

J. C. Ryle Tracts

A classic of Gospel Truth that readers of J. C. Ryle have come to expect from all his writings. This introductory article on "the Inspiration of the Bible" to the classic 6 vol. Imperial Bible Dictionary, needs to be read more than ever today. I offer you this work exactly word for word as first published in the 19th. century.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE

"Thy Word is Truth." JOHN XVII. 17

What is truth about the Inspiration of the Bible? This is a question of supreme importance in the present day. Ignorance, or want of clear views about the subject, is a worm at the root of much religion in the nineteenth century. Myriads of professing Christians are like men whose feet are on a quicksand and whose heads are in a fog. They do not know what they believe about inspiration.

The treatise [Rev. C. H. Waller's "The Authoritative Inspiration of Holy Scripture," being an "Introduction" to the 6 vol. Imperial Bible Dictionary edited by Rev. Patrick Fairbairn in the 19th century.] to which I have been asked to write an introduction, contains a most satisfactory discussion of the whole subject of inspiration, and places it on the right foundation. It is, in fact, an exhaustive statement, to which I can add very little.

But I do not forget that the minds of men, like their bodies, are "fearfully and wonderfully made." The standpoints from which two thinking and educated men look at the same deep subject are seldom exactly the same. The minds of readers, moreover, differ quite as much as those of writers, and the line of argument which meets and satisfies the mental wants of one person does not satisfy another. I do not therefore hesitate to preface my valued friend's treatise by a few simple thoughts of my own. The ground that we travel over, it will be found, is not exactly identical. But the final conclusion we arrive at is one and the same. We both firmly maintain the plenary verbal inspiration of the Bible.

I begin by saying that a general vague belief that the Bible is an inspired book is common among Christians. Many, no doubt, could not explain what they mean. But whether men know it or not, their belief is well founded. It rests on a collection of facts which no intelligent, educated, and honest-minded man can pretend for a moment to deny.

(a) It is a fact that there is an *extraordinary depth, fullness, and richness in the contents of the Bible, which is supernatural and above man.* There is a complete gulf between it and any other book that ever was written. It throws more light on a vast number of most important subjects than all the other books in the world put together. It boldly handles matters which are beyond the reach of man, when left to himself. It treats of things which are mysterious and invisible,—the soul, the world to come, and eternity, depths which man has no line to fathom. All who have tried to write of these things, without Bible light, have done little but show their own ignorance. They grope like the blind; they speculate, they guess, they generally

make the darkness more visible, and land us in a region of uncertainty and doubt. How dim were the views of Socrates, Plato, Cicero, and Seneca! A well-taught Sunday scholar, in this day, knows more spiritual truth than all these sages put together.

The Bible alone gives a reasonable account of the beginning and end of the globe on which we live, a true picture of man, and just views of God.—The Bible alone shows us a reasonable and satisfactory remedy for the spiritual wants and necessities of dying men, and meets the universal cravings of conscience by revealing a Saviour.—The Bible alone explains the state of things which we see in the world around us. There are many things on earth which a natural man cannot explain. The amazing inequality of conditions,—the poverty and distress,—the oppression and persecution,—the shakings and tumults,—the failures of statesmen and legislators,—the constant existence of uncured evils and abuses,—all these things are often puzzling to him. He sees but does not understand. But the Bible makes it all clear. The Bible can tell him that the whole world lieth in wickedness,—that the prince of the world, the devil, is everywhere,—and that it is vain to look for perfection in the present order of things. The Bible will tell him that neither laws nor education can ever change men's hearts,—and that, just as no man will ever make a machine work well, unless he allows for friction,—so also no man will do much good in the world unless he always remembers that human nature is fallen, and that the world he works in is full of sin. The Bible will tell him that there is "a good time" certainly coming,—and coming perhaps sooner than people expect it,—a time of perfect knowledge, perfect justice, perfect happiness, and perfect peace. But the Bible will tell him this time shall not be brought in by any power but that of Christ coming to earth again. And for that second coming of Christ the Bible will tell him to prepare.

Now all these are things which men could find nowhere except in the Scriptures. We have probably not the least idea how little we should know about these things if we had not the Bible. We hardly know the value of the air we breathe, and the sun which shines on us, because we have never known what it is to be without them. We do not value the truths on which I have been just now dwelling, because we do not realise the darkness of men to whom these truths have not been revealed.

(b) It is another fact that there is *an extraordinary unity and harmony in the contents of the Bible, which is supernatural and above man*. We all know how difficult it is to get a story told by any three persons, not living together, in which there are not some contradictions and discrepancies. If the story is a long one, and involves a large quantity of particulars, unity seems almost impossible among the common run of men. But it is not so with the Bible. Here is a long book written by not less than thirty different persons. The writers were men of every rank and class in society. One was a lawgiver. One was a warlike king. One was a peaceful king. One was a herdsman. One had been brought up as a publican —another as a physician,—another as a learned Pharisee,—two as fishermen,—several as priests. They lived at different intervals over a space of 1500 years, and the greater part of them never saw each other face to face. And yet there is a perfect harmony among all these writers! They all write as if they were under one dictation. The style and

handwriting may vary, but the mind that runs through their work is always one and the same. They all tell the same story. They all give one account of man,—one account of God,—one account of the way of salvation,—one account of the human heart. You see truth unfolding and developing under their hands as you go through the volume of their writings, but you never detect any real contradiction or contrariety of view.

(c) It is another fact that there is *an extraordinary wisdom, sublimity, and majesty in the style of the Bible, which is above man*. Strange and unlikely as it was, the writers of Scripture have produced a book which even at this day is utterly unrivalled. With all our boasted attainments in science and art and learning we can produce nothing in literature that can be compared with the Bible. Even at this very hour, in the nineteenth century, the book stands entirely alone. There is a strain and a style and a tone of thought about it which separates it from all other writings. There are no weak points, and motes, and flaws, and blemishes. There is no mixture of infirmity and feebleness such as you will find in the works of even the best Christians. "Holy, holy, holy" seems written on every page. To talk of comparing the Bible with other "sacred books" so-called, such as the Koran, the Shasters, or the book of Mormon, is positively absurd. You might as well compare the sun with a rushlight,—or Skiddaw with a molehill,—or St. Paul's with an Irish hovel,—or the Portland vase with a garden-pot,—or the Koh-i-noor diamond with a bit of glass. God seems to have allowed the existence of pretended revelations in order to prove the immeasurable superiority of His own Word. To talk of the inspiration of the Bible, as only differing *in degree* from that of such writings as the works of Homer, Plato, Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton, is simply foolish. Every well-educated, honest, and unprejudiced reader must see that there is a gulf between the Bible and any other book which no man can fathom. You feel, at turning from the Scriptures to other works, that you have got into a new atmosphere. You feel like one who has exchanged gold for base metal, and heaven for earth.

(d) It is another fact that there is *an extraordinary accuracy in the facts and statements of the Bible, which is supernatural and above man*. Here is a book which has been finished and before the world for nearly 1800 years. Those 1800 years have been the busiest and most changeful period the world has ever seen. During this period the greatest discoveries have been made in science, the greatest alterations in the ways and customs of society, the greatest improvements in the habits and usage's of life. Hundreds of things might be named which satisfied and pleased our forefathers, which we have laid aside long ago as obsolete, useless, and old-fashioned. The laws, the books, the houses, the furniture, the clothes, the carriages of each succeeding century, have been a continual improvement on those of the century that went before. There is hardly a thing in which faults and weak points have not been discovered. There is scarcely an institution which has not gone through a process of sifting, purifying, refining, simplifying, reforming, amending, and changing. But all this time men have never discovered a weak point or a defect in the Bible. Infidels have assailed it in vain. There it stands, —perfect, and fresh, and complete, as it did eighteen centuries ago. The march of intellect never overtakes it. The wisdom of wise men never gets beyond it. The science of

philosophers never proves it wrong. The discoveries of travellers never convict it of mistakes.—Are the distant islands of the Pacific laid open? Nothing is found that in the slightest degree contradicts the Bible account of man's heart.—Are the ruins of Ninevah and Egypt ransacked and explored? Nothing is found that overturns one jot or tittle of the Bible's historical statements.—How shall we account for this fact? Who could have thought it possible that so large a book, handling such a vast variety of subjects, should, at the end of 1800 years, be found so free from erroneous statements? There is only one account to be given of the fact,—the Bible was *written by inspiration of God*.

(e) It is another fact that there is in the Bible *an extraordinary suitableness to the spiritual wants of all mankind*. It exactly meets the heart of man in every rank or class, in every country and climate, in every age and period of life. It is the only book in existence which is never out of place and out of date. Other books after a time become obsolete and old-fashioned. The Bible never does. Other books suit one country or people, and not another. The Bible suits all. It is the book of the poor and unlearned no less than of the rich and the philosopher. It feeds the mind of the labourer in his cottage, and it satisfies the gigantic intellects of Newton, Chalmers, Brewster, and Faraday. Lord Macaulay and John Bright, and the writers of brilliant articles in the *Times*, and the humblest City Missionaries, are all under obligations to the same volume. It is equally valued by the converted New Zealander in the southern hemisphere, and the Red River Indian in the cold north of America, and the Hindoo under the tropical sun.

It is the only book, moreover, which seems always fresh, and evergreen, and new. For eighteen centuries it has been studied and prayed over by millions of private Christians, and expounded, and explained, and preached upon by thousands of ministers. Fathers, and Schoolmen, and Reformers, and Puritans, and modern divines, have incessantly dug down into the mine of Scripture, and yet never exhausted it. It is a well never dry, and a field which is never barren. It meets the hearts and minds and consciences of Christians in the nineteenth century as fully as it did those of Greeks and Romans when it was first completed. It suits the Dairyman's Daughter as well as Persis, or Tryphena, or Tryphosa—and the English peer as well as the converted African at Sierra Leone. It is still the first book which fits the child's mind when he begins to learn religion, and the last to which the old man clings as he leaves the world. In short, it suits all ages, ranks, climates, minds, conditions. It is the one book which suits the world.

(f) Last, but not least, it is a great fact that the Bible *has had a most extraordinary effect on the condition of those nations* in which it has been known, taught, and read.

I invite any honest-minded reader to look at a map of the world, and see what a story that map tells. Which are the countries on the face of the globe at this moment where there is the greatest amount of idolatry, or cruelty, or tyranny, or impurity, or misgovernment, or disregard of life, and liberty, and truth? Precisely those countries where the Bible is not known.—Which are the Christian countries, so-called, where the greatest quantity of ignorance, superstition, and corruption is to be found at this very moment? The countries in which the Bible is a forbidden or

neglected book, such countries as Spain and the South American States.—Which are the countries where liberty, and public and private morality, have attained the highest pitch? The countries where the Bible is free to all, like England, Scotland, Germany, and the United States. Yes! when you know how a nation deals with the Bible you may generally know what a nation is.

But this is not all. Let us look nearer home. Which are the cities on earth where the fewest soldiers and police are required to keep order? London, Manchester, Liverpool, New York, Philadelphia—cities where Bibles abound.—Which are the countries in Europe where there are the fewest murders and illegitimate births? The Protestant countries, where the Bible is freely read.—Which are the Churches and religious bodies on earth which are producing the greatest results by spreading light and dispelling darkness? Those which make much of the Bible, and teach and preach it as God's Word. The Romanist, the Neologian, the Socinian, the deist, the sceptic, or the friends of mere secular teaching, have never yet shown us one Sierra Leone, one New Zealand, one Tinnevelly, as the fruit of their principles. We only can do that who honour the Bible and reverence it as God's Word. Let that fact also be remembered. He that denies the Divine inspiration of the Bible, let him explain that fact if he can.

I place these six facts about the Bible before my readers, and I ask them to consider them well. Take all six together, treat them fairly, and look at them honestly. Upon any other principle than that of *supernatural and divine inspiration*, those six facts appear to me inexplicable and unaccountable. Here is a book written by a succession of Jews in a little corner of the world, which positively stands alone. Not only were its writers isolated and cut off in a peculiar manner from other nations, but they belonged to a people who have never produced any other book of note except the Bible! There is not the slightest proof that, unassisted and left to themselves, they were capable of writing anything remarkable, like the Greeks and Romans. Yet these men have given the world a volume which for depth, unity, sublimity, accuracy, suitableness to the wants of man, and power of influencing its readers, is perfectly unrivalled! How can this be explained? How can it be accounted for? To my mind there is only one answer. The writers of the Bible were divinely helped and qualified for the work which they did. The book which they have given to us was *written by inspiration of God*.

Of course I know that deists, agnostics, and infidels see nothing in the six facts which I have just put down. Such unhappy persons always appear blind to the enormous difficulties of their own position. We have a just right to ask them how they can possibly explain the origin and nature of the Bible, if they will not allow that it is of Divine authority? We have a right to say, "Here is a book which not only courts inquiry but demands investigation. We challenge you to tell us how that book was written, if you deny its inspiration." How can they account for this book standing so entirely alone, and for nothing having ever been written equal to it, like it, near it, or fit to be compared with it for a minute? I defy them to give any rational reply on their own principles. On our principles we can. To tell us that man's unassisted mind could have written the Bible is simply ridiculous. It is worse than ridiculous: it is the height of credulity. In short, the difficulties of unbelief are

far greater than the difficulties of faith. No doubt there are things "hard to be understood," if we accept the Scriptures as God's word. But, after all, they are nothing compared to the hard things which rise up in our way and demand solution if we once deny inspiration. There is no alternative. Men must either believe things which are grossly improbable, or else they must accept the great general truth that *the Bible is the inspired Word of God*.

Passing away from the common vague general belief in the Divine inspiration of the Bible, I propose now to consider *the extent to which the Bible is inspired*. Assuming as a general truth that the Bible is given by Divine inspiration, I wish to examine how far and to what degree its writers received Divine help. In short, what is it exactly that we mean when we talk of the Scriptures as *the Word of God*?

This is no doubt a difficult question, and one about which the best Christians are not entirely of one mind. It is a question, moreover, about which there is an immense quantity of loose and unsatisfactory opinion floating about in the Churches, and many do not seem to know what they believe. But it is a question about which I have fully made up my own mind, and I will not hesitate to say what it is.

My starting-point is this. Do we believe that Christianity is a supernatural religion? Do we or do we not believe in the possibility of miracles? That is my first point. Inspiration is a miracle; and, like all miracles, there is much about it which we cannot fully understand.—We must not confound it with intellectual power, such as great poets and authors possess. To talk of Shakespeare and Milton and Byron being *inspired*, like Moses and St Paul, is to my mind almost profane.—Nor must we confound it with the gifts and graces bestowed on the early Christians in the primitive Church. All the Apostles were enabled to preach and work miracles, but not all were inspired to write.—We must rather regard it as a special supernatural gift, bestowed on about thirty people out of mankind, in order to qualify them for the special business of writing the Scriptures; and we must be content to allow that, like everything miraculous, we cannot entirely explain it, though we can believe it. A miracle would not be a miracle if it could be explained! That miracles are possible I do not stop to prove here. I never trouble myself on that subject until those who deny miracles have fairly grappled with the great fact that Christ rose again from the dead. I firmly believe that miracles are possible and have been wrought, and among great miracles I place the fact that men were inspired by God to write the Bible. Inspiration, therefore, being a miracle, I frankly allow that there are difficulties about it which at present I cannot fully solve.

The exact manner in which the minds of the inspired writers of Scripture worked when they wrote I do not pretend to explain. Very likely they could not have explained it themselves. I do not admit for a moment that they were mere machines holding pens, and, like type-setters in a printing-office, did not understand what they were doing. I abhor the "mechanical" theory of inspiration. I dislike the idea that men like Moses and St. Paul were no better than organ-pipes, employed by the Holy Ghost, or ignorant secretaries or amanuenses who wrote by dictation what they did not understand. I admit nothing of the kind. I believe that in some marvellous manner the Holy Ghost made use of the reason, the memory, the

intellect, the style of thought, and the peculiar mental temperament of each writer of the Scriptures. But how and in what manner this was done I can no more explain than I can the union of two natures, God and man, in the person of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.—I only know that there is both a Divine and a human element in the Bible, and that while the men who wrote it were really and truly men, the book that they wrote and handed down to us is really and truly the Word of God. I know the result, but I do not understand the process. The result is that the Bible is the written Word of God; but I can no more explain the process than I can explain how the water became wine at Cana, or how five loaves fed five thousand men, or how a word raised Lazarus from the dead.—I do not pretend to explain miracles, and I do not pretend to explain fully the miraculous gift of inspiration. The position I take up is that, while the Bible-writers were not "machines," as some sneeringly say, they only wrote what God taught them to write. The Holy Ghost put into their minds thoughts and ideas, and then guided their pens in writing and expressing them. When you read the Bible you are not reading the unaided, self-taught composition of erring men like yourselves, but thoughts and words which were suggested by the eternal God. The men who were employed to incite the Scripture "spake not of themselves." They "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. i. 21). He that holds a Bible in his hand should know that he holds not the word of man but of God.

Concerning the *precise extent* to which the Bible is inspired, I freely admit that Christians differ widely. Some of the views put forth on the subject appear to me erroneous in the extreme. I shall not shrink from giving my own opinion and stating my reasons for maintaining it. In matters like these I dare not call any man master. Painful as it is to disagree with able and gifted men on religious questions, I dare not take up views of inspiration which my head and heart tell me are unsound, however high and honoured the names of those who maintain them. I believe in my conscience that low and defective views of this subject are doing immense damage to the cause of Christ in these last days.

Some hold that some of the books of Scripture are not inspired at all, and have no more authority or claim to our reverence than the writings of any ordinary man.—Others who do not go so far as this, and allow that all the books in the Bible are inspired, maintain that inspiration was only *partial*, and that there are portions in almost every book which are uninspired.—Others hold that inspiration means nothing more than general superintendence and direction, and that, while the Bible writers were miraculously preserved from making mistakes in great things and matters necessary to salvation, in things indifferent they were left to their own unassisted faculties like any other writers.—Some hold that all the ideas in the Bible were given by inspiration, but not the words and language in which they are clothed,—though how to separate ideas from words it is rather hard to understand!—Some, finally, allow the thorough inspiration of all the Bible, and yet maintain that it was possible for the writers to make occasional mistakes in their statements, and that such mistakes do exist at this day.

From all these views I totally and entirely dissent. They all appear to me more or less defective, below the truth, dangerous in their tendency, and open to grave and

insuperable objections. The view which I maintain is that every book, and chapter, and verse, and syllable of the Bible, was given by inspiration of God. I hold that not only the substance of the Bible, but its language,—not only the ideas of the Bible, but its words,—not only certain parts of the Bible, but every chapter of the book,—that all and each are of Divine authority. I hold that the Scripture not only contains the Word of God, but is the Word of God. I believe the narratives and statements of Genesis, and the catalogues in Chronicles, were just as truly written by inspiration as the Acts of the Apostles. I believe Ezra's account of the nine-and-twenty knives, and St Paul's message about the cloak and parchments, were as much written under Divine direction as the 20th of Exodus, the 17th of John, or the 8th of Romans. I do not say, be it remembered, that all these parts of the Bible are of equal importance to our souls. Nothing of the kind! But I do say they were all equally given by inspiration.

In making this statement I ask the reader not to misunderstand my meaning. I do not forget that the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. The inspiration of every word, for which I contend, is the inspiration of every original Hebrew and Greek word as the Bible writers first wrote it down. I stand up for nothing more and nothing less than this. I do not say that those who wrote copies of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures were incapable of making mistakes, and never left out or added a word. I lay no claim to the inspiration of every word in the various versions and translations of God's Word. So far as those translations and versions are faithfully and correctly done so far they are, practically, of equal authority with the original Hebrew and Greek. We have reason to thank God that many of the translations are, in the main, faithful and accurate. At any rate our own English Bible, if not perfect, is so far correct that in reading it we have a right to believe that we are reading in our own tongue, not the word of man, but of God.

Now the view for which I contend,—that every word of the Bible is inspired,—is not accepted by many good Christians, and is bitterly opposed in many quarters. I shall therefore mention a few reasons why it appears to me the only safe and tenable view which can be adopted, and the only one which is free from innumerable objections. If I err in maintaining it I have the comfort at any rate of erring in good company. I only take up the same ground which almost all the Fathers occupied; which Bishop Jewell, and Hooker, and Owen, took up long ago; and which Chalmers, Robert Haldane, Gaussen, Bishop Wordsworth, M'Caul, Burgon, and Archdeacon Lee of the Irish Church, have ably defended in modern days. I know, however, that men's minds are variously constituted. Arguments and reasons which appear weighty to some are of no weight with others. I shall content myself with setting down in order the reasons which satisfy me.

(a) For one thing, I cannot see how *the Bible can be a perfect rule of faith and practice*, if it is not fully inspired, and if it contains any flaws and imperfections. If the Bible is anything at all it is the statute-book of God's kingdom,—the code of laws and regulations by which the subjects of that kingdom are to live,—the register-deed of the terms on which they have peace now and shall have glory hereafter. Now, why are we to suppose that such a book will be loosely and

imperfectly drawn up any more than legal deeds are drawn up on earth? Every lawyer can tell us that in legal deeds and statutes every word is of importance, and that property, life, or death may often turn on a *single word*. Think of the confusion that would ensue if wills and settlements, and conveyance, and partnership deeds and leases, and agreements, and Acts of Parliament were not carefully drawn up and carefully interpreted, and every word allowed its due weight. Where would be the use of such documents if particular words went for nothing, and everyone had a right to add, or take away, or alter, or deny the validity of words, or erase words at his own discretion? At this rate we might as well lay aside our legal documents altogether! Surely we have a right to expect that in the book which contains our title-deeds for eternity every word should be inspired, and nothing imperfect admitted. If God's statute-book is not inspired, and every word is not of Divine authority, God's subjects are left in a pitiable state. I see much in this.

(b) For another thing, if the Bible is not fully inspired, and contains imperfections, I cannot understand the *language which is frequently used about it* in its own pages. Such expressions as "The oracles of God;"— "He saith;"— "God saith;"— "the Holy Ghost spake by Isaiah the prophet;"— "the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear His voice,"—would appear to me inexplicable and extravagant if applied to a book containing occasional blemishes, defects, and mistakes. (Acts vii. 38; Rom. iii. 2; Heb. v. 12; 1 Pet. iv. 11; Eph. iv. 8; Heb. i. 8; Acts xxviii. 25; Heb. ii. 7; x. 15; Rom. ix. 25.) Once grant that every word of Scripture is inspired, and I see an admirable propriety in the language. I cannot understand "the Holy Ghost" making a mistake, or an "oracle" containing anything defective! If any man replies that the Holy Ghost did not *always* speak by Isaiah, I will ask him who is to decide when He did and when He did not? I see much in this.

(c) For another thing, the theory that all the words of the Bible were not given by inspiration of God, appears to me utterly *at variance with several quotations from the Old Testament* which I find in the New. I allude to those quotations in which the whole force of the passage turns on one single word, and once even on the use of the singular instead of the plural number. Take, for instance, such quotations as: "The Lord said unto my Lord" (Mat. xxii. 44). "I said, Ye are gods" (Jn. x. 34). "To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." (Gal iii. 16). "He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren." (Heb. ii. 11, 12). In every one of these cases the whole point of the quotation lies in a single word. But if this is so, it is hard to see on what principle we can deny the inspiration of all the words of Scripture. At any rate, those who deny verbal inspiration will find it difficult to show us exactly which words are inspired and which are not. Who is to draw the line, and where is it to be drawn? I in this.

(d) For another thing, if the words of Scripture are not all inspired, *the value of the Bible as a weapon in controversy is greatly damaged*, if not entirely taken away. Who does not know that in arguing with Jews, Arians, or Socinians, the whole point of the texts we quote against them often lies in a single word? What are we to reply if an adversary asserts that the special word of some text, on which we ground

an argument, is a mistake of the writer, and therefore of no authority? To my mind it appears that the objection would be fatal. It is useless to quote texts if we once admit that not all the words of which they are composed were given by inspiration. Unless there is some certain standard to appeal to we may as well hold our tongues. Argument is labour in vain if our mouths are to be stopped by the retort, "That text is not inspired." I see much in this.

(e) For another thing, to give up verbal inspiration appears to me to *destroy the usefulness of the Bible as an instrument for public preaching and instruction*. Where is the use of choosing a text and making it the subject of a pulpit address if we do not believe that every word of the text is inspired? Once let our hearers get hold of the idea that the writers of the Bible could make mistakes in the particular words they used, and they will care little for any reproofs, or exhortations, or remarks which are based on words. "How do you know," they might ask us, "that this word, about which you made such ado yesterday, was given by the Holy Ghost? How do you know that St. Paul or St. Peter, or St. John did not make a mistake and use the wrong word? That they could make mistakes about words you yourself allow." I know not what others may think. For myself I could give no answer. I see much in this.

(f) Last, but not least, the denial of verbal inspiration appears to me to *destroy a great part of the usefulness of the Bible as a source of comfort and instruction in private reading*. Where is the truly Christian student of the Bible who does not know that words, particular words, afford a large portion of the benefit which he derives from his daily reading? How much the value of many a cherished text depends on some single phrase, or the number of a substantive, or the tense of a verb? Alas! there would be an end of all this if we once concede that each word is not inspired; and that, for anything we know, some much-loved favourite substantive, or verb, or pronoun, or adverb, or adjective, was an Apostle's mistake, and the word of man, not of God! What others might think I know not. For myself I should be tempted to lay aside my Bible in despair, and become of all men most miserable. I see much in this.

Now, I freely grant that many excellent Christians think that the view I maintain is open to serious objections. That the Bible, generally speaking, is given by inspiration they firmly maintain. But they shrink from maintaining that inspiration extends to every word of Scripture. I am sorry to differ from these worthy people. But I cannot see the weight and force of their objections. Fairly and honestly examined, they fail to carry conviction to my mind.

(a) Some object that there are occasional statements in the Bible which contradict the facts of history. Are these all verbally inspired?—My answer is that it is far more easy to assert this than to prove it. There is nothing of which we have so few trustworthy remains as very ancient history, and if ancient uninspired history and Bible history seem to disagree, it is generally safer and wiser to believe that Bible history is right and other history wrong. At any rate, it is a singular fact that all recent researches in Assyria, Babylon, Palestine, and Egypt, show an extraordinary and increasing tendency to confirm the perfect accuracy of the Word of God. The lamented Mr. Smith's discoveries at Babylon are a remarkable example of what I

mean. There are buried evidences which God seems to keep in reserve for these last days. If Bible history and other histories cannot be made to agree at present, it is safest to wait.

(b) Some object that there are occasional statements in the Bible which contradict the facts of natural science. Are these all inspired?—My answer is again, that it is far more easy to assert this than to prove it. The Bible was not written to teach a system of geology or astronomy, and on matters touching these two sciences it wisely uses popular language, such as common people can understand. No one thinks of saying the Astronomer Royal contradicts science because he speaks of the sun's "rising and setting." If the Bible said anywhere that the earth was a flat surface,—or that it was a fixed globe round which the sun revolved,—or that it never existed in any state before Adam and Eve,—there might be something in the objection. But it never does so. It speaks of scientific subjects as they appear. But it never flatly contradicts science.

(c) Some object that there are occasional statements in the Bible which are monstrous, absurd, and incredible. Are they really obliged to believe that Eve was tempted by the devil in the form of a serpent,—that Noah was saved in an ark,—that Balaam's ass spoke,—and that Jonah actually went into the whale's belly? Are all these statements inspired?—My answer is that Christ and His Apostles speak of these things as historical facts, and were more likely to know the truth about them than we are. Will any one dare to say that the eternal Son of God was ignorant and mistaken, or that He and His Apostles spoke of things as real facts, in order to please their hearers and readers, while they knew in their own hearts that they were only fables, and not facts at all? I challenge an answer to that question. After all, do we believe in miracles or not? Do we believe that Christ Himself rose from the dead? Let us stick to that one grand miracle first, and disprove it if we can. If we do believe it, it is foolish to object to things because they are *miraculous*.

(d) Some object that there are things mentioned occasionally in the Bible which are so trifling that they are unworthy to be called inspired. They point to St. Paul's writing about his cloak, and books, and parchments, and ask if we think such little matters were really written by inspiration of God?— I answer that the least things affecting any of God's children are not too small for the notice of Him who numbers "the hairs of our heads." There are excellent and edifying lessons to be learned from the cloak and parchments, as Robert Haldane has shown most convincingly, in his work on the *Evidences of Divine Revelation*. After all, man knows very little indeed what is great and what is small in God's sight. The history of Nimrod "the mighty hunter" is despatched in three verses of Genesis, while the history of a Syrian dwelling in tents, called Abraham, fills up no less than fourteen chapters. The microscope applied to the book of nature, can show us God's hand in the least lichen that grows on the top of Scawfell as well as in the cedar of Lebanon. The veriest trifles, as they seem to us in the Book of Scripture, may turn out to be most striking confirmations of its truth. Paley has shown this admirably in his *Horæ Paulinæ*, and Professor Blunt in his *Undesigned Coincidences*.

(e) Some object that there are grave discrepancies in some of the Bible histories, especially in the four Gospels, which cannot be made to harmonise and agree. Are

the words, they ask, all inspired in these cases? Have the writers made no mistakes?—I answer that the number of these discrepancies is grossly exaggerated, and that in many cases they are only apparent, and disappear under the touch of common sense. Even in the hardest of them, we should remember, in common fairness, that there are very likely circumstances kept back from us which entirely reconcile everything if we only knew them. Very often in these days when two honest veracious men give a separate account of some long story, their accounts do not quite tally, because one dwells on one part, and the other on another. All well-informed students of history know that the precise day when Charles I erected his standard at Nottingham in the Parliamentary war has not been settled to this hour!

(f) Some object that Job's friends in their long speeches said many weak and foolish things. Were all their words inspired?—An objection like this arises from an illogical and confused idea of what inspiration means. The book of Job contains an historical account of a wonderful part of the old patriarch's history, and a report both of his speeches and those of his friends. But we are nowhere told that either Job or Eliphaz and his companions spoke all that they spoke by the Holy Ghost. The writer of the book of Job was thoroughly inspired to record all they said. But whether they spoke rightly or wrongly is to be decided by the general teaching of Scripture.—No one would say that St. Peter was inspired when he said, "I know not the Man," in the High Priest's palace. But the writer of the Gospel was inspired when he wrote it down for our learning.—In the Acts of the Apostles the letter of Claudius Lysias was certainly not written by inspiration, and Gamaliel, and the town-clerk of Ephesus, and Tertullus were not inspired when they made their speeches. But it is equally certain that St. Luke was inspired to write them down and record them in his book.

(g) Some object that St. Paul, in the 7th chapter of the 1st Corinthians, when giving certain advice to the Corinthian Church, says at one time, "Not I, but the Lord," and at another, "I, not the Lord." And they ask, Does not this show that in part of his advice he was not inspired?—I answer, Not at all. A careful study of the chapter will show that when the Apostle says, "Not I, but the Lord," he lays down some principles on which the Lord had spoken already; and when he says, "I, not the Lord," he gives advice on some point about which there had been no revelation hitherto. But there is not the slightest proof that he is not writing all the way through under direct inspiration of God.

(h) Some object that there are many various readings of the words of Scripture, and that we cannot, therefore, feel sure that we have the original inspired Word of God. I answer that the various readings, when fairly examined, will prove to be absurdly exaggerated in number and importance. Dr. Kennicott, Bengel, and others have proved this long ago. No doubt we may have lost a few of the original words. We have no right to expect infallibility in transcribers and copyists before the invention of printing. But there is not a single doctrine in Scripture which would be affected or altered, if all the various readings were allowed, and the disputed or doubtful words were omitted. Considering how many hands the Bible passed through before printing was invented, and who the transcribers were, it is marvellous that the various readings are so few! The fact that about the immense

majority of all the words in the old Hebrew and Greek Scriptures there is no doubt at all, is little short of a miracle, and demands thanksgiving to God. One thing is very certain. There is no ancient book which has been handed down to us with so good a text and so few various readings as the Bible.

(i) Finally, some object that occasional parts of the Bible are taken from the writings of uninspired men, such as historical chronicles, and pedigrees, and lists of names. Are all these to be regarded as inspired?—I reply that there seems no reason why the Holy Ghost should not direct the Bible writers to use materials made ready to their hands as well as facts which they had seen themselves, and by so directing them, invested such words as they used with Divine authority. When St. Paul quoted lines from heathen poets he did not mean us to regard them as inspired. But he was taught by God to clothe his ideas in the words which they had used, and by so doing he very likely obtained a favourable reading from many. And when we read such quotations, or read lists of names taken from Jewish chronicles and registers, we need not doubt that the Bible writers were taught to use such materials by inspiration of God.

I leave the objections to verbal inspiration at this point, and will detain my readers no longer with them. It is vain to deny that the subject has its difficulties, which will probably never be completely solved. But I have no doubt they can be explained, and perhaps will be some day. These things do not move me. I expect difficulties in such a deep and miraculous matter as inspiration, which I have not eyes to see through. I am content to wait. It was a wise saying of Faraday, that "there are many questions of science about which it is the highest philosophy to keep our minds in a state of judicious suspense." It should be a settled rule with us never to give up a great principle, when we have got hold of it, on account of difficulties. Time often makes things clear which at first look dark. The view of inspiration which presents to my own mind the fewest difficulties, is that in which all the words of Scripture, as well as the thoughts, are regarded as inspired. Here I take my stand.

I ask my readers to remember what I have just said. Never give up a great principle in theology on account of difficulties. Wait patiently, and the difficulties may all melt away. Let that be an axiom in your mind. I will mention an illustration of what I mean. Those conversant with astronomy know that before the discovery of the planet Neptune there were difficulties which greatly troubled the most scientific astronomers respecting certain aberrations of the planet Uranus. These aberrations puzzled the minds of many students so much, that some of them suggested that they might possibly prove the whole Newtonian system to be untrue! But at that time a well-known French astronomer, named Leverrier, read before the Academy of Science a paper in which he laid down this great axiom,—that it did not become a scientific man to give up a principle because of difficulties which could not be explained. He said in effect, "We cannot explain the aberrations of Uranus now; but we may be sure that the Newtonian system will prove to be right, sooner or later. Something maybe discovered one day which will prove that these aberrations may be accounted for, and yet the Newtonian system remain true and unshaken." A few years after the anxious eyes of astronomers discovered the last

great planet Neptune. This planet was shown to be the true cause of all the aberrations of Uranus; and what the French astronomer had laid down as a principle in science was proved to be wise and true. The application of the anecdote is obvious. Let us beware of giving up any first principle in theology. Let us not give up the great principle of plenary verbal inspiration because of apparent difficulties. The day may come when they will all be solved. In the meantime we may rest assured that the difficulties which beset any other theory of inspiration are tenfold greater than any which beset our own.

J. C. RYLE, LIVERPOOL

PALACE, LIVERPOOL.

June 15, 1885.
