

Present Day Intellectual Difficulties of the Young Christian.

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I. INSPIRATION.

I shall treat of three classes of difficulties. First, those relating to the inspiration and divine authority of the Bible; second, those suggested by modern criticism, and third, those arising from the assumptions of atheistic evolution.

Several years ago I spent Thanksgiving Day at the home of an influential member of my congregation in Davisville, California. A prominent lawyer from Sacramento, a relative of my host, was also present. The conversation turned upon Mormonism, and I expressed my surprise that such a transparent fraud should have imposed upon intelligent men. My lawyer friend replied, "It is no more surprising that some should believe in the inspiration of the Book of Mormon, than that others should believe in the inspiration of the Bible. There is as much evidence for one as for the other. No court of law would accept the testimony which is offered for the facts of the Gospel, or the resurrection of Christ." I replied, "I am more surprised than ever to hear a lawyer say so. You know, or ought to know, that one of the highest authorities in the English language on the subject of evidence is Mr. Greenleaf, an American writer, and he has written a large volume entitled 'Examination of the testimony of the Four Evangelists, by the rules of Evidence as administered in Courts of Justice; with an account of the Trial of Jesus.' His conclusion is precisely the reverse of your assertion" (Allow me to interject here, that there is an article in the July-August number of the "Methodist Review" on "A Legal View of the Evidence of the Resurrection," that covers briefly and popularly the argument referred to. I should like very much to see the article repeated in some of our Canadian periodicals, so as to be accessible to a larger number of readers.) We cannot go into every question connected with Christian Evidences. A very short process must suffice. The establishment of the fact of Christ's resurrection carries with it the substantial truth and divine authority of the whole Bible. The Old Testament is certified to us by the New—the Acts, Epistles and Revelation hang upon the Gospels—and the corner-stone upon which the Gospels rest is the resurrection of Jesus. "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Cor. 15: 14). If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then His whole mission is discredited. He made no atonement for sin. He was at best an amiable enthusiast, self-deceived and bearing no message of hope to despairing humanity. If it be true, on the other hand, that the tomb in Joseph's garden was but the temporary abode of the Lord of Life, and that He who had hung upon the cross, and whose death was officially attested by His executioners, did really resume the life He had laid down, then all He said and all He claimed for Himself are true. "He was delivered for our offences and rose again for our justification" (Rom 4: 25) and "is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb 7: 25). The Scriptures which He expounded and which He bade us search are the Oracles of God; and the apostles whom He sent forth to speak in

His name are to be received the stewards of divine mysteries. The fact is, that there is no other fact of history better attested than that of the resurrection. The made-up story of the Jewish priests will not stand a moment's consideration. An infidel writer applied himself to the study of this question with the view of proving the whole narrative an invention, and he ended by echoing the exclamation of the doubting disciple, "My Lord and my God."

But if the Bible is true, it is more than true. Such are the claims which it puts forth, such is the character of its contents; that if true, it must be inspired. It is either God's Book, or an audacious imposture. This alternative brings us face to face with some of the most perplexing questions which disturb the candid student. "If the Bible is inspired," he asks, "why are there so many discrepancies and apparent contradictions? Why is there such an apparent difference in the standard of morals recognized in the Old Testament as compared with the New? Are we to admit as historically true all the Old Testament miracles, no matter how childish or grotesque they may seem to our judgment?"

As a necessary preliminary to any further discussion, let us say that we have no theory of inspiration. We do not undertake to settle this vexed question. While it is quite true that words stand for thoughts, and we cannot have the correct thought without the precise word that conveys it; and that very vital doctrines depend upon the right use of very insignificant parts of speech, yet we cannot successfully maintain that the Bible as we now have it is verbally inspired. Whatever may be asserted regarding the original documents, these have long since disappeared, and there are too many discrepancies among the manuscripts that survive to warrant us in saying, in any instance of disagreement, with absolute certainty, which was the word dictated by the Holy Spirit. All that can be reasonably required of us to believe is that the sacred writers were preserved from essential error as to their facts, and mentally and spiritually illuminated so as to impart absolutely reliable information in matters relating to faith and morals. We hold that this illumination was not that of genius or extraordinary natural gifts, but the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon their minds and consciences. Having defined what we mean by inspiration in this very general way, let us consider the three groups of difficulties which we have mentioned.

1. We had an illustration of the first group in connection with our Sunday school lesson a few weeks ago. In Matt. 12: 1 we read "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus saying, who is the greatest in the kingdom of God?" In Mark 9: 33-34 we are told "And he came to Capernaum; and being in the house, he asked them, what was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace; for by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest." And again in Luke 9: 46-47, "Then there arose a reasoning among them which should be the greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child and set him by Him, etc." Here are three different accounts of the circumstances leading up to the lesson. In one the disciples ask a question of Jesus; in the next Jesus asks them, and they are too much ashamed to speak; and

in the third it would seem that no question was asked on either side, but that reading their hearts, Jesus taught the lesson of humility that follows. Does this shake our confidence in the reliability of the narrators? Some years ago I had the honor of representing the New Brunswick S. S. Association at the Ontario Provincial convention at Guelph. I was the guest of a prominent lawyer of that city, and had as a fellow guest a venerable Methodist minister, well known in Toronto. The conversation on one occasion turned upon the question of evidence, and one of us asked our host "Would such variation in the evidence of two witnesses, or of one witness at different examinations, not touching the essential matter under inquiry, weaken the force of their testimony in a court of law?" He answered promptly, "By no means. On the contrary, identity in non-essentials would awaken suspicion of 'coaching' or collusion. Let me give you an instance of what I mean," he continued. "Some time ago I had a case relating to a will, and it was appealed. On the appeal the witnesses were required to repeat their evidence, and they were cross-examined very much as before. In the case of one important witness I was puzzled to find that he answered my questions in precisely the very words he had used on the previous occasion. I did not know at first what to make of it. I could not credit him with such an extraordinary memory, and an honest witness would not be so particular. At last an idea struck me and I asked him, 'Have you seen the copy of your previous evidence?' 'Yes, sir' 'Who shewed it to you?' 'Mr. ——— (the opposing counsel). He made me commit it to memory.' That was enough. I followed up the hint and succeeded in unmasking completely the conspiracy of which this verbal accuracy was a part." Such deviations from each other only strengthen our confidence in the independence and truthfulness of the witnesses. In regard to the apparent contradictions of scripture generally, it may be said that nearly all are capable of a reasonable explanation, and none of them affect, in the slightest degree, the main teaching of the volume. Those that are due to the inaccuracy of transcribers need cause no surprise, except that they are so few and unimportant. No other class of ancient manuscript is so free from them.

2. It is sometimes asserted that the moral standard of the Old Testament is lower than the New, and that therefore, in so far as its claim to be of divine origin must be discredited. But many of the objections raised are of no force whatever. The commanded sacrifice of Isaac is no proof that human victims were ever offered to Jehovah, for we are told that Abraham fully believed that Isaac would be spared, or restored to life again (Heb. 10: 19). Exterminating wars were acts of divine punishment, in which human executioners were employed instead of earthquakes, disease and other natural agencies. This is distinctly asserted, and the utmost care is taken to prevent them degenerating into mere wars of conquest. The moral delinquencies of Noah, Abraham or David are impartially recorded, but they are never palliated or excused. We are left to judge them as they deserve, and justice requires that the standard applied should be that of their own age, and not of ours. In all the acts and ordinances of divine government throughout the history of