

THE CANADA PRESBYTERIAN.

VOL. 22.

TORONTO, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 21st, 1893.

No. 25.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

MEETING AT BRANTFORD.

The nineteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada opened at 7.30 o'clock, on Wednesday, 14th inst., in Zion Church, in this city, Rev. Dr. Cochrane, pastor of the Church, conducting the devotional exercises. The spacious edifice was comfortably filled, a large number of citizens intermingling with the commissioners on the ground floor and occupying the galleries. The services opened with singing a portion of Psalm 102, after which Dr. Cochrane read from Psalm xix, and II. Timothy, iii. 10, and Principal Caven, Moderator of the Assembly, led in prayer. The 106th hymn was then sung, followed by an eloquent sermon upon the subject of inspiration, by the Moderator.

THE SERMON.

The learned Principal took as his text II. Timothy, iii. 16: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable, etc." He proceeded as follows:

The apostle exhorts Timothy, his "own son in the faith," to continue steadfast in the things which he had been taught, seeing that they were of sure authority. Timothy had doubtless received careful instruction from the apostle himself, but from childhood his pious mother led him to know the "Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Like his blessed Master, the apostle constantly recognises the divine origin, absolute authority and unpeakable value of the Scriptures, and having here declared that heavenly wisdom is attained through them, he adds this most important statement regarding the book of the old covenant: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Whether we follow the authorised version or the revised version ("Every Scripture inspired of God," etc.) we must understand the apostle to affirm inspiration of the entire volume which we call the Old Testament, and the usefulness of every part of it. For, apart from all criticisms of translations, the meaning cannot be that those parts of Scripture which are inspired are profitable. The "Holy Scriptures" and "all Scripture given by inspiration of God" must be equally extensive.

It will not be questioned by Christians that the books of the New Testament may claim equal rank, at least, with those of the Old, and thus we can regard our whole Bible as "inspired" and "profitable." The late Scriptures, indeed, contain the record of things which "many prophets and righteous men desired to see, but did not see them," and, in the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, shine as noon-day compared with the light of early morning.

We have here, then, two statements regarding "all Scripture," viz., that it is "given by inspiration of God," and that it is "profitable." And these are not independent statements, but closely related to each other, for the profitability of Scripture is guaranteed and immeasurably enhanced by its inspiration. If Scripture is inspired of God its value must exceed that of all human productions, even the holiest and best.

1. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. It is "God-breathed," for this is the literal meaning of the term. When the risen Lord would communicate authority and power to the apostles to execute their office He "breathed on them, and said unto them, receive ye the Holy Ghost." In this symbolical act He did, as it were, convey the Spirit, so that they should become qualified to teach and

govern the Church; though not till Pentecost was the blessing, thus signified, fully bestowed upon them. So, in the vision of the valley of bones, the Lord says, "Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live." The psalmist says, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." "The spirit of the Lord hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life," are the words of Elihu. In all which, and similar passages, we have clear allusion to the creative act, when "the Lord breathed into man's nostril, and he became a living soul"—when God did, as it were, impart of Himself to His creature, who was made in His "image" and "likeness." All Scripture is thus "God-breathed," and hence possesses attributes which are directly from God, and which distinguish it from all ordinary human compositions.

DEFINITIONS OF INSPIRATION.

It is difficult perhaps impossible, to give an adequate definition of inspiration. We cannot tell how, in bestowing this gift, the Divine Spirit acted upon man's spirit, nor can we describe what was peculiar in the consciousness of the person endowed with the gift. We do not even know that there was anything peculiar. The nature and conditions of inspiration are hidden from our inspection, and while Scripture declares the fact of inspiration and attests its importance it furnishes little information regarding its essence or methods. Philosophical curiosity might be gratified by knowledge of the mystery involved, but reverent piety and confidence in the truth and excellence of the Scripture would not necessarily be increased.

Definitions of inspiration more or less elaborate have been offered, and some of these are doubtless correct, so far as they go. "Inspiration," says a recent eminent theologian, "was an influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of certain select men, which rendered them the organs of God for the infallible communication of His mind and will." (Dr. C. Hodge.) Here is another well-known attempt at definition: "Inspiration is such a degree of divine assistance, influence or guidance as enabled the authors of Scripture to communicate religious knowledge to others, without error or mistake, whether the subjects of such communications were things immediately revealed to those who declared them, or things with which they were before acquainted." (H. Horne.) A third definition runs: "Inspiration is an influence of the Holy Spirit upon the understandings, imaginations, memories, and other mental powers of the sacred writers, by which they were qualified to communicate to the world the knowledge of the will of God." (Dick.)

The Church symbols refrain from definition, though they all clearly recognise the divine character of Scripture. The Confession of Faith says that "the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek are immediately inspired of God; it calls the Scriptures the "Word of God," and attributes to them "entire perfection," "infallible truth" and "divine authority." And so in all branches of the Christian Church the Bible has been accepted as the inspired Word of God.

HUMAN ELEMENT IN SCRIPTURES.

(1) The Scriptures were written by the hand of man, the only exception, so far as we know, being the Ten Commandments, which were graven by the finger of God on tables of stone. In the New Testament we have, at least, eight different writers; in the Old Testament probably more than thirty. Each of these has

his own style of writing and his own mental characteristics, which, so far as we know, were not changed nor repressed by the great fact of inspiration. The sacred writers were not merely penmen of the Spirit, whose task was the purely mechanical one of setting down the words which were given to them. Often have individuals spoken of them as "penmen" and as "writing to dictation," but no church, so far as appears, has ever held what is called the mechanical theory of inspiration, and even those who have used the expressions referred to have, as a rule, meant only to assert strongly the divine origin of Scripture.

That the individuality of the sacred writers was not laid aside is patent to every intelligent reader of the Bible. Isaiah's language and thought are easily distinguished from those of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Little penetration is required to discern the difference between the vehement logic of Paul and the contemplative spirituality of John, to see wherein Luke is both like and unlike Paul, or to note in the Epistle of James striking features not found in any part of the New Testament. Paul was a learned man, and shows a good measure of Greek culture and discipline in union with the knowledge and mental characteristics of the educated Jew. With one exception the New Testament writers are Jews, and Jewish thought and idiom appear as certainly in them as in the old prophets, historians and poets of the Old Testament. You find in both Old Testament and New, compositions of the highest literary excellence, and you have others which may without irreverence be called homely and even rude.

But more: not in style and mental qualities only, but in the parts and aspects of truth which they love to present and enforce, the writers of Scripture may be distinguished from one another. The perfect orb of heavenly truth is seen more clearly in one phase by one writer, in another phase by another writer. Correct interpretation shows that James does not contradict Paul, but is rather the complement of Paul; yet each has his own way of looking at truth, his own special aim in the presentation of it and each in his writing enables you to see not merely his intellectual but his moral and spiritual habitudes and tendencies.

When God selects men as the organs of His Spirit He seems to have respect to their aptitudes natural and gracious. Inspiration is bestowed in the line of these aptitudes. The moral and intellectual constitution and history of one qualify him to portray vividly the evil and danger of sin: the Spirit uses him for this purpose. Another delights to dwell on love and fellowship; his inspired utterances have this theme. A third is predominantly ethical—as the Apostle James; the Spirit directs him to declare and enforce duty. The Spirit could, of course, mould and shape His instruments to use in a moment; but the analogy of God's working leads us to expect, rather, that He will choose instruments with qualities or tendencies which point towards the service which they will be honored to render. Many phenomena of Scripture support the view here advanced.

FREEDOM OF WRITERS.

The freedom, the spontaneity of the sacred writers was not compromised by their becoming organs of the Spirit. May we not say, rather, that because they were filled and moved by the Spirit their freedom was the more perfect? The knowledge, experience, hopes, fears, sympathies of the writers are all in requisition—all in full exercise. Their personality is as fully transfused into their compositions as if they alone were responsible for them. Hence we may say that the Bible is a truly human book; a man's voice is heard in every utterance. With calm deliberation, with tearful sadness, with exultant joy, according to his theme, the sacred writer addresses us; himself penetrated with his message, his words flow from the fulness of his heart. One who can read the Bible without perceiving that such is the fact must have either defective sensibilities or a judgment clouded by some false theory of inspiration. Those of us who have tried to speak to our fellow-men on spiritual things have constantly felt that the more completely self was in abeyance—the more completely mind and heart were surrendered to divine power—the greater was our freedom, the more entirely were we delivered from constraint. It is not suggested that the glad freedom of speech which the Christian preacher sometimes enjoys is the inspiration of the sacred writers, but it serves to show that when divine assistance is greatest we may be most entirely ourselves.

SCRIPTURE THE WORD OF GOD.

(2) But if Scripture may be called a human production, it is all most surely the Word of God. God speaks in it and through it. Its thoughts are God's thoughts, and its words are God's words. The human writer cannot strictly be termed the author of Scripture, for this designation can belong only to Him who deigns to employ the writer for the delivery of His message. The doctrines, narratives, predictions, songs, of the Bible have one true source; they are the various forms of human speech in which God reveals Himself, and through which He addresses the understanding, conscience, imagination and heart of men. Not otherwise can the manifest characteristics of Scripture be accounted for. There shines in the Word of God a union of knowledge, wisdom, power, righteousness and love, which has no parallel in any merely human writings. When Scripture is compared with the highest uninspired literature of any age we are at once sensible of its unique and unapproachable excellence; and especially is this the case when the books of the Bible are compared with the sacred books of other religions, or with any contemporaneous productions either of Jew or Gentile. The seal of God is upon the Bible, and it cannot be counterfeited. Says one: "The Bible proves its divinity by finding me at every point." Says another: "I know that the Bible is God's book because I feel that it is man's book."

THE SCRIPTURES CLAIM INSPIRATION.

In many—in most—parts of the Scripture this marvellous attestation of its heavenly origin is present. But should there be parts in which, from the nature of the case, no subjective test can well be applied—as in many narrative passages, e. g.—they also are inspired, and they contribute to the completeness of the sacred volume. We can appreciate the unexampled combination of power, holiness and love in the Scriptures, but we have other and still surer evidence that the Bible throughout, is "given by inspiration of God." It is impossible to overlook the Bible's own teaching on this subject. Our text is indeed decisive as to the peculiar character and authority of the Scriptures; but in multitudes of places, and in many forms of expression, the divine authorship of the Bible is declared. No one doubts, indeed, that the Bible claims to be of God in a sense peculiar