

The Pulpit.

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A Sufficient Witness.

FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF THE ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE
RIGHT REVEREND THE MODERATOR TO THE GENERAL
ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
OF NEW SOUTH WALES.

(Concluded from last week.)

but which were at last excluded from the N.T. by common consent. Among these were the 1st Epistle of Clement, which is attached to the N.T. in the Codex Alexandrinus, and therefore was Scripture in the 5th century; the Epistle of Barnabas and the "Shepherd" of Hermas, which are bound up with N.T. in the Codex Sinaiticus, and therefore were Scripture in the 4th century; also the recently recovered Gospel of Peter, which was read in the Church at Rhossus in Cilicia, till Serapion, Bishop of Antioch, about 200 A.D., condemned it as heretical. Thus, for three centuries the N.T. Canon was a variable quantity while the long process of selection and rejection went on. The Verbal Theory requires that in forming the N.T. Canon no mistake shall have been made, such as excluding 1 Clement, which claims to be inspired (1 Cl. lix: 1 and lxiii: 2), and wrongly including 2 Peter, which does not claim inspiration, and the right of which to appear in the N.T. is regarded as doubtful. The Theory cannot hold its ground, except on the assumption that all who co-operated in forming the N.T. Canon, i.e., the Fathers, the Church officials, the whole body of the Christian people, and even the heretical leaders and sects, were inspired and inerrant in making an infallibly correct Collection of authoritative sacred books.

THE VERBAL THEORY BREAKS DOWN.

The Verbal Theory requires that, as well as the agents, the process by which the Canon was formed be perfectly inerrant. The principle of the Scribes was that nothing should be admitted that was not written by a prophet. To apply this principle implied a perfect knowledge of the author and the date of every book, which knowledge the Scribes certainly did not have. The principle of the Fathers was that no book should be in the N.T. that had not been written by an apostle or an apostolic man. But they blundered in the application of their principle. For instance, the Church in the East rightly decided that Hebrews was not written by Paul, and for that reason wrongly refused it a place in the Canon. Centuries afterwards, they changed their minds. They admitted the book, and rightly, but they did it on the wrong ground that Paul was the author. Thus, the Verbal Theory utterly collapses. It is a mere speculation for which there is not a particle of evidence. It requires an absolutely inerrant text, but no such text exists. It requires a Collection formed by an absolutely inerrant authority, but no such Collection exists. Therefore the Theory, even if it were true, is useless; there is nothing to which to apply it. And it has to make the monstrous assumption that the whole host of Jewish Scribes and other agents, who at any time had to do with the text and the Canon of the Bible were inerrant, infallible and inspired.

THE BIBLE AS A "CODE OF RULES."

The Verbal Theory was evolved as a consequent of the notion that the Bible is a "Code of Rules," which, like an Act of Parliament, has an enactment in every clause, must be strictly construed according to the letter, and has the express sanction of the Sovereign Power in every syllable. This "Code of Rules" notion is nothing but a tradition of the Scribes. It originated in the fact that Ezra's Canon was the Torah or Mosaic Law. The notion took strong hold of the legal mind of the Jews so that when the other O.T. books were placed in the Canon, it was extended to them, though they have plainly nothing of the character of a "Code." The Christians, with the O.T., took over from the Jews the ready-made Rabbinical notion of a "Code," so that, when the Christian sacred books were put into the Canon, they were stamped with the same character, but most improperly, for the notion involves a total misconception of their nature and function. The Reformers, having on the one hand renounced the view that the Church is the seat of authority in matters of faith and life, and, on the other, recoiling from the Naturalistic principle that Reason is the soul authority, and having failed to discern the real source of authority in Christ Himself, were driven to emphasise the notion of the Bible being a "Code of Rules." This notion is on experiment and examination found to be unworkable and untenable. It has to assume that the Bible is one homogeneous "Code" of equal value and equal authority in every part. It takes no account of the fact that in the Bible there is a development of revelation and a progression in morals. It is indifferent as to the part of the Bible in which it finds its proof vers. of doctrine or its moral precept. It takes them with equal promptitude and confidence from the Law of Moses or the Gospel of Christ. It puts Esther on a level with John, Ecclesiastes with Paul, and the Song of Songs with the words of Jesus. If this Rabbinical notion were strictly applied, the proper way to use the Bible would be to open the Book fortuitously, stick a pin point on the page at random, and take the transfixing verso as an oracle. This use of the Bible, like Sortes Virgilianæ, would lead to nothing but confusion and disaster in doctrine and morals. The N.T. does not countenance this "Code of Rules" notion. The object of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to prove that the Old Covenant was imperfect and transitory, and had been fulfilled. Paul urges the same thing (e.g., 2 Cor. iii). Christ Himself repeals laws of the

O.T., and substitutes laws of His own, with the expressive formula, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time . . . but I say unto you" (Matt. v). Therefore, to regard the Bible as a "Code" homogeneous and equally authoritative and binding in every part, is to disregard Christ's express words and to condemn Christ's authority.

THE TRUE FUNCTION OF THE BIBLE.

What, then, is the true nature and function of the Bible? To whom shall we go for an answer to this all-important question? We go to the Lord Jesus Christ. To the Scribes and Pharisees He said: "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and these are they which bear witness of Me; and ye will not come to Me that ye may have life" (Jo. v: 39-40). He blames them for mistakenly ("ye think") seeking in the Scriptures that which was not in them as Scriptures—eternal life, which they failed to find, because they did not seek it where alone it could be found—in Him, and in Him only. But He is in the Scriptures, for they "bear witness" of Him. If the Scribes had searched the Scriptures for Him, they would have found both Him and eternal life. Christ thus sternly repudiates the notion of the Scribes that the Scriptures are a "verbally inspired Code of Rules" as to what men should believe and do to win eternal life; and in contradiction sets forth His own view, which, just because it is His, must be the true view. The Scriptures "bear witness" of Him. This He said of the O.T. He afterwards virtually said the same of the N.T., when He thus commissioned His Apostles: "And ye shall be My witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts i: 8). The Apostles were His witnesses at first by word of mouth, and the N.T. is just their testimony written down. Christ tells us that the real and sole function of the Bible and its supreme value lie in this: that it is His witness, making Him known to men. The Bible is therefore invaluable and indispensable, because without the Bible men could not know Christ, could not stand in His presence face to face and hear His voice. The Bible reveals to men the flawless character, the perfect life, the saintly soul, the gracious and glorious personality of the Son of Man who is the Son of God. He promised His Apostles the aid of His Spirit that they might be true and sufficient witnesses of Him (Jo. xiv: 26). But the question as to the inspiration of the Bible writers, its nature, extent and mode, is of really no importance whatever when we regard them as witnesses. The real question is: Are they "Sufficient Witnesses?" And the triumphant proof that they are "Sufficient Witnesses" is the simple fact that they have revealed and do reveal Christ and make Him known to men. The highest degree of inspiration could not enable them to do more. And if any deny them inspiration, we do not pause to argue, we say: "Let that be so, if you will. Still, they have done all that was required, and the utmost they could do—they have made Christ known to men." The Bible is like a great cathedral "with storied windows richly light." In each window stands the emblazoned figure of a Moses, an Isaiah, a Paul, or a John, and through them a glory of light tinted with the richness of their several colors and individual forms, streams out into the darkling world. This radiance is not their own. But for the light within, which they variously reveal to the enchained gaze of men, those glowing figures would be only dim outlines of dusky shapes. The light that shines with such splendor through them is the white effulgence of the Light of the World. Christ thus revealed, directly in the Gospels and indirectly in the other Scriptures, is perceived by each man according to that man's power of vision. All who read the Gospels with earnest attention see a radiant vision they can never forget and never ignore, and they get to know One whom they can never again class among common men. However men try to account for Him, all acknowledge Him to be Wonderful, Unique, Transcendent, such as a thousand Shakespeares could not have conceived, transcending the comprehension of the very inspired men who saw Him and wrote of Him; and transcending the imagination of men through all the ages. And the better He is seen and known, ever the greater He appears to the wondering eye of men. Those who study Him most closely and most lovingly as He is revealed in the Gospels, and especially those who with all their might try to form an image of Him in their own selves, they see Him most clearly, they know Him best. Christ is "self-evidencing" (John viii: 14). He needs no man, not even an inspired man, to vouch for Him (Jo. v: 34). Let Him only be seen by men, and He vouches for Himself (Jo. iv: 42). All men will readily acknowledge that if ever there was a perfect sinless man, it was Christ; if ever there was a miracle-worker, it was Christ; if ever there was an inspired soul, it was Christ; if ever God was manifest in the flesh, it was in Christ. It is only in these latter days that men have begun to perceive the independent, self-evidencing Christ. In the last century Paley, in his "Evidences," set about proving the possibility of miracles and the reality of the Gospel miracles. Then, and not till then, he concluded that Christ was Christ. And why? Because He wrought the proven miracles. An eminent modern scientist once said: "If I had put off believing in Christ until I had argued myself into believing in miracles, I should never have believed in Him. But I believe in Christ because I know Him, and just because He is Christ; and as He is Himself the most stupendous of all miracles, I am quite disposed to believe that He wrought miracles." That is precisely how Christ Himself puts it. He makes Himself the first evidence, and the evidence of miracles He puts second. He said: "Believe Me, that I am in the Father and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the very works' sake" (Jo. xiv: 11). The Verbal Inspiration Theory insists that faith in Christ must come after and be a consequence of faith in the inspiration of the Bible writers. It puts the first last and the last first. But if we must put off believing in Christ until we have conclusively proved the possibility and the reality of the miracle of