

Pastor and People.

QUESTIONINGS.

What can I do for Thee, Master?
For the field is so very wide.
And calls to Thy service are sounding
From toilers on every side.

What can I do for Thee, Master?
The question I fain would repeat,
And reverently, prayerfully waiting
I lay my life down at thy feet.

What may I do for Thee, Master?
Since Thou hast done all things for me?
In love and humility bending
I wait to be guided by Thee.

Wherever Thou leadest, Master,
Whatever Thou sendest to me,
Let me know that my hands are doing
The work that is chosen by Thee.
Margaret E. Stewart.

THE INSPIRATION OF SCRIPTURE.

BY REV. D. M. GORDON, B.D., HALIFAX.

There are some who form a very wrong conception of the formation and character of the Bible, and who imagine that if it be proved that one text should be dropped out or that one mistake has crept in, the whole book must be abandoned. They think of it as a chain, of which every verse is a link, and since a chain is no stronger than its weakest link, they conclude that if one verse be at fault the whole volume is discredited. But that is not the true statement of the case. The Bible is made up of sixty-six different books, the work of some forty different authors, the whole period of production spanning at least 1,500 years. These books are like so many separate pamphlets bound in one volume, and they are to be considered not like the links of a chain, but rather like separate witnesses, giving evidence to us about God and man and duty and immortality. Now, suppose that you are dealing with sixty-six different witnesses, all separate and independent; even if you could impeach one of them, you will still have sixty-five to deal with; if you could impeach two there would still remain sixty-four; if you could go on impeaching them until only one was left, yet if the testimony of that one was true, you would still have his truth to deal with. So, in dealing with the books of the Bible. Suppose that some one were dropped out, you would still have all the rest to deal with. For most of us it is enough to know that the books of the Old Testament received the stamp and approval of Christ, and that the books of the New Testament were written by those to whom He promised special guidance. But suppose that there seemed to be sufficient evidence for dropping out from the canon of Scripture such a book as Esther, in which the name of God does not appear (although God's providence very plainly appears in it), or the Song of Solomon, on the ground that some critics regard it as a love lyric, or some other, in whole or in part—though no reason has yet been given sufficient for so doing—still, even were this done, there would remain all the rest, laws and history, psalms and prophecies, gospels and epistles, bearing witness of their inspiration from God by the way in which they speak to the hearts and work on the lives of men.

Now, as we look through these books of the Bible, there are various considerations that lie on the very surface marking off this book from any and all others. The late Matthew Arnold would have us regard it simply as a part of Jewish literature; but though it was first given to the men of one race, it is a book for all mankind, and different from all other literature. Very marvellous, for instance, is the unity of purpose that runs through all these books that make up our Bible. They were written by a variety of authors—kings and poets, philosophers and fishermen, statesmen, shepherds and taxgatherers—some learned in the wisdom of Egypt, some trained in the schools of Babylon, some reared at the feet of Jewish rabbis, men writing in many styles and on many subjects—law, prophecy, history, poetry, morals—and yet, though written by such a variety of authors and on such a variety of subjects, and embracing a span of 1,500 years, still as you go through the whole volume from the first promise in Genesis to the closing vision on Patmos, you find it treating in the main of one purpose, and pointing to one Person, with steady progress of growing light, the revelation unfolding

from bud to flower. Eden and Ararat, Sinai and Pishgah, are points from which you get glimpses of Calvary and Olivet. From the first promise down through the words of Moses and Samuel and David and Isaiah and their brethren, we are led on to Him of whom the law and the prophets spoke, and of whom in clearer tones the apostles preached. Down through the deliverance by the ark, the call of Abraham, the rescue of Israel from Egypt, the thunders of Sinai, the ceremonies and sacrifices of tabernacle and temple, the entrance into Canaan, the establishment of the kingdom, the fuller preaching by the prophets of God's redeeming purpose, you have types and symbols and foretokens that were fulfilled in Christ. This unity that runs through all these books for 1,500 years is a very marvellous feature. Take the literature of England even for the past 500 years, from Chaucer's time till now, you could not, if you tried, find from the several centuries of our literature, so many books, by so many authors, on so many subjects, with one thread running through them all. And the wonder is made, if possible, all the greater when we remember that in the course of those fifteen centuries many other books were written that have dropped into oblivion. Books are engulphed in the tide of time; only a few fragments remain like the shattered pieces of wrecks that are floated ashore. But here, as you look at the pieces that remain, you find that they fit each to each, as if out of the fragments that strew the shore you could form the fairest ship that ever sailed, fair as if the wealth of the world's mines and forests and factories were at your command. How shall you account for this one purpose running through all this one testimony borne by all these witnesses, this one pulse-throbbing through all the members, how, except by admitting that they throb with the same life-blood, that the design was not theirs, but God's, that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost?"

Take another illustration of the peculiar character of this book. How is it that the first chapter of Genesis, though manifestly written for a moral and spiritual, rather than scientific purpose, is in harmony with the latest teachings of exact science? Ask the men of science to-day what they know—not what they guess and speculate but what they know, about the origin of things, and you will find that, according to such teachers as Darwin and Huxley and Tyndall, there are gaps which they cannot bridge, points where they find a new problem that they cannot solve. And these occur specially at the three points where, according to the Mosaic record, there is introduced the creative act of God. What is the origin of matter? Go back to the furthest point that science can picture, beyond the cooling of the earth's crust even to the primal fire mist that some have imagined, and still no answer is given. Science is dumb before that question. And that is the first point at which the creative power of God is asserted in the record. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Come forward any member of centuries, for the Bible assigns no time limit to creation, and the question meets you. What is the origin of animal life? The latest verdict from Professor Tyndall is that there is no such thing as spontaneous generation. Beyond and behind all that the test of the chemist or the knife of the anatomist can unfold is this mystery of life, of which science can only say that it comes from some previous form of life. But whence came the first life? In presence of that question science is dumb. Yet that is the second point at which the creative act of God is asserted, when we are told that He created the life that swarms in sea and air and earth. Come forth further in the course, and the question meets you. Whence came the mind, the reasoning spirit of man? Not from the lower animals. Huxley, who is perhaps the greatest living teacher of the evolution theory, in this department of science, regards the hypothesis of Darwin on this point as not proven. Here again is a question before which science is dumb, a dead wall through which it finds no portal. And here is the third and only remaining point at which the Mosaic record asserts the creative act of God. Three times the word "create" is used in the Mosaic account of the origin of things, viz., at the three points where matter, life, and the spirit of man, are first introduced, and these three are the great mysteries, the unsolved problems of science. How came it that while the bright intellects of Greece accepted as the account of creation a myth which no school boy would now credit, and which the earlier

and perhaps keener intellects of India did the same, we find Moses, nearly fifteen centuries before Christ, giving a record that our latest knowledge cannot contradict? Surely those holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

But while there are many thoughts of that kind they may well convince the devout student of science and of history that the Bible does bear special evidence of the hand of God, yet the facts on which St. Paul lays special stress in the words before us are not such facts as these, but rather such as it is within the range of all to examine. You may not be in a position to compare the teaching of Scripture with the teachings of science; but you can do this; you can see for yourself that the book will make you wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ; you can see for yourself, if you only read it, that it is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

Profitable for teaching. What book can teach as this does? Where else can you get such conceptions of the living God for Whom our hearts yearn and in Whom is our fullness of life? Where else can you learn with such clearness your own nature, the greatness of the ruin, yet the ruin of what was so great? Where else can you get such a vision of life and immortality, which fits into the hopes and longings of your best moments as a key fits the lock for which it was made?

Profitable for reproof, to convince us of our sin. Where else can you find a law so searching, or words that call forth and express in the same degree your penitence and self-reproach? Though the name of Moses had never been connected with the law, that law would be none the less true and binding as a rule of life that commends itself to the conscience even of those whom it condemns. Though the name of David had never been connected with the fifty-first Psalm, or though that Psalm had been found as an anonymous fragment from some unknown age, it would be none the less fitted both to quicken and to express our penitence.

Profitable for correction, to correct the erring and to restore the fallen. You may find in other books good moral precepts. The Romans received many from Seneca; the Chinese received many from Confucius, but they were precepts without the inspiring power of a life to illustrate them or a spirit to help us to fulfil them. Compare them with the words of Jesus and they are like a bunch of artificial flowers, compared with the living, luxuriant plants in full bloom. There is life in the one that is not in the other, a power to help you up and to sustain you, which they who have tested can understand, but which cannot be known except by experiment.

Profitable for instruction in righteousness, able to guide us step by step along the path of holiness, so that we may become that which in our best moments we would desire to be, renewed into the likeness of Christ. Now the point on which the apostle here lays stress is that these are tests by which any of us can try the Bible, ways by which we can convince ourselves of the origin and character, not by any far-fetched, long-drawn arguments, not by any proof of its harmony or of its conflict with science, but by a proof that is close at hand, by its power in the heart and life of those who read and obey it. Deal honestly with this book, read it, not from mere curiosity nor for the sake of controversy, but with the faithful effort to live up to the truth that you find in it, and your experience will bear witness to the truth of Christ's words, "Whosoever is willing to do His will shall know of the teaching whether it be from God." Test it as you would test the counsel of a friend or the prescription of a doctor that you thought worth following, and you will need no other argument to assure you that the book is from God. You will be convinced that it is inspired because it inspires you to a better life, convinced that it comes from God because it helps you toward God; and when you set your foot on that rock you can afford to make little of the attacks of those who would make little of the Bible. Your own experience will be your witness in its favour, and then your life of obedience to Christ may be a witness in its favour to those around you. You will rest assured that while there is a heart exposed to sorrow a will warped by temptation from the line of righteousness, a memory to recall and a conscience to condemn the sins that are past, a spirit grieved over its present pollution and looking out amid fears and hopes to the unseen future, this good old Bible cannot be outworn; there will be a work for it to do which no other books can perform. And though strife may rage around it, though scepticism may assail it, though vice reproved by it may league with vice against it, you shall be calm and confident in the assurance that it shall survive all attacks of the future as it has withstood all attacks of the past, still pointing heavenward like the everlasting hills.