

what vowels should be supplied to each word, and one generation learned this tradition from its predecessor by oral instruction. In different passages different vowels would have to be added to the same consonants to make sense. The liability to error under this system was very great, as may be seen by an example. The consonants PR with various vowels added might represent the words "pair," "peer," "pyre," "pore," "poor," "pure" and many more. If in English books the consonants alone were printed, it would be extremely difficult, and often impossible, to decide which of these words PR represented. For the inerrancy of the Massoretic text it is necessary that from generation to generation the Scribes down to the 8th century A.D. should have made not the slightest mistake in selecting the right vowels for every word in the O.T. The Verbal Theory, if it is to be logical and consistent, and if it would shun self-destruction, must declare the tremendous consequence that, if the Scribes made a single blunder, if a single vowel or accent can be proved to be wrong, the authority of the Bible goes by the board, and Christianity is shorn of Divine sanction. The risk is too great; we cannot take it. The price is too high; we cannot pay it. The Septuagint, or Greek Bible, is quoted in the N.T. indiscriminately with the Hebrew. It was the Bible of the primitive Christians, and was the O.T. of the Church down to the 5th century A.D. It was owing to Jerome (420 A.D.) that the Church is not to-day using it instead of the Hebrew, from which it differs so considerably. It, and not the Hebrew, was the O.T. which the Fathers regarded as verbally inspired. But its numerous variations from the Hebrew and the confusion and blunders in its own text show that the Septuagint is anything but inerrant. Thus, no absolutely inerrant text, such as the Verbal Theory requires, exists in English, Greek or Hebrew. Therefore the Theory is mere lumber. If it were possible, regardless of facts, to say that the text at any stage was inerrant, it would be necessary to assert and to prove the inerrancy, infallibility and inspiration of all the agents who had been engaged in producing the inerrant text, including, according to the stage fixed on, the Scribes that chose the one Hebrew exemplar, all the generations of Massorets who knew the right vowels and invented the vowel points, the Fathers of Antioch who made the "Syrian" recension of the N.T., all the monks who, in the dark ages did penance by copying the Scriptures, all the makers of versions from King Ptolemy's translators to King James, from Wycliffe and Tyndale to the Company of Revisers; and the critics, Westcott and Hort, who by their critical judgment have constructed the purest existing text. But this, especially this last, is more than the most ardent Verbal Inspirationist is prepared for. His Theory breaks in pieces under the strain. If Verbal Inspiration were necessary to the authority of the Scriptures, God would have inspired not only the original writers, but also, we must suppose, every copyist, and so caused every transcript to be a *fac-simile* of the original. But He did nothing of the sort. He allowed the copyists of the N.T., for instance, to pile up errors for 14 centuries, and then, through His servants Westcott and Hort, He made of those very errors a means as effectual as inspiration would have been,—and much more satisfactory, because it can be thoroughly tested,—of restoring to the Church in the 19th century the text of the N.T. in almost pristine perfection. Thus God at once vindicates His Providence in the care of the Holy Bible, and repudiates as unnecessary and false, the Theory of Verbal Inspiration.

THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

III. A third test of the Verbal Theory is its relation to the results of the Higher Criticism. Assuming for the moment the correctness of those results, one example will suffice. To adopt without inquiry the speculation of the Scribe that Moses wrote the whole of the Pentateuch just as we have it, and that therefore it is in every part verbally inspired and inerrant, is easy enough. But when it is ascertained that the first six, and not the first five, books of the Old Testament are really one work—a Hexateuch, not a Pentateuch—and that the Hexateuch comprises the writings of several anonymous authors (J, E, P, D, etc.), whose works were combined and reduced into their present form by a number of redactors; then the application of the Verbal Theory becomes extremely difficult. The only alternative to its abandonment is to assert the inerrancy and inspiration of the unknown authors and redactors. And that is impossible when the two-fold narrative of, e.g., the Creation (Gen. 1: 1 to 2: 4, and 2: 4 to 2: 24), the Flood (Gen. vi: 9 to viii: 19), the wives of Esau (Gen. xxvi: 34, 35 and 36: 2-3), the deportation of Joseph (Gen. 37: 12-30 and 39: 1 and 40: 15), and the Plagues of Egypt (Ex. 7: 14, etc.) is looked at when the varying and sometimes amended laws, as e.g., the law of the plurality of Sanctuaries (Ex. 20: 24-26) and the law of the one Sanctuary (Deut. xii: 5, 13, 14) are considered; and when it is noticed that such men as Samuel (1 Sam. vii: 9), of the tribe of Ephraim, and David (2 Sam. vi: 13, 17-18) and Solomon (1 Kings iii: 3; viii: 22, 54; 55, 56) of the tribe of Judah, discharged without blame priestly functions, which by the law were confined to the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron.

THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON.

IV. The fourth test of the Verbal Theory is the history of the Canon of Collection of inspired authoritative books called the Bible. The Verbal theory regards the Bible as one book, homogeneous and of equal authority in all its parts. But the Bible is really a library, a literature of many books by many authors, mostly anonymous, and written at different times extending over many centuries. Each of these books was separately published and circulated. Now all are gathered into one Collection. The fact of a book being in that Collection stamps it with Divine authority. Many of the books make no direct claim to that authority. Their being in the

Collection depends on the judgment of those who placed them there. The Verbal Theory requires in those persons absolute inerrancy. If they were not inerrant, they might have blundered into admitting an uninspired or excluding an inspired book. The Canon may be said to have begun with the promulgation of Deuteronomy by King Josiah in the 7th century B.C. (2 Kings xxiii: 3). Then in the 5th century B.C. Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh. viii: 1-9) added Gen., Exod., Lev., and Num., and formed the Pentateuch, containing and called the Torah or Law of Moses. After their time the Prophets were gradually added through popular use, though they were still regarded as inferior to the Law, and were not written on the same rolls. The Psalter was added owing to its use in the Temple service; and finally before 100 B.C., the Hagiographa, or Sacred Writings, comprising the remaining books of the O.T., were added, on grounds that are unknown. The Canon was, however, still open in the time of Christ, the claims of certain books being yet under debate, and it was not finally completed till the close of the 1st century A.D. The debated books were called Antilegomena, or "books spoken against." Among these were the Apocryphal books and fragments still found in the Septuagint, which were finally shut out of the Hebrew canon. The other debated books, Chron., Prov., Ezek., Eccl., Esch., and Song of Songs, were finally admitted. The admission of Ezek. was secured by Rabbi Hananiah, who lived in the time of Christ, and the Talmud says (Hagiga I: 3a) the price he got for his decision was 300 measures of oil. Eccl. and the Song of Songs were admitted by the Assembly of Scribes at Jamnia in 90 A.D., but only by a majority vote; and but for the violence and anathemas of Rabbi Akiba, the Song of Songs would have been excluded (Mishna, Jadinin 3, 5). The process of forming the O.T. Canon was thus a twofold one of selection and rejection of books, and the agents were the Scribes. On their judgment, the O.T., as it stands, is received by Christians as containing inspired Scriptures and nothing besides. What is the guarantee that the Scribes did not make mistakes? The only guarantee that will suit the Verbal Theory is the inerrancy, infallibility and inspiration of the whole tribe of Scribes, including Rabbi Akiba, a supporter of Bar Kokhba, the false Messiah, and including those very Scribes and Pharisees who made the tremendous blunder of rejecting the Christ.

THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON.

The early Christians got from the Jews with the O.T. the notion of a canon. The Christians had sacred books of their own, which they read publicly in the churches. In the first half of the 2nd century A.D. they began to place these in the same rank as the O.T., and this was the beginning of the N.T. Canon. The process, as with the O.T., was one of selection and rejection of the great mass of literature in circulation. Local collections were first made. These differed from one another and from the N.T. as we have it, both as to books included and books excluded. The Church in each district felt at liberty to make its own selection, and each Father had his own list of authoritative books. It was not till the beginning of the 5th century A.D. that all differences disappeared, and the N.T. Canon, as we have it, was tacitly agreed on by all except the Syrian Church. The first list exactly the same as our N.T. is that decreed by the provincial Councils of Carthage in 397 and 419 A.D. All the books now in the N.T. were, however, in some local collection before the end of the 2nd century A.D.; and some were without question placed in all the collections from the first. These, called Homologoumena, or books "agreed on," were the Four Gospels, Acts, the Epistles of Paul, 1 Peter and 1 John. Before the middle of the 2nd century A.D. the Four Gospels, as containing the words and deeds of Christ, were regarded by all as being Scripture just as much as the Law, the Prophets and the Psalms. They were selected out of a host of fragmentary gospels (Luke i: 1), heretical gospels, as that of Marcion, and apocryphal gospels, such as those of the Hebrews, the Egyptians, and Peter, which were highly regarded for a time in some localities, but were finally rejected. The date of the composition of the N.T. books must not be confused with the date of their admission to the Canon. Towards the beginning of the 2nd century there were two main streams of N.T. text, the Western and the Neutral, showing great divergencies. (Westcott and Hort, 159). The autographs in the original writers, the one source of these two divergent streams, must be placed well back into the 1st century, in order to account for these two texts with their numerous and marked divergencies. Therefore, by a purely scientific method it is proved that the N.T. (with the possible exception of a small portion; Westcott and Hort, 368) existed within the lifetime of the Apostle John. This fact destroys at one blow the Mythical Theory of Strauss and the Tendency Theory of Baur, and for ever precludes every other speculation requiring, like them, that the date of the composition of the N.T. books be placed later than the Apostolic age. Of the N.T. Antilegomena, there were two classes. One comprised books now in the N.T., but whose claim was for centuries debated. These are Hebrews, the Apocalypse, James, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, and Jude. Till about the end of the 1st century the Church in the West refused to place Hebrews, and the Church in the East, with the exception of Alexandria, refused to place the Apocalypse in the Canon. The debate then died out, to be renewed at the Reformation. Luther disputed the claim of Hebrews, James, Jude and the Apocalypse, and placed them at the end of his German Bible. Calvin, in his *Antidote* to the Council of Trent, says the question as to certain books being in the Canon must remain open. The other class of Antilegomena comprised those books which for centuries were regarded and quoted as Scripture and were read in churches,

(Concluded next week.)