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TRACTS FOR THE MILLION.

THE CHURCH THE WITNESS OF SCRIPTURE; OR HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT THE BIBLE IS?

We have already shown you* that it is to the Catholic Church alone that Protestants are indebted for the possession of that sacred volume of which they revile her as the enemy, inasmuch as but for her, it must, humanly speaking, have perished long ago from the face of the earth. This, however, is but a small part of the debt they owe her; the preservation of the Bible they may look upon as a service long past, and therefore, according to the ordinary practice of mankind, may consider themselves justified in throwing aside the remembrance of it. Scripture, they think, no longer needs a guardian, nor ever can need one again; for, by means of the art of printing, its copies have been multiplied and diffused to an extent which defies all future danger of destruction: "It little matters to us," they may say, "who kept it in times past; we will keep it for the time to come, or it will keep itself." But there is a further service which the Catholic Church has not only rendered them in ages gone by, but which she continues to render them at the present day, and which is needed by them at the present day quite as much as it ever was; that, namely, of bearing witness to Holy Scripture. She has not only secured to them the possession of the Word of God, but that also without which such possession would be of little value,—the knowledge that it is the Word of God. If Holy Scripture no longer requires a guardian, it still requires a witness as much as ever; nay, increasingly, as years roll on, and remove us further and further from the time when it was originally put forth among men. And this witness, *the only sure witness*, is the Catholic Church.

Why do Protestants believe in the Bible? This is surely but a fair and reasonable question to ask of men who profess to make the Bible their sole rule of faith. We are told over and over again, that "the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants," meaning, we suppose, the foundation, the groundwork of their religion; that upon which their religion is built. The Bible is to them what St. Paul says the Church is, (1 Tim. iii. 15.) "the pillar and ground of the truth;" that is, they believe in Christianity because they believe in the Bible. It would be but reasonable then, on their parts, resting, as they do, their whole belief on the Bible alone, to make very sure their grounds of belief in the Bible itself. We have read of certain adventurous mariners in the Polar Seas, who, after walking northwards with all perseverance for upwards of forty miles, found, after all, when they came to make their observations, that they were considerably further to the south than when they set out; the broad plain of ice on which they were walking having steadily drifted southward all the while, and with much more rapidity than they were urging their toilsome way to the north. Even so it may be with those who do not look well to the foundations of their faith; the very ground on which they stand may be sliding away in one direction, while they are straining in another. What becomes of the whole belief of a Protestant, if the Bible be not the Word of God? That point, then, that it is the Word of God should surely be thoroughly made good by them, established by such sufficient reasons as really to satisfy their own minds, and to furnish them with an answer to all gainsayers.

Yet Protestants in general leave this very point, so all-important to them, uncared for, and themselves in utter ignorance about it. What ought to be proved is carelessly taken for granted; and, while they are very conversant, it may be, with the text of Scripture, (at least with the letter of it, knowing perhaps whole chapters by heart,) they have never even asked themselves this simple question: Why they believe in it? why they believe it to be the Word of God?

Their reason, however, for thus neglecting so important a question is not very difficult to discern. The fact is, that the answer to it throws out in bold relief, the inconsistency of the whole Protestant system; for when we trace back their belief in the Bible, step by step, from authority to authority, we find that the authority on which it rests at last is the Catholic Church; that very church from whose bosom they have torn themselves away, which they denounce as corrupt, and full of foul deceits, nay, as Antichrist, the man of sin; and therefore it is not very wonderful that they should be shy of investigating the matter. To find that their belief in the Bible rests at last on the testimony of Antichrist, might stagger the simple-minded, and lead to misgivings which their teachers might not find it altogether easy to remove.

* See the Church the Guardian of Scripture.

Yet on what testimony but that of the Catholic Church do Protestants rest their belief in the Bible? Those of the present day of course received it from their parents and teachers in their childhood, and took it on trust from them without inquiry: so that, with all their hatred of "tradition," it is manifest, that for this foundation-stone of their whole religion, it is to tradition alone that they are indebted. But so far this is a mere human tradition, and one not to be implicitly depended upon; parents and teachers have no promise of infallibility, and are, as we know, very often mistaken. Mahometan parents and teachers teach their children that the Koran is the Word of God; why must our parents and teachers necessarily be right? Perhaps you will go back a step further, and say that the sect to which they belonged, Wesleyans, or Baptists, or whatever they might be, receive these Scriptures, and that they receive them on the authority of their sects. Here is tradition again; and still a mere human tradition: what authority has that sect? Had it any promise of being divinely guarded from error? and, as a mere human witness, how could it know any thing of the matter, having sprung into being so many hundred years after the latest Scripture was written? Where did that sect, then, get its knowledge concerning Scripture? The next step leads you back to the Established Church, the oldest Protestant communion in Great Britain; for the translation of the Bible put forth under her auspices was adopted without inquiry by almost all the other sects.

This said translation is dedicated to his majesty King James I., in a very pompous preface, wherein he is addressed as "the sun in his strength," and the nation is congratulated on his having arisen to cheer it after the setting of "that bright occidental star, Queen Elizabeth of happy memory;" and as it seems from this said preface, that the translation was made at his command, we may suppose that he guaranteed to his people that the volume thus presented to them by him, the supreme head of their Church, was the true inspired Word of God, as in the translation, so, of course, in the "original sacred languages" from which it was taken. But on what authority did he speak? Does any one suppose that he, or the "bright occidental star" who went before him, had any supernatural gift of discernment, whereby to know what was the inspired word? Had the church over which he presided any such? Certainly not, according to her own showing; for she herself declares in one of her articles of religion, that "particular churches may err;" and if on other points, so also in this. On what authority, then, did she receive the Scriptures? A chasm of more than 1500 years separated her, just sprung into being, from the age in which those Scriptures were written: how was this chasm bridged over? But one answer can be given: by the Catholic Church.

She alone it was who could reach back to the times of the Apostles, and so give her testimony in this matter; and her testimony was accepted even by her revolted children. As it was from her hands alone that they received the sacred volume itself, so also was it from her lips alone that they received the knowledge of what that volume was,—that it was the inspired Word of God. Why they believed her in this matter, without question or hesitation, and disbelieved her in almost every other, it is not for us to explain; but such was the simple fact.

Some, indeed, unwilling to be thus beholden to her, assert that the Bible needs no witness, being a sufficient witness to itself; but those who thus talk can never have realized the number, complication, and difficulty of the questions with which this subject is entangled, and can never have tried to make out in their own minds what they should think and feel about the Bible, if it were really presented to them for the first time without any evidence concerning it, but such as may be gathered from its own pages. It is indeed almost impossible for people to put from them, even in thought, the traditions which have grown round them from their childhood; and so, whenever they take up the Bible, coming to it with an undoubted belief in its inspiration already ingrained into their minds, they find in it a great deal which harmonizes with and corroborates that belief; and so they are apt to imagine that it is on what they read in the Bible that the belief itself is grounded; whereas, in reality, they take up the Bible with that belief already established; a much smaller amount of evidence being sufficient to strengthen an opinion once formed, that we should have required for the original formation of that opinion.

The mass of mankind would certainly never be able, from the mere study of the Bible itself, even to prove to themselves its genuineness: I mean, that its several books were really written at the time and place at which they profess to have been written, or by the persons whose names they bear; still less could they prove to themselves its truth, that its his-

torical parts are the records of real events, or its prophetic parts the record of true prophecies. For if the New Testament bears witness in some measure to the truth of the Old, we still want a witness to the New; otherwise the whole falls to the ground. I do not mean that there are no evidences to the genuineness of the different books of Scripture, or to the truth of much that they contain, to be gathered from their own pages, for many and learned works have been written to gather up such evidences; but I mean, that they are, of their very nature, too subtle and delicate to be the groundwork of a universal belief. And even if the genuineness of Scripture could be satisfactorily proved from its own pages, and the truth of its contents established in the same way, or by evidences drawn from other books, all this would by no means prove its inspiration; no, not even if the facts, the truth of which has been thus established, were of such a nature that they could only be known to man by a direct communication from God. This would prove indeed that the book contains the record of a revelation, but it would by no means prove the inspiration of the record itself, still less that of any thing else contained in the same book. For instance, supposing it proved beyond dispute, that the book of Genesis is really the work of Moses, and supposing it proved further, (if it were possible,) that all it recounts is perfectly true, this would by no means prove that the book is inspired. It would prove that a revelation had been made from God, because several of the events related, such as those preceding the creation of Adam, could not otherwise have been made to man. But it does not even follow that the revelation was made to Moses; it might have been made to Adam, or to Seth, or to Noah, and handed down to Moses by tradition; or even if made to Moses himself, this would not prove that he was inspired in recording it, still less that he was inspired in any thing else that he wrote.

To take another instance. There is, as we know, a famous prophecy of Daniel, predicting the rise and fall of the four great empires of the world, and the establishment of the kingdom of God, the Church, on their ruins. Now, it is quite certain that this prophecy was written before the establishment of the Christian Church, because it is to this day in the hands of the Jews, who have certainly received no additions to Scripture since that time; and therefore its wonderful fulfilment sufficiently testifies that it was a true prophecy. But it does not follow that the person who recorded it (even if it could be proved to have been Daniel himself by whom the prophecy was spoken) was inspired in the act of recording it; still less, that any thing else to be found in the book bearing his name is inspired; and far less, again, that the whole Bible is inspired because this book is among its contents.

So, too, with the New Testament Scriptures. To prove that they were really written by those whose names they bear, and that the facts they record really happened, is not sufficient to prove their inspiration. Some may say, that to prove a book to have been written by an Apostle, would be the same thing with proving it to be inspired; but St. Barnabas is spoken of in the Acts (xiv. 13.) as an Apostle, and also as one full of the Holy Ghost; yet an epistle of his which has come down to us, and of whose genuineness there is no doubt, is not considered an inspired Scripture. And several of the books of the New Testament are written by those who were not Apostles at all, as St. Mark and St. Luke. What is there on the face of it to prove that these last were inspired, any more than St. Clement and St. Hermas, who were, like them, friends and companions of the Apostles, and of one of whom (St. Clement) St. Paul says that his name was "written in the book of life," whose writings, nevertheless, though some of them are undoubtedly genuine, and all no doubt containing true doctrine, yet nobody holds to be inspired?

Taking for granted, as even Protestants do in this country, the inspiration of Holy Scripture, they have never examined the question sufficiently to be aware how impossible it is to gather sufficient evidence of it from the pages of Scripture itself, and how entirely therefore, the belief in it rests on external testimony. What is there in the structure of any part of Scripture to indicate it? It nowhere assumes the form of an address from God to man, but in some parts, as in the Book of Psalms, of an address from man to God, and in all the rest, from man to his fellow-man—now in historical narratives, and now in moral and spiritual lessons. The nearest approach to an address from God is in the Books of the Prophets; and there we are only presented, as we have said before, with a record of revelations made by God to His Prophets, and by them spoken to His people before they were thus recorded. Not a single passage can be quoted, from the first chapter of Genesis to the last of the Apocalypse, in which the writer declares himself to

be writing from inspiration. Some people, indeed, quote that saying of Paul (2 Tim. iii. 16.) "All Scripture, inspired of God, is profitable," &c., (or, as the Protestant version renders it, "All Scripture is written by inspiration of God,") as a triumphant proof of the inspiration of the Bible, the comprehensive word, "all Scripture," settling the question, as they think, entirely. But what does this "all Scripture" comprise? The Old Testament Scriptures alone; for St. Paul congratulates St. Timothy on having known them from his infancy, which could only be true of these. The faith of Christ he had learned, not, certainly, from the New Testament Scriptures, which, at the time of his conversion were in all probability none of them yet written, but from the teaching of the Apostle St. Paul. "Continue then," St. Paul says to him, "in the things which thou hast learned, and which have been committed to thee, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;" and he goes on to say, and that "from thy infancy thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which can instruct thee to salvation by the faith which is in Christ Jesus." And then comes the passage in question, "All Scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the name of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work." Surely the meaning of this is sufficiently clear: the Apostle rejoices in St. Timothy's knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, as being able to instruct him to salvation, "through the faith which is in Christ Jesus;" that is, with the faith of Christ for his key, he could unlock the mysteries of those old Scriptures, more especially of prophecy, to which the attention of believers is so often called by the Apostles, and seeing their perfect fulfilment, become himself better and better instructed, and better able to instruct others. All, therefore, that this passage really proves is this, that there were certain inspired books which Christian bishops, such as St. Timothy, did well to study; but what those books were, it gives us no clue for ascertaining, and, as we have seen, to the New Testament Scriptures it certainly does not apply to all.

And, after all, if the New Testament Scriptures bear witness to the inspiration of the Old, which of course they do in some measure, though by no means completely, yet (as we said before with respect to their genuineness) this avails us but little unless we can also find a witness for the inspiration of the New. There is no such claim on its own behalf expressed in its pages; and even if there were, a claim is not sufficient to establish its own truth. "If I bear witness of myself," said our blessed Lord, "my witness is nothing." The Koran, the book held sacred by the Mahometans, distinctly declares its own inspiration, much more distinctly than any one can pretend to say that the Bible does, inasmuch as it really purports to be an address from God to man, which the Bible does not. But you do not therefore take its own word for itself, and believe in its inspiration.

Again, others say that the Bible bears witness to its own inspiration from the superhuman wisdom and beauty of its contents. Now this is precisely what Mahometans say of the Koran; Mahomet himself did not pretend to work miracles, but appealed to the wisdom and beauty of the Koran as a sufficient proof of his divine mission, he being an unlettered man, and therefore, as he argued, incapable of producing such a work. "You ask for miracles," he used to say; "the Koran itself is a standing miracle."

That there is superhuman beauty and wisdom in the Bible is, of course, most true; but that it is so obvious as to create in ordinary minds, coming to the study of it altogether unprepared by any previous training, a certain conviction of its inspiration, is what we cannot believe. Surely, for the most part, we do not grow into a sense of its beauty until we have well studied it, and that with the temper of mind produced by the certain knowledge that it is the word of God. Most people, taking up the Bible for the first time, without any such preparation, would find at least as much to repel as to attract them; a great deal would strike them as very difficult to be believed; and a great deal too, without the traditional interpretation which even Protestants in this country have been taught from their childhood, would surely tend rather to scandal than to edification. Who, for instance, could possibly discover, from the sacred text alone, that the song of Solomon has a mystical meaning, and is an inspired composition? And, in fact, it is generally found by missionaries that the Bible itself makes little impression on the heathen; for they often declare that they have much better books of their own. The truth is, that all such evidences as these serve to corroborate a belief already existing; but the belief itself, universal as it is among Christians, rests mainly, and in the first instance, on testimony—the testimony, as we have said, of the Catholic Church.

(To be Continued.)