their evidence, while there is such a depth in their complete agreement, as can only be explained by the fact that they were taught by God’s Spirit to convey to us infallible truth.

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Other objections have, I know, been urged; but all, I firmly believe, may be fully and fairly met by the principle that it has pleased God in His own wisdom to combine in the one book the divine and human element. In some cases the mind of the man may be more conspicuous than the mind of the Spirit, while in others the mind of the Spirit seems completely to overrule the mind of the author who wrote the words. In some passages the thoughts are so far within man’s compass that no inspiration appears to be necessary, while in others they dive so deep into hidden mysteries that they far outstep the utmost range of the human intellect. Thus God has given us a record of what man has felt, as well as a statement of His own hidden will. He has given it through the medium of minds of the same nature as our own; but by His own mysterious power He has given their writings such a divine authority that they claim our unwavering trust; so that, notwithstanding the cavils of infidels, and the sneers of those who despise us as bibliolaters, we heartily thank God for our Bibles, and receive as divine all that God has taught in them, believing without reserve the statement of St. Peter, that ‘Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.’

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## FOOTNOTES.

[5a] *Essays and Reviews*, p. 347.

[5b] *Ibid.* p. 345.

[8] *Inspiration of Holy Scripture*.

[45] *Essays*, p. 348.

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