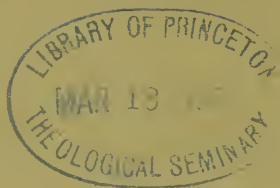


F. Gardiner

---

"Errors" of the Scriptures

BS480  
.G22



BS480  
.G22

Washed Library



F. Gardiner

"Errors" of the Scriptures



## ARTICLE IV.

## "ERRORS" OF THE SCRIPTURES.

BY REV. FREDERIC GARDINER, D.D., PROFESSOR IN BERKELEY  
DIVINITY SCHOOL, MIDDLETOWN, CONN.

SINCE the emancipation of history, natural science, and human learning generally from the control of the theologian, many conclusions have been reached which are in conflict with the older interpretations of the Scriptures. These interpretations have been modified, and fresh conflicts have arisen. Is interpretation still to be changed with each fresh discovery; and, if so, has the Bible any fixed meaning at all? Or is it to be frankly conceded that the various books constituting what is known as the Scriptures were written by men at various times and in possession of various degrees of truth, and so have come down to us with a not inconsiderable admixture of error? Many varying opinions on these questions have each their own honest and earnest advocates. There seems but one way out of the perplexity; and that is the scientific one — to examine carefully the facts, and base our theory exclusively upon the result.

The first fact to be observed is, that the Scriptures have in them both something which is divine and something which is human. This is so generally admitted that it is not worth while to spend much time in its re-examination. That there is in them somewhat that is divine, and divine in a higher sense than Homer or Dante may be said to have a divine element, is abundantly shown by the work which they have done and are doing in the world; that they have also somewhat which is human is sufficiently obvious from the idiosyncrasies of the several writers, and from the varying style and manner in which they have delivered the message intrusted to their care. Yet, inasmuch as both sides of this fundamental fact have been called in question by the advo-

cates of opposite theories, it may be well to point briefly to a single and satisfactory proof of each of them.

That the Scriptures have in them something which is human we conceive to be absolutely proved by the fact that both the Old and the New Testaments, as we have them, do contain undeniable errors. In the New Testament errors of copyists — most of them of little consequence, but still errors — have been brought to light in great abundance. It may be replied that these are matters which human care can rectify, and that inspiration was never intended to take away from man the trouble of ascertaining what it really said. This does not matter. These errors remained in the text unsuspected for centuries, and some of them still, and probably always will, remain; for no competent critic would pretend to say that the text is in all cases now definitely settled, or that it is ever likely to be. In the Old Testament manuscripts of proportionate antiquity are wanting, and the best and oldest of the versions give but a poor apparatus for the criticism of the text. Nevertheless, we may become certain by a comparison of parallel passages that errors exist in one or other of them. For example, when the census of the captives returning from the Babylonian exile as given in Ezra ii. and in Neh. vii. is compared, it becomes plain that there must be several errors in one or the other or in both of them. Or if we put the statement in 1 Kings iv. 26, that Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses, by the side of that in 2 Chron. ix. 25, that he had four thousand, it is obvious that one of them has been either multiplied or divided by ten. This being admitted, another step may be taken, and an error assumed if absolutely impossible statements are found in the text; as when it is said (2 Sam. xv. 7) that “after forty years” Absalom did certain things in furtherance of his rebellious plans, while it is known from other parts of the story that Absalom’s whole life was less than forty years. And this being granted, the critic will not hesitate to apply the same principle to other statements. having such an extreme degree of improbability as to amount to a practical

impossibility ; as when it is said that the Philistines mustered to battle thirty thousand chariots (1 Sam. xiii. 5). The errors thus far spoken of in both Testaments are, no doubt, mere *lapsus* of the scribes ; nevertheless, there they are, and often there is no other than conjectural means of correcting them. They prove that there are errors in the Bible, and make simply impossible the extreme theory of verbal inspiration, at least as far as the actual Scriptures in our possession are concerned. Only undeniable errors have been mentioned, that the evidence may be clear that there is a human element in the Bible. How far does it extend ?

On the other hand, it is equally clear that the Scriptures have in them somewhat that is more than human ; for they contain truth which, outside of them, man has never discovered for himself ; and if any one is disposed to argue that man might ultimately have discovered it, yet he certainly did not, and could not, at the time at which it was revealed. It is not necessary here to appeal to prophecy, or to anything else to which a possible objection may be made ; it is enough to refer to the broad fact that the gospel has introduced into the world truths unknown, or at least unregarded, before, which when announced are recognized of all men to be true, and has given to these truths practical sanctions of sufficient power to transform the institutions, culture, and principles of action of those parts of the world in which it has been received. Nothing but religion has ever had such power over the minds and hearts of men, at least on any large scale ; and no other religion can compare with the Christian in the assurance it conveys of having been inspired from on high. The older revelation is distinctly recognized and made its starting-point by the new ; and besides this, mankind generally have not failed to recognize in such parts as some of the Psalms a spirit and aspirations breathed into them from a higher than human source, because they commend themselves as in harmony with all that is most divine, and no human compositions, except as based upon them, have ever reached so high a strain. The evidence in this

case, being of a higher kind, is necessarily less tangible than in the former ; it is sufficient for the present purpose that it is generally admitted by the common sense of mankind.

There are but three possible theories in regard to the Scriptures : First, that they are purely human ; secondly, that they are purely divine, even to their minutest detail ; and thirdly, that they are at once human and divine. The first two have already appeared untenable ; the third alone remains. Accepting this, a most interesting and important question arises as to the relations or proportions of these two elements in the Bible. It is a question which can never be entirely solved, any more than it is possible to draw a definite line in the complex action of the human and the divine spirit. The two elements are there, and their union has produced the actual result, without the possibility of assigning to each an independent part of the work. Both have co-operated in the whole. It may be compared to the doctrine of the church in regard to our Lord, in whom the two natures are inseparably (*ἀδιαίρετως*) united, though without confusion. Yet even in this case there are limitations in the activity of either nature ; the divine nature did not prevent him as an earthly child from growing in wisdom as well as in stature, and the human nature did not hinder him from speaking as never man spake. In regard to our present subject, it is of great practical importance to ascertain, as far as may be possible, such limitations as actually exist.

An obvious limitation to the divine element of the Bible is, that the inspiring Spirit has not seen fit to do away with the manhood and individuality of the various writers. The personality, the temperament, the habits of thought and culture, of each particular writer are manifest in his writings. The same truth is taught by John, Paul, and James, but in such different guise that they have been imagined to contradict one another. No one can fail to recognize the differences in manner of utterance between the courtly Isaiah, the despondent Jeremiah, the priestly Ezekiel, and the apoca-

lyptic Daniel. The Scriptures have certainly been given *πολυμέρως καὶ πολυτρόπως*. It is one office of these differences to adapt the Scriptures to minds of every class and mode of thought; it is essential to the life-like character of the sacred narrative; and it has become an important means of determining the genuineness and authenticity of the various books.

Our main question, however, is with the limitations of the human element. It has already appeared that there is no such limitation of this as to prevent errors of the copyists in the transmission of the sacred records. But the writers lived in times far apart, and all of them long gone by, and must themselves have shared in the crude and erroneous notions of their times concerning natural science, history, ethnology, archaeology, and many other matters. Have these errors become incorporated, through the human writers, in the Bible itself? or has their humanity been so overshadowed, limited, and controlled by the inspiring Spirit within them, that the expression of such errors has been prevented? This is a question simply of fact, and must be decided by an examination of the evidence. Its answer is important not only to our theory of inspiration and our principles of interpretation, but must determine the kind and degree of reliance to be placed upon the Scriptures themselves, and whether they *are*, or simply *contain*, the word of God. We thus come back again to the discussion of the errors of the Scriptures.

Before going farther, it is well to have a distinct understanding of what is meant by error. Shall that be called an error in history which at any particular time is inconsistent with the historical knowledge of that time, such knowledge being confessedly imperfect? This has been done over and over again. The Scripture history has been repeatedly pronounced wrong, when further investigation has proved it after all to be right. Shall that be deemed an error in ethnology which seems to contradict the best information that can be attained, when this information is only fragmentary and dim; or shall judgment be suspended until more com-



plete data are obtained? Such errors have been repeatedly charged, and then the Scripture statement has been confirmed by excavations and the decipherment of inscriptions. As a single instance, in archaeology, ancient writers say that the vine was unknown in Egypt, and yet Moses mentions it; Egyptian hieroglyphics have been read, and it is found that Moses was right. Such reversals of too hasty judgments have been compelled so often that the accuracy of the Scripture writers in regard to all matters within their knowledge has come to be generally acknowledged. There is a widespread conviction, begotten of long experience, that in matters of this kind it is unsafe to assume an error while our own knowledge of the facts remains imperfect, and, in case of any still remaining instances of apparent error, there is a presumption that a satisfactory solution will be reached with the progress of investigation. This kind of supposed error was once the favorite ground of attack upon the Bible; it is now seldom mentioned. It may therefore be eliminated from the discussion, as constantly tending to vanish, and really non-existent. But this will only show that the Scripture writers were honest and intelligent men; it tells nothing of any limitation of the human element in their writings.

What, then, is meant by error? Something which is wrong as proceeding from that imperfect knowledge of the truth — whether moral, mental, or physical — which belonged to the times in which the writers lived, and in which they unquestionably shared. Such errors are commonly alleged as abounding in the Bible; and if this is true, there is in this respect no limitation of the human side of the Scriptures. But if it is not true, then it is obvious that there must have been such a limitation extending through many ages; and the Bible, consequently, presents a prodigy quite equal to any of the miracles it records, and similarly makes a corresponding demand upon our faith.

The most serious errors thus alleged are moral contradictions — instances in which words or deeds are commended, or even commanded, especially in the older Scriptures, which

are inconsistent with the divine character as made known in later revelation. Some space will be devoted to these farther on. Meantime it is to be considered that the various writers speak freely of whatever comes in their way, in the language and according to the ideas of their time, and that those ideas and that language were often wrong. It is argued by many, with apparent fairness, that this concludes errors upon the Scriptures; because the writing must be interpreted according to what the writer meant to say, and in order to this his language must be examined in the light of the views and opinions he is known to have held. Is this reasoning valid?

Take a few test cases. The Bible frequently speaks of the rising and setting of the sun, and its writers undoubtedly supposed that the sun went round the earth, and that this expression was literally true. It has proved to be untrue. Are the Scriptures so committed to this error that it may be cited as one of the scientific errors of the Scriptures? If so, the case may at once be given up; but if not, it will certainly be hard to cite a clearer instance. The language of the Bible is in opposition to the facts of science, and the writers who used it were ignorant of those facts; while the Copernican system was under discussion, and before its truth was established, it was generally held that the Bible was committed to the opposite view. Here, then, are all the elements of what is called an error; it is acknowledged that the statement is false, and that the writers who used it believed it to be true; it is notorious that when its truth was first called in question the interpreters of the Bible with one voice assured the world that the point had been definitely pronounced upon in holy writ, and that no other view could be taken without a flat contradiction of the Bible. Nevertheless, the opposite view was established, and nobody's faith was disturbed. It was found that men still went on speaking of the rising and setting of the sun, although acknowledging themselves the disciples of Copernicus. The common sense of mankind has settled it that there is no error here. The

Scripture writers merely used the popular language of their times, and of all times, in alluding to the natural phenomena around them; Galileo himself would still have used the same language. This is a typical case, and may be referred to again.

Let us take another instance. Moses speaks of the coney (*Hyrax Syriacus*) as unclean, although he chews the cud, because he does not divide the hoof (Lev. xi. 5), and so of some other animals; on the other hand, the swine (ver. 7) is accounted unclean, because he does not chew the cud, although he divides the hoof. All this is wrong. The coney does not really chew the cud, but merely has a way of moving his lower jaw which gives him the appearance of doing so; and the swine does not divide the hoof, because, anatomically, he has four toes. In the same connection it is said (ver. 4) that the camel chews the cud, but does not divide the hoof; but anatomically he does divide the hoof, only he has a large pad which comes down behind the hoof, and on which he treads; so that the description of Moses, while right to the eye, is scientifically wrong. In general, this whole distinction is wrongly taken. Chewing the cud and dividing the hoof are correlated developments, so that all animals which do the one do the other also. Now was this an error on the part of Moses; and is it an error of the Bible? Technically and superficially, of course it is, but not really. Moses himself may very likely have been but an indifferent comparative anatomist; but this cannot be determined simply from this use of language. He was giving a law for popular observance, and must necessarily mark his distinctions according to appearances, or expose the people to be continually involved in transgression. It is of no consequence at all what was the extent or the deficiency of his own private information. The exigencies of the time and the circumstances required that the law should be expressed as it is, and it would have failed of its purpose had it been set forth in the technicalities of modern science. Shall we then say that such errors were unavoidable, and therefore Scripture must contain errors

which betray the imperfection of human knowledge, and show that the human element was not so limited as to prevent error? Or shall we conclude that before the highest tribunal these are really no errors at all, but merely the condescension of infinite knowledge in making itself comprehensible to men of limited information? For ourselves, we prefer the latter alternative, in view of the fact that Cuvier or Owen, or even Mr. Huxley himself, with whatever superior knowledge, must still have used substantially the same language, if giving a law under similar circumstances, and with the design of having it observed. But really the question is merely one of words, whichever we choose; since if these are to be called errors, they are yet errors which indicate neither faulty knowledge nor the necessary restriction of the source of the Scriptures to the human imperfection of the period in which they were written.

Once more, to take an instance which has been the occasion of endless discussion — the cosmogony of Genesis. Here both the main fact and the subordinate details are necessarily beyond the scope of human observation; and both the one and the other must either have been revealed, or else must have been the conclusion of speculative thought. It is not uncommon to explain one of them in one way, and the other in the other — to say that the main fact is that all things originate from a divine source; this was revealed and intended to be taught; but it was left to the writer to communicate this as best he could; and he actually did communicate it as best he could, in accordance with such knowledge as he had, or in such way as he could best imagine, and after the lapse of several thousand years his information has proved to be faulty. Now, it must be admitted that, under any possible exegesis, the account itself, if pressed to minutiae, is scientifically inaccurate. The word “day” may be understood (if this be exegetically allowable) of periods never so indefinite, or it may be taken to indicate only a series of pictorial visions; the phrases “Let the earth bring forth” and “Let the waters bring forth” may be taken, with Augustine

and many others, in a causative sense, in accordance with a theory of spontaneous generation; still, the palpable fact will remain that the introduction of the higher forms of vegetation upon our planet was not completed before animal life began, as is certainly implied by the story of the third and fifth days in Genesis, nor were the highest developments of aquatic life known before terrestrial animals appeared.<sup>1</sup> Here, then, as in the former cases, there is error. It is not sufficient for our present purpose to say that this error is in a secondary detail, and is comparatively unimportant. It is necessary to ascertain whether the detail containing the error is the outgrowth of human ignorance, or whether it belongs to the divine revelation. There are reasons for thinking that it could not have come from merely human reasoning or imagination. It is too good, it is too nearly scientifically accurate, to admit fairly of this supposition. Among all the cosmogonies of which we know it is unique in this respect. The best accounts of the creation found elsewhere have probably either come originally from the same source, or have been modified by this. The nearest approach to it is the Etruscan, of which, at present, we know only through the account given of it by a Christian writer of the tenth or eleventh century;<sup>2</sup> and this, such as it is, differs exactly in the point of being less in harmony with the teachings of science. The Chaldean legends of the creation—not to speak of their being overlaid and interpenetrated with a mass of mythological absurdity—have plainly been derived origi-

<sup>1</sup> It is scarcely worth while to stay to notice some alleged minor errors, such as that God is said to have *set* the sun and moon in the firmament, as if he had permanently fastened them to a solid vault. There is no proof whatever that the Hebrews shared in the conception of the classical nations of the *expanse* (such is the meaning of the Hebrew word) above being solid; but whether they did so or not, it is certain that Moses, or any one else of sufficient intelligence to have written this narrative, must have known of the motion of the moon relatively to the sun. He could not therefore have meant that both were fixed or attached to a solid foundation, but must necessarily have used the Hebrew word in its ordinary sense of *put* or *placed*, and not in the technical meaning of the English word *set*.

<sup>2</sup> Suidas, Lex. s. v. Τυρρηνία.

nally from the same source with the account in Genesis, and cannot therefore help us to account for its truth. Even Knobel, after recounting these and various other cosmogonies, says: "Of all these the prize belongs by universal acknowledgment to the simple and natural, dignified and sublime Hebrew narrative." It is so difficult to suppose that such a cosmogony should have been the result of merely human speculation in the remote ages to which it belongs, that it would be much easier to consider it a divine revelation throughout, but for the errors mentioned above. Let us, then, look more narrowly at those errors before deciding that they are inconsistent with a revelation from the Omniscient.

The general order of creation is given with entire accuracy — first chaos, then light, then a fluid mass, then a separation of the dry land from the waters, then life beginning in its lowest vegetative forms and advancing through aquatic animal life to terrestrial, all finally culminating in the appearance of man. The celestial bodies, sun, moon, and stars, are mentioned just when they must have first shone through the murky atmosphere of the cooling earth. The only difficulty is, that when the beginning of vegetation has been mentioned its story is continued without break to its culmination; and the same thing is done, also, with marine life. Is there any way of accounting for this consistently with the supposition that the whole story emanated from omniscience? We think it is not merely accounted for, but necessitated by the circumstances of the revelation. It must be given in such wise as to be comprehended by a rude people, and therefore must be given without the use of scientific terms; and in accordance with the proportion of revelation it must be given very briefly. Its purpose is not to teach science, but to show that all things come from God. Whether the revelation was made by vision, or by whatever other method, its object could hardly be otherwise accomplished than in the way it has been, by mentioning in succession the great features of the world, and saying that God made each of them. To have said that he made first the humbler forms of vegetation,

particularizing them ; and then the humbler forms of animal life, particularizing these too ; and then the higher forms, first of the one, and then of the other ; and lastly the highest of each of them in succession, would but have introduced prolixity and unnecessary confusion of mind. No wise man now would be likely to adopt such a method of teaching his child. He would tell him that God made all things — the earth and the sky, the sun, moon, and stars ; he made the grass, too, and the trees ; the fishes and the birds and the animals ; and last of all he made man. This is precisely what the Omniscient taught those who were in their spiritual infancy. In this teaching there is no evidence of the error of imperfect knowledge, but only of an adaptation to the exigencies under which the revelation must be made. It leads men at once to the great features of the truth ; it leads them to the exact detail, as far as they were capable of being led at the time ; its apparent error is simply from its generality and its brevity. To have been more precisely accurate, merely to teach a scientific detail which man in due time could and would find out for himself, would have required a prolixity unsuited to the occasion.

It may be said, in this and several other cases, that the result is the same, whether we suppose the statements to be those of imperfect human knowledge, or of omniscience adapting itself to human ignorance ; in either case, the imperfect statement remains. In a certain sense this is true, and is a necessity of any progressive revelation, and, in fact, of any revelation, to men of limited knowledge ; but the view to be taken of the Scriptures depends greatly on whether we consider this imperfection the result of man's speculation or of God's condescension. In the one case, we have the human element of the Bible without limitation, and can rely upon it only in so far as man's wisdom is trustworthy ; in the other, we have the teaching of Omniscience itself, and only need to take into account that he taught men according as they were able to bear. We think that the cosmogony of Genesis, to say the least, is consistent with the latter hypothesis.

The three examples now given are enough to show how all alleged errors of this kind may be treated, i.e. all errors which are sometimes considered as the result of imperfect knowledge, and especially those which come within the scope of natural science. They are due not to the human imperfection of the writers, but to that of the readers; they are simply the necessary limitation of revelation in making itself intelligible to those to whom it was given. They are consistent, therefore, with the view that all the teaching of the Scriptures is controlled by infinite knowledge, and that the human writers have been so limited as to prevent their introducing into them the errors of their own private notions. Not, of course, that the Omniscient can be convicted of imperfect knowledge, but that for man's sake he has seen fit to use such language and such incomplete statements as man has been able to receive, and which should ultimately become the means, through the spiritual education they afforded him, of enabling man himself, in some degree, to fill out what was insufficient in them.

This leads to the consideration of another class of errors with which the Bible is charged. From its earliest to its latest books there is evident a gradually growing conception of the spirituality and infinity of the Father of all. The representation of God as walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and inquiring of guilty man where he might be found, would be out of harmony with the New Testament, and would clash with the way in which the Divine Being is there spoken of. Hence it is argued that the Old Testament conception of God is a human and a false one; that it represents him as an exaggerated man, changing his plans and repenting of what he has done, pleased with one action of his creatures, grieved with another, and frequently using purely human methods and contrivances for the accomplishment of his purposes. It may be remarked, in passing, that the same objection applies—in a less degree, indeed, but still in its essential point—to the New Testament also, and to all human discourse about the infinite; for this must of



necessity be expressed chiefly in concrete and figurative terms. But this remark does not meet the difficulty; for, whatever be the necessities of human language, there is a manifest progress in the course of the long ages during which the composition of the various books of the Bible was going on. During these ages man's conception of God was purified and exalted, and, as this change is reflected in the books of the various ages, it is easy to attribute the change in the books themselves to the improved conceptions of the writers. On this supposition, whatever is imperfect and erroneous belongs to the writers, and gives evidence that the human element has not been so limited as to prevent the introduction of error.

An entirely different view may also be taken of these errors, referring them to the omniscient Source of the Scriptures; and if this view becomes on examination probable, or even possible, the basis of any sure inferences from the opposite view will be taken away. If it can be still farther shown that even the earlier scriptural conceptions of the Deity embrace features which were beyond the reach of the men of the time, or of any time, except as they have been taught by revelation, then it will be clear that the representations, as a whole, come from a divine source, and cannot be considered as errors at all, except in the same sense as those already considered. An examination of the facts is likely to lead to this last conclusion.

Nothing can be more true than the assertion of modern philosophy that the Infinite Being is, and must always have been, in his own ultimate essence, *unknowable* to finite man. Were it conceivable that he should reveal himself as he is, the revelation would have no value or significance for us, because we could not understand it. Any useful revelation must be in terms adapted to the human understanding, and hence must be partial and imperfect, and, in that sense, erroneous. Nevertheless, it may be of the utmost value, not because of the side which is imperfect, but because of that partial truth which man could not otherwise attain. And

this being attained leads on to ever higher and higher, though still imperfect, truth, and meantime enables man to guide his life in far closer correspondence to the divine will than would otherwise be practicable. The possibility of a revelation is here assumed, although this is not the place to inquire how it is possible. The personal conviction of the writer is clear that it can only be made through a Mediator—that the infinite and the finite, the divine and the human, are incommensurable terms, which can only be brought together in one who partakes of the nature of both, and hence that the incarnation is the fundamental fact in the possibility of revelation. But however this may be, we assume that a revelation exists, and we are concerned only to know what are the limitations upon its human side. Revelation must be given in terms adapted to human comprehension in order to be intelligible; and hence it follows that it must be given at various times, in terms adapted to the varying capacities of those times. In the spiritual infancy of the race it must be vastly more anthropomorphic than is necessary after thousands of years of continued spiritual education. And after the higher revelation has been given, it will still be desirable that the earlier, and in this respect lower, shall remain for the benefit of those not yet prepared for the higher; and this is a condition through which all pass in the course of their lives, and in which, perhaps, some remain permanently fixed.

If, therefore, the fact be accepted that God is what in the imperfection of our language we are fain to describe as merciful and loving, it follows that in any revelation of himself he will not reveal himself perfectly,—that is, absolutely truly,—but only partially, as man is able to bear it; and this must be, in a certain sense, untruly or erroneously. Revelation must, therefore, be marked in different ages by different degrees of this imperfection or so-called erroneousness of teaching. Men must be trained through inferior conceptions—such conceptions as it was possible to awaken in them without violating the laws of their nature—to enable

them to rise to higher ones; they must be appealed to through motives and feelings they can understand, before they can be led up to those which at first they could not understand. It was necessary to insist long and earnestly upon monotheism before the mystery of the Trinity could be safely taught. It is therefore possible that what at first sight seems to belong to the faulty conceptions of the human writers of the Bible may really be a part of the progressive divine teaching. As far as yet considered, indeed, it might belong to either; and since the growing capacity of man for higher and purer revelation is parallel with his actually higher and purer conception of God, we might be uncertain to which of them to refer this progress. It is necessary, then, to inquire if these imperfect revelations have any characteristics which indisputably bespeak a divine origin. There need be no difficulty in finding them.

One of the most striking features in the scriptural representation of the Divine Being from first to last, and all along with these anthropomorphic representations, is, that no man shall see God and live; that he dwells in light which no man can approach unto; that he is not a man that he should repent, but that with him is neither variableness nor shadow of turning; that no man by searching can find him out; and many like expressions. Such teaching is scattered through books by the most various writers, and at great distances of time, and makes it plain that anthropomorphic representations are also used in them only as of necessity, and for man's sake. That there might be no real misunderstanding, the declarations just mentioned are interspersed with these representations, showing as clearly as the language of any modern philosophy that the Scriptures understood God, in his absolute essence, to be unknowable and unapproachable by his creature. Now, this was not a doctrine of human invention. In the philosophies of antiquity it appears only in their profoundest treatises, never in popular teaching; and it does not appear at all until long ages after it had been announced in the Scriptures. Moreover, it never

appears with the fulness and distinctness of enunciation which it has in the Bible. Here, then, is the clear mark of a divine source—the sign-manual of more than human knowledge; and this is so interwoven with the other representations that they cannot be disentangled. Thus the doubt is solved, and what might otherwise have been considered as the result of human imperfection is shown to be the effect of divine condescension. This class of errors, then, like those which have gone before, are in no other sense really errors than as they are imperfect representations of the truth, adapted to the wants and capacities of those to whom they were given; and at the same time they are so connected with other statements as to show that there was a limitation put on the expression of the human notions of the writer, so that he was to teach, on the whole, what was beyond the reach of merely human thought.

There is another kind of alleged error, of a more technical kind, which must be considered here, that it may not be in the way farther on. There is frequently in the different books a duplicate account of the same transaction, and these do not always agree; and there is sometimes in a later book a quotation or a reference which does not, at least upon its face, answer exactly to the original. Such divergences are often disposed of by the remark that they arise simply from the individualities of the writers, their differences of recollection, their habits of mind, their misunderstandings of what they read, and their mental prepossessions; just as similar divergences are seen in the testimony of conscientious witnesses in our courts of justice, or in varying reports of conversation or of public addresses. It is certainly unnecessary to eliminate this human mould of the Scriptures altogether. It constitutes, e.g. one of the peculiar charms of the fourfold portraiture of our Lord in the Gospels. It is important, nevertheless, to know its limits; it is important to know if actual errors, even in matters of secondary importance, do occur, so that we cannot be better assured of the truth of the casual statements of the Bible than of those of

other historians ; or whether, whatever be the individual coloring of the narrative, we can yet rely upon every positive statement of the sacred books as absolutely true. In other words, the question here comes up, as in other cases, whether these alleged errors are due to the imperfect knowledge and faulty ideas of the human writers, or whether inspiration has so watched over and guarded them that they have been restrained from any even trivial misstatements. It is, of course, impossible to examine here all debatable passages. Only a few of the more vexed and difficult cases can be selected as examples of the whole.

The general principle in the comparison of seemingly inconsistent accounts in ancient documents is the same as is now observed in regard to testimony in any modern court of justice — before pronouncing either of them false, it is to be seen whether there is not some rational and likely hypothesis in regard to the circumstances which will bring both accounts into harmony. Or, if this fails, it is to be asked whether each witness must not have been aware of the facts stated by the other, and yet, without other motive than a desire to tell the truth, has given a different version of them. In the latter case there is reason to suppose that both are true, although at our distance from the events we cannot suggest any hypothesis which will bring them into consistency. The discrepancies between the evangelists have so long attracted attention that little need be said of them. Especially in regard to the varying accounts of the resurrection of our Lord, long the stalking horse of infidelity, it is worth while to remember that West, a few generations ago, undertook to demonstrate from his deistical stand-point the falsity of the Gospels, by showing their absolute inconsistency in this narrative ; he examined them with a clear head and an honest heart, and the result was his famous treatise on the resurrection, and his own conversion into a Christian believer.

We select, as one of the most apparently contradictory narratives, the healing of the blind man, or men, near Jericho. It has long been recognized that there is no real difficulty

here, as in several other cases, in the mention of *two* blind men by one of the evangelists (Matt. xx. 30), while the others (Mark x. 46; Luke xviii. 35) speak only of the one, Bartimaeus, who especially attracted attention. But both Matthew and Mark expressly say that the event occurred when they had departed from Jericho, while Luke is equally definite in saying that it was when Jesus was drawing near to the city (*ἐν τῷ ἐγγιζειν αὐτὸν εἰς Ἱεριχώ*). All attempts to explain the latter phrase as meaning only *while they were near* must be given up as strained and unsupported by usage. But it is altogether likely that our Lord on this journey spent several days at Jericho, and that, as was his custom at Jerusalem, and as is still the common custom in visiting Eastern cities, he slept in the country, and came daily into the city. This supposition, which is not only possible, but in itself probable, removes the whole difficulty. Matthew and Mark speak of the miracle as wrought when he had gone out from the city; Luke, more particularly, as exactly when he was entering it again on his morning return. The various records of Peter's denials of his Master, and other seeming discrepancies, are all brought into accord by even more simple suppositions; but this one example must here suffice. An intelligent exegesis, seeking harmony, will always find it without strain.

The most difficult case of apparent disagreement between the Gospels and the other books of the New Testament is in the account of the death of Judas. Matthew (xxvii. 5) says that he hung himself; Peter, in a discourse to his fellow-disciples recorded by Luke (Acts i. 18) gives a different version of what happened. The devices often used for reconciling the two stories must be recognized as somewhat strained; no simple and entirely satisfactory suggestion in explanation of their difference has yet been made. But this we do know: At the time of Peter's discourse the two disciples had been constantly together since the occurrence, some six weeks before, and they must have talked together, often and minutely, over all the circumstances con-

nected with the betrayal and death of their Master. Their knowledge of all the facts was held entirely in common. Matthew was present, and gave at least silent assent to what Peter said, and neither of them could have had any object in perverting the facts which are mentioned by both of them quite incidentally. Under these circumstances there is but one tenable conclusion — that there were still some additional facts (though at this distance of time we may not be able to guess what they were) which, if known, would fully explain the discrepancy.

In the citation of the Old Testament it is by no means necessary to suppose that the New Testament writers *always* intended to quote it according to its original meaning. Their minds were full of its language, and it was natural for them to express what they had to say, just as men do now, in terms with which they had been familiar from childhood, without a thought that the passage had originally the application given to it in their quotation. They would also sometimes see an application of what had been said of events long gone by to occurrences of their own time too *à propos* to pass unnoticed, just as is done in our own day; and in such cases they might very well introduce their application by saying, “It has come to pass according as it is written,” or “Thus was this scripture fulfilled,” without imagining that the old scripture itself looked to any such application. Passages of this kind, however, are fewer than is sometimes supposed, and the common sense of mankind is sufficient to deal with them.

There are many passages of the Old Testament also cited argumentatively, and it is alleged that in some of these the argument is faulty through a misinterpretation of the quotation. These will be considered presently, in connection with alleged errors of reasoning. Meantime there are several quotations with which fault is found on other grounds.

Perhaps the most classic instances are in the speech of Stephen (Acts vii.). In discussing these it is to be remembered who he was — “a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost” and “of power,” and of a wisdom that his adversaries could not

resist (Acts vi. 5-10). He was familiar with the history of his people, and spoke to an audience fully competent and well disposed to trip him up in any slip. His object was not to instruct them in their history, but to prove from its familiar facts that they sinned in rejecting Jesus as their Messiah. Under these circumstances, it is in the highest degree unlikely that he would have made any errors. If any statements appear to us wrong, after the lapse of eighteen hundred years, the presumption is strong that Stephen knew more about the facts than we do. Yet this presumption is only *à priori*; the facts must be taken as they are. Almost his first statement is that God called Abraham "when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran"; and, accordingly, the English Bible reads, in Gen. xii. 1: "Now the Lord *had said* unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country," etc.; but the critics say that this is an incorrect translation, made for the purpose of bringing the passage into accord with Stephen. We doubt this. The Hebrew certainly does not express the pluperfect, because it has no form for that tense, and must depend upon the context for its indication. We think such indication is found here, especially in the mention of the country and kindred and father's house which Abram was to leave, and which were certainly not left in Haran; and hence we consider the English Bible right in its translation. But waiving this, there is the distinct statement in xv. 7: "I am the Lord, that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees," so that Stephen had good authority for what he said. A more serious difficulty is found a little farther on, where he states (ver. 16) that the twelve patriarchs were buried "in the sepulchre that *Abraham* bought for a sum of money of the sons Emmor." Now, we know that Abraham bought a cave for a sepulchre at Mamre, but Joseph and his brethren were not buried there; we know, also, that *Jacob* bought a piece of land of the sons of Hamor near Shechem, and Joseph was buried there. Is it possible that Stephen, in the haste of his utterance, mixed the two facts, and attributed to Abraham the purchase which belonged to Jacob? We



think not; because, in all probability, Abraham was the original purchaser of the same land afterwards purchased by Jacob, and this fact was known to Stephen. The evidence is as follows: The land about Shechem was already occupied (Gen. xii. 6, 7) when Abraham built an altar there. There were but three ways in which he could have done this: he must either have built it on the Shechemites' land, by their sufferance — an unlikely procedure for Abraham, and one giving no security for the sacredness of the altar; or he must have taken it by violence, which is improbable in the extreme; or, finally, he must have purchased it, which it is reasonable to suppose he did. A century or more later Jacob came to the same place, and also wished to build an altar, presumably on the site of his grandfather's. But the land being occupied, this field would not have been left so long unoccupied, and Jacob doubtless found it in some one's possession. If he would reclaim it, it must be either by his sword, or by a fresh purchase. No one familiar with Jacob's character can doubt his choice, and his purchase is recorded. The facts, however, make it probable that Abraham had purchased it before, and hence that Stephen was right. Some other minor points in this speech, which cannot be considered here, are satisfactorily solved, if carefully considered. The two noticed, which are the most difficult, may serve for examples of all.

There are also inaccuracies in the New Testament quotations from the Old. When these do not affect the substance of the quotation it is enough to say that, as the case may be, the quotation is from the Septuagint, the version in common use, without stopping to criticise it, or is freely translated from the original, or even sometimes is loosely quoted from memory. But there are cases in which the Septuagint is quoted when it differs in an important point from the original. The most striking instance is in the Epistle to the Hebrews (x. 5): "Sacrifice and burnt-offering thou wouldst not, but a body hast thou prepared me." It is notorious that the word "body" is not in the original, and is quoted from the Septuagint. If this were an unimportant word, it would attract no

attention, because it would not have been worth the writer's while to go out of the way to correct it; but as the discourse is of Christ's atonement, at first sight this word seems very important. But a closer examination shows that the whole stress of the passage and the whole argument from the quotation rests upon Christ's having come to do the Father's will. The contrast is drawn between the imperfect way of removing sins by the sacrifices of old, and the perfect way through Christ's obedience. The word "body" was so entirely immaterial to the argument that, in summing up, the quotation is repeated to clinch the conclusion, but without the clause containing this word.

This instance closely connects itself with alleged errors of reasoning. Our Lord himself and his apostles also reason largely from the Old Testament. This is the only authority which Christ recognizes at all; and while he subordinates even this to his own teaching, he yet bases arguments upon its language, and positively declares, "One jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law until all be fulfilled." The apostles everywhere assume that the Old Testament was accepted as a matter of course with Christianity; and even with heathen converts (as e.g. the Galatians) they reason from Old Testament types and shadows to Christian verities. It is asserted that some of this reasoning is illogical and inconsequential, is fashioned after the rabbinical methods of argument, and is a clear case of the human element, unrestrained and uncontrolled, coming to the surface in the word of God.

A full answer to this allegation could only be made by a careful examination of every passage by which it is thought to be sustained. This is impossible within our limits; but, as in other cases, a few of the more difficult instances may be taken as examples of the rest. The arguments in question are chiefly in the Epistles of Paul, and in that to the Hebrews, if that be the work of a different author. It is admitted that the writer was an intelligent man, gifted with no small degree of logical acumen. His main arguments, too, are

powerful, and generally convincing. The question is about some minor details, which were satisfactory enough to his contemporaries, but which are now criticised as resting upon a faulty exegesis of the passages quoted, while the reasoning based upon them is said to savor of rabbinical subtlety, rather than of manly and fair argument. These are sometimes defended on the ground of the lawfulness of the *argumentum ad hominem*; but this is hardly satisfactory. Either the reasoning must be shown to be fair, and based upon sound premises, or else it must be recognized as the result of the imperfection of the human writers, which inspiration has not controlled sufficiently to prevent the introduction of error into the Scriptures. The latter alternative may seem, at first sight, the easiest; but we are not entitled to adopt it until some case can be pointed out in which it is clearly required. The *à priori* presumption must always be against it in books which confessedly contain so much of the divine teaching. The most frequently cited instances are one in the Epistle to the Hebrews and two in that to the Galatians. If all these shall be found on examination to be sound arguments, without the aid of rabbinical casuistry, other alleged instances will still more readily yield before a fair and careful examination.

The case referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews is that in which the superiority of the Melchisedecan to the Aaronic priesthood is shown by Abraham's payment of tithes to Melchisedec (Heb. vii. 4-10). The argument here we understand to be this: All spiritual authority is from God, and there can be no disturbance of the relations he has established. He gave certain blessings and privileges to Melchisedec, and also certain ones to Abraham and his descendants. The relation which existed between these two must continue in after ages to be the relation between those who draw their authority from them respectively. Now, Abraham recognized the spiritual superiority of Melchisedec; therefore the spiritual authority of the priesthood derived from Melchisedec must be superior to that derived from Abraham. Incidentally the author remarks,

“And (as I may so say) Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham; for he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him”; but this is an illustration, not an argument, and even as illustration is qualified by the “as I may so say.” The assumption of a fallacy here rests upon the supposition that the argument culminates in this clause; whereas it is complete without it, except as this points the fact that Levi was descended from Abraham. The only flaw in the argument as it stands is met by the author a little farther on. It might be that the Levitical priesthood, being expressly established by God, had received a higher authority than belonged to the spiritual position of Abraham, and thus have been raised even above that of Melchisedec. The apostle shows elaborately that this was not the case, and his argument remains intact.

The two cases in Galatians may be taken in the order in which they occur. In the first (iii. 15, 16) Paul argues that the promise made to Abraham and to his *seed*, rather than to his *seeds*, must apply to Christ. The difficulty arises simply from not observing wherein the apostle’s argument really lies. Unquestionably the word “seed,” whether in Hebrew, Greek, or English, is a collective term, and had the promise to Abraham been meant to be distributed to all his numerous posterity it would still have been couched in the same terms. No sound argument, therefore, can be drawn from the use of the singular rather than the plural; nor is this the apostle’s design. He has, indeed, been supposed to argue from this, and therefore to argue fallaciously; but he does not do so. He supposes some things to be known to his readers, and among them the nature of the promise to Abraham. The primeval promise to fallen man was that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head — that in the long struggle with the power of evil one born of woman should at last win the victory. This promise had been the hope of every God-fearing man through the long ages of corruption that followed; and from time to time, as at the birth of Cain and of Noah, this hope found definite expression. It had

been still deferred ; and when Abraham was told that in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed, he must have understood it meant that the promised Redeemer should be born of his line. It is to this promise that Paul refers, and it is from the nature of this promise that he argues. The promise, he says, was not to the posterity of Abraham generally, but to this one, this Redeemer, who is Christ. To express compactly and tersely his meaning, he uses the words, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many ; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." His argument is not drawn from the word, but from the nature of the promise ; and that nature of the promise he expresses, as the most compact and convenient way, by the singular and plural of the word "seed."

The other case is that of the beautiful allegory from the history of Hagar and Sarah and their descendants, used by Paul to set forth the relations of Jews and Gentiles under the gospel (Gal. iv. 21-31). It is alleged that the apostle, under the influence of his rabbinical education, has here been guilty of founding an important argument upon what should have been a mere illustration. Paul was undoubtedly a man who made all his human acquisitions tell to the advancement of his Master's cause, and frequently brings the familiar story of the Old Testament to the enforcement and illustration of gospel truth (as in 1 Cor. ix. 9, 10 ; x. 1-11, etc.) ; but the precise question here is,—and this is important in its bearing on the general subject,—whether he does this after the rabbinical fashion of subtle and inconsequential argument, or whether the tendency to this which might have been expected from his education is so overruled and controlled by the Spirit of inspiration as to allow of his using only arguments which are really sound and forcible. None can doubt the appropriateness of the references here, and in other places, as illustrations. It is plain, too, that they have force as arguments to this extent—that when it has been already shown that parties under the gospel occupy the same relations as other parties did under the law, then what is

predicated of those relations in the one case will hold good in the other also. This is precisely what is done in the passage before us. There was in the old time a child of nature and a child of promise, and under the gospel there is the same. The child of nature of old was the child of the bondmaid, and followed his mother's condition; and the same is true now; the Jew is the child of Abraham by nature, and is under the bondage of the law to which he was born. The child of promise was by the free-woman, and answers to those who come into the gospel covenant by promise, and not by natural descent, and are therefore free from the law. Paul, recognizing the historical truth of the events to which he refers, says that they truly represent — as they certainly do — the relation between mere natural inheritance and inheritance by promise, and shows that this is the very relation between Jews and Christians under the gospel. He then draws from this relation a forcible and legitimate argument. There seems to be here no ground for a charge of error. There is also a minor point objected to in the incidental statement that a local name of Mount Sinai was Hagar, of which sufficient external evidence is wanting; but Paul had himself been on the ground, and his assertion is quite as trustworthy as that of any other traveller, and, moreover, does not at all affect his argument.

The part of this whole subject most perplexing to some minds is in what is considered the faulty morality, particularly of the older parts of the Old Testament. Polygamy, slavery, revenge, the punishment of the innocent for the sin of the guilty, the extermination of whole nations — and that too in bloody wars — by the hands of the chosen people, the success of Jacob's deceit, the praise of Jael's perfidy, the spirit of hatred to enemies that glows in some of the Psalms, — these are among the things which strike strangely on the Christian's ear, and seem inconsistent with the character of an All-holy God. Do these, indeed, come from the divine source of the Scriptures, or are they the teachings of men enlightened only to the standard of the times in which they

lived? Of course, many things are narrated in the Bible simply as historical facts, for the morality of which it is in no way responsible. Immoral acts, also, are sometimes recorded of the saints, like Abraham's deceit or Peter's denial of his Master, which must be eliminated from the the discussion; because the Scriptures in no way commend them, even where they do not openly denounce them. Other evils, like polygamy, were always opposed to God's will, but were suffered "for the hardness of men's hearts" among a people yet unable to bear a higher morality; yet the evil was mitigated and restrained as far as was practicable at the time. So also with slavery. The law was unable to forbid it; even Christianity did not directly do this; but the old dispensation in every possible way modified and reduced its evils. After these things have been said, however, there remains much that seems dark and inexplicable. The *lex talionis* of the Pentateuch was not merely permissive, but obligatory. "Thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deut. xix. 21). How shall this be reconciled with the gospel law of returning love for hatred, and good deeds for evil? Because the condition of the people required such commands, in order that they might thereby be made fit for a higher standard. Principles of justice must be implanted in the mind as a necessary basis for those of love. The monsters of the carboniferous era must precede the development of life in the tertiary, and that in turn must prepare the way for the age of man; yet to him who ordered the earth from the beginning those carboniferous monsters were good in their day, and we now see no unfitness in their formation under the guiding hand of him who was leading our earth on to a higher state. So in the spiritual development of our race, as far as we can judge, it was necessary that God should govern man according to his capacities, and give him laws suited to his condition. Only thus could he be advanced to a higher standard; only by impressing on a lawless people, given to unbridled license of revenge, a sense of exact justice

and of the rights of others could they be prepared for a higher teaching. At the same time, it is to be remembered that higher principles were everywhere embodied in the law for such as were able to receive them. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev. xix. 18) was a precept of Leviticus, as well as of the gospel. These considerations, fairly applied to the circumstances, will account for what otherwise may seem strange and anomalous in the law.

But why should the people who were thus to be trained to better things have been made the executors of God's wrath, thereby inuring them to deeds of savage cruelty, and teaching them to imbrue their hands with the blood of defenceless women and unweaned children, as well as with that of the warrior? Why, too, in the judgments upon individual offenders, as Dathan and Abiram, or as Achan, should sentence have been executed also upon their innocent wives and little ones? The answer to both these and other like questions is essentially the same. Men always have stood, and they still stand, not merely in an individual, but also in a federal, relation to God. This is plain everywhere under what is called God's natural government of the world. People suffer or prosper according to the acts of their rulers; families are affected by the conduct of their head; children inherit not merely the fortunes, but the idiosyncrasies of their parents. Why the world should have been so constituted we cannot here inquire; but the fact is plain; and if revelation come from the same Author as nature we must expect to find in it the same general features. The institution of the Christian church is one great example of it; and whatever blessing, whatever grace comes to the individual by its instrumentality is in consequence of the federal relation in which the believer, over and above his individual relation, stands to his Master. So strong was this relation of old that the prophet could say (Num. xxiii. 21): God "hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel," at the very time when he was punishing tens of thousands among them for their gross and outrageous sins.



This federal relation was stronger and relatively more important in ancient than in modern times. The progress of revelation has always tended to bring out the individual more clearly as he stands by himself before God; but the federal relation also still exists, and anciently was much more important. Nations existed chiefly as nations, and families as families, and men understood little of any other relation. They looked upon a nation as an organic whole, and upon a family as an appurtenance and a possession of its head. When, then, a nation, as the Amalekites or Canaanites, had arrayed itself as a whole against the church of God, how was it to be dealt with? The divine judgment must be made intelligible, alike to friends and foes, to have any value. Men could distinguish but little between the individual and the nation of which he was a part. Sometimes there may be such a striking instance of faith as that of Rahab, when it became possible to spare the individual<sup>1</sup> in the destruction of the doomed city; but generally, if the divine judgment was to be effective, to make an impression, to establish God's government of the world, it must be sweeping and comprehensive. The Israelites could not have understood that God was very seriously displeased with Achan, except his family also were involved in the same sentence. They could not have believed in the divine detestation of the sins of the Canaanites, unless the whole people were utterly swept away. In this case there was the further object of removing all contaminating influences from the one people upon earth whose vocation it was to keep alive the knowledge of the true God.<sup>2</sup>

But these commands are sometimes coupled with an appeal to lower motives which look like the mere outcome of hereditary revenge. God says to Saul (1 Sam. xv. 2, 3): "I remember that which Amalek did to Israel. . . . Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have.

<sup>1</sup> But even so, her whole family must be spared with her.

<sup>2</sup> See Arnold's Sermons, vi. 35-37, quoted by Stanley in "Jewish Church," Vol. i. p. 283.

..... Slay both man and woman, infant and suckling." In the light of what has been said, it may be possible to explain the necessity for the destruction of Amalek; but why should an appeal be made for this purpose to the hereditary national sentiment of revenge? We can only answer that man is of a mixed nature; and God, in leading him to do his will, has always appealed, and still appeals, not only to the highest motives of love and duty and gratitude, but also to self-interest and gain. As we are constituted, such appeals are a help to us, even now in the full sunlight of the gospel, in our heavenward path, with which we could not dispense; how much more to those in their spiritual infancy in the dim twilight of the law. Even here, however, the appeal is not to revenge for personal injuries, but to revenge for injuries long generations ago, inflicted upon their people as the church of God.

It is always to be remembered, moreover, that these judgments in which the innocent were involved with the guilty were purely temporal in their character, like the consequences to the ship's company now of the carelessness of the engineer, and have nothing to do with rewards or punishments beyond the grave. It may have been that the wife of Dathan was received into paradise, or that some of the children of Rahab received the doom of the impenitent. These judgments may be likened to the earthquake which cuts off all the inhabitants of a city now, good and bad alike.

Still, it is asked, why should the Israelites have been made the instruments of these judgments, inuring the chosen people to deeds of cruelty and blood, instead of punishing the rest of the Canaanites, like Sodom and Gomorrhah, by direct divine interposition? A single example may help to explain this. When Joshua called upon the captains of the men of war to plant their feet upon the necks of the prostrate kings of Canaan (Josh. x. 24), the act seems to our Christian apprehension like one of wanton insult to a prostrate foe; but to one at all able to enter into the spirit of the times it will be seen in its true light, as a necessary means of raising the courage of the Israelites, and teaching them not to tremble

before the might of the idolatrous heathen whom they were to supplant. And in general, the lesson of God's anger against Canaanitish sin could in no other way have been so impressed upon the Israelites as by making them the actual executioners of his wrath. With the strong tendency of the Israelites to heathen abominations, it would seem that, but for the personal impression thus produced, there would have been no restraining them at all. We do not find that the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrha ever had any marked moral effect upon their neighbors.

These thoughts lead to the more sweeping charge that from Abraham down through all the history of Israel they are represented in the Bible as the especial favorites of the Almighty, and whoever interferes with them, no matter if he is right and they are wrong, is yet doomed to feel the vengeance of the Omnipotent. It is said that this is just what is found in the legends of every ancient people, and gives good ground for looking upon the Scripture records as largely the human story of a nation who imagined themselves the especial favorites of heaven. This is simply a question of fact. Were the Israelites really in such a peculiar relation to God that they should have been treated differently from other people? There can be but one answer to this, if the general course of history as set forth in the Scriptures is received at all. Men had increased in wickedness as fast as in numbers. The race had been wiped from the face of the earth by the flood, and a fresh population developed from the only righteous family. Even this was ineffectual; nor was the confusion of tongues more successful. Man tended too rapidly to moral degeneracy to be restrained by any universal discipline. Then a particular individual was selected to become, with his descendants, the depository of divine truth. He was trained as a childless wanderer for long years, and his son also in the same way. Not until the third generation was any multiplication allowed; and then, when the family was growing to be a nation, it was brought into bondage, and schooled for generations, first under the rigors of a servile condition, then in the free air

of the desert, and was placed under a law of minute detail and of severe penalty. It is plain, therefore, that in God's dealings with these patriarchs and their descendants he would rightly have had regard, even more than to them individually, to the part they were called to play in the furtherance of his purposes, and in the preparation for that great fact in the world's history, the coming of the Redeemer. Jacob, e.g. was promised the birthright, and would in any event have received it. He actually obtained it by fraud, and for this was punished by long years of exile and many sorrows; but he was allowed to retain the birthright, because this was a step in the world's progress to Christ. Israel was again and again told that God's favor to them was not for their own sake, for they were a "stiff-necked and rebellious people," but for the sake of God's great name. Their sins are continually recorded, as well as their punishments. All this is unknown in the legends of other ancient people; there is nothing in ancient history like it. If these were human records, they would be like others. Because they are not, and because as a matter of fact the Israelites had been made the peculiar people of God to facilitate his purposes of love in the redemption of mankind, therefore this partiality for Israel must be attributed not to the imagination of the human writers, but to the divine revelation itself.

In regard to the so-called faulty morality of the Old Testament, we select the most difficult case to serve as an example. In the great war between Israel and their oppressor, although Jabin's army had been routed, there could be no security against a recurrence of the oppression as long as his general, Sisera, lived. The Kenites occupied a neutral position between the two parties, on friendly terms with both, yet always, on the whole, attached to Israel. Under these circumstances the flying Sisera sought refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, and was received with every demonstration of cordiality and friendship. But when the tired warrior had fallen asleep in fancied security, she slew him, and showed his dead body exultingly to the pur-

suing Israelites. History has instances enough of similar treachery; but the peculiarity of this is that the deed is especially commended in the song of the inspired prophetess, Deborah. She not merely rejoices in the result, but declares Jael as "blessed above women" for having done the deed. It is plain that the act of Jael was considered by her contemporaries as most praiseworthy. They had not yet risen to a moral condition in which they could be shocked at its treachery; they saw in it only the brave deed of a woman who had faith enough in the God of Israel to dare the wrath of their oppressors, and by one act to destroy the nerve and strength of Israel's enemy. The commendation of Deborah in the midst of this state of moral childhood may be regarded, in itself, in either of two ways — either as a mistaken human commendation of an essentially wrong act, or as a divine commendation of a zeal for God and a trust in him, although this showed itself forth according to the light of the times. It is so difficult to transport ourselves in thought into times far different from our own that the former has often seemed the easier alternative; yet there can be no question of the general principle that God does commend men in our time, and in all times, for zealous and brave activity in his service according to the best light and knowledge they can command, even when it afterwards proves that their views were mistaken. This, of course, does not justify wrong deeds when those who do them *might* know better; but in Jael's case, and in others of that time, the opportunity for such better knowledge was wanting. They acted according to their light, even as we now, with a clear conscience and with the approbation of our fellow-men, do many things which in a higher stage of existence may be seen to have been wrong. Yet we reasonably expect our heavenly Father to judge such acts in view of our imperfect knowledge and of the spirit which animated them. It was in the same way that the act of Jael was commended. She knew no better, and served God with courage and zeal according to the light she had. May we never do worse.

The unrighteous acts of several of the judges bring out another important fact. Samson loved strange women; Ehud treacherously assassinated Eglon; and many like deeds were done by men expressly "raised up by the Lord" for the deliverance of Israel, and at times when "the Spirit of the Lord" had especially come upon them. How could these things be? In a less conspicuous way, the same thing happens now. Men are providentially raised up, and go forth, moved by God's Spirit, to do good in their day and generation. Nevertheless, in their human weakness and infirmity of judgment, they often do many foolish and hurtful things. Shall it be said that the Lord prompted them to do these things? By no means. He prompted them to do good, but left the manner of the doing to the exercise of their own faculties. So God prompted the judges to deliver Israel, but left the manner of it to themselves; and they, in the moral darkness in which they were, took counsel perhaps of their passions, or at least of their prejudices and misconceptions of the right. These acts themselves were often severely punished. Samson's guilty love led to his imprisonment and death, and Jephthah's rash vow turned into bitter mourning the very hour of his victory. But there is no error in the statement that they were "raised up by the Lord," or that they acted under the impulse of his Spirit. The mistake is in supposing that this impulse guided them to acts which were really determined by their own erring judgment.

The more general question recurs: Why should men have been kept so long under the tutelage of an imperfect system, and have been taught such incomplete morality, that they could do these abominable things, either with a clear conscience, or at least without adequate sense of their wrong? Why should not a higher standard have been set before them so clearly that they must have recognized polygamy and slavery, murder, revenge, and deceit, as in direct opposition to God's holy will? Because they were not able to receive or understand a higher standard. The slowness of development of the human faculties in the race, as in the individual, is something in proportion to their

value. Physical prowess and skill is earlier and more easily acquired than intellectual, and intellectual than moral. *Character* is the hardest and the slowest thing in its formation. There were always sufficient indications of God's will in his revelation, if men had been able to see them. The same dispensation which tolerated polygamy recorded that "at first God made them male and female"; the same law which required an eye for an eye also commanded, "Thou shalt not avenge" (Lev. xix. 18). Under the education of this law a fair-minded man could see, when it was pointed out to him, that its two great commandments, embracing all others, were a supreme love to God, and an equal love to one's neighbor with himself. This is the sum of all morality, and this is the acknowledged sum of the teaching of the old dispensation; but to the recognition of this mankind must be trained, like children, little by little, and imperfect commands must be given until they were able to rise to better. Men were very wicked, and "the law was added because of transgressions, until the promised Seed should come," and bring out the higher morality and spirituality which all along lay hidden under its temporary educational provisions. Now, we submit that in all this there is nothing to show this imperfect law was the outgrowth of the ideas of its human writers; if it had been, it would not have been possible to trace a higher law beneath it, and it would not have been "our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." Since it is marked by these characteristics, there is but one tenable conclusion: It was divinely given to prepare men of dull spiritual apprehension for a higher and better law ready to be revealed in its time.

There are no other classes of alleged error in the Scriptures requiring especial notice. The treatment of the subject is necessarily incomplete; because the force of an inductive argument depends upon an examination of all the facts, which is impossible here. But the aim has been throughout to take the most difficult facts; and if these do not sustain the theory that the Bible is untrustworthy in certain directions, because of the erroneous views of its human writers,

there are no others which can do so. It has been attempted to show that all these so called errors are at least consistent with the hypothesis that they proceed from the Divine Source of the Scriptures, and in many cases are so inextricably involved with what must belong to that Source that no other hypothesis is tenable. The consideration of the subject would be incomplete, however, without mention of the way in which the Scriptures themselves treat the question.

Our Lord continually refers to them as absolutely reliable and true. He speaks of various details in them as of "Scriptures which cannot be broken." He quotes even incidental passages as conclusive in argument. As already said, they are the only authority to which he defers, and yet he defers to them in their minutest points; while at the same time he unfolds in them a previously unknown richness and depth of spiritual truth. There are points where he has occasion to change their teaching, as e.g. in regard to the law of divorce; but even there he shows that he only restores the original will of his Father, and he proves what that will was by the same Scriptures. He recognizes that God had suffered that will to be in abeyance for a time, because of the hardness of men's hearts; but he treats the law thus suffered to be imperfect as not from man, but from God. He shows, indeed, that much of the older Scriptures came to its intended result in himself and his teaching, and had no farther force; but this, so far from making them human, makes them so thoroughly divine that from the hoar ages of antiquity they could have looked forward to and been written in view of his coming.

His apostles, beyond all question, regarded the Scriptures in the same way. No particular passage, admitting of any doubtful interpretation, need be referred to. The view taken throughout the Acts and the Epistles is plain beyond any possibility of doubt. The Scriptures are everywhere appealed to as of authority in small matters, as well as in great. Their histories are regarded as authentic in every particular; their precepts are made the foundation of Christian teaching;



their prophecies are treated as evidence of Christian truth ; and their moral teaching is abundantly urged on Christian disciples. We suppose that no one, whatever may be his own view, can fail to recognize, if he look fairly at the question, that the New Testament writers believed the Scriptures *to be* the word of God, rather than simply *to contain* it. This belief we have tried to show was justified by the facts ; and if so, certain important consequences follow.

First, in regard to the theory of inspiration. If the Bible is thoroughly true and reliable (not taking into account mere copyists' errors),—making allowance only for such imperfect statements of the truth or such imperfect commands as were required by the condition of the men to whom it was given,—then we have before us this prodigy : that during the lapse of many centuries a number of writers, of different personal character and of every variety of culture and position,—writing with such freedom that their idiosyncrasies are plainly to be seen, and unhesitatingly touching upon every subject that came in their way—historical, ethnological, archaeological, scientific, and moral,—have been preserved from error. This result could not have had place in writings of human origin. Is there any other logical conclusion from this, than that, whatever else be or be not the function of inspiration, its scope included the preservation of the Bible from error, and the giving to man of a book on which he may rely absolutely as the word of God ?

Finally, in regard to exegesis. The interpretation of Scripture is an easy matter, if the interpreter may refer everything that seems troublesome to the mistake of the human writer, treating it as of no consequence because he thinks it does not interfere with the essential office of God's word as the teacher of religious duty. If, however, the interpreter must accept all Scripture as given by inspiration of God, allowing only for the coloring of the various human writers and for unavoidable error in the transmission of their writings, he has a different task before him. He must interpret not only in view of the opinions of the individual writers,

but also according to the infinite knowledge and truth which lay behind them, and which exercised over them an indescribable, but potent influence. And he must do this not by subtleties and technicalities, but by open and manly treatment of the text before him. We do not deny that this requires thought and study, and a familiarity with the conditions under which revelation in its various parts was given, and the circumstances, character, and spiritual apprehensions of the people to whom it was given. But the study of the Scriptures under these conditions will more than repay the labor required, and will, we believe, lead to the ever firmer and firmer conviction that they are in very truth THE WORD OF GOD.

---

## ARTICLE V.

### BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS FROM BIBLE LANDS.

BY REV. THOMAS LAURIE, D.D., PROVIDENCE, R. I.

IT is one of the favorable signs of the times that so much attention is given to the elucidation of Scripture. The Palestine Exploration Fund in England and the corresponding society in our own land furnish maps of that country such as never were known before; and men who have lived in it give us the fruit of their protracted observation, showing how natural history, as well as topography, and manners and customs also, both corroborate the statements of the Bible and illustrate its meaning. The danger is that instead of *la Bible theologique* we shall have *la Bible géographique et pittoresque*.

While the exploration societies give us the most perfect specimens of cartography that modern science can furnish, it is very desirable that the department of Bible illustration should attain a like degree of accuracy; and every one should be ready to contribute to that end. If he cannot supply



BS480 .G22  
Errors of the Scriptures.

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00051 9043