

Project Canterbury

§1 INTRODUCTORY

§2 THE SPIRITUAL VALUE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

§3 OUR LORD AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

§4 THE AUTHORITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

§5 CRITICISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

§6 INSPIRATION AND INFALLIBILITY

§7 THE REFORMERS' VIEW OF SCRIPTURE – H.R.Mackintosh

§8 CONCLUSION

The Doctrine of the Infallible Book

By Charles Gore, D.D.

Sometime Bishop of Oxford

London: Student Christian Movement, 1924.

With a Section by Professor H. R. Mackintosh, D.D., New College, Edinburgh

New York: George H. Doran, [no date, but 1924]

§1 INTRODUCTORY

I have reason to believe that, as In the United States so in England, there is a revival to-day of the position that faith in Christianity, as really the divinely-given gospel for the world, is bound up with the old-fashioned belief in the Bible as the infallible book, and that if the existence of mistakes in the Bible records is admitted, or the presence there of traditions which are not strictly historical or folklore which is not historical at all--if these things are admitted, faith in the Bible message, as being the Word of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, will not stand for long. And I suppose that I have been asked to write this little book for the Student Christian Movement because, since I was preparing for ordination fifty years ago, I have held more and more firmly the opposite opinion--that we can admit what is called the "critical" view of the Bible and still hold the faith of St. Paul or St. John and of the Christian Creeds--hold it indeed with an increased assurance and enthusiasm.

I am not now attempting to argue the case for the critical view; I am only arguing

for full freedom to hold it and for its compatibility with the Faith. Moreover, I am writing in full recognition of the fact that the leaders of criticism, especially on the Continent, have been very frequently rationalists, by which is meant men to whom the idea of the supernatural and the miraculous is intolerable. This sort of rationalism is, of course, incompatible with Christian faith. But many of the "critics," and especially those in Great Britain, have been devout believers; and their motive in maintaining "critical conclusions" has been the conviction that such conclusions are really scientific, and that it is disastrous to set religion in antagonism to science or to seek to shackle science, which is bound to be free. I am writing also in full recognition of the fact that almost every science "sows its wild oats." The reaction against tradition leads the extremists of so-called science to all sorts of wild denials, which sober thought finally declines. [See Dr. E. W. Hobson's *Domain of Natural Science* (Cambridge, 1903), a book full of excellent caution for enthusiasts.] So it has been in Biblical criticism. But moderate criticism, like that of Dr. Sellin, of whose *Introduction to the Old Testament* the reactionaries have been making use, admits the same principles as the extremer critics and reaches many of the same conclusions--such as the following: that the early chapters of Genesis are based on folk-lore which cannot be treated as history; that even the more historical tradition cannot always be relied upon as accurate; that the codes of law in the Pentateuch date from different epochs down to the return from the Captivity, though they were all ascribed to Moses, and critics differ as to how much was actually Mosaic; that the development of the ceremonial law, the centralization of worship at one only shrine of Jehovah, and the threefold ministry of high priests, priests and Levites were the result of a gradual process which has left its marks on the records; that the Book of Chronicles gives us history not strictly as it was, but as it ought to have been in the view of the priestly writer; that considerable portions of the books of the prophets were not the work of the prophets whose names they bear; and that the Book of Daniel, as we have it, dates from the years of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. I am a very poor Hebrew scholar and cannot claim to speak as an authority on matters of Old Testament criticism. But, for what it is worth, my opinion is that the scientific verdict will go with the moderate rather than the extreme critics. Nevertheless the conclusions of the moderate critics require a very thorough revision of our traditional estimates of the literature of the Old Testament. And I see no signs of archaeology reversing the demand for this revision on the most material points.

§2 THE SPIRITUAL VALUE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

I am therefore proposing to take this "critical" position for granted and to ask the question, Is it a matter in which the Faith is at stake? Does the critical position contradict the Faith? And I answer this question in the negative for the reasons

which follow.

The spiritual value of the Bible is that it conveys to us the word or message of God in the several stages of its delivery. "God, who in many portions and many manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." The first part of this opening sentence of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to the old covenant and the second to the new. Let us concern ourselves with the old covenant first. It was the prophets in virtue of whose ministry Israel became, in S. Athanasius' striking phrase, "the sacred school of the knowledge of God and of the spiritual life for all mankind." And it is precisely this that the critical treatment of the Old Testament brings to the front. The ritual practices of the Jews, and their folk-lore and much of their national tradition, were common to them with the peoples about them. What is distinctive in Israel is the teaching of the prophets. Certainly Moses is to be reckoned among the prophets. Perhaps he was the greatest of all. But there is much controversy as to exactly how much can be ascribed to Moses himself. Let us come down to a point where there is no controversy, i.e. to the period of the prophets whose writings remain to us--say from Amos to Malachi. Here, over a period of some three hundred years, you have a succession of men to whom the world is supremely indebted for the establishment of those fundamental beliefs about God and about man on which the Christian religion reposes--that God, whom the Jews knew as Jehovah, or more accurately Jahweh, is the one and only God, the creator and sovereign of all that is, whose supreme characteristic is moral righteousness, so that there is no possibility of fellowship with Him or of acceptance with Him except by likeness of moral character, by justice and purity and truth; that He has made mankind in His own image, endowed with the fateful gifts of freedom and reason, to be, as it were, His vicegerents upon earth, and that though men have monstrously misused these gifts to resist and disobey God, and have thereby fearfully perverted the moral order of the world, He has not withdrawn His gifts from them or abandoned His loving purpose of establishing His kingdom of righteousness and peace; that for the fulfilment of this purpose He "called" Israel from among the nations, and from within rebellious Israel those who "have ears to hear" and who listen to His prophets, and that from faithful Israel as its centre the divine kingdom is at last to be realized and God is to come into His own in His whole creation.

This is a sort of rough summary of the teaching of the prophets, which they knew to be, not their own discovery, but the word of God. Any close study of the Bible will show us how little acceptance this teaching found amidst the mass of the people, or even among those who were popularly reckoned for prophets, down to the time of the Captivity, when at last it obtained control of the destiny of Israel. But long before that it had been remoulding the folk-lore, as it appears in the early chapters of Genesis, so as to express no longer a meaningless

polytheism, but the profoundest truths about God and nature and man, albeit in a form more or less mythical; and it impressed itself on the whole national tradition as we find it in the historical books; and it inspired the religious poetry as we find it in the Psalms; and the moral thought of the wise as we find it in the Wisdom books; and the whole social law, and finally the whole ceremonial law of worship in all its elaborated form.

What we need to find in the Old Testament, if we are to satisfy the Christian requirement, is a message of God, delivered in many parts and many manners, really a word of God, but confessedly incomplete--looking forward for its completion to the times of a Messiah, or more vaguely to "a good time coming," when the fullest light and the fullness of spiritual endowment was to arrive from God to Israel. And it seems to me that this providential purpose of God through Israel, so far from being obscured by the critical reading of its history, it only brought out into prominence for those who have ears to hear. I will not labour the point because it seems to me to be evident. Certainly God was in many portions and many manners speaking through all those old times unto the fathers by the prophets: certainly, through these prophets, Israel was "the sacred school of the knowledge of God and of the spiritual life for all mankind," quite as obviously as Greece was the school of art and poetry and philosophy, though we ought not in any way to treat with grudging recognition the contributions of other nations. [Zoroaster, for instance, was a mighty prophet of God. But he was an isolated figure, without successors, so that his teaching did not bear fruit for the world like that of the prophets of Israel.]

§3 OUR LORD AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

But here we reach what is, I suppose, the most important and weighty objection to the acceptance of the critical view of the Old Testament. It is said that our Lord would not be satisfied with this sort of general belief in the pervading action of the Divine Spirit upon the literature of Israel. His language about it requires us to accept the account of the Flood and the story of Jonah as literally true; and He asserts the Davidic authorship of Psalm cx. We must carefully consider this objection.

Now no doubt the scribes and generally the Pharisaic party in our Lord's time venerated the Old Testament in a spirit of literalism which we should call irrational, and also subordinated the prophets to the Law. But it must be admitted that in general our Lord's use of the sacred books was in a markedly opposite spirit.

For (I) He insists upon the ethical quality of the Scriptures as primary, and

interprets the Law in the spirit of prophecy. Thus it is His chief complaint of the learned ecclesiastics of His day that they suffered themselves to be dominated by positive enactments, or interpretations of enactments, in the Law at the expense of its spiritual purpose. For instance, they interpreted the Sabbath law strictly, to condemn our Lord's disciples, forgetting that "the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath"; [Mark ii. 23 ff.] and He declared that, accordingly, "the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath"; and He added that if they had known what the prophetic word meant, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," they would not have condemned the guiltless. This saying of Hosea, we notice, He is recorded to have quoted twice. [Matt. xii. 8, and ix. 13.] Again, He rebuked them for interpretations of the law of ceremonial purity and of the fifth commandment which evacuated their moral purpose: "Thus have ye made the word of God of none effect by your tradition: and many such like things ye do." And immediately He uttered a word about the nature of real defilement which "made all meats clean." [Mark vii. 1 ff.] And in the most general sense He affirmed the supremacy of the twin commandments of the love of God and of one's neighbour, and blessed the scribe who found in the observance of those two commandments something much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. [Mark xii. 28 ff.] Nothing, in fact, could in general have been less in accordance with Pharisaic literalism or legalism than our Lord's use of the Jewish Scriptures. It was profoundly prophetic and spiritual.

(2) He insists also upon prophecy as foretelling the future,⁵ disclosing one who was to come, the Christ, and a divine kingdom of which He was to be the centre. But here again He spoke in a quite new tone and spirit. To deal very briefly with a matter which has been recently blackened with controversy, it appears to me to be certain that the dominant expectation in Israel was that of the divine king of the family of David who was "to restore again the kingdom to Israel," and that this expectation was at the root of the whole nationalist movement in Palestine. The legitimacy of this expectation our Lord acknowledged, but in a spiritual sense which deeply disappointed the militant nationalism. Besides this, there was a vision in the Book of Daniel of "one like a son of man" [Dan. vii. 13.] who was to come on the clouds of heaven to exercise universal dominion; and though this human figure is interpreted in the text as a symbol of God's holy people, [Dan. vii. 18, 22, 27.]

who should enter upon world sovereignty in place of the great empires already symbolized by the fierce beasts, it appears that it had already received another interpretation in the apocalyptic Book of Enoch, which was current in some Jewish circles, as revealing a Messiah from heaven very different in character from the more widely recognized king of the House of David. This interpretation also in a sense our Lord accepted. I say "in a sense," because He alone recalled into prominence the figure of the suffering servant of Jehovah, which is so familiar to Christians in Isaiah liii., but which had been left practically unnoticed

by the Jews; and this figure of the meek and righteous Sufferer, rejected of His people, who redeems Israel by His death and lives through death, which must be taken in company with other pictures of righteous sufferers for the cause of God in the Psalms and elsewhere, is by our Lord made central to the picture of the Christ, or of "him who was to come." It is in the light of this picture of the Righteous One, triumphant through shame and death, that He would have His disciples interpret the Messianic hope, and only on this background of rejection and suffering and death will He consent to introduce the figure of the enthroned king or the glorified Christ from heaven. Thus He continually appears to have insisted that the Scriptures of the Old Testament prophesied a Christ who should suffer and die, and only so rise again to glory and a kingdom. [Mark viii. 31-33, ix. 12, ix. 31-2, x. 33-4, 45, xii. 6-8, xiv. 8, etc.] No words can well exaggerate the importance attached by our Lord to this novel interpretation of the different elements in the Old Testament forecast. "O foolish men," He is reported after His resurrection to have cried to His two companions on the way to Emmaus, "and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Behoved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory?" [Luke xxiv. 25, 26.] And the account of the institution by our Lord of the sacrament of His body and blood at the Last Supper plainly implies that He saw also in the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament a religious symbol which could not be ignored, but which was to be fulfilled on a higher plane by His own self-sacrifice, by the rending of His body and the outpouring of His life-blood upon the cross, whereby His humanity--His body and blood--was to become the spiritual nourishment of His people. [Mark xiv. 24; 1 Cor. xi. 24, 25; Matt. xxvi. 27.] Thus in the deepest sense He claimed "not to destroy but to fulfil" both the Law and the Prophets: but it was in a very new sense, as opposite as possible to literalism or to the quest of verbal fulfillments.

(3) Our Lord insists on the imperfections of the Old Testament. As we have said, nothing in it was to be ignored and all was to be fulfilled. But in being fulfilled it was to be superseded, though it came from God Himself. It was all imperfect. "It was said to them of old time: Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not forswear thyself, thou shalt be moderate in revenge; but I say unto you: Thou shalt not even be angry, thou shalt not entertain an impure purpose or thought in thine heart, thou shalt not swear at all, but speak the simple truth; thou shalt take no revenge at all, but lose all hatred in a universal love." So we may paraphrase the famous section in the Sermon on the Mount. [Matt. v. 21-48.] Again, "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives." But that was not the original purpose of creation, and I abrogate this permission. [Mark x. 5 ff.] "The law and the prophets were until John," but thenceforth the kingdom is come and there is a higher authority. [Matt. xi. 13; Luke xvi. 16.] To appeal to the precedent of Elisha for divine judgments on those who would not receive the Christ is to deserve His rebuke, "Ye know not what

manner of spirit ye are of." [If these words are not in the correct text of Luke ix. 55, they seem to interpret our Lord's meaning aright.]

Now my contention is that we are blind if we do not see that these are the really dominant characteristics of our Lord's constant references to Old Testament scriptures. To accept His estimate of them no doubt involves that there was a divine vocation for Israel--that salvation was of the Jews, and that the holy men of Israel did really speak as they were moved by the Holy Spirit of God. Thoroughgoing rationalism rejects any such conclusions. But criticism, properly so called, offers no obstacle to it. The belief in the inspiration of the prophets, permeating ultimately the whole of the literature of Israel, is wholly compatible with critical methods and results; and it is the glory of the higher criticism to exalt the spiritual teaching of prophecy into the place of first importance, in the spirit of our Lord, and at the same time to recognize with Him the imperfection of the Old Testament--and, what goes with that, to recognize degrees of inspiration, and that inspiration may be real which is yet incomplete.

Further than this, it is, of course, true that our Lord showed no signs of acquaintance with the literary ideas or conclusions of modern criticism any more than with any modern science. No doubt to accept the conditions of existing knowledge, as to accept the current language of His time and nation, was involved in the Incarnation. He shows the perfection of His manhood in what Dr. Sanday called "His sovereign breadth of view and deep penetration of insight," whether He is dealing with the Old Testament Scriptures or with the circumstances of human life; but He exhibits no miraculous knowledge of history or of nature, such as was not accessible to other men. I do not think that this affects the infallibility of His teaching. For it seems to me that He cannot be said to teach anything but what is of eternal validity about God and nature and man. No doubt He alludes to incidents in the Biblical record, like the Flood, as any teacher of His time would have alluded to them, and indeed as we should allude to them to-day, at their face value. But it seems to me to be even preposterous to suggest that He binds us by His allusion to the Flood to suppose that it occurred as it is described in Genesis. [Luke xvii. 26 ff.] It remains in any case a standing type of divine judgment on a sinful world. We should, I think, feel in the same way about His allusion to Jonah's resurrection out of the whale's belly, if it were authentic. But, in fact, there are the weightiest reasons for thinking that the verse, which occurs in St. Matthew only, is a misleading gloss on our Lord's reference to Jonah's preaching, which cannot rightly be ascribed to Him. [Matt. xii. 46. See Dr. Box's commentary in the Century Bible, or Dr. Plummer's (Elliot Stock).]

There is one occasion when our Lord appears to argue in a sense which requires the assumption that David wrote Psalm ex. [Mark xii. 35 and parallel

passages.] That is for us a very improbable literary conclusion. But if we look at the passage (which occurs with some variations in all the first three Gospels) we shall, I think, conclude that our Lord is not there teaching at all. He is not teaching (as would appear on the surface) that the Christ was not to be the Son of David. He is simply reminding the scribes, who used glibly to give this account of the Christ, that they must, on their own principles, acknowledge that He was to be something more than that. This is one of several occasions in the Gospels where I think we find our Lord taking people on their own ground--arguing, as we say, ad hominem, seeking, that is, to make them recognize that on their own principles they must hesitate to use the language they were in fact using.

The other passages are: (1) John x. 24, where our Lord cannot really mean that He was divine only in the sense in which all Jewish judges were called "gods" by the Psalmist. He means only that the language of the psalm ought to lead them to feel that even on their own principles it was not necessarily blasphemy to call Himself "son of God." And (2) Mark x. 18, where our Lord surely is neither repudiating goodness nor directly claiming to be God, but asking the young man to think seriously what he meant by the flattering title he had applied to Him.

It is, in fact, one of the most valuable debts which we can owe to a great teacher--that he has taught us to check the hasty utterances of prejudice and impulse in order to ask ourselves whether our own acknowledged principles will really justify what we were just about to affirm or to deny.

I have very often in my own conscience reviewed this matter of our Lord's language about the Old Testament, and have sought honestly to ask myself whether He forces me into a corner, so that I must either refuse to believe something which He teaches or accept a conclusion which my critical reason judges to be most improbable. As a result it seems to me even preposterous to suggest that that is the case. On the contrary, I think that all His insistence is on my reading the Old Testament with intellectual faculties all alert and spiritual eyes wide open--in the direct opposite of the spirit of literalism.

The Apostolic Writers

About St. Paul and other apostles I must be more concessive. All the great statements indeed in the writings of the New Testament about the spiritual value of the Old Testament, we can heartily welcome. Let us recall them. [Rom. i. 2; Heb. i. 1; Acts x. 43; 1 Peter i. 10-11; 2 Peter L 20-1; Heb. ix. 8; Rom. xv. 4; 2 Tim. iii. 16-17.] "The gospel of God, which he promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures"--"God having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners"--"To Jesus bear all the prophets

witness"--"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace which should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories which should follow them"--"No prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost"--"The Holy Ghost this signifying [in the provisions of the ceremonial law which hedged about from access the Holy of Holies], that the way into the holy place hath not yet been made manifest, while as the first tabernacle is yet standing; which is a parable for the time now present"--"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope"--"Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." All these ideas about the value of the scriptures of the Old Covenant, I say, we can welcome. Legitimate criticism--criticism that is not inspired by a dogmatic denial of the supernatural--will have nothing to say against them. But when we pass from these general ideas to the interpretation of particular texts, we are forced to recognize that the writers of the New Testament used the methods of their time and often positively give the texts meanings which they cannot bear. I would ask anyone to consider St. Paul's arguments in Gal. iii. 16 and in Rom. iii. 11-18, and in Rom. ix. 25. Is it possible to maintain that the particular texts which St. Paul cites really, when legitimately interpreted, support his argument? Or can we feel that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews in i. 10 draws a legitimate argument from the particular psalm? or that David really, as St. Peter assumes in Acts ii. 25, wrote the 16th psalm in the person of the Messiah? Or, finally, can we say that the texts cited in Matt. ii. 15-18 are legitimate "proofs"? The ideas for which these apostolic writers and preachers are contending are true ideas, but their inspiration plainly did not make them unerring in their interpretation of particular texts. They used them in a way which we should call quite uncritical; and we do not want to feel ourselves bound by their methods.

§4 THE AUTHORITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

But we have got to the point where what has to be considered is not only the books of the Old Testament but those of the New. It was not so at the beginning of the Christian Church. "The Scriptures" meant at first the Old Testament only. [In 2 Peter iii. 16 St. Paul's epistles appear to be alluded to as "scriptures"; but if we deal candidly with the evidence, it would appear that this one book of the New Testament is not by the writer in whose name it is written. The so-called Epistle of Barnabas quotes St. Matthew as "Scripture," and that may date from

the end of the first century and be earlier than 2 Peter.] Our Lord shows no signs of entrusting His teaching to a book. He entrusted it to living men. Thus the first Christians looked to two kinds of authority--the authority of the prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament and the authority of the apostolic teaching or tradition. It is very noticeable that no one of the books of the New Testament was written to give those who should read it their first instruction. They all were written to those who had already received what St. Paul calls the "form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered." [Rom. vi. 17 (Revised Version).] The preface to St. Luke's Gospel, with its conclusion, "that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed," i.e. at the time of thy initiation into the Christian religion, St. Paul's frequent allusions to the "tradition" which his converts received from him when they first became Christians--which he declares to have been common to himself with the other apostles, and to be something which neither he nor anyone else has authority to alter--and similar phrases in the other writers, such as "Ye know this, my beloved brethren" in St. James, or "I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it"--"the word which ye heard from the beginning" in St. John, or the exhortation of St. Jude "to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered"--such phrases which occur in all parts of the New Testament are sufficient to prove this. [See Luke i. 4; I Cor. xi. 23, xv. 1-11; Gal. i. 8-11, etc.; James i. 19; 1 John ii. 7, 21, 24; Jude 3.]

It is very interesting to discover the contents of this original tradition by studying the sort of knowledge which is presupposed in the New Testament books. We shall find that the readers of them are supposed to be familiar with the threefold name of the Father, and the Son, Jesus Christ the Lord, and the Holy Spirit, and with the doctrine of the Incarnation, and with the facts of the human life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the expectation of His second coming, and "the last things," and with the moral obligations of membership in Christ and the Church, and with the meaning of the sacraments as both channels of divine gifts and bonds of fellowship. These elements constituted the apostolic tradition of the Church, to which the Fathers from the beginning refer. When later the New Testament books had been received side by side with those of the Old, still the idea was that it was the function of the Church to give to all converts their proper primary instruction both doctrinal and moral by word of mouth. It was for "the Church to teach." Only the writings of the apostles were now recognized as giving their teaching in its most authentic form, and therefore while it was the business of "the Church to teach," it was the function of "the Scriptures" (now including the New Testament) to verify and confirm the teaching. And you find an early bishop (St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century) saying to his catechumens, "Do not believe what I say simply unless you receive the proof of it from the Holy Scriptures." This is the constant assumption of the early centuries--that the preliminary teaching is to be given orally by the Church to the learner

and is to provide him with his creed and point of view; but that the Scriptures, which are to be open to all and familiar to all, are to keep the tradition of the Church pure, because nothing may be added in the way of doctrine to what is taught there and nothing omitted; there is to be found the final court of reference in matters of doctrine.

Now no book of the New Testament can be said to claim directly to be written under inspiration, except the last, the Revelation of St. John. [Rev. i. 1-3, xxii. 18-19.] The evangelists, to judge from St. Luke's preface, would claim only the authority which belongs to well-informed recorders. The author of the Fourth Gospel, however, who, I believe, claims to be an apostle, speaks with the authority of an eye-witness, and with the assurance of one who had received the promise, specially addressed to the apostles, that the Holy Spirit, who was to be given them, should guide them into all the truth and bring all things to remembrance which Jesus had said unto them. [John xiv. 26, xvi. 13.] And St. Paul, though he does not seem to claim any special inspiration to write, does clearly claim that he had authority as an apostle to impart a gospel or teaching to the world which was the word of God and must be so received in faith, or, what is the same thing in other words, that he was an inspired teacher. [I Thess. ii. 13.] And St. Peter in like manner claims the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the apostolic message. [Peter i. 12.] It is no wonder, therefore, that the Church from the second century treated both the Gospels and the Epistles as inspired, and ranked them, in this respect, with the Old Testament Scriptures; and we must proceed to ask what exactly was involved in this inspiration.

But before we seek to define the meaning and limits of inspiration, something must be said about the effect of criticism upon our estimate of the New Testament books, considered simply as historical documents.

§5 CRITICISM AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

Historical criticism must be applied impartially to all writings which claim to convey history, and therefore to the New Testament equally with the Old Testament books. But there is a strange delusion abroad that no criticism is worthy of the name which is not destructive in result. This is a delusion. Criticism, for example, has vindicated the historical value of the Old Testament books, though in different degrees. For example, it has vindicated the history of the reign of David at Jerusalem and of his family and court, as given in 2 Samuel and I Kings, as embodying an almost contemporary record of the highest historical value. As applied to the New Testament, criticism has survived its headstrong youth and for the most part has come to acknowledge that almost all the material of the first three Gospels comes from before the destruction of

Jerusalem, A.D. 70, which is like a great gulf fixed between the earlier and later history of Israel; and that the second Gospel was really written by that John Mark who is found in his mother's home at Jerusalem in the earliest days of the Christian Church, who became the companion of Barnabas and Paul and Peter-- a man, therefore, who had had the best possible opportunities of knowing what the earliest witnesses taught, and that St. Luke, the physician and companion of St. Paul, really wrote the Third Gospel and the Acts, as two volumes of one work, and really fulfilled the claim to trustworthiness presented in his preface. Of course there are plenty of critics whose intellectual presuppositions force them to disbelieve these records in many respects. But, without making any claim to infallibility for these evangelists, I dare to maintain that it is those who disbelieve them rather than those who believe who do violence to the evidence. Again, reasonable criticism allows us to accept as authentic the whole body of the epistles of St. Paul, with the exception perhaps of the Pastoral Epistles. And though the vocabulary of these epistles suggests a writer other than St. Paul, I think they should be admitted to be his in substance. And we should accept the First Epistle of Peter as authentic, and the Epistle to the Hebrews as written by one of the apostolic circle; nor is there sufficient reason why the Epistles which bear the names of James and Jude should not also be accepted as authentic. Again, criticism seems to be tending steadily to reaffirm that the personal memory embodied in the Fourth Gospel is that of an original Palestinian disciple, and that where he seems deliberately to correct the tradition of the earlier evangelists his corrections should be treated with the highest respect.

For my own part I believe with Dr. Drummond, Dr. Scott Holland and Canon Richmond that the traditional ascription of this Gospel to the Son of Zebedee is the true one. Nor can we doubt that the Epistles of John are by the same author as the Fourth Gospel. With regard to the First Gospel, the critical conclusion is more ambiguous. We may grant that the great mass of it consists of the records of St. Matthew the Apostle; but it seems to have passed through the hands of a Greek-speaking editor who introduced into it certain glosses and traditions of doubtful value. [See Dr. Box's excellent edition in The Century Bible. The disputable features in the First Gospel are such as these--there are three or four cases where a supposed prediction is allowed apparently to modify in detail the record of fulfilments, e. g. Matt. xxi. 2 (the introduction of the ass beside the colt), xxvii. 3-10 (the precise sum, "thirty pieces of silver), 34 (the gall). There is the "gloss" on our Lord's reference to Jonah, already referred to (Matt. xii. 40); and the passage, Matt, xviii. 17, which seems to reflect a later experience: and the exceptive clauses (Matt, v. 32, xix. 9) in the prohibition of divorce, which seem to contradict the earlier records; and the stories of the resurrection of the saints, and of the guard set upon the tomb, and the subsequent bribing of the soldiers (xxvii. 52-53, 62-66, xxviii. n-15), which are open to suspicion. And if our Lord had announced the Trinitarian formula of the divine name, as is recorded in St.

Matt, xxviii. 19, so explicitly, it is hard to believe that it could have made so little impression on the earliest preaching and practice as recorded in the Acts.]

Some of these conclusions may be regarded as regrettable. But we seem to be bound to accept them on critical grounds: and they do not in any way seriously affect the historical character of the records. Nor, if the earliest Gospels are really historical, is it possible to accept any merely humanitarian or non-miraculous estimate of Jesus, or to doubt that the faith in the incarnation of God which you find in St. Paul, and the Epistle to the Hebrews and in St. John, is the estimate of the person of Jesus which fits the facts. Thus the tradition as it is enshrined in the Creeds stands supported in the history, both in its doctrines and in its assertions of fact. This position cannot, of course, be argued here. The point here insisted upon is that the acceptance of the principle of applying historical criticism to the documents of the New Testament does not, if the criticism is impartial and free from a dogmatic prejudice against anything supernatural or miraculous, result in impairing their testimony to the traditional creed of the Church. That remains secure. But it does impair the belief in the infallibility of the records in detail. There are mistakes in the Gospels and a great number of more or less important discrepancies of detail. Thus we return to the question which is the only object of this little book--Can you, if you accept criticism as freely to be applied to the Bible records, both of the Old and the New Covenant, still retain your belief in their inspiration? Or has the Church of Christ so tied the belief in inspiration to the idea of infallibility that in losing the second you lose also the first?

§6 INSPIRATION AND INFALLIBILITY

The point of the last section has been to show that the doctrine of the inspiration of the New Testament Scriptures is not a doctrine which lies at the foundation of the Christian faith. All that is necessary in order to maintain the faith of St. Paul and St. John is that the Gospels and Acts should give us substantially true history and the Epistles a true record of the apostolic interpretation of the Gospel. And this foundation legitimate criticism cannot undermine.

No one, however, can doubt that the first Christians believed the whole Church and every member of it to be inspired of the Holy Spirit, and recognized in apostles and prophets the highest gift of inspiration. At the same time the New Testament gives us no materials which enable us to define inspiration with any such strictness as has been customary in the Church. The evangelist St. Luke in his preface appears to make no claim to inspiration, but only to accuracy. The evangelists plainly differ in details quite freely: and one purpose of the Fourth Gospel appears to be tacitly to correct the earlier tradition in important respects.

St. Paul apparently thought that persons speaking "through the Spirit" might give mistaken advice, for he disregarded it. [Acts xxi. 4.] And he insists that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets," which implies that there is a human element of intelligence and will, as well as an element of divine inspiration, in their prophecies. He himself certainly does claim that his gospel was the word of God, and that as an evangelist he was inspired of God, but in giving practical decisions and advice he does not write as one who believes himself infallible, but says, "I think that I also have the spirit of God." [1 Cor. vii. 40.] Indeed in certain respects, as about the expectation of an immediate "coming" of Christ, and about the value of matrimony, his mind shows a certain change. The New Testament certainly does not warrant our identifying inspiration with infallibility on all subjects.

But, as has been said, when the books of the New Testament had been written and received by the Church, they were universally regarded as inspired, and it cannot be denied that "almost from the very first" the inspiration of the writers both of the Old Testament and of the New is commonly regarded as "verbal" and commonly identified with infallibility. [See Dr. Sanday's admirable Bampton Lectures on "Inspiration," pp. 30 ff.] This was to be expected, for the Jews had commonly identified inspiration with verbal infallibility, and the Christians learned it from them. But we must all admit, whether we like it or not, that opinions may become almost universally current in the Church without being true, as, for instance, the doctrine of the atonement which represented the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as a debt paid to Satan; and if it is sought to impose upon us to-day the early belief in the infallibility of the Scriptures as if it were part of the essential Gospel, three considerations will suffice to free us from this claim.

(1) That the Church never attempted to define inspiration any more than it attempted to define the doctrine of the atonement. It did, in opposition to current ideas which were held to undermine the Faith, define within certain limits the doctrine of the person of Christ and, by consequence, the doctrine of the Trinity. But, though one of its greatest teachers, Origen, maintained, as we shall see, a view of the purpose of the Scriptures which led him to declare that many statements both of the Old Testament and of the New were in their literal sense untrue, and other views obtained currency which contradicted the idea of the strict infallibility of Scripture, yet the Church never showed any disposition to define the scope of inspiration; and we cannot but feel that a very real movement of the Holy Spirit is apparent in the history of the ancient Church, guiding it in what it did define and in what it abstained from defining. [De Principiis, iv. 15, 16, 17: "The attentive reader may notice . . . very numerous passages like these, so that he will be convinced that in the narratives that are literally recorded, circumstances are inserted which history does not admit."] There is, then, no authoritative dogma about inspiration. Even in the Roman Catholic Church it was

open to maintain that the inspiration of Scripture concerned only matters of faith and morals, down to the date of a famous Encyclical of Leo XIII issued in 1893, which no doubt sought to impose upon the Roman Church the strictest view of inspiration. But I believe I am right in saying that this Encyclical is not, by Roman Catholic authorities, regarded as infallible.

(2) We must take notice that opinions were held unrebuked in the early Church which suggested a view of inspiration much more agreeable to the modern spirit. Thus it was widely held that the opening chapters of Genesis are allegorical and not historical--they give us, as St. Gregory of Nyssa said, "ideas (or 'doctrines') in the form of a story." [Oratio Catechetica, cap. v.] And Irenaeus, who would be regarded as a literalist, is reported by a later Greek writer who had more of his text than remains to us, as having argued against the literal and in favour of the allegorical interpretation of the story of the fall. [Iren. (Stieren), Fragm. xiv.] And a fifth-century book On the Catholic Faith, ascribed to Boethius, gives us a general account of the divine revelation in Scripture as given us "under such a mode as is either the mode of history, which narrates only what happened, or the mode of allegory, which cannot represent the course of history, or a mode made up of these two so as to remain both historical and allegorical." [Boetii, Opuscula Sacra (Teubner), p. 178.] Again, St. Chrysostom, when confronted with apparent discrepancies between the evangelists, does not dispute their existence, but is content to plead that they show the independence of the witnesses and do not touch the main points of the Gospel. [Homilies on St. Matthew i. 2.] Others held a similar view, and also contended that some things in the Epistles were not inspired, but simply human judgments. [See Sanday, op. cit. pp. 42-47] Again, Chrysostom boldly maintained that the ritual institutions of the Old Testament law--"the sacrifices, and the purifications and the new moons and the ark and the temple itself--had their origin from Gentile grossness. Yet God, on account of the salvation of those in error, endured to be worshipped by means of the very things through which those outside were worshipping demons, only giving them a slight alteration, that little by little He might draw them away from their customs and lead them up to the high wisdom." [On St. Matthew vi. 3.] This view, that God tolerated and controlled, but did not institute, the Old Testament ritual (animal sacrifices, etc.) was widely prevalent. So also was the sense that the Old Testament presents us with the record of a gradual education by which the discipline of God led a barbarous people up to a higher moral and spiritual level. Thus "the moral difficulties" of the Old Testament presented no difficulty to those Fathers. They explained them on the principle of gradual moral guidance. "Do not ask," writes St. Chrysostom, "how (these Old Testament precepts) can be good, now that the need for them is past: ask how they were good when the period required them. Or, rather, if you wish, do enquire into their merit even now. It is still conspicuous, and lies in nothing so much as that we can now find fault with them. Their highest praise is that we now see them to be defective."

That is the sign, he argues, that they trained us well. Swearing is of the evil one, but the practice had to be limited before it could be abolished. "And how can the same thing be good at one time and bad at another? I ask, rather, how should it not be so, when we have regard to the plain teachings of growth both in the fruits of the earth and the acquirements of man? . . . All agree that murder is an invention of Satan. Yet Phineas' murder was reckoned to him for righteousness, and Abraham obtained an even higher honour for being [in intention] a murderer of his child. We must not look at the facts in themselves only, but investigate with attention the period, the cause, the motive, etc. So only can one get at the truth." [Chrys., In Matt. Hom. xvii. 5, 6 (abbreviated).] Similar passages from other Fathers might easily be quoted.

(3) The third point to which I wish to draw attention is that, when Christianity appeared and made its way to supremacy in the world, there was a method of interpreting writings held to be sacred which regarded them as having an allegorical or mystical meaning as well as their plain and obvious sense. This principle of interpretation was prevalent both among the Greeks and among the Jews. [Sanday, *op. cit.* p. 80.] Philo, who was both a Jew and a philosopher of the Greek schools, carried this method to great lengths in interpreting the Old Testament. He found a profound philosophy hidden in the simple phrase of the Bible, "The Lord brought him (Abraham) forth abroad." [Gen. iv. 5.] It means the deliverance of the soul from the trammels of the body. He lays the greatest stress upon the actual letters and words of the Greek Bible, and then gives them a meaning which we should regard as perfectly arbitrary. He does this systematically and constantly. St. Paul does it also, but sparingly. In the great Alexandrian teachers, Clement and Origen, of the second and third centuries, this allegorical method runs riot again. Origen held that the literal meaning of the text is constantly allowed to be such as we cannot believe to be true, just in order to force us to consider the spiritual or hidden meaning. [This, however, he declined to apply to the narratives of the sayings and doings of Christ in the Gospels.] Most of the Fathers held fast to both the literal and the hidden meaning. To us their allegorical interpretations appear utterly arbitrary. St. Gregory on the Book of Job and St. Bernard on the Canticles are writings which contain the most valuable spiritual truth, but bear little or no real relation to the texts they are commenting on. Nevertheless the method prevailed more or less down to the period of the Renaissance. Since then it has passed away. Hardly anyone now can be found really to rely upon it. I mention this only because those who would force us to retain the ancient literalism without the ancient allegorism seem to be behaving unreasonably. Different epochs have different canons of interpretation: and our reasonable duty seems to be to use the best canons of interpretation which our own age affords, remembering always that we shall only understand any kind of literature by sympathy with its spirit, and that "the Bible must be read in the same spirit in which it was written"--with the same faith in

God as animated its writers, but also in the light of the best knowledge of our own times.

My conclusion would be that the inspiration of prophets and holy teachers by the Spirit of God is a fact which our own spiritual capacities force us to recognize; and that the Bible provides us with the supreme example of such inspiration in varying degrees and modes. But that we are not bound by any definition of inspiration such as would tie us to the method of interpretation current among the Jews or in the primitive or mediaeval Church.

§7 THE REFORMERS' VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

PROF. H. R. MACKINTOSH

What was the view of the Reformers about the meaning of inspiration? The following answer to this question has been supplied me by the Rev. Dr. H. R. Mackintosh, Professor of Theology in New College, Edinburgh:--

In order to understand how the leading Reformers thought of Scripture, we ought first of all to glance at the mediaeval doctrine, which they rejected. To the mediaeval theologian the Bible was a book full of divine information or infallible truths about doctrine and morals, and saving faith was assent to correct propositions, found in the Bible, about God, the universe, and the soul of man. But as the Bible contains much which this description does not seem to fit--such as long inventories of temple furniture--it was held that Scripture language has more than one sense. For example, it has a spiritual sense as well as a historical; it may have four different senses. And this made it very hard to know what exactly the Bible does teach.

The Reformers' conception, on the other hand, rises directly out of religious experience. [See especially Dr. T. M. Lindsay's article in the Expositor for 1894.] In its pages they found a redeeming God entering into personal touch with men; the Bible is no mere collection of truths, but God's converse with His people. It was in history He had met with believers of old, drawing them to Himself; and by faith, called out in us by the Holy Spirit, we know that He will treat us with the same mercy and judgment as He showed them. If we wish to see clearly, therefore, how He dealt with David or St. Paul, we must interpret the record historically. "We are to go to the Bible feeling that we are having speech with God, and that the speech declares God's heart." Thus the whole Reformation view of Christianity is bound up with a historical treatment of Scripture. But that is only a half-truth. The other half, of still greater importance, is that nothing but the Spirit of God in the heart of the believer enables him to realize that in very truth it

is God, and none else, who is seen in the history; none else than He who speaks in the Word, coming near to unveil Himself and declare His saving purpose.

Holding this conviction, the Reformers were able to make a clear distinction between the Word of God, as God's personal and saving declaration of His heart, and the Scriptures, which form the record in and through which this declaration is conveyed to us. Old Protestant Confessions say that in the first place holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (this is the Word of God to men), thereafter the revealing Word was put in writing (this is the Bible). But, when saying so, they never lost sight of the cardinal point that it is only in and through the Bible that God's Word of mercy and judgment reaches us. Where, except in Scripture, is Christ offered to sinners? Thus the tie between the Word of God and the Bible is an absolutely vital tie; His Word is recorded and conveyed by the Bible, and the Bible alone. Now if we read the Bible with faith, the Reformers taught, the Holy Spirit enables us to grasp the Word of God contained there as something which is infallibly and authoritatively true. His saving revelation of Himself and of His will comes home to us as a message which is divinely true and commanding, and to which the believer feels he must simply bow in obedience and trust.

Forty years ago William Robertson Smith, a great Biblical scholar and a deeply convinced Christian, summed up all this in words on which it is not possible to improve. "If I am asked why I receive Scripture as the Word of God, and as the only perfect rule of faith and life, I answer with all the Fathers of the Protestant Church, Because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in Jesus Christ, and declaring to us in Him His will for our salvation. And this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul."

This is the Reformers' conception in its essence, and it meant in principle a new view and a new use of the Bible. But when we investigate their thought of inspiration--of the question, that is, how the Bible came to have this unique character as the vehicle of God's Word--we are brought face to face with a mixed state of things. It does not seem as if the Reformers (who had many other pressing questions to work at) quite realized where the new evangelical thought of Scripture was to lead, or what it implied for exact Biblical study.

Unquestionably a deep religious instinct so guided them that they made the authority of the Bible for faith wholly independent of problems that may and must be raised about the human processes by which the Bible took its present shape. But sometimes what they say about the inspiration of Scripture is in keeping with the new spirit of evangelical liberty, and sometimes it is not.

It ought to be said frankly that Luther often clings to the older notion of a verbally inspired Bible. He actually speaks of the Holy Spirit as the author of the books of Moses; he submitted his judgment undoubtingly to Scriptural statements on points of natural science; and in a famous controversy he appealed to a New Testament verse as an infallible oracle, to be accepted with the purest literalism. In some respects he fastened the letter of the Bible on those who followed him more bindingly than had been done before. The same is true of Calvin. The Bible is to him a volume in which no error has been suffered to appear. The accuracy of every word of the record can be relied on. As he writes: "The full authority which the Scriptures ought to possess for the faithful is not recognized unless they are believed to have come from heaven as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them." In a sermon he says, "Moses was not the author of the Law; he was simply a kind of amanuensis or secretary who wrote what he had received from God."

This was obviously bound to lead to conclusions which, in a Christian writer, are strange and unwelcome. If any isolated passage of the Bible is as real a mirror of God's mind as the teaching of our Lord, what is Christianity for? Hence it is only too clear that when Calvin declares, as he does, that the example of David in hating his enemies has been set before us by the Holy Spirit for our imitation, Jesus Christ is not being taken in earnest as our supreme moral authority, whose "Love your enemies" is final.

Actually, however, both Luther and Calvin were compelled by facts to break away from the rigid dogma of verbal inspiration which they had inherited. Consistently or not, they faced the undeniable truth that in conveying to us the gift of the Bible, as the adequate and enduring presentation of His redeeming love, God has employed a series of human agencies, and that in the working of these agencies He has not excluded slight human imperfections. And so Luther and Calvin became, wittingly or not, the precursors of the modern critical study of the Bible. Luther, for example, says of the prophets that they studied Moses and his successors, and that on this foundation they built not only gold and silver, but sometimes also wood, hay, and stubble. The Book of Esther in his view ought not to form part of the Bible. The Gospel of St. John he thinks best of all, yet he does not shrink from the surmise that it may not invariably give Christ's words in the proper order, and that its account of St. Peter's denial in the house of Caiaphas may contain inaccuracies. There are mistakes in Stephen's speech just before martyrdom, as recorded in Acts vii. The Epistle of St. James he calls "an epistle of straw," and he objects to St. Paul's interpretation of Hagar's name in the Epistle to the Galatians. In the same way, Calvin is forced to admit the presence of errors, as when he roundly declares that it is by a blunder that the name of Jeremiah has crept into St. Matthew xxvii. 9, and the name of Abraham into Acts vii. 16. We need not argue that the Reformers were necessarily right in

all these points. The really important thing is the fact that they, like modern scholars, exercised the right to criticize in the interests of truth. Deeper than the professed doctrine of verbal inspiration lay such an assurance of God's saving love in Christ as led them to put aside as trifles whatever minor discrepancies the Biblical narratives might contain.

§8 CONCLUSION

I have now, with Dr. Mackintosh's help, sought to give a cursory view of the course of opinion in the Christian Church as to the meaning of the inspiration of Scripture down to the time of the Reformation. Since that time there can be no question that the stricter interpretation, which makes inspiration identical with a general infallibility, has tended to prevail both among Catholics and Protestants, but not without exception. Meanwhile a new science of historical criticism has arisen, which is as truly a new product of human intelligence, and accordingly a new gift of God, as physical science is. It demands of us in many respects a new interpretation of the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament. So far as the minds which use this new intellectual instrument are, as many of them are, believing minds, they do not seek to diminish our reverence for the Scriptures or our belief that their authors were really inspired by the Spirit of God. But they do demand of us that we should recognize more frankly the element of human limitation in the writers and the varieties of their natural gifts which inspiration did not overwhelm. They would have us recognize grades of inspiration, and see in this or that psalmist and this or that prophet a fuller inspiration than is to be found, for instance, in the Book of Ecclesiastes or the Book of Esther or the Chronicles. They would have us recognize that in respect of their knowledge of history or their science of nature inspiration did not enable the writers to transcend the limitations of their time. The sphere of their special illumination is in the knowledge of God and His will and purpose--"the things of faith and morals"--and it does not constitute them infallible as historians, or as interpreters of natural facts and processes. And the illumination granted to them was gradual and progressive, and only reached its climax in Jesus Christ. There are thus all sorts of literature, and all the stages of literary development, to be found in the Old Testament as in other ancient literatures; and if we seek and find in the New Testament a fuller historical accuracy than we find in most parts of the Old, it is because the witnesses are there closer to the events they record and the events themselves are more full of divine meaning.

The contention of these pages has been that we are free to yield to the demands which historical criticism makes on us in its application to the Bible. There is to be found neither in the Bible nor in the records of the Church any authoritative definition of inspiration. If we are now unwilling to say that the Bible is the Word

of God in the sense that all its phrases, on all sorts of subjects, were dictated by God and are infallible, yet we are no less sure than our ancestors that it contains and conveys to us the Word of God. And on this note I will end, illustrating my meaning from an incident which has special interest for members of the Anglican Church, but interest for others also. The Anglican reformers of the sixteenth century devised a question to be answered by those just to be ordained deacons. "Do you unfeignedly believe all the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?" To which the answer was required, "I do believe them." But our bishops of to-day have proposed an addition to the question, so that it should run, "Do you unfeignedly believe all the canonical Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament, as conveying to us in many parts and in divers manners the revelation of God, which is consummated in Jesus Christ?" And the answer they proposed is, "I do so believe them." Whether, and exactly in what form, this alteration of phrases in the Ordinal will finally receive authoritative sanction, remains to be seen, but this is the sense in which the present English bishops ask the question of those whom they are to ordain deacons and expect their answer. And there is certainly nothing in what can legitimately be called Biblical criticism which should make men hesitate to give the required answer.

Project Canterbury