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The Bible as Literature and Much More.

ROBERT STUART MACARTHUR.

IX

(Continued from last issue.)

The Inherent Teaching of the Bible.

Has the Bible spoken with absolute truth regarding the deepest questionings of the human heart? Is it an infallible guide to human conduct? Can the longing soul hear in the Word of God the voice of the living Father?

That God has spoken in nature is joyously, devoutly, and gratefully admitted. The Psalmist in majestic personification represents one day as calling to the text in the utterance of divine speech. He also represents night whispering to her successor night, and showing divine knowledge. He reminds us that God's testimony in nature is heard throughout the world. We have all seen the glory of the light in the morn. but eloquent language of sunrise and sunset in the white robe of winter, and in the verdant garment of summer. We have listened to the music of nature's harp, which has been to us rhythmic, inspiring, and ennobling. The king of day and the queen of night alike voice God's great thoughts in His unwritten Bible, the Bible of nature. Nowhere does the written Bible, the Bible of Scripture, contradict, or even depreciate, the value of the teachings of God's "elder Scripture." We ought to study nature as sacred in its place and for its purpose. We ought to hear the voice of God echoing through the cathedral of nature, as Moses heard the voice of God in the burning bush, and in the quaking mount. But as fallen beings, estranged from God, we long for a voice more personal, tender, and divine than that which nature utters in her most majestic orations or in her tenderest whispers. We long for the voice that can tell us that God is a Spirit, that God is a Father, as well as a Creator. We must hear God speak to us promising pardon for sin, strength for daily need, and transformation of human character into its own divine likeness. This voice comes to us in the Word of God with all the sweetness, tenderness, and authority of God Himself. Can this voice be trusted? This is the question of the hour in theological thinking.

Objections to Inspiration.

It is claimed that a belief in inspiration is vitiated, if not destroyed, because of literary defects in the Word of God. Even Luther accused Paul, in one instance, of false logic; he also spoke disparagingly of the Book of Esther. Still it is to be observed that no one has ever more magnified Paul and the Scriptures as a whole than did this same Luther. A true doctrine of inspiration may still admit mistakes, or at least the possibility of mistake, in historical and biographical statements, while it denies any error in matters of faith or morals. We may still firmly hold our conviction of the truth of Scripture, even if its inspired writers erred concerning things entirely unimportant from a religious point of view. We ought not to demand inferrancy on all subjects or perfection in style and logic on the part of these writers. If they received without adulteration, and presented without errancy, invaluable spiritual truths, we ought not to ask more at their hands; they were appointed for this special purpose. The Bible, as we have seen, is God's book, and yet man's composition. We have here the subtle interrelation of the divine and human elements, as in the God-man, and also in all men who become God's men by the work of salvation. It is easy to believe the discourses of Christ although we may be in doubt regarding the lists of the genealogical tables of Adam, or some other historical personage, or regarding some astronomical

question. The Bible, as was long ago said, was not given to teach us how the heavens go, but how we may go to heaven. Scientific matters are related in popular rather than in scientific language. Perhaps the writers did not always have in mind the proper view of scientific interpretation, as we understand the term now. But it is astonishing that the Bible so often anticipates (as we shall later see) many of the scientific discoveries of modern times. Neither the Hindu Shastas, nor any of the heathen cosmogonies, can for a moment compare with the Holy Scriptures in their general agreement with the *dicta* of modern science. It is not too much to say that science has nowhere conclusively shown that any page of Scripture, when fairly interpreted, is scientifically untrue. But granting that there may be errors in the cosmogony and cosmology, or in the ethnology or some related science, or in the chronology or some statistical statement in the Bible, what does such an error signify in a document whose special purpose is the communication of spiritual truth? Granting that there may be in the Word of God some logical irrelevancy, or some historical defect, we are not disturbed by the admission. Such defects might set at naught the theory of verbal inspiration, but they do not in any degree set aside the fact of inspiration. Our standard of judgment on all these points differ from that of other writers. The inspiration which would have corrected errors into which, according to our standard of logic, rhetoric and science, writers of that day might fall, would have been an utter failure for the purpose for which it was given. If the writers of the Bible had striven to correct every scientific error on the part of their readers, their words would often have been meaningless, and would occasionally entirely have defeated their spiritual purpose. If only we have a true conception of what the design of the Bible is, an error in such matters will not give us a second thought. It is again repeated that inspiration is not omniscience.

We must also make due allowance for the mistakes of copyists. Errors in matters of history are often mistakes in transcription; and such errors have no force of argument against the inspiration of the Bible. Certainly printers and proof-readers in our day are not infallible. Why should we expect copyists of the Word of God to be infallible? God has indeed wonderfully preserved the Scripture in these regards. They are far more free from various readings than are other ancient manuscripts. It is not too much to affirm that no existing variation endangers any important doctrine of our faith, and this is a remarkable fact. Some mistakes in numbers no doubt there are. We know that in Hebrew numbers are expressed by letters of the alphabet; and we know also that the addition or omission of a dot or a line might greatly change those numbers. These remarks apply to the numbers given in Bible history as engaged in battle, to the number of talents of silver and gold frequently stated, and to other round numbers in various other connections. But such matters are really of very little moment. The criticisms sometimes pronounced upon the Scriptures at this point are often seen to be puerile to a laughable or a provoking degree.

We must also make due allowance for the anthropopathic element in describing God. Revelation (as later we shall fully see) is progressive. Each type is appropriate to its own period and for its own purpose. Inspiration took its writers and readers where it found both. We judge of other writings and writers by their time and their special purpose. Why should we otherwise judge Scripture writings and writers? Both these writers and writings grew in apprehension of truth and in spirituality of character under the divine instruction, and proofs of that growth are everywhere seen on the pages of Scripture. These writers never commend the evil deeds which they record; their reports are absolutely impartial. The moral correctives are given in other connections. The Old Testament is not to be judged by the light shining at the close of the nineteenth century; neither is it to be judged by the light which shone upon the world at the close of the canon of Scripture. Like all literature, it must be judged by the spirit of the time in which it was produced. We ought thus to judge of the treatment of the Canaanites; and, so judged, it will be seen to be in entire harmony with the usage of the times. In this same spirit we are to judge of the vindictive character of the

relatively few psalms which are known as imprecatory. The man who carries back the spirit of the Gospel as taught by Jesus Christ to the ages which long antedate His coming, is a manifestly unfair critic.

Granting, then, that there are occasional errors in history, that there are slips in syllogistic reasoning, that there are mistakes in figures, chiefly due to the fallibility of copyists, our faith in the Word of God as an inspired rule of life, is in no way shaken. With all our boasted improvements in the printing press it is still almost impossible to guard against errors in books today. After three or four readings of proof, mistakes are still found. The marvel is that the Scriptures have been preserved so free from error as they are even in the judgment of their fiercest critics. It was important that the writers of the Bible should use language in such germinal form as to be "understood" by those to whom they wrote; and yet they use language which is capable of such expansion as to be in harmony with the latest conclusions of the most advanced science, of our day. Many statements of Scripture which once were obscure, or apparently untrue, have become clear with the advance of science, and have been proved truthful by the progress of various discoveries. Light is increasing daily. Witnesses for God's Word are coming from every quarter. The spade is bringing them forth from the sands and debris of many countries and centuries. Philology and archeology join hands in testifying to the truth of Holy Scripture. The wisest erudition joins hands with the simplest faith in endorsing the Word of God. If we patiently wait, earnestly study, and devoutly trust, all problems will disappear, all doubts will vanish, all problems will find solution. We may, with Dr. Strong, quote regarding biblical obscurities what Isocrates said of the work of Heraclitus: "What I understand of it is so excellent, that I can draw conclusions from it concerning what I do not understand."

Salvation, Deliverance, and Association with
Christ—Luke vii:36-50; viii:43-48;
x:38-42

H. S. COSMAN.

2. DELIVERANCE. We are now to the second thought in our study which is that of Deliverance, which is brought out in the case of the woman with the issue of blood.

Here we have beautifully and vividly portrayed the doctrine and experience of a delivered soul. And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind Him, and touched the border of His garment, and immediately her issue was stanch'd. And Jesus said who touched me? When all denied, Peter and all they that were with him said, Master the multitude throng thee, and press thee, and sayest thou, who touched me? And Jesus said somebody hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.

And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before Him, she declared unto Him before all the people, for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately, and He said unto her, daughter, be of good comfort: Thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.—Luke viii:43-48.

I give this circumstance in detail because of its forcefulness, and strikingly illustrating the truth of a delivered soul from its unhalloved surroundings of wilderness life. I do not mean so much the soul being delivered from the bondage of Egypt, while that is a blessed fact; as the believer on the wilderness side of the Red Sea being delivered from fleshly lusts which war against the soul while on the journey to the Promised Land. If we notice carefully Christ does not address this woman as a sinner, as in the first instance, but says: "Daughter be of good comfort: Thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace." His words were spoken to console her in exercising faith in Him as the only one who could rid her of her infirmity. Her case reminds us of the close girding sin that the Apostle Paul admonishes the believer to lay aside. She realized her utter inability to receive help from any source that the world offers, and in despair and disappointment she came in trembling faith to the divine Physic-