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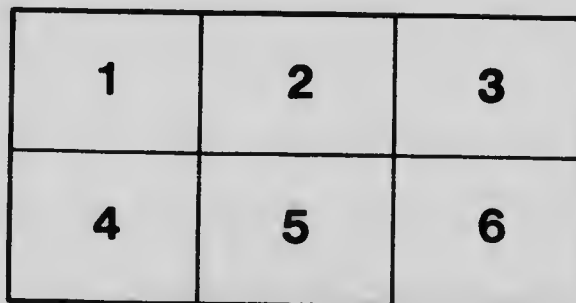
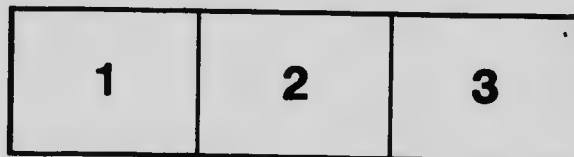
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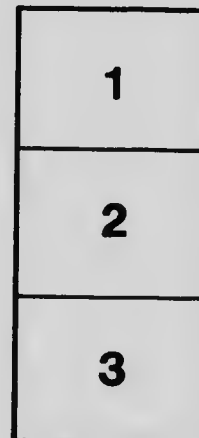
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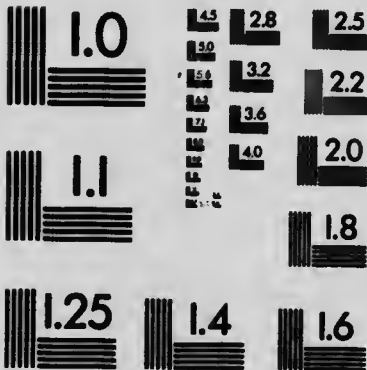
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GOD, CONSCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

III

THE FUNCTION OF CONSCIENCE IN INTERPRETING THE BIBLE

I

WHAT is the relation of Conscience to the Bible? It is the relation of the pupil to the teacher. But with this startling paradox, that the pupil which needs the teaching for its enlightenment yet insists on judging that teaching before it can accept it.

As already pointed out, this Conscience for which we make such lofty claims begins life in the baby stage, needing, like Intellect, like all our faculties, to be developed and educated. Life presents to it continual examples and continual exercise in choices of good and evil. The Bible brings it in touch with the noblest consciences of humanity, and above all brings it into the presence of the Blessed Lord Himself.

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So precious is this Conscience in the sight of God that He has inspired a whole Bible for its training and enlightenment, and though Conscience has gone far even when there was no Bible, it can never reach its highest achievements without this higher training and the help of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible we are presented with nobler models, with the living forms of a fairer and sublimer goodness transcending every object of our previous reverence. And Conscience in its instructive sympathy with goodness feels and discerns this higher goodness, and though unable to conceive it beforehand, recognises it reverently and instinctively responds to it when thus presented.

But while Conscience is thus dependent on the Bible for enlightenment, even the humblest Christian feels that his conscience is not a mere blank tablet receiving with blind submission every statement within the covers of the Bible. He finds his conscience presuming to approve and in some instances even to disapprove.

It is very wonderful and fascinating to see Conscience seizing with avidity a high truth thus presented from outside, feeling that that truth rightfully belongs to it and corresponds with its

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nature, though it might never have attained to that high truth unless it were thus presented from outside. And to see it instinctively shrink back from other thoughts which at first sight seem presented on the same authority within the covers of the same Bible. You read the Sermon on the Mount or St. Paul's exquisite description of Charity, and it takes hold of you as exactly agreeing with the fundamental instincts of your spirit. Conscience grasps it, responds to it, delights in it. Then turn, say, to the ninth Psalm, "Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. Let them beg their bread in desolate places. Let Satan stand at his right hand and let his prayer be turned into sin." And Conscience instinctively shrinks back from it and refuses to respond.

By the law of its Divine nature Conscience keeps reaching out after the light like a plant in a dark room. The light is outside of it. It cannot produce it for itself. But it will insist on not taking darkness for light. It knows enough to judge the light which it requires.

There is a story of Michael Angelo, old and blind, standing before the fragment of a famous broken statue. With his fingers groping along

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the mutilated lines he could tell how the entire figure must have stood. The head and neck are gone. He cannot trace the lines beyond the broken trunk. But he knows the direction in which those lines must run. Conscience (un-illuminated by the light of Holy Scripture) is a blind Michael Angelo standing pathetically before the torso of the Spiritual Universe feeling in its blindness along the fragmentary lines. The head of the statue is beyond our reach, the feet stand deeper than our thought can fathom, but we know that the lines which we are touching in our blindness must, if completed, form the perfect image, the image that has never been entirely obliterated in any human soul.

This is the nearest approach that we can make to illustrating that paradox of Conscience and Revelation. We must leave it thus. Blind Conscience pathetically groping for the true lines and needing Revelation for their fuller development. Its ignorance should keep it deferential and reverent before the Bible. But it must not be too deferential to be honest, it must not be too blindly reverent to be true. By a necessity of its nature it must always insist that Wrong shall not be set before it as Right.

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That faculty of Conscience is implanted in us by God. Therefore we must cultivate reverence for it in our study of Scripture. Much evil has been done by the unguarded teaching of popular theology that human nature is so depraved that Conscience is not trustworthy and must surrender its strongest convictions to the demands of external authority. I have dealt with the weakness of Conscience and its need of illumination by Scripture. But let me here utter my strongest protest against the danger of repudiating this our one organ of Divine illumination whenever some theological doctrine comes into collision with it.

II

One can imagine here a reverent Christian, puzzled or indignant, asking if God's inspired Word is imperfect, so that Conscience has to form its arrogant judgment as to what it may or may not accept. It is necessary, therefore, to call attention to the way in which God has given us the Bible.

If the Bible had come to us in certain formal propositions, each a complete truth in itself,

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such as GOD LOVES MANKIND, GOD WILL PUNISH SIN, GOD FORGIVES IF MEN REPENT—and if its teaching were everywhere so perfectly clear that it could not be misunderstood—and if every sentence were a direct utterance of God unalloyed by any human element—and if its teaching were all on the high level of Christ without any lower notions of earlier days—then this chapter would be quite unnecessary.

But this is not at all God's method in Revelation. Not in complete texts and proverbs, not in golden aphorisms or finished creeds, but through the medium of history, and dialogue, and poetry, and drama, through the story of men's lives and troubles, and the cries of noble souls struggling towards the light, does He vouchsafe the glimpses of His truth to men. From the incidents of the patriarchal history, from the story of the Jewish kingdom, from the fervid utterances of prophet and psalmist, from the intercourse of Jesus Christ with the Judean peasants, and the letters of His apostles about various questions of interest to the early Church—from all these sources men *have to form for themselves* their ideas of God and of His will towards men.

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And there are passages whose meaning is open to question, as witness our many disputes and controversies.

And the Holy Spirit used imperfect men as channels of His truth, that thus it might be better received and assimilated. Inspiration does not mean that God used these men as mere mechanical instruments to express His thoughts just as we might use a pen or a typewriter. They were men like ourselves, each with his own full personality, each with his own human peculiarities, each with his own education or lack of it, each influenced differently from others by the different experiences and discipline of life. They were holy men stirred to high thoughts by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. But they were very human men. They were not all on the same spiritual level. Their inspiration did not make them all infallible. It did not take all the naturalness, all the passionate impulses out of them. It did not make them machines. It left them men.

And, again, the whole Bible is not on the high level of Christ. The Old Testament is rather the inspired record of God's *gradual progressive education* of humanity, the story of man's gradual

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discovery of God through the help of the Holy Spirit. And the Christian Conscience to-day, guided by that Holy Spirit, must discern between lower and higher classes in God's great school. This thought is so important for the understanding of moral difficulties in the Bible and the function of Conscience in its interpretation that it seems worth devoting a few pages to this gradual progressiveness in the teaching of Scripture.

III

Of all the difficulties which can confront the simple student of the Bible, the most formidable is that which arises in his mind when some of its utterances seem to him to fall below the level of the enlightened Christian conscience. He finds in the Old Testament usages permitted which would not be sanctioned by the civilisation of England to-day ; he finds sentiments expressed—as, for instance, in the imprecatory Psalms—which he feels could not win the approval of Christ. And inevitably the disturbing question must come to him, if he be an honest, fearless

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thinker, "How can these things be inspired of God?" Some time since a devout Christian lady, an earnest student of her Bible, came to the writer with an anxious mind. A sceptical friend had been trying to disturb her faith in God and in the Bible. He showed her how slavery was permitted in the inspired teaching, and plurality of wives, and how a man was allowed to put away his wife by merely giving her a writing of divorcement. He pointed to the prophetess pronouncing her benediction on the bloody treachery of Jael, and the Psalmist uttering prayers for vengeance on his foes. "And that," said he triumphantly, "is the God of your devotion, that is the Bible which you speak of as inspired!"

This is but an ordinary instance of the evil of reading these things without understanding them. Good, simple, earnest Christians are every day having their faith in God and in the Bible disturbed by such difficulties. In olden days the evil was even worse, when, instead of seeing these things to be wrong, and wondering that they should be attributed to God, men with less instructed consciences received these utterances of the ancient ages as God's teaching for

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themselves ; when polygamy and slavery were justified by the example of the patriarchs ; when poor innocent women were burned as witches on the authority of a verse in Leviticus ; when the bloody slaughters of the Crusades and the atrocious massacre of St. Bartholomew were hailed by loud Te Deums in the churches, and compared to the zeal of Old Testament days.

Surely it is necessary that readers of the Bible should learn how to regard these difficulties. They have no need to be frightened by them as though they were destructive to their faith. They have no need to slur them over and try to forget them. It needs but a looking at them from the right point of view ; it needs but a true understanding of the object of Scripture, and these bogies will vanish away from us like ghosts in the daylight.

What, then, is this right point of view, and how shall we attain to it ? The right view is the historical view of the Bible, and the way to attain to it is by thinking of the world as the great school of God, where gradually, patiently through all the ages He has been training humanity for

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nobleness of life. The Bible [or rather the Old Testament, for it is there mainly that these difficulties come in] is to be regarded not as a series of perfect precepts equally applicable to all men in all ages of the world, but rather as the story of God's *gradual* education of man, or, to put it otherwise, the inspired account of man's gradual discovery of God by the help of His Holy Spirit. We must remember that what is true of the development and education of the individual is equally true of the development and education of the race. The individual man is capable of continual development from the cradle to the grave. Now, this is equally true of the race as a whole. There is a capacity for continual development, each generation incorporating into itself the results of the preceding generation's growth. So that we may picture to ourselves the human race as a COLOSSAL MAN, whose life reaches on for thousands of years. The successive generations of men are days in this MAN'S life. The discoveries and inventions of the different epochs are HIS works. The creeds and doctrines and principles and opinions are HIS thoughts. The states of society at different times are HIS manners.

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He grows in knowledge, in self-control, just as we do. And HIS education is in the same way, and for the same reason, precisely the same as ours.¹

Now think of God through all the ages educating this human race as we have to educate a little child to-day. Then think *how* we have to educate the little child. We have to recognise the necessity of gradual growth and gradual development. We know that we must begin at the very lowest rudiments, that very crude and imperfect conceptions must satisfy us at first. Though all the glory of the highest knowledge is before the child, he can only partially receive it until his mind has grown. And so we have to begin at the A B C, and to go on and wait on patiently for many days and months and years till the gradually-developing mind achieves at length the full knowledge that we had aimed at for it.

The same thing is true of our attempts at moral and religious training. Place a wise, judicious man at the head of a slave mission in Central Africa, over poor creatures gathered in from slavery and savagedom, and with all their evil

¹ See Bishop Temple's Essay, *The Education of the World*.

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habits strong upon them, with drunkenness and impurity and murder and revenge amongst the ordinary incidents of their previous life. He will doubtless try to reveal to them the loveliness of Christianity, which is so apparent to himself. But, as in the case of the child referred to, though this highest knowledge is before them, they cannot yet appreciate or comprehend it. Even the best amongst them can but dimly grasp such ideas as the duty of self-sacrifice, of loving their enemies, of chivalrous reverence for women, of lofty faith and sweet, adoring love and perfect consecration of the life to God. As for the bulk of his converts, if he can ever impress upon them that murder and theft and drunkenness and adultery are sinful, he may consider himself for the time in some degree successful.

And if he be a wise man he will not be surprised or greatly disappointed at this, remembering the law of gradual development. He will at first tolerate much of which he really disapproves. He will overlook much that grieves him. He will rejoice at any little sign of effort after good, even though it be still largely mixed with evil. Lovingly, prayerfully, hopefully he will watch

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over his people in his slow, patient system of education. He will be content to move slowly, to win his way by almost imperceptible degrees, willing even to wait perhaps for years for appreciable progress in the path of right. He will give his approval to acts which for these poor savages really mean progress upward, though to the Christian world at home they seem worthier censure than praise. He will daily pray for his degraded people that God would "cleanse the thoughts of their hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit." But he will believe that the presence of God's Holy Spirit does not necessarily imply the absence of all error and wrongdoing, that it necessarily implies only the possession of some truth, some life, sometimes very little truth and life indeed. And thus believing he will patiently wait, teaching, praying, hoping still.

By and by, when some of these converts have grown into noble, high-minded Christian men, trying to follow closely the steps of the Crucified, will they not look back on the early training and the early notions as on a lower stage that they have long since passed, and yet will they not confess that this lower stage was a necessary

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part of their progress upward to the full Christian life ?

Now let in the thought of God's great school and His pupil, whose school-days are thousands of years. Remember that this pupil, this great human race, has had to be taught just like the poor blacks in our illustration, slowly, gradually, step by step, as it could bear it. Remember that the faults of the Old Testament are the faults not of the teacher, but of the pupil, the necessary result of the pupil's limitations.

Then think of the Old Testament as an account of this training, or rather of part of it, presenting views of the pupil now and then at different stages of his progress, and see if, regarded from this new point of view, things do not begin to settle into their places. It tells us of one nation chosen out from all the rest, not for its own sake, but for the good of the whole ; for unless you think of God as just and impartial and caring for all men, you never will understand your Bible at all. It tells us how this special nation was trained, how the impulses of the poor degraded slave race coming out of Egypt were checked

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and guided and chastened and elevated by a slow and gradual process ; how God watched over them as the refiner of silver over the crucible, slowly and patiently "purging their dross and taking away all their tin."

It tells of His plan of progressive education like that of the ideal teacher in our illustration ; how many things in the early stages were overlooked or "winked at," as the Authorised Version badly puts it¹; how slavery was not at once swept away, but its cruelties forbidden and its abuses checked ; how divorcing of wives was not absolutely prohibited, but laid under stringent regulations so that it could no longer be a mere matter of careless whim ; how the wild national customs of revenge were kept in check by the use of the cities of refuge, giving time for the moderating of the avenger's passion.

It shows how the kindly spirit of gentleness and forbearance and care for others' interest grew gradually into their legislation by the inspiring of the Holy Ghost.

It shows that their idea of God was often crude and imperfect like that of our own children when

¹ Acts xvii. 30.

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their teaching has but begun. He was great and powerful, greater than all gods; He loved righteousness, He hated iniquity; but He was regarded as only the national Deity of Israel, not seeming to care for other nations beside. Yet there are glimpses of fuller truth in His care for Nineveh, in the drama of the Arabian Job, and especially in His word to this the most exclusive race in the world, that in the promised seed "should all the nations of the earth be blessed." Gradually the horizon widened with the Prophets. But it was not until after the coming of Christ that the old imperfection was finally done away, and Jehovah was revealed as the Father of all men, the God who "willeth all men to be saved."

Thus in this law of gradual progress we find the key also to others of the difficulties referred to. We find actions mentioned without blame which we in the purer light of Christianity would regard as blameworthy, deeds of mingled good and evil, in which perhaps the evil has allowances made for it owing to the evil circumstances of the time. We find in the Psalms the lofty moral teachings and burning aspirations after God and holiness now and then marred by the fierce

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prayer for punishment on the wicked. They are the prayers of stern, faithful servants of God claiming that God would vindicate His justice. But it was in an age that expected God to vindicate it in this life. It was in an age that did not clearly distinguish between the sin and the sinner, an age when moral indignation and hatred of villainy showed itself in invoking vengeance on the villain as the enemy of the God who hates all villainy.

We must remember that we are judging men in the lower stages of the patient Divine building-up of the kingdom of God on earth. We must remember, like the missionary teacher in our illustration, that the influence of the Holy Spirit does not necessarily imply the absence of all error and all wrongdoing, that it implies necessarily only the possession of some truth, some life in those on whom it acts. We must recognise the fact that the coming of Christ made an enormous difference to humanity, and that much less was to be expected of the earlier world. "The Law was given by Moses, but Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ." There is therefore a childhood and youth and manhood of the human race.

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The men of the earlier ages were but as children compared with us. They required a lower and more elementary teaching, less demand upon their self-control, more allowance to be made for their failures and their sins. They were in the lower classes of the great school of God.

Remember how clearly our blessed Lord states this difference between the older teaching and the new: "Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy, BUT TO FILL UP"¹ [that which is deficient]. And in accordance with this He goes on: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not forswear thyself."² But *I* give you commandments more advanced than these. Again, "Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But *I* say unto you that ye resist not evil.³ Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But *I* say unto you, Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you.⁴ Mosès

¹ Matt. v. 17.

² Ibid., v. 21, 27, 33, R.V.

³ Ibid., v. 38.

⁴ Ibid., v. 43.

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for the hardness of your hearts permitted you to put away your wives. But *I* say unto you that he who putteth away his wife except for fornication committeth adultery." And again, when the indignant disciples wanted to call down fire, "as Elijah did," upon those who had slighted their Master, they were plainly taught that even this great prophet of the Old Dispensation was no sufficient example for Christians under the New ; that they belonged to a higher stage in the spiritual education of man.

Let us, then, read the Bible with this historical view of its meaning and purpose, and many of its moral difficulties will inevitably disappear. Let us study the Old Testament always in the light of Christ's teaching, and wherever it falls below His standard regard it as an earlier and more elementary stage in the gradual education of the race. The lower lessons of lawgiver and prophet must yield to the fuller, higher teaching of their Lord. Like a parable comes to us the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Peter wished Moses and Elias to remain, and the Voice from Heaven came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, hear ye *Him*."

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IV

All these considerations must indicate to us that only through an active conscience illumined by the Holy Ghost can any man intelligently read his Bible.

This must be a fundamental axiom in all interpretation of Scripture: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" or, to put the statement into other words, Every Christian man who prays to have his Conscience enlightened by the Holy Ghost is bound to use that Conscience in interpreting the Bible.

Conscience is to the soul what sight or taste is to the body. It is the Moral Sense, the organ of the Holy Spirit, the organ of perception of spiritual things. When we pray for a further enlightening by the Holy Spirit we are chiefly praying that Conscience should be brought into closer sympathy with God, that it should see more clearly God's standard of right, that it should recoil more sensitively from everything wrong. And, as the eye cannot help distinguishing the colours of flowers, as the tongue cannot

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help distinguishing bitter from sweet, so Conscience, especially when illumined by the power of the Holy Ghost, cannot help being keenly sensitive to the quality of actions or commands. This keen sensitiveness is the gift of God, and it is wrong to ignore it when interpreting God's Bible. For the Holy Ghost is speaking externally through the Bible, internally through Conscience, and any apparent clashing between these is a warning against erroneous interpretation.

Therefore, if men draw from that Bible doctrines from which Conscience recoils, that recoil is a strong indication that these men are in some way wrong. *It would of course not be safe to judge from the recoil of this or that man's individual Conscience,* lest there may be in him anything abnormal, just as it would not be safe to decide positively about a colour or taste on the evidence of the eyes or tongue of one or another individual, lest there might be colour-blindness or insensibility of tongue. But it is quite safe to assert that if any interpretation of Scripture clashes with the universal Christian Conscience, i.e. with the best men's highest sense of what is right and true, then the

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honest student of Scripture is bound by his faith in God to question boldly the truth of such interpretation.

It is sad that it should be necessary to say this in a Christian land in this twentieth century ; but we cannot blind our eyes to the fact that it is necessary, and that much injury has been done to religion by the neglect of thus exercising faith in God, and of using the Conscience that God has given us, when interpreting the meaning of His Word. It has been often said that we must not venture to judge from our notions of right and wrong—that, even if we are told that a certain passage in Scripture means something which clashes with men's highest sense of what is generous and fair, yet "our shrinking, our moral repulsion of the doctrine must not weigh with us—true faith will accept it without hesitation."

True faith, believe me, will do nothing of the kind. It is a most pernicious thing, subversive of all true religion, to speak thus of faith. True faith means faith in a Person, faith in a Character, faith in an infinite Justice, and Love, and Nobleness, and Generosity—faith in a God to whom it would be absolutely impossible that He should

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do anything unfair or ungenerous or unkind. This is the faith which you must pray for in your Bible reading—a faith that is taught you by the Bible itself—a faith that will keep you loyal to your Heavenly Father, jealous for His character, refusing to believe anything unworthy of Him.

Of course, it will be understood that here there is no question of doubting or believing the Bible, but only of doubting or believing *man's interpretation* of the Bible. The comparison, in the writer's mind, is that of a schoolboy reading in a letter from his father some passage which he cannot understand. A companion suggests an unworthy meaning which the words might bear, but the boy only smiles at such an interpretation; instinctively, without hesitation, he rejects it as untrue to his father's lofty character. If he can find no other meaning he prefers leaving the passage a mystery for the present. Who will deny that this is the highest faith, the truest loyalty to his absent father?

Let no one object that this is "a presumptuous setting-up of the puny human Conscience to judge of the morality of the Word of God." To

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say this would show a misapprehension of the whole position. For is not the author of any book the best interpreter of that book? Is not the Holy Spirit the best interpreter of the Bible which He has inspired? Is not the Conscience, the organ of the Holy Spirit, the faculty by means of which He guides men towards the right? For surely the Holy Spirit is a living power in the world to-day, and His Bible is not a dead book to be interpreted without Him. Why, then, should it seem presumptuous that earnest, reverent-minded Christian men who pray for the illumining and sensitising of Conscience by the Holy Ghost should use its indications of approval or recoil in judging how they ought to understand their Bible?

Neither let anyone object that this is to set up our poor human reason as a criterion of God's wisdom. It is nothing of the kind. If I have a complete faith in the character of someone far wiser and better than myself, I shall be quite ready to believe that his action is right, even though the small part of the circumstances known to me are not sufficient to justify it. If I am told that certain things are done by God which puzzle me, *because* I do not know all

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the circumstances of the case as they appear to Him, but which would seem to me good in the highest degree if I did know all the circumstances—I can easily believe it. But if I am told that a certain passage in the Bible teaches that God acts in a way which every honest mind must feel to be ungenerous and unfair, and which no conceivable further knowledge of the circumstances would show to be other than ungenerous and unfair, then I must refuse—I am bound by my loyalty to Him to refuse my belief to such an interpretation. If no other interpretation seems warranted by the words, I must leave it an unsolved difficulty for the present.

For example, if I read in Exodus that God told the Israelites to borrow of their neighbours “jewels of silver and jewels of gold” to spoil the Egyptians, and if I do not understand the solution of the difficulty, I am, of course, bound to leave it unsolved rather than believe that its meaning is that God commanded an immoral action.

I read that “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart,” and afterwards that He punished Pharaoh for this hardness of his heart. I read also that

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Pharaoh hardened his own heart. I may not understand what this hardening of Pharaoh's heart meant ; but if anybody interprets it that God punished Pharaoh for what Pharaoh could not have helped, I must at once reject that meaning.

If I read in the ninth of Romans St. Paul's famous passage about God's election, and if any man should explain it to mean that God destines some men to eternal salvation and some to eternal hell, not for anything of good or ill that they have done, but for His own glory—to magnify Himself—I am bound, if I have any real faith in God, to reject such a meaning without hesitation. It is mainly the Bible itself that has thus educated my Conscience and encouraged me to have this real faith in God. And a little further searching of that Bible justifies such fearless faith in this especial case by teaching me through another letter of this same writer that God "willeth that all men should be saved."¹ And so, though unable to reconcile the paradox, I can rest like a little child with heart at peace because I have refused to believe evil of God. I can patiently await the solution of the mystery. I may never

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 4, R.V.

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in this world understand fully what it means, but I am bound by my faith in God to believe that if ever I do understand it, I shall see it to be just and fair and generous to all, perfectly consistent with the good Heart of Him who "so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son" to save it.

It is necessary to write plainly about this matter even at the risk of being misunderstood. It is no true reverence, nay, it is a foolish superstition which would suppress the spiritual voice of Conscience and accept human interpretations of Scripture that are dishonouring to God. It has made sad many hearts that God has not made sad, and shaken the belief of thousands in the truth of revelation.

But in opposing false reverence it is all the more necessary anxiously to cultivate the true. Let there be no forgetting that we are but as children on the shores of the great ocean of truth. One thing we know with certainty, that God must be good. Let us hold loyally to that knowledge at all costs. Let not our knowledge be disturbed by our ignorance. But let not that knowledge lead us to shallow conceit and

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presumption. Young people and impulsive people, on first realising that the utterance of Conscience in such matters has Divine authority, are inclined to score out at once as mistakes and misapprehensions all the moral difficulties which confront them in the Bible. Some of us who have grown older and less impulsive have learned to be more careful, finding that these difficulties may have often important teaching when men have become wise enough to understand it aright. For example, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, though a great difficulty to the superficial reader, is to the more patient and careful thinker a deep and solemn truth about God's laws of life and conduct. Therefore let us be humble and reverent and patient in dealing with moral difficulties. If we cannot see our way through them, let us be content to leave them aside as unsolved for the present. They are but a few dark spots that may wait for illumination. Amid the glory and beauty of the teaching around them they need shake no man's faith in God or in the inspiration of Scripture.

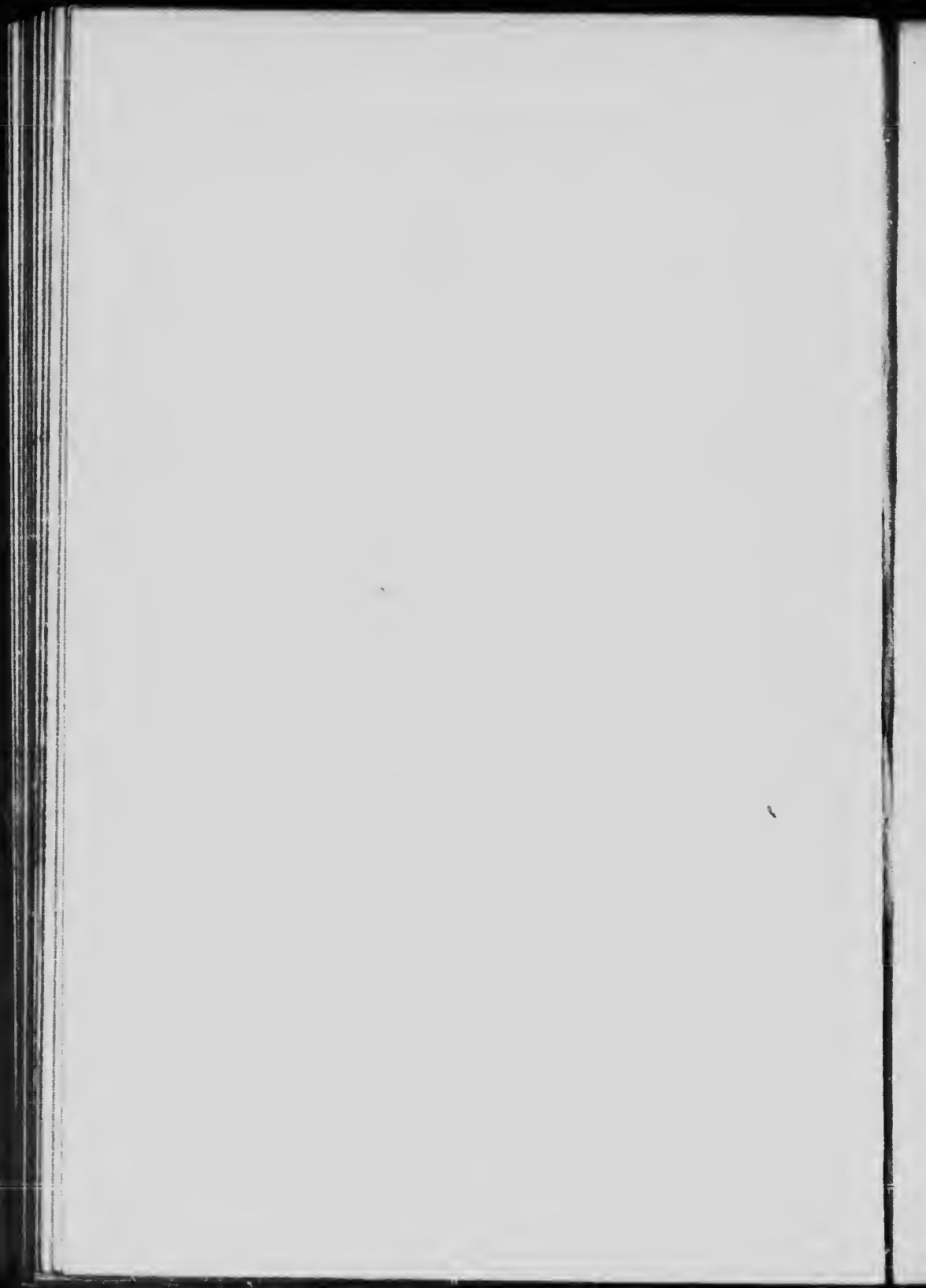
The stern revolt of Conscience at the travesty of God's "election" sent men back to examine their Bibles more carefully and to think whether

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it meant *election to the service of others*¹ as in Abraham's case, "that in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

¹ That first recorded instance of "election"—the call of Abraham—strikes the keynote of all. As you go through the history of the elect souls in the Bible, you will see that it consistently and throughout affirms "that when God calls or separates one man to Himself, it is for the good of other men; that when He selects one family, it is that through it all the families of the earth should be blessed; that when He chooses one nation, it is for the welfare of all nations—salvation being of the Jews, but for the Gentiles as well; that when He elects and establishes a Church, it is for the spiritual benefit of the whole world. No man, no family, no nation, no Church, possesses any gift, any privilege, any superior capacity or power for its own welfare alone, but for the common advantage, the general good."

IV
THE FUNCTION OF CONSCIENCE IN
MAKING THE BIBLE



IV

THE FUNCTION OF CONSCIENCE IN MAKING THE BIBLE

WE have been making very lofty claims for Conscience, thinking of its supremacy amongst human faculties, of the imperitiveness and universality of its pronouncements, of its judging even the Bible while depending on it for teaching. Now we go, if anything, a step farther still. We point to the function of Conscience in making the Bible.

If this should seem an arrogant phrase to make use of, keep reverently in mind what has been already pointed out, that Conscience in man is the organ of the Holy Ghost, the point of contact between the human spirit and the Divine. It is the moral faculty whose province is the perception of Right and Wrong. It is the sensitive chord within, which vibrates responsive to the Divine voices without. In its responding

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to and gathering together into a Bible the Divine voices which came to it, it can hardly be wrong to speak of the function of Conscience in making the Bible. And I trust it will be seen as we go on that this function of Conscience in the making of the Bible gives our best assurance of the unshakeable position of that Bible amid present-day doubts and disquiet. It is mainly for the purpose of such reassurance that I am writing this chapter.

I. THE APPEAL TO CONSCIENCE

The thesis of the chapter is this :

THE BIBLE HAS BUILT ITS THRONE IN HUMAN HEARTS BY ITS APPEAL TO CONSCIENCE AND THE RESPONSE OF CONSCIENCE TO ITS APPEAL. BY THE SAME CONTINUING APPEAL OF THE BIBLE WITHOUT AND THE SAME CONTINUING RESPONSE OF CONSCIENCE WITHIN IT HOLDS ITS POSITION TO-DAY, AND THEREFORE MUST FOR EVER HOLD IT.

If there should ever come to us the fear of the Scriptures being discredited by present-day controversies after having been accepted as God-given for three thousand years, first pause for a

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moment, and let the full weight press upon you of all that is implied in the fact (1) that any set of old documents, always open to scrutiny and question, should for thousands of years have been accepted as of Divine origin ; (2) that they should have been yielded to by men as an authority to guide their conduct by commands often disagreeable to themselves ; (3) that this acceptance and obedience have been chiefly amongst the most thoughtful and highly-cultured nations of the world ; (4) that it has gone on age after age, steadily increasing, and never in any age has made more progress than in this cultured, enlightened, all-questioning century in which we live.

What has given these Scriptures such authority ? Remember they were only separate documents selected from the ancient religious literature of Israel, often with hundreds of years intervening between them, written by different writers of different characters to different people, and under different circumstances. Remember that in many cases we do not know their origin, or how they assumed their present form. And yet somehow we can never reach back in their history to a time when they were not treasured and revered among men as in some way at

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least above human productions. There they stand, a long chain of records with one end reaching away into the far-back past, and the other gathering around the feet of Christ.

And remember especially this, that they were selected out by no miracle, that they rest on no formal decision or sentence of Church or Council, or pope or saint, nay, not even of the Blessed Lord Himself; for long before He came, for centuries and centuries there they stood, testifying of Him, cherished and revered as a message that had come from above "at sundry times and in divers manners." All study of their history shows that their acceptance rested on no decision of any external authority. They were accepted as of Divine origin for many generations before they were gathered into any fixed collection. "The Church," said Luther, "cannot give more force or authority to a book than it has in itself. A Council cannot make that to be Scripture which in its own nature is not Scripture."

It is true that the great Synagogue, or their official descendants, collected the Old Testament Canon of Scripture. Yes, but when? Somewhere about the time of our Lord, when the books

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had been for ages recognised as of God. It is true that the Christian Church collected the New Testament writings into a Bible, and arrived at a decision concerning certain books the authority of which had been in debate. Yes, but when? After they had been for three hundred years accepted as the God-given guide of the Church. *Evidently it was not their being collected into a Bible that made them of authority, but rather the fact of their possessing authority made them be collected into a Bible.*

Again, I repeat the question, what gave them that authority? And there seems no possible answer but this, that they possessed it of themselves. They commanded the position they held by their own power. Men's moral sense and reason combined to establish them. They appealed by their own intrinsic worth to the God-given moral faculty, and the response to that appeal through all the ages since is in reality the main foundation of the Bible's position.

Look at the Old Testament. If we at the present day are asked why we receive it as inspired, we usually reply that we receive it on the authority of our Lord and His apostles.

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They accepted it as the Word of God, and handed it on to us with their official approval of it. Well, but why was it accepted before their day without any such formal sanction? How did men come to believe and obey as Divinely-inspired the words of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, and the rest? Except in the case of Moses, there were no miracles or portents; no external voice from heaven to command men's allegiance. They were not established on their Divine supremacy by any single authority. Why, then, were their utterances accepted?

It seems evident there can be but one answer. They asserted that supremacy by their own intrinsic power. Men were compelled to acknowledge that their declaration that "the word of the Lord had come to them" was true. There was that in the messages of the Prophets and in the evidence by which they were accompanied which compelled this belief.

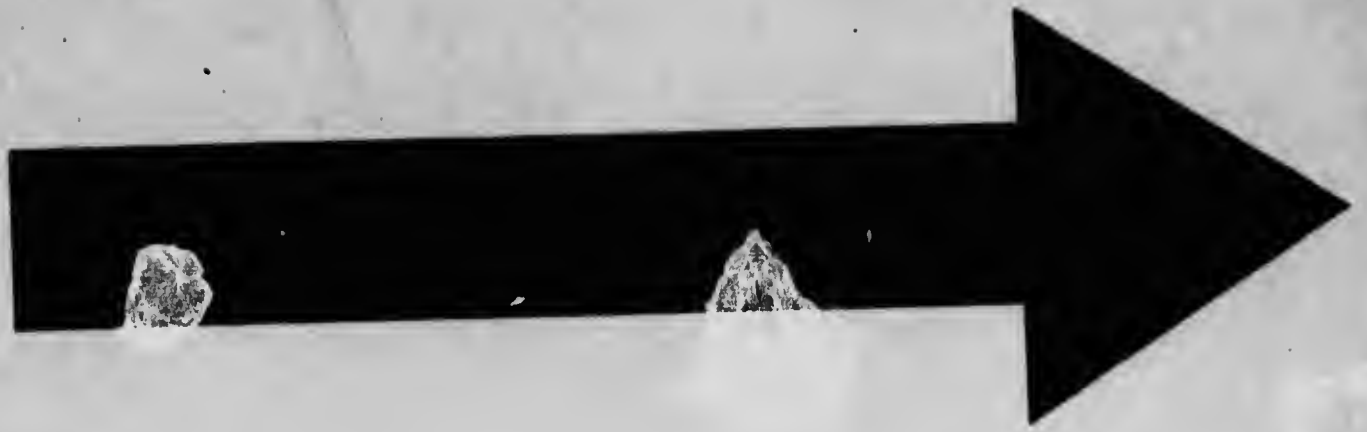
The books of the New Testament became recognised among Christians just as the books of the Old Testament had been recognised among the Jews, by virtue of their own inherent evidence. The Gospels record the tremendous

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fact, " We know that the Son of God is come," and His life and teaching set before men in concrete form the ideal toward which the Conscience of humanity had been groping through the ages. The Epistles were teachings of men who claimed His authority or the guidance of His Holy Spirit. Their few miracles had nothing to do with the acceptance of this claim. No miracle could of itself authenticate a message from God which did not bear internal evidence also of having proceeded from Him. The appeal in the early Church was directed, as in the time of our Lord Himself, to the hearts and consciences of men. He Himself could but appeal to those hearts and consciences, and men accepted and rejected Him, not by reference to any external authority, but in proportion to their capacity for recognising His Divine character.

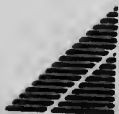
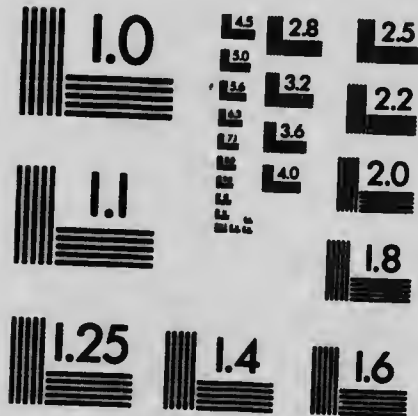
" Thus from the first to the last, the authority of the Scriptures has been equivalent to the authority with which they themselves convinced men that they had come from God."

I have been anxious to show you that the position of the Bible rests not on any miracle, or any external authority of the Church or



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Council, but on its appeal to the minds and consciences of men. You may doubt a miracle, you may doubt your individual instincts, you may doubt the competency of any one body of men ; you cannot doubt so easily the conviction of the consciences of a hundred generations. Men found in it a power to make them good and they were convinced that it had come from God.¹

That is why the Bible has held its authoritative position in the face of the most violent attacks all through the centuries ; that infidels have dreamed that they had overthrown it and exploded it times without number, with the result only that its power has steadily increased, so that to-day it would be almost as easy to root the sun out of the heavens as to root this Bible out of human life.

¹ I am quite conscious that I may be pointed to the acceptance of the Koran and the Sacred Books of India as a fact that weakens this argument. I have no hesitation in admitting that, in part, the reason of their acceptance, too, lies in their appeal to the consciences of men through their containing broken rays of "the light that lighteth every man coming into the world." I should be sorry to think that Christianity required my belief that the God and Father of all men left the whole non-Christian world without any light from Himself. But surely there is a vast difference between the position of these books and that of the Bible. All that is good in the Koran existed already in Christianity and Judaism, and is mainly derived from them. The Sacred Books of India, with their pearls of spiritual truth gleaming here and there amongst a mass of rubbish, can surely not be compared with the Bible in reference to the above argument.

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Take this single fact as an illustration. A hundred years ago Voltaire refuted it quite satisfactorily, as it seemed to himself. "In a century," he said, "the Bible and Christianity will be things of the past." Well, how has his prophecy been fulfilled? Before his day the whole world from the beginning of it had not produced six millions of Bibles. In a single century since, and that, too, the enlightened, critical nineteenth century, *two hundred millions* of Bibles and portions of Scripture have issued from the press, in five hundred and forty-three languages. And I have read somewhere that the house in which Voltaire lived is now one of the depots of the Bible Society.

II. THE WITNESS IN OURSELVES

1. I have pointed out that the authority of the Scriptures has been equivalent to the authority with which they themselves convinced men that they came from God. Now let us try to bring this conviction home to ourselves—to *test on ourselves* the power of these Scripture utterances which persuaded men of old that they

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came from above. For it is as they compel in us the same convictions that we can readily understand the making of the Bible.

Get outside all thoughts of an authoritative Bible. Forget the fuller light of Christ in which you stand, which reveals comparative imperfection in those ancient writers. Put yourself in their place. Picture the nations of the earth in their ignorance and depravity, with their blind gropings after God, reaching no higher than fetichs and idols, and the tales of classical mythology. Then listen wonderingly to those prophetic voices in Israel amid the surroundings of that dark old world before Romulus and Remus were suckled by the wolf :

“Jehovah, Jehovah. A God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.

“Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil.

“Thus saith the high and holy One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy : I dwell in the high and holy place with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite one.

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“What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God?”

And mingled with these noble thoughts, like a golden thread woven through the web of prophecy, see that strangely-persistent groping after some great Being, some great purpose of God in the future—from the Genesis prediction of “The Seed of the Woman” to the vision of the Coming One by the great prophet of the exile, “Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows . . . the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Try to realise the impressiveness of it. All down the Jewish history in the midst of a dark world came these mysterious voices telling of a holy God—teaching, threatening, pleading, encouraging, pointing to a gradually-brightening ideal and to the hope of some Great One who yet was to come. And to deepen its impressiveness notice that these prophets asserted passionately their conviction: “These are not our words. These are not our thoughts, God has put them into us.” “The word of the Lord came unto me. Hear ye therefore the word of the Lord.” How could the people doubt it? They were not good people. They were stiff-necked and

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uncircumcised in heart and ears, "who did always resist the Holy Ghost." They hated the high teaching. They killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent unto them. But conscience insisted that these prophets were right, and by and by, in deep remorse, they built them sepulchres and treasured up what fragments they could find of their sacred words. How could they help it? Put yourself in their place. Do you not feel that you must have done the same if you had been there?

The same is evidently true of the Psalms, the hymns of the Jewish Church. They too owe their position to the appeal which they made to the highest in men. They were the utterances of noble souls who, with all their imperfections, knew and loved God, and all kindred souls then and since have felt their power in inspiring the spiritual life. The author's name did not matter. In most cases it was not known.

The position of the Psalter, then, is not due to any author's name, to any Council's sanction, but to its compelling appeal to the highest side of men in that old Jewish community. Its appeal was to Conscience, and Conscience

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instinctively responded. That was how the Holy Spirit wrought in making the Bible. Judged by the higher standard of Jesus Christ, we can see imperfections and faults due to the poor, imperfect men who wrote the Psalter. Strange if it were otherwise in that dark age in which it grew. But when all allowance has been made for these, who can doubt that that Psalter, which has been so powerful in inspiring human life through the ages since, caught on to men's souls in those early days and convinced them that it came from God.

Again let us test its compelling power on ourselves. Keep back still in that dim old world with its self-seeking, and idolatries, and human sacrifices, and lustful abominations, with no real sense of sin, no longings after holiness, and listen to the Jewish shepherd reciting in the field, and the Jewish choirboy singing in the church :

“ Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, praise His Holy Name, Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction, Who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies. . . . Like as a father pitieth his own children, so is the Lord merciful to them that fear Him, for He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are but dust.

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“ Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness and speaketh the truth in his heart.

“ The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for His Name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.”

“ Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness, according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. . . . The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.”

Are not such songs in such an age one of the miracles of history? How could men help loving and reverencing and preserving such songs? How could they help feeling their appeal to Conscience, feeling that a Divine Spirit was behind them?

The rest of the Old Testament is the history of God's dealing with the nation, a story gathered under the guidance of God's providence in many generations, from many sources since the far-back childhood of the race. The historians were

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evidently men with the prophetic instinct. But I make no appeal on the score of their being prophets. The appeal to Conscience is made by the history itself. Was ever national history so extraordinarily written? It is the history of an evil and rebellious people, yet everything is looked at in relation to the God of Righteousness. Records of other ancient nations tell what this or that great king accomplished by the people conquered or were conquered by their enemies. In these Jewish records every thing is of God—a righteous, holy God. It is God who conquered, God who delivered, God who punished, God who fought. There is no boasting of the national glory, no flattering of the national vanity; their greatest sins and disgraces and punishments are recorded just as fully as their triumphs and their joys. In the records of other nations the chief stress is laid on power and prosperity and comfort and wealth. In these strange records goodness seems to be the only thing of importance. To do the right, to please the holy God is of infinitely more value than to be powerful or rich or successful in life. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." "He did that which was evil in the

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sight of the Lord," are the epitaphs of their most famous kings.

Therefore the national history of Israel also holds its position by its appeal to the religious instinct. No author's name, no theory of its composition, affects its position. Whatever its imperfection, it has impressed itself upon us as the simple story of God's dealing with men.

III. THE WITNESS OF CHRIST

There is no need for discussing the New Testament and its appeal to Conscience. It is the record of His life who is the Lord of the Conscience: "the light that lighteneth every man" coming into the world. It is this revelation of the kindly fatherhood of God. It is the story of Him who "laid down His life for His friends." In Him the groping Conscience of humanity finds its ideal and its rest.

And His presence as the centre around which the whole Bible revolves confirms that Bible's position for every Christian man. *It all centres in Jesus Christ.* It cannot be dissociated from Him.

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The Old Testament tells of the preparation for Christ. The New Testament tells that when that preparation was complete "in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son." Jesus Christ, as it were, stands between the Old Testament and the New and lays His hand upon them both. The Old Testament contains the Scriptures which He told men were of God and which bear witness of Him. The New Testament is the story of His words and works, and the teaching of apostles and early disciples sent forth by Him as teachers with the power of the Holy Ghost. It is this fact that Christ is its centre which accounts for the striking unity of this collection of separate documents. The parts belong all to each other. And surely for us Christians our conviction as to the authority of the Bible is increased a thousandfold by the attitude of Christ Himself towards the only Bible that He had, the Old Testament.

It was the Bible of His education. It was the Bible of His ministry. He took for granted its fundamental doctrines about creation, man, righteousness, God's providence and purpose. He accepted it as the preparation for Himself and taught His disciples to find Him in it. He used

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it to justify His mission and to illuminate the mystery of the Cross. Above all He fed His own soul with its contents and in the great crisis of His life sustained Himself upon it as the solemn word of God.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus in olden days in the mysterious Conscience of humanity the sensitive chord within vibrated responsive to the voices of God without, and men gathered the Divine voices together into a Bible.

And still the appeal goes on and still Conscience responds, and so the Bible continues to hold its throne to-day in the hearts of humanity. Need I remind you of that practical conviction of every earnest Bible student, the conviction which Coleridge expresses when he speaks of the way in which it "finds me"? Men feel by their own spiritual experience that the Book witnesses to itself. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with their spirit" that the Book is the Book of God. It "finds them" as no other book ever does. Its words have moved them deeply; it has helped

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them to be good ; it has mastered their wills and gladdened their hearts till the overpowering conviction has forced itself upon them, " Never book spake like this Book."

Need I point you to the world around, to the miraculous power exercised by that Bible, to the civil lives reformed by it, to the noble, beautiful lives daily nourished by it ? Did you ever hear of any other book of history, and poetry, and memoirs, and letters that had this power to turn men towards nobleness and righteousness of life ? Did you ever hear a man say, " I was an outcast and a reprobate, and a disgrace to all that loved me till I began to read Scott's poems and Macaulay's History of England ? Did you ever hear a man tell of the peace and hope and power to conquer evil which he had won by an earnest study of the Latin classics ?

You can get a great many to say it of the study of the Bible, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. You can see the amount of happiness and good that has come to the world even from the miserably-imperfect following of it. You can see that the world would be a very paradise of God if it were thoroughly followed. Misery and vice would

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vanish for ever, purity and love and unselfish work for others would hold their universal sway on earth. The millennium would have begun.

Need we be disquieted about a Book that comes to us thus accredited in so many powerful ways? Can we not see with restful hearts that all for which we value it is safe from assaults; that we never can doubt that it has come to us from God? So I repeat at the close the statement with which this chapter opens:—

THE BIBLE BUILT ITS THRONE IN HUMAN HEARTS BY ITS APPEAL TO CONSCIENCE AND THE RESPONSE OF CONSCIENCE TO ITS APPEAL. BY THE SAME CONTINUING APPEAL OF THE BIBLE WITHOUT AND THE SAME CONTINUING RESPONSE OF CONSCIENCE WITHIN IT HOLDS ITS POSITION TO-DAY AND MUST FOR EVER HOLD IT.

With this confidence in our foundations we shall study peacefully and with interest all new knowledge on the Bible. Instead of fearing a conflict of Science and Scripture, we shall learn to read our Bible more wisely. For example, we shall read the Creation story not as a scientific treatise, but as a simple religious primer for an ancient child-race three or four thousand years

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ago to teach them first lessons about God. And if Higher Criticism teaches us that some of the old books have been edited and re-edited before reaching their present form, that David did not write all the Psalms, that Moses did not write the whole Pentateuch as it stands to-day, we shall learn to regard it as a matter of mere literary interest.

Such questions may be discussed with a quiet mind. For if the authority of the Bible rests not on any external miracle, nor on any author's name, nor on any theory of its composition, nor on any pronouncement of any one body of men, but on its own compelling power to convince the consciences of a hundred generations that it came from God, then its foundations are safe enough, and the question how the Books grew or by whom they were written or edited or brought together into a Bible is a matter of literary interest in no way vital to the authority of Scripture.

We shall therefore need in our Bible-reading more thoughtfulness, more study, more prayer. But the outlay of these will be repaid a hundred fold. The Bible will shine forth for us more real, more natural, more divine. Our beliefs will

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rest on a firm foundation. And, though there may be still things that puzzle and perplex us, we shall learn that our Christian life does not depend on the understanding of all mysteries and all knowledge, but on the humble obedience to the will of God, which for all practical purposes is clearly revealed.

V

THE MAKING OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT

V

THE MAKING OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT

I

THE object of this chapter is to arouse interest and remove misunderstandings about what is called "Higher Criticism" by telling the story of the Making of the Old Testament simply and frankly in the light of modern scholarship. Unfortunately the limits of space demand that it shall be told in very condensed form,¹ which is a pity. For, fully told, it would make a fascinating and romantic story.

Let me first get to the questionings in the reader's mind. He wants to know—

¹ PUBLISHER'S NOTE.—For any reader desiring to study more fully the subject of these two brief articles, the Publishers advise Dr. Paterson-Smyth's *The Bible in the Making in the Light of Modern Research*. (Sampson Low & Co., London, England; Pott & Co., New York).

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How did we originally get this collection of books, history and biography and letters and sermons and poetry and drama? When and where was the ultimate beginning of them? Had they any existence before they were written in the Bible? Who wrote them? Who collected them? Who selected them? By what test were they selected out of the literature of the time? For there was a wider literature. Other books beside these were written by "holy men of old," both in Old Testament and New Testament times. How does it happen that these particular books and no other should be regarded as specially inspired and collected into an authoritative Bible?

It will simplify the answer if it be kept clearly in mind that there are two stages in the making of the Bible :

First : The gradual growth of a religious literature.

Second : The selection or acceptance or recognition of certain parts of that literature as authoritative and inspired Scripture.

These stages must be kept clearly distinct, and always there must be kept prominently in mind

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the thought of a religious community behind them.

That goes without saying. It is impossible to discuss the subject at all until we recognise the fact that the Bible does not stand alone. A divine society, divinely formed and guided and inspired, stands behind it. In this divine society it grew from small beginnings away far back in dim antiquity. By this divine society it was selected and guarded and transmitted. The Bible is the Book of the Church, and the question of its growth and formation is quite an impossible one if it be thought of apart from the background of the Church. The Church stands behind the Bible. The Jewish Church stands behind the Old Testament. The Christian Church stands behind the New.

This, then, is the first step in the making of the Bible. God, in His loving purpose for the world's blessing and good, selected through His Divine providence a community of men in which His Holy Spirit should especially act, not for their sakes alone, but for the sake of the whole world. In this community both in Old and New Testament times, was an all-pervading sense of God's presence and rule. In it arose

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prophets and psalmists and apostles and teachers who in various degrees felt strongly the religious impulse to help life upward. They were not all of the same level—some were ordinary, commonplace good men—some had a very high inspiration, a very deep intuition of the grandeur of righteousness, of the hand of God behind all history. Thus there arose a religious literature and history. In this literature and history certain parts stood out more prominently, partly through great authors' names, mainly through the gradual popular recognition of higher spiritual values. The best naturally rose to the top. Thus came a gradual, half-unconscious selection of what seemed highest and best—what most appealed to the highest and best in men, what they felt convinced in the deep recesses of their soul to be the expression of the mind of God. *And this selection is the Bible.*

In a real sense, then, the statement is true that the Church formed the Bible. But we must not misunderstand the statement. It does not mean that the Jewish or Christian Church on some definite occasion, on its own authority, officially selected from its literature certain books

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and decided that they were to be regarded as inspired and authoritative. On the other hand, neither does it mean that they had only to collect and safeguard certain books which from their ultimate beginnings stood apart from all their other literature, or whose Divine origin was somehow miraculously guaranteed. There is an old Church fable that at the time of the Council of Nice all the books were placed near the altar with a prayer that God would decide between them, and that immediately the true canonical books of Scripture jumped up on the altar and the others remained quietly on the floor!

Some such process might fit in with popular notions about Scripture. But the Divine method was very different, and here I call careful attention to this method. Not suddenly, by some startling miracle—not officially, by some decision of a council, but slowly, gradually, half-unconsciously, by the quiet influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men in the Church, was the canon of Scripture settled. "The Bible was formed even as the Church itself was formed by that Holy Spirit which was the life of both." The Holy Spirit, who touched the highest consciences in the community to utter noble teaching, touched

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also the general conscience of that community to discriminate between higher and lower—to appreciate and love and treasure especially what was highest and most valuable to its religious life. The formation of this collection of documents was gradual. It was decided unconsciously by usage rather than by criticism or deliberate choice. It was no verdict of any one gathering of men that formed the Bible. It was the slow accumulating verdict of the ages.

The making of the Bible was the act of men. But surely it was none the less for that the act of God the Holy Spirit. It was really His Divine working that separated certain books for the perpetual instruction of the Church. But the mode of His working was by the quickening and guiding of human souls, that they should instinctively love what was most Divine, what was most stimulating and helpful to their religious life; that by a Divine impulse men should gradually arrive at a general recognition of a certain set of writings as authoritative and inspired Scripture. Thus the Bible formed itself by a power inherent in it. It won its own way. It built its own throne. All that was best in human consciousness recognised its right

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to rule over men. Its position, we repeat, rests on no merely external authority, or no one sentence of council or synod or prophet or saint but on a gradual choice by a Church guided by the Spirit of God.

It is necessary to say what I have just said, in view of the vague uneasiness about the Old Testament when Biblical criticism came to disturb us by upsetting some of our popular theories. We had no business making those theories without any real ground for them, and it may be a good thing that somebody should upset them for us. For example, the vague popular belief has come down from a conjecture in the Jewish Talmud, that Moses wrote the first book, the complete Pentateuch; then Joshua wrote the next book and put it beside the first; then Samuel wrote the next, and so on. Anyone reading, say, the Talmud tract *Baba Bathra* must see that all this is a mere conjecture by scribes of later days. But the early Christian Church, in an uncritical age, in taking over the Bible of the Jews took over also some of their theories about it. By and by these theories grew into the popular Christian tradition, and became so interwoven with men's ideas

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about the Bible that when scholars began to disturb the theories people got an uneasy feeling they were disturbing the authority of the Bible.

But if these theories are without foundation, and if the authority of the Bible rests not on any external miracle, nor on any author's name, nor on any theory of its composition, nor on any pronouncement of Church or council or pope or saint, but on its own compelling power in every age to convince Conscience that it came from God, then its foundations are safe enough, and the question how the books grew or by whom they were written or edited or brought together into a Bible can be discussed without anxiety. It is a secondary matter, a matter of mere literary interest, in no way vital to the authority of the Scriptures.

II. THE FIRST STAGE IN BIBLE-MAKING

With this preparation we proceed to tell briefly of the making of the Old Testament, which differs only in this from the making of the New, that while the New Testament was completed in

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one generation, the Old Testament was in the making for nearly two thousand years.

Does any reader think that the Old Testament began with the books which are in our hands to-day? A very little study of its structure will dissipate that idea. The Bible itself distinctly contradicts it. Long before a chapter of our Bible was written, there existed an older religious literature, now lost for ever, which seems to have been quite familiar to the writers of Scripture.

They tell us in the Pentateuch that they went to their "Books of the Wars of Jehovah" for the Song of the Arnon valleys (Num. xxi. 14), they quote the Song of the Well from the folk-songs of their day (Numb. xxi. 17, 18), the Book of Jasher was their source for the battle of Beth-horon and the sun standing still (Josh. x. 13). Later on they turn up the same book of Jasher for the Song of the Bow, the lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. i. 18), and other incidents are quoted freely from the Book of Nathan, the Book of Gad, the Book of Jehu, the Book of Shemaiah, the Book of Iddo the Seer, etc.

Which at once sets us wondering about this ancient lost literature, and wondering how much still more ancient lay behind it of song and story

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and legend and folk-lore in the beginnings of Jewish religious thought.

How can we know anything about it, some-one asks, since we have no history to tell us? Neither has the scientist, we reply, who seeks to learn the story of the making of the mountains. We can but do what he does. As the geologist digs into the strata of the rocks for traces of the old-world shells and animal remains which compose them, so we can dig into the strata of the Old Testament, seeking traces of the old-world literature built into it. And in doing so we find exciting answers to our guesses; we are brought back to the child-races of the world, to the beginnings of the Jewish Church, to the laws and legends of a primitive people, to the rude ballads and war-songs and histories of far-back days when bards and story-tellers took the place of books, and history was transmitted by word of mouth.

Later on I shall say a word about the methods of this study. Here is a rough list of results, partly conjectural, but main' resting on evidence in the Scriptures—a list, in which most modern scholars would agree, of that old lost literature :

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Ancient Lore.—The old Semitic Legends of the Creation and the Deluge from the cradle of the Hebrew race, not in their crude pagan form, but purified and transfigured after contact for centuries with the religious life of Israel.

Ballads and folk-songs of earliest days sung around the camp-fires and in the tribal gatherings.

Oral histories of great deeds of the past told by the story-tellers at feast and festival.

Cuneiform inscriptions on tiles, the probable originals of, e.g., Gen. xiv.

Cycles of Legends of the Patriarchs current amongst the people and preserved at the sanctuaries connected with their names—Shechem and Bethel and Shiloh and Mahanaim.

Codes of ancient laws, oral or written, originating with Moses, amongst them the Book of the Covenant, the Law of Holiness, etc., and prominent above all the Ten Commandments.

Stories of the Exodus, written records of the desert journeys. Directions about worship. Teachings of Moses.

The ballads and histories of the Judges

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preserved at their several centres. Songs and camp stories about Saul and David, etc. Records of the schools of the prophets, from Samuel to Elijah. Historical notes by the official recorders.

Collections.—The Book of the Wars of Jehovah. The Book of Jasher. The Book of Nathan. The Book of Gad. The Book of Iddo the Seer. The Book of Jehu. The Book of Shemaiah. The Acts of Solomon. The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. The Chronicles of Israel, etc.

Sheets of Psalms from the temple choir-desks. Collection of Proverbs by the men of Hezekiah (Prov. xxv. 1). The sermons and predictions of the prophets written down by the prophets or their disciples.

Bibles before the Bible.—The Bible of Southern Judah (the Jahvist Bible, ninth century B.C.), the Bible of Northern Israel (the Elohist Bible, eighth century B.C.), the Book of Deuteronomy, 621 B.C., the Book of the Priests.

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III. CREATION AND DELUGE STORIES

Assuming this statement as to old-world literature to be approximately a fair presentation of facts, it demands some comment. First and chiefly the CREATION AND DELUGE STORIES. They start a serious problem which if honest in our inquiry we must frankly face.

In 1853 Homuzd Rassam, assistant to Sir Henry Layard, was exploring the buried ruins of Nineveh and Nimrod (note the name Nimrod, Gen. x. 9). There he came on the large collection of clay tablets forming the library of Assurbanipal, King of Nineveh, which he at once sent on to the British Museum to await deciphering. In these were found the now famous Creation and Deluge tablets recording ancient Chaldean legends of the Creation and the Flood. Scholars date the story about 2000 B.C., about the date of Abraham, and place it in Chaldea, where Abram came from.

Straightway we are carried back to the old-world days, to the infancy of the Hebrew race, when Abram and his band came wandering out of Ur of the Chaldees, one thousand years before

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Moses. These legends would be in their memories part of the mental furniture of their race. These legends were primitive, childish, almost grotesque in parts, and they clearly belonged to a people who believed in many gods. That is perfectly natural, just what we should expect in those old Semitic races from which Israel sprang, when "their fathers dwelt of old time beyond the River, even Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods" (Josh. xxiv. 2). They were blind guesses of the old child-races long ago, puzzling in wonder and awe over the mystery of Creation—blind guesses about a Creator—may we not say blind gropings after God? At first sight we should feel sure that they could never touch the Bible. But it is hard to judge beforehand what may or not happen in the mysterious working of God's Providence. At any rate, if we are seeking truth we must face the facts before us. There are such reminiscences of them in the great epics of Genesis that we cannot escape the feeling that there must be some connection.

The resemblance is but slight in the Creation story, but in that of the Deluge it is very striking.

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The writer describes the awful storm and flood at which the gods in heaven were frightened and wept. The flood lasted six days, and he watched the corpses floating by. On the seventh day it began to subside, and after seven days more the ship rested on the mountains of Nizir. Then the poem goes on—

When the seventh day arrived
I brought out a dove and let it go ;
The dove went to and fro ;
As there was no resting-place it turned back.
I brought forth a swallow and let it go ;
As there was no resting-place it turned back.
I brought forth a raven and let it go ;
The raven went forth and saw the decrease of the waters ;
It ate, it waded, it croaked, it turned not back.
Then I sent forth everything to the four winds ;
 I offered sacrifice ;
 The gods smelt the savour,
The gods smelt the goodly savour,¹
The gods gathered like flies over the sacrific

Then he tells how the goddess Istar lighted up the rainbow, and how the gods pleaded that all should not be destroyed, only the sinners, not the righteous, etc.

¹ Compare Gen. viii. 21, "The Lord smelled the sweet savour."

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Now, when we find poems such as these coming down, it is believed, from Abram's day and from the birthplace of the Hebrew race, and when we notice their curious coincidences with the Genesis story, it cannot but set us thinking. All probability points to the theory in which most modern scholars are now agreed, that the early wandering shepherds of the Hebrews were familiar with the notions of the race from which they came, that these old legends floated down for centuries in the folk-lore of primitive Israel, that mingling with the stream of thought of a people impressed by the presence of a holy God, the polytheism and degrading ideas could not remain. The Spirit of God was moving on the face of the waters, working, as it is the economy of the Divine method to work, upon existing materials. Priest and inspired prophet and pious parent would tell the old story in the light of their religious knowledge. Traces of the old national legend remained, but the whole story was transfigured. Passing through the crucible of faithful souls, a Divine touch, and yet a Diviner touch, was added as they came down through the years, till the simple child-story of many gods with human passions became

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the story of the one God holy and just who made the sun and moon which the Chaldeans worshipped, and the great bulls to which the Egyptians prayed, and as the crown and summit of His work made man in His image after His likeness ; till the legend of Paradise was touched by inspiration to become a vehicle of deepest spiritual truth, of the rise of conscience, of the coming of evil, of the dread which every man feels in his secret sin when he hears the voice of the Lord God in the garden in the cool of the day and is afraid and hides himself. Where the Babylonian poet saw only the action of deified forces of nature the Hebrew writer saw the working of God. *And that insight was Inspiration.*

THE AGE OF SONG AND STORY

In our Lost Literature was much of ancient song and story.

There is no doubt that the ultimate beginnings of Bible history and literature were mainly oral—ballads and folk-songs recited among the people ; stories of the distant past told in

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shepherds' watches and around the camp-fires, and afterwards collected in groups in literary form: laws and judgments, some of them written, most of them handed down orally for generations by the priests at the various sanctuaries.

The literature of almost every nation begins with easy alliterative verse, songs of famous men and famous deeds sung by the people in the early days when writing was not known or the people could not read. It seems to have been especially so in Israel, for most of the direct quotations from ancient sources are in verse and are so printed in the English Revised Version. The way in which they are introduced suggests that they usually represent the older original sources used by the Bible writers, which, by the way, may be the explanation of the poetical rhythm in much of our Old Testament prose.

We can almost see the writer using his originals. They are apparently in poetry which he is condensing into a prose story. But sometimes his poetical instinct is too strong for him, and he gives us delightful little glimpses of the sources before him by lifting direct into his book a bit of

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the historic song which is running in his head or which is written in his ancient manuscript, and so enables us to reproduce in part the primitive "song and story literature." (See, for example, in the Revised Version the poetic originals cropping up in Genesis ; or the writer in Exod. xv. copying in the song of Moses and Miriam ; or later in Judges v. the stirring war-song of Deborah. See the bits of the old poetry of the Book of Jasher appearing in Joshua x., and again in 2 Sam. i. the Song of the Bow which had been "taught to the children of Judah," or that strange archaic verse (Num. xxi.) lifted out of the ancient copy of the "Book of the Wars of the Lord.")

Ballad history has the advantage of being easily remembered and transmitted, and also of being less liable than prose to changes in transmission. And beside the ballads would run the stream of oral tradition ; the legends of the patriarchs which gathered round their chief centres, Schechem and Hebron and Bethel and Shiloh ; the stories told in the lonely pastures "when shepherds watched their flocks by night," or recited by practised story-tellers at the feasts and tribal gatherings. We must put ourselves

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in their place to realise the position. Picture the crowds going up to worship at any of the sanctuaries, and hearing every time its patriarchal legends. Picture the village girls in the evening at the well loitering over the tale of the Wooing of Rebecca; and the rude, rough shepherds laughing in their delight over the oft-told story of Samson tricking the stupid Philistines.

THE MOSAIC WRITINGS

In our Lost Literature were also, as we shall see later, the sources of the Pentateuch laws and Mosaic history. We are assuming here the conclusion in which now practically all scholars are agreed, that the Pentateuch as it stands to-day is a compilation from earlier sources, a completed edition of the story of Moses and of various collections of laws whose origin and nucleus go back to Moses' day.

In our Lost Literature, then, say about the time of King David, we should find not our completed Pentateuch, but separate sources of it, such as the Ten Commandments, the Book of the Covenant (Exod. xx. to xxiii.), the law

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of Holiness (Lev. xvii. to xxvi.), the history of Battles, the itinerary of the Wanderings, codes of Laws, some of them written, some of them existing orally in the several sanctuaries in the memories of the priests who dispensed justice.

Later on we shall find collections of this material in the Northern and Southern Bibles, and in the Bible of the Priests. The writers of course got their matter from the earlier sources existing in their day, some of it oral, certainly some of it written, and amongst these written sources some which, at least in their opinion, had come from the hand of Moses himself. They tell us that "Moses wrote in a book" the Battle with Amalek (Exod. xvii. 14), and the Desert Journeys (Num. xxxiii. 2), and the Book of the Covenant (Exod. xx. to xxiii., see Exod. xxiv. 4-7), and other collections of laws (Exod. xxiv. 7; xxxiv. 27). Apparently they knew these books, or knew about them, and believed Moses to be the author. Even if it cannot be proved that they were right in that, it is evident, at any rate, that there were about the ninth century B.C. some written books so ancient that they could be attributed to Moses.

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THE REST OF THE RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

So as the years went on, through the Providence of God, all unconsciously men were gathering and preserving material for the Bible that was to be. The ballads and poems grew into collections like the Book of Jasher. The legends were brought together in connected cycles and put in literary form. From the School of the Prophets came the vivid story of Elijah and his compeers, butless very much more of such history. In the various sanctuaries priests gathered their laws and oral traditions. There were historical notes by the official recorders (2 Sam. viii. 16; 1 Kings iv. 3, etc.). Many of the earliest prophets were writers of books, a tantalising list that we can never now examine, the Books of Nathan and Gad and Jehu and Iddo the Seer and Shemaiah and the rest. Then there were the collections of Proverbs by the men of Hezekiah and others (Prov. xxv. 1). There were psalms and sacred lyrics in the First Temple and among the people. And so on.

Thus would the common people learn the

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brave deeds of old, sometimes lightly in heedless moods, sometimes more seriously as the thought of God came in, in His dealings with Jacob, in the deeds of the Judges, in the solemn days when Moses led their fathers through the Wilderness.

This is a common phenomenon of life to-day in the unchanging East. Eastern history mainly springs from such sources. We can hardly be wrong in transferring it to those older days. Life was dull; there were no newspapers or books. There was not much to talk of. So the old stories would be greatly prized, and memory with no books to lean on could perform feats impossible to us, and carry on history through many generations.

Let imagination conjure up those early days and the primitive child-race which thus learned its religion. What conjectures and emotions it sets stirring in one's mind! Was the Providence of God protecting these old legends? Did the slaves in Egypt tell them to each other? Was this the religious knowledge which made Joseph such a hero? Did Moses' mother teach it to her boy when she nursed him in the palace of Pharaoh's daughter? How otherwise did Moses

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begin to learn about Jehovah? Was this part of the thought in the inspired writer's mind when he tells that "God who spake to the fathers in many times and in many manners hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son"?

IV. HOW PROPHETS WROTE HISTORY

Now that we have found so much of the material for the Old Testament, let us get on with the making.

So far as we can judge, this making proceeded gradually. First came the written collections of the old ballads and legends, such as the Book of Jasher.

Then came earnest prophets and teachers touched by the Spirit of Jehovah, teaching and illustrating from the story of the past great lessons of God and Life and Duty. They were not so much concerned with the details of the history as with its solemn lessons. They selected what they wanted to illustrate their themes. They left out what they did not want. They would probably not be regarded in our day as

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scientific historians. But it might be good for us if more of their spirit were in our histories to-day.

Take, for example, the collection of legends of the Judges which grew up at the several centres where they lived. Then see the inspired prophet-writer taking these stories and placing them in the setting suitable for his purpose. See his continually-recurring formula—

The Children of Israel sinned against the Lord,
And the Lord sold them unto the hand of . . .
Then the Children of Israel cried unto the Lord,
And the Lord raised up unto them a deliverer.

That is the setting or framework of his pictures. The whole story is told in a continuous cycle of sinning and suffering and repenting and deliverance, and sinning again and suffering and repenting and deliverance, and behind it all is a loving holy God. It is the inspired writer's view of the philosophy of history. He is not content with the outward phenomena. He wants "to see the wheels go round." And to him God is behind the wheels. That is where his inspiration comes in.

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THE BIBLES BEFORE THE BIBLE

In this spirit were written the most important sources of the Old Testament which we have now to tell of—"Bibles before the Bible" I call them—which were afterwards worked in in the making of the Pentateuch. First comes the Bible of Southern Judah.

THE BIBLE OF SOUTHERN JUDAH

Somewhere about the time of the prophet Elijah it seems that God raised up a great silent prophet, not for preaching to crowds nor for striving with kings, but for greater and more enduring work. A scholar, an historian, a literary artist, a man deeply touched by the Spirit of Jehovah, he took for his great life task the making of a Bible that Israel might know the Lord. No man knows the name or the habitation of this silent worker. But his work remains his monument for ever.

His attitude is that of the Church in her litany, "O God, we have heard with our ears

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and our fathers have declared to us the noble works that Thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them." He is no mere collector, no mere dry historian. He is an enthusiast. He is also a great literary as well as spiritual genius. By frequent dialogues and picturesque vocabulary he gives charm to his story. His heart is in his work. He feels what he is writing, and therefore makes his readers feel. He makes us share the silent pain of Abraham sacrificing his son. He makes our children flush with intense interest over Joseph in Egypt. From him our Bible gets the story of Jacob and Esau, and to this day he makes the lump rise in our throats as we listen to poor Esau's sobbing cry, " Bless me, even me also, O my father ! "

He gives us the first written version of the Pentateuch story. The full contents of his book we shall never know, since it has gone with the rest of the Lost Books of Israel. But much of it has been disinterred from our present Bible. It evidently began with a Creation story which is inserted in our Bible, beginning in the middle of the verse Gen. ii. 4: " In the day that the Lord God [Jehovah Elohim] made the earth and the heavens." Note especially his

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title for God, JEHOVAH, which is persistently avoided by the other writers in Genesis. To this peculiarity he owes the title by which his work is known. The Jahvist (or Jehovist) document.

THE BIBLE OF NORTHERN ISRAEL

The "Jehovist" writer is supposed to have written in the south, in Judah, because the names in that locality are more prominent in his work. About fifty years later some northern prophet or group of prophets wrote a similar work for northern Israel (that is, if we may judge again by prominent localities). It was probably somewhere in the days (800-750 B.C.) when Amos and Hosea were preaching in the north. We know less of this work than of its predecessor. We have less of it to judge by. The same earnest spiritual purpose runs through it, but it lacks the vivid personal touch which is the charm of the other book. It looks as if it were the work of a group of prophets rather than of one.

The first piece we have of it is inserted at Gen. xv., so we do not know whether it went

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back beyond Abraham. Its story runs parallel with the Judah Bible, though evidently it is using different early sources, for there are discrepancies between the narratives, and it uses different names, e.g., Horeb instead of Sinai; Amorites instead of Canaanites; Jacob instead of Israel, etc.

The most marked difference is the use of the title ELOHIM (not Jehovah) in all the earlier narrative. Therefore scholars have designated this document as the ELOHIST, which is rather stupid of them, for it only shows this characteristic in its earlier sections and it is not the only one to do so.

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

Now comes the most important of these early "Bibles," the Book of Deuteronomy, written perhaps about the time of King Hezekiah by some great unknown student of the life and times of Moses. His chief sources were apparently the Northern and Southern "Bibles" just mentioned. But he was greater than his teachers and wrote greater things than they.

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We can judge of him the more confidently because his book, unlike the others, has been found intact. As we read it we try to reproduce him for ourselves. An enthusiast for righteousness and an enthusiast for Moses. As St. John spent half a century meditating about Jesus before he put his pen to the story of the Fourth Gospel, so we judge of this man as meditating on God's dealings with Moses till the spirit of the old Legislator lived again in him. His book tells the events of the last month of the desert wanderings. He gathers into it the essence of the teachings of Moses. He saw the deep spiritual import of that teaching. He brought to it perhaps a still deeper power through the influence of the Spirit of God on himself. The result is the noblest section in the Pentateuch.

We do not know for whom he wrote it, or what he did with it when written. We do not know what influence it had on the people of his day, though there is reason later to conjecture that on its first appearance it had made a deep impression. We know nothing about its history. The manuscript disappeared, and the world might never have known anything about it but for the fortunate accident (humanly speaking)

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that brought it to light perhaps a century later. The story of its recovery is told in 2 Kings xxii, the story of that never-to-be-forgotten day in the eighteenth year of King Josiah (621 B.C.) when all Jerusalem was stirring with excitement and no one could talk of anything but the news from the Temple. "They have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord!"

Evidently it made a tremendous impression. King Josiah and his helpers made it their banner of reform. Jeremiah the prophet went out through the land teaching its precepts (Jer. xi. 1-8). His own writings show deep traces of its influence. Hebrew scholars tell us that a study of the style of the two books shows that Jeremiah had "steeped himself in Deuteronomy."

This accidental discovery of "The Book of the Law" is the most striking event in the whole History of the Making of the Bible. Here is evidently a book regarded for some reason as of divine authority, a book which Josiah and the people clearly regard as an ancient Book of the Law, which had been known before and which had been for a long time lost. The whole story forces that impression on us.

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No other book ever before was such a power in Israel. It was the first appearance of what we may well call a "People's Bible." Other collections of laws and history were in the keeping of prophets and priests. But never before was such a book as this, a book for the people, published to the people, telling in noblest form the thoughts of their great Lawgiver, preaching and teaching and beseeching the nation to return to the Lord their God.

There is, of course, no room here to indicate the reasons for identifying it with Deuteronomy.

THE BOOK OF THE PRIESTS

We have still one more "Lost Bible" to tell of, the documents from which our Pentateuch gets the main parts of its laws. The priests were the chief depositaries of laws, part of them oral, handed on at the various sanctuaries from generation to generation, much of them probably written, since the priests were familiar with writing. The book is very decided on the theory that the name Jehovah was not known before Moses. It always calls God ELOHIM in

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Genesis. It records the declaration in Exod. vi. 2, "By my name Jehovah was I not known unto them." We owe to it the majestic Creation story in Gen. i. It seems to have touched very slightly the history of the Patriarchs. It gives special prominence to worship and ceremonial, telling minutely of Circumcision, the Sabbath, the Priesthood, and the Festivals. It has a very large collection of laws mainly ceremonial. The concluding parts of Exodus, the beginning of Numbers, and practically the whole of Leviticus come from it. It is a very systematic work, very particular about chronology and genealogies. And it is a book with splendid lofty ideals. But it looks as if it would be a dull book to read by itself as compared with the stirring pages of Deuteronomy and the Southern Bible.

Scholars have designated it the "Book of the Priests," indicated in brief notation by the letter P.

V. METHODS OF CRITICAL STUDY

All this time the question is inevitably in the reader's mind: If these elementary "bibles"

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have vanished with the other "lost literature," how can we know anything about them?

The answer is that it is possible in a large measure to reconstruct them by examination of our present Bible, in which they are incorporated.

The ancient Semitic writers pieced together their sources, extracting from each such sections as suited their purpose, lifting them bodily word for word into their work and connecting them where necessary by notes of their own. So that if the documents thus incorporated have any marked characteristics of subject or language or style, it may be possible to distinguish them from one another, and sometimes to reconstruct the original sources word for word.

Take for example the Pentateuch. Begin at the beginning. In the first section, chap. i. to ii. 4, we have a version of the story of creation in dignified, solemn, formal style with characteristic words and phrases which also occur in later parts of the book. Amongst them we notice especially the title of the Deity, ELOHIM (God).

Now, the very next section, beginning Gen. ii. 4, is another Creation story, apparently from a different source. The order of creation is different, the style is very different, and we are

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especially struck by the sudden change of the Divine name to JEHOVAH ELOHIM (Lord God).

This at least suggests to us that the Book of Genesis was written by combining earlier sources. Then, as we go on, we find counterparts of these two sections running on still together, keeping still their marked characteristics.

Now let us take the first section, Gen. i, and all its corresponding sections through Genesis, and with a camel-hair brush tint them all over in a pale red. Then read them consecutively for several pages. We shall find them forming a fairly intelligible story, though very slight and scrappy in the Genesis portion. We shall find characteristic words and phrases running through them, such as: *create*; *after their kind*; *the selfsame day*; *these are the generations of*; *living creatures*; *beasts of the earth*; *creeping thing*; *all flesh*; *sojourner*; *throughout their generations*, etc. There is not very much from this source in Genesis, but if we continue our red sections right through the Pentateuch we shall find in them nearly all the regulations about ritual and ceremonies, about Circumcision and the Sabbath and the Festivals, also the great bulk of the priestly laws. And I trust it will be

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with some interest we shall feel the conviction that all the old "lost literature" is not altogether lost, that in these red-tinted sections, right through the Pentateuch, we have got back at least a large part of the Bible of the Priests.

Then we turn back to the Bible to read the parts left uncoloured. Evidently we are reading quite another document, differing from the first in language and style, much more interestingly written, more artistic, more poetical, full of vivid dramatic touches that make the history live before us. We have got back the old Jahvist Bible of Southern Judah. Or, rather, we have got back the combination of it with the Elohist Bible of the north.

This little sketch is merely intended as the barest suggestion of the methods of critical work on the Bible. It is impossible in my limited space to do more.

VI. THE FINAL STAGE

We now come to the final stage in the growth of the Old Testament.

In the day when the nation fell and the last

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King of Judah was carried away captive the Jewish Bible in its present completed form was still unwritten.

Then came the final stage in the Making of the Old Testament. God took that poor faulty Church and nation into captivity, "apart from the multitude," and prepared them to give to the world their BIBLE. Very wonderful is the working of His Divine Providence. That terrible trouble seems to have done more for Israel than all the years of prosperity. Without it they had hardly been fitted for the Making of the Bible. Their misery brought them closer to God. "The nation as it were went into retreat and performed penance for its long errors and sins." Henceforth idolatry had no power over them. Henceforth the Divine Presence grew more and more real. Henceforth their sacred records grew exceedingly precious as they felt the prophetic voices passing away. There seemed little of national glory to hope for in the future, and so they learned to brood in that sorrowful exile over their wondrous past, to treasure and love as never before the words and deeds of their great leaders of old. They were apart with God and with their Sacred Records. Every

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word of their prophets, every page of their history, was prized. Their deepening spiritual perception made them realise that "unto them were committed the Oracles of God" (Rom. iii. 2). Now they were ready for the final stage, the formation of the Canon of Scripture.

The whole environment of our history is now changed. We are no longer in Palestine, the land of Jehovah's worship, the land of Abraham and Moses and David and the Prophets, where the Bible had been growing for a thousand years.

The scene is transferred to gorgeous Babylon, with its pride and pomp and barbaric splendour, with its majestic temples and countless idols and pagan wickedness, where the name of the spiritual Jehovah was not known. There dwelt the exiles in the Jewish quarter by the river.

By the waters of Babylon they sat down and wept :
Yea, they wept when they remembered Zion.

But they did something more than weep about the past. A compelling impulse was upon them from above as they thought of the holy teaching which they had too lightly prized. The prophets were gone, but they would record the sacred

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words of the prophets. Their history seemed closed, but they would write it for their descendants. Their temple was in ruins, but the priests who preserved the laws and the ritual of its worship would formulate all connected with the service of Jehovah. The loving-kindness of the Lord must never be forgotten ; the hope of the mysterious Messiah must still be kept alive.

So they began the writing of the Old Testament. And scarce was their task finished when the Messiah came, in whom lay its chief interpretation and fulfilment. And—it is the bitter irony of history—when He came they knew Him not—they crucified Him.

They had piles of precious manuscripts brought with them into their exile. And prominent amongst their books were the Four Sacred Histories :

The Jahvist book of Judah.

The Elohist book of Israel.

The Book of the Law, which we call Deuteronomy.

The Book of the Priests, written or perhaps completed in the early exile days.

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With these Four Books they began. They made from them one great book which we call the Pentateuch. Why? And how?

Be it remembered that Deuteronomy was already regarded as a sort of national Bible. But it was clearly a very imperfect Bible as it stood. It looked back to laws which it did not quote, and to history which it did not relate. Clearly it was necessary to add these. So, as the other three books were the standard collection of these laws and history, they must in some way be appended. But since they were largely parallel collections, each of them containing much of the same material, it would naturally occur to the writers to make selections and weave them together to avoid repetition.

We can best understand their methods of working by glancing at a literary work done for the four gospels six hundred years later.

Early in the second century A.D. a very famous book was written by a Syrian scholar named Tatian, for the convenience of reading in church. It was known as the Diatessaron, or Book of the Four. It wove together cleverly the very words

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of the four Gospels so as to avoid repetition and
give a clear consecutive life of our Lord. Here
is a section of it :

Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to the Jordan unto John to be baptized of him. **Matt. iii. 13.**
And Jesus was about thirty years of age and was supposed to be the Son of Joseph. **Luke iii. 23, 24^a.**
Now John saw Jesus coming unto him and saith, This is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. This is He of Whom I said, after me shall come a man which is preferred before me, for He was before me, and I knew Him not, but that He may be made manifest to Israel therefore came I baptizing with water. **John i. 29-31.**
Now John was forbidding Him, saying, I have need to be baptized of Thee and comest Thou to me? Jesus answered him, Suffer it now, thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. **Matt. iii. 14-15.**
And when all the people were baptized Jesus also was baptized, and He went up straightway out of the water and the heaven was opened unto Him. **Luke iii. 21^a.**
And the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the form of a dove's body, and lo a voice from heaven, This is My Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased. **Matt. iii. 6.**
And John bare witness saying, Furthermore I saw the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and it abode on Him. **Luke iii. 23^b.**
Matt. iii. 17.
John i. 32.

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This making of the Old Testament was not done all at once, but in three separate periods. The "First Jewish Bible" was the "Torah," the "Law," our Pentateuch. Later on, the chief of the Prophetic Utterances and Prophetic Histories were added. So the "Second Jewish Bible" was "The Law and the Prophets." Later on again it was still further enlarged, and the "Complete Jewish Bible" was "The Law and the Prophets and the Writings."

In the New Testament titles of the Jewish Bible we see the traces of this gradual formation, e.g. "The Law" (Matt. v. 18 ; xii. 5, etc.) ; "The Law and the Prophets, or Moses and the Prophets" (Matt. vii. 12 ; Luke xvi. 29, 31) ; "The Law and the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke xxiv. 44).

THE FIRST JEWISH BIBLE

The first Jewish Bible, then, was quite a small one, only the Pentateuch. With the Jews this has always been *par excellence* "The Bible." No other books have ever won quite the same position in Judaism. The Samaritans

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have never accepted any other books at all. There is little doubt that this completed Pentateuch was the book referred to when Ezra came up from Babylon to Jerusalem "with the Law of God in his hand" (Ezra vii). Here, then (457 B.C.), was the first appearance in history of our present completed Pentateuch.

The reader is, I hope, now in a position to see that this Pentateuch of the Exile days is but a "latest edition," a completest and fullest edition, putting together in literary form earlier existing sacred histories. It is necessary to emphasise this. For in all the disquiet caused by "higher criticism" of the Old Testament, nothing has so disturbed simple Christian people as the statement that the Pentateuch was not written until the days of the Exile.

It is quite true, in a certain sense. But why should it be disturbing? Take an illustration from secular history. Green's *History of the English People* tells the story of Alfred and of William the Conqueror nearly a thousand years after date. Do we therefore doubt the substantial truth of these stories? Of course we assume that Professor Green used all the earlier English histories, that he and his predecessors used

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also all accessible older material, ballads and folk-lore and traditions and laws and letters and ancient charters which bore upon their work.

The Pentateuch comes to us in a somewhat similar way. The writers in that Divinely-guided community used earlier authorities, and these, again, used still earlier material back as far as they could go. Behind our Pentateuch, as we have seen, lie two earlier independent "Pentateuchs" (if I may use the word), the Northern and Southern Bibles, one of them going back to about 900 B.C. These two, again, distinctly state that they used still earlier and evidently independent sources, as already pointed out. The sources they mention are some of them written documents which even in their day were so ancient as to be ascribed to Moses himself. Other sources were oral traditions or written collections of oral traditions. I have no desire here to minimise the risk of long oral transmission. We must make full allowance for this. But it is quite a different thing to doubt that the history is in substance historical, or to suggest that the writers, instead of keeping to the traditions which they had

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received, were simply inventing ideal pictures for themselves.

This we can say, judging the Bible as we judge ordinary secular history. But Christian men will also keep in mind that the Bible grew in a community solemnised by the sense of God's presence and devoutly remembering and recording, however imperfectly, the things that God had done. They will reverently bring in the thought of inspiration and of Divine oversight, and of the connection of the Old Testament with the coming of Christ. And they will remember how our dear Lord Himself loved and revered that old Book. Though these things do not guarantee inerrancy in its history, they at least generate an attitude of mind averse to gratuitous suggestions of doubt.

Surely the overruling Providence of God was at the making of that Jewish Bible. In their exaggerated reverence for its first part, the Law, one wonders how they ever let any other books in. But the appeal of the Prophets was impossible to resist, so their Bible was enlarged to be "The Law and the Prophets." When the Prophets had got into the sacred enclosure,

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doubtless they thought their Bible must now be complete. But the God of the wilderness journey was guiding them, still "speaking to the children of Israel that they go forward."

Outside the limits of the Sacred Canon of the Law and the Prophets, there remained an abundant religious literature which could not well come under either of those headings, and which contained phases of spiritual truth not yet included in the Bible. In this literature certain parts had stood out prominent for generations in the reverence and regard of the spiritual in Israel. Doubtless most popular of all was the Psalter. From the older days, from the choir-desks of the first Temple had come sheets of psalms and temple music composed by holy men for the service of Jehovah, and if we may judge from the habits of modern choirboys, not always in very good order or preservation. We have a glimpse of the men of Hezekiah in early days picking out from the temple music the psalms of David and Asaph the Seer (2 Chron. xxix. 30). With these were the newer hymns of the second Temple. All these, by gradual growth and survival of favourites, probably grew into the five little hymn-books as indicated in

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our Revised Version, and it is very likely that they were the first part of this third group of writings to gain admission into the Canon.

Also amongst this literature were the words of "them that speak in proverbs." There was that wonderful dramatic poem, "Job," grappling with deep questions which men were asking about the mystery of evil. There was the Book of Daniel, which had come too late for admission into "the Prophets," and other books containing, in more or less imperfect form, glimpses of precious spiritual truth.

There were doubts as to the admission of some of these books. Esther and Canticles remained long on the borderland. It was not until the Synod of Jamnia, about A.D. 90, that Esther and Canticles were finally accepted and the list of Old Testament Books officially completed.

So I close my brief, imperfect sketch of "The Making of the Old Testament." Surely no reader who has followed it carefully needs here to be told that these scribes and doctors of the Captivity, or afterwards, did not decide what

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was to be accepted as the Scriptures of God. Yet at risk of tediousness, let me repeat that these scribes and doctors had very little to do with the decision. The mass of Old Testament books gained canonical authority because for centuries they had by their own inherent power commended themselves to the spiritual discernment of the godly in Israel. They had long established themselves in the hearts of the faithful with an authority which could not be shaken or confirmed by official decision. The men who compiled the Bible simply accepted established facts. They decided not *what was to be* Bible, but *what was already Bible*. They recorded not their own judgment, but that of ages before them. Their verdict only asserted, "These are the books which have been for generations accepted amongst us as of Divine authority."

Be it remembered, too, that this collection of sacred books was not only the authoritative inspired Bible of the Jewish Church, but also the only authoritative inspired Bible of the Christian Church for many years until it was again enlarged by the gradual inclusion of the New Testament writings. Our Lord and His

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Apostles recognise it as "the Scriptures," "the Law and the Prophets," "the Oracles of God." They never hint that this collection of sacred books is imperfect or excessive. They quote it as the inspired teaching of God and the authoritative standard to end all controversy. It is Jesus Himself who bids men search these Scriptures and answers an inquirer's question by referring him to this Bible, "What is written in the Law, How readest thou?"

But there is something more important still. Let my last words be to point out to Christian people, as I have already done in an earlier chapter, the personal attitude of our dear Lord Himself toward that Old Testament. It was the only Bible He had. It was the Bible of His education. It was the Bible of His ministry. He took for granted its fundamental doctrines about creation, man, righteousness, God's providence and purpose. He accepted it as the preparation for Himself and taught His disciples to find Him in it. He used it to justify His mission and to illumine the mystery of the Cross. Above all, He fed His own soul with its contents and in the great crises of His life sustained Himself upon it as the solemn word

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of God. In spite of its defects (which He Himself points out), I cannot help feeling that the Bible which was good enough for my dear Lord Himself should be good enough for me.

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THE MAKING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

WHERE the story of the Old Testament closes, the story of the New Testament begins. They touch at the centre-point in the history of the world when "In the fulness of time God sent forth His Son."

The first thing that strikes one in the Making of the New Testament is that, like that of the Old, it was unconscious, unintentional. When we come to Apostolic days, we find the first Christians with their complete Holy Bible which we now call the Old Testament. And to one who really thinks himself into their position, the wonder is, humanly speaking, that there should ever have come what we call the New Testament. For these early Christians had no more notion of making a new Bible or adding to the old one

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than we have to-day. They had, as we have, the Word of God, believed to be complete, regarded by them and quoted by Christ and His Apostles as the Bible of Divine authority. They wanted no other. It would have seemed to them sacrilegious to add to it even if they thought of such a thing, which they did not.

The curious thing, though, is that they did not want (even without putting it into the Bible) to write at once for their own use a full life of Jesus. One would have expected that the first thing they would do after Pentecost would be to go to the twelve Apostles and ask them, "Write us down in a book at once everything that you have seen and heard and learned about Jesus during those wonderful three years." But they did not. Perhaps it will surprise us less if we try to put ourselves in their place.

I. THE ORAL GOSPEL

Take the first twenty years after the Ascension up to about A.D. 50. Here is a religious community scattered in groups through many cities and villages—simple, plain people, fishers and

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farmers and porters and tent-makers and artisans. They are very happy in their wonderful new religion. One thought dominates all life for them: "We know that the Son of God is come." They want to hear everything they can about Him. Most of them cannot read. Very few would be capable of writing a book. In any case they do not want books. In Palestine, at least, they have a strong prejudice against committing anything to writing. Their whole training has been oral. Their knowledge of things has come by hearsay. There are no newspapers. When there is any news somebody tells it. Written books or read books (except the Bible) are not at all in their line.

Also it is hardly worth while writing books. Mingled with their joy is a restless expectancy. They are convinced that Jesus will return during their lifetime to take them all to heaven. They do not know the moment. It may be any day, "at evening or at midnight or at cockcrow, or in the morning." Even their Apostles at first looked forward to the day when "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air." So, with heaven lying about them, there was no need of writing books for the

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future. There was no future, except a future in glory with the Lord.

So they gathered in their little weekly assemblies to hear their Old Testament Scriptures and to pray and to receive their Holy Communion, and to listen to the burning words of the "Witnesses" who had been with Jesus or seen Him or learned about Him from those who had. They wanted not written documents, but heart-to-heart talks from men who knew. Sometimes they had only a teacher who had learned from the Apostles. Sometimes they had a disciple who had actually heard the Lord. And sometimes they would get hold of a real live Apostle, one of the Twelve.

Now, it is a matter of experience that if any man keeps telling the same incidents for many years there comes naturally a certain uniformity in the telling, almost as fixed as writing. And if the several Apostles were continually teaching the life of Jesus, there would gradually come a certain uniformity in the cycle of teaching. They could not dwell on every little point. They would "put first things first." Special acts and discourses of the Lord would stand out

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in higher prominence. Other incidents of minor importance would fall into the background or be dropped out. The Incarnation, the Baptism, the Passion, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the historic substance of the ancient creeds, would be the great centres around which the teaching grouped itself. Thus, in course of years, there would be a growingly-uniform cycle of facts and sayings which would be the main Gospel of the Church, stored in the memories of the hearers.

Then, again, every year in a hundred places together were the preparation classes for Baptism like our Confirmation classes. Converts had to be taught in regular and compact form the main facts of the Christian creed. This would greatly tend towards crystallising the oral teaching into a fairly uniform gospel known well by all instructed Christians all over the Church.

Thus came the formation of an *oral gospel* differing somewhat in different places and periods, but in the main the same. This was the "deposit," the matter "which they delivered, which from the beginning were eye witnesses and ministers of the Word." This was what Paul was orally taught by Ananias at Damascus

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and by others more fully afterwards. "I delivered unto you," he says to the Corinthians, "that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." This is what he means when he bids the Thessalonians, "Hold fast the traditions which ye have received." This is the deposit about which he charges Timothy, "O Timothy, guard that deposit which is committed unto thee."

This was the *oral gospel* published through the whole Church, not in written books, "but on the fleshy tablets of the heart." Probably our present gospel of St. Mark would fairly represent its main substance. Mark is said to have learned it from the "lessons" or oral instructions of Peter. At any rate, this oral deposit was the only Gospel the Church had for thirty years.

II. THE EPISTLES

Now we come to the next stage—the stage of the first Christian writings, the Epistles—

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beginning, say, about the year A.D. 50. These were the first written part of the New Testament.

The various needs and perplexities of the scattered churches called forth letters of advice and direction and instruction, written mainly for the immediate occasion and in answer to letters of inquiry received. There was no thought of them as Bible or Scripture or Sacred. They were simple letters of the great missionary Apostles to the communities which they had visited and evangelised.

I picture to myself the writing of the first Christian Scripture. It is A.D. 48. A wiry little man with weak eyes is seated in his work-room working at pieces of black haircloth material for tents. He has his work to do, and perhaps he can think better that way, as a woman can think better with her knitting in her hands. He has been worrying for weeks waiting news from his converts at Thessalonica, and now Timothy has just arrived with very pleasant news, and Paul is dictating a letter to them. Two young men, Timothy and Silvanus, are with him. Silvanus can probably write best, as we find indications later that he wrote for Peter.

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So Paul is dictating and Silvanus is writing on a papyrus roll in little columns two or three inches wide :

" PAUL AND SILVANUS AND TIMOTHY UNTO THIS CHURCH OF THE THESSALONIANS . . . GRACE BE WITH YOU AND PEACE, ETC."

How little these two men thought that day that they were writing the first words of the great Christian Scriptures for all the world and for all the ages. We do not know that this was the first church letter that Paul wrote. Some have been lost. But this is the first that we know of.

A.D. 54. Again Paul is dictating a letter, a much larger and more formidable one. It is the Epistle to the Romans. This time I do not imagine he has any tent-work in his hands, for he has to concentrate hard. And this time we have not to guess at his secretary's name, for it is signed, " I, Tertius, who write the epistle, salute you in the Lord." We can even make a guess at the messenger who carried it. " I commend to you Phœbe our sister, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea, that ye receive her in the Lord and help her in whatever matter she needs." Apparently Phœbe was travelling to Rome along the great Roman roads or by the

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vessels of one of the shipping companies navigating the Mediterranean. Who more likely to carry the letter ?

Thus the epistle reached Rome, and surely it was eagerly read the next Sunday, and probably for several Sundays.

And when they had read it repeatedly, they would lend it to another church (cf. Col. iv. 16). But it had to be handled carefully ; for if the papyrus got damp it moulded and spoiled the writing, and if too dry it grew brittle and easily broke in handling. Then trouble came, as we shall find later, in St. Mark's Gospel, where it is likely the end-piece cracked off and got lost, and so caused trouble and manifold discussions in many ages since. In later times, when the position of the Epistles was recognised as Scripture, they were carefully copied on to parchment like the Old Testament. But they probably remained a good while on papyrus, and papyrus was a perilous material on which to preserve for the world the inspired Word of God.

We have thirteen epistles of St. Paul. A third epistle to the Corinthians which he refers to¹ has evidently got lost, and possibly others.

¹ 1 Cor. v. 9.

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We have three epistles of St. John, one of James, one of Jude, a first epistle of Peter and another called his Second Epistle whose authorship is less certain. The Epistle to the Hebrews is anonymous. It has been widely attributed to Paul, sometimes to Barnabas and others. Origen, the greatest Bible scholar the world has seen, said of it in the third century, "Who wrote this epistle God only knows."

III. THE FOUR GOSPELS

Thus the Epistles were written. This brings us to about A.D. 60, thirty years after the Ascension. Not one of our Gospels was yet written. The larger churches had probably a collection of some Apostolic Epistles. These were the only documents.

But things could not go on thus much longer. Paul was dead. The men who had known Jesus were rapidly passing away. And all the time the Church was steadily growing in extent and needing to be told the Christian story. In the missionary churches amongst the heathen, where "they ordained elders in every city," there must be some authoritative documents for

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teachers to use who knew nothing at first hand of the Lord's life. Besides, it would hardly be safe to leave the story much longer trusting to memory. For these were not quiet, isolated people like the ancient Jews with their traditions. The Church lived in the midst of bustling life and crowding events, a condition not favourable to long oral transmission.

So, just when Paul's Epistles and Paul's life were closing, begins the writing of our first three Gospels. Paul died about the year 64. The writing of our first Gospel is usually dated about that time,¹ about thirty years after the Resurrection.

The Oral Gospel had now become fairly fixed in men's memories. And scraps of writing were floating about. Someone here and there would write on a papyrus slip some saying of the Lord which especially touched him :

Jesus said, Come unto Me, all ye weary, and I will give you rest.

Jesus said, A certain man had two sons, etc. (Prodigal Son).

¹ Harnack (a famous present-day investigator) has recently argued for an earlier date. He would put Mark between 50 and 60, Matthew about 70, and Luke in Paul's lifetime.

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Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers.

Amongst them was probably one which St. Paul had been taught, but which did not get into our Gospels.

Jesus said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.¹

And I like to think that in this form, too, came down that pathetic little story of Jesus and the Adulteress, which also was left out of the Gospels, but which appeals to every heart as a true story of Jesus. Some disciple who had heard it told in the oral teaching perhaps wrote it down on a papyrus tablet. We hear that it was written into the lost "Gospel to the Hebrews." At any rate, someone who knew it wrote it later on in a blank space in some copy of the Gospel manuscripts, and it so appealed to men's hearts that a place had to be made for it. The Revised Version indicates its unauthorised insertion into the middle of St. John's Gospel.² It evidently does not belong there, but wherever its true place, the world has reason to be thankful to the man who wrote on his

¹ Acts xx. 35.

² John viii. 3.

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papyrus tablet long ago this lost story of Jerusalem.

Many of these little "Logia," or sayings, have recently been found in the East, some belonging to very early times, though not to the first century. Most of those found are already in the Bible. Some day we may light on a valuable collection in sealed jars or in tombs which will restore to us precious lost sayings of Jesus. The most interesting find up to this is that of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, found by Dr. Grenfell and Dr. Hunt at Oxyrhynchus, in Egypt, in 1897 and 1903, now in the British Museum. They seem to preserve some lost sayings of Jesus which floated about in early evangelical tradition, but did not get into our Gospels. Quite an excitement was caused in 1903 at the discovery of the five sayings written on the back of a "real estate" man's list of measurements. It was prefaced by the introduction, "These are the wonderful sayings of Jesus."

Jesus saith, Let not him who seeks cease until he find, and when he finds he shall be astonished; astonished, he shall reach the Kingdom, and having reached the Kingdom he shall rest.

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Jesus saith . . . and the Kingdom of Heaven is within you, and whosoever shall know himself shall find it. (Strive therefore) to know yourselves, and ye shall know that ye are the sons of the Father, and ye shall know that ye are in the city of God and ye are the city.¹

Probably there were little collections of these "sayings" which helped the writers of the Gospels. We know of one large collection attributed to St. Matthew, of which we shall hear more later.

By and by would come something fuller—little Gospels, little attempts of private Christians to write down what they had been learning in church.

St. Luke's preface gives us a valuable glimpse of the position when he wrote. I quote from the Revised Version :

1. The Oral Gospel. Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word.
2. The Fragmentary Gospels. Many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters fully established among us.

¹ *Sayings of Our Lord*, 2s., and *New Sayings of Jesus*, 1s., published by the Oxford University Press.

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3. The Final Gospels.

It seemed good to me also having traced the course of all things from the very first to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed by word of mouth.

Here we see the evolution of the first three Gospels : (1) the Oral Gospel ; (2) the Fragmentary Gospels ; (3) the Final Gospels as we have them. St. Luke sets himself to write *in order* the separate narratives which people were familiar with. Is it not very like the evolution in the Old Testament—except that the one was accomplished in one generation whilst the other went on for two thousand years—the oral traditions followed by collections such as the book of Jasher, and then by still fuller histories, the Northern and Southern “Bibles,” and all moving toward the complete books as we have them to-day ?

The first definite mention of our present Gospels is a very interesting one. Shortly after the death of St. John (about A.D. 120) there was a bishop named Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis, in Phrygia. He lived close to apostolic days. He had met in Hierapolis the

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daughters of Philip the Evangelist, the virgins which did prophesy, who were friends of St. Paul. He writes :

“ John the Elder told Papias that Matthew wrote the ‘ Logia,’ i.e. the Words or Sayings of Jesus in Hebrew (i.e. Aramaic, the vernacular of Palestine). And this too the Elder said, ‘ Mark, the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, yet not in order, all that he [Peter] told as said or done by Christ. For he [Mark] himself did not hear the Lord nor was a disciple of His, but . . . of Peter, who used to give teachings to suit the immediate wants [of his hearers], but not as making a connected narrative . . . so that Mark made no mistake. . . . For he took care of one thing, not to leave out anything he heard nor give anything in a wrong way.’ ”¹

From this we gather that St. Matthew made a collection of discourses of Our Lord in Aramaic. No copy of this has yet been found. If ever it is, it will upset or confirm many theories made about it. It was not our present Gospel of St. Matthew, though it probably formed the chief source of it.

The first Gospel was certainly St. Mark's. Its basis apparently was the oral Gospel which he had learned in church on Sundays, especially the form in which he had heard St. Peter tell it. Where Mark wrote it, and why, and for

¹ Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, iii. 39.

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what church, we do not know. But one thing we do know, that it means more to the world than almost any other book written. For, as we shall see, it was also the chief source and foundation of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke. Just a few sheets of papyrus easily injured in handling. The church which first got it had to be very careful not to break it, and in spite of all their care they apparently did break it—broke off a piece perhaps twelve inches long, which caused a good deal of trouble in later days. The Revised Version shows us how in the sixteenth chapter the Resurrection story breaks off awkwardly and abruptly at verse 8, and that an ending of twelve verses is added which quite probably was not the original ending. The marginal note tells us that the oldest manuscripts omit this ending, and that different endings have been appended in several manuscripts. Evidently the reader who clumsily cracked off that piece is responsible for some confusion.

Soon after St. Mark appeared the Gospel of St. Matthew, probably because it was based largely on St. Matthew's collection of Discourses.

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Whether St. Matthew wrote it, or who wrote it in its present form, nobody really knows.

And very soon after came the Gospel of St. Luke, which he wrote with the Acts and dedicated to some prominent Christian, "His excellency Theophilus."

A careful study of these three Gospels brings out some curious facts as to their sources and composition. Matthew and Luke are the only Gospels that tell anything of the life of Jesus before His ministry began. There they write quite independently of each other, scarcely touching in any point.

The moment they begin the story of the ministry they tell it in the same way, followed mainly the order and frequently the very words of St. Mark.

Then when Mark comes to an end where the papyrus broke off at chap. xvi. 8, they immediately branch out again, independently of each other and relating quite different incidents.

Volumes have been written on the difficult "synoptic problem," as it is called, of the composition of these synoptic Gospels. It is on the whole fairly evident that both used St. Mark, or an earlier version of St. Mark, as a

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basis ; that they had access to other sources, the chief probably being St. Matthew's collection of Sayings. But where did Luke get that immortal story of the "Shepherds abiding in the field," or those precious parables in chap. xv, that "Gospel within the Gospel," or the several events peculiar to his gospels which the other evangelists do not seem to have known? Notice that his contribution to the story lies mainly in a new section which he has inserted in the middle (chap. ix. 51 to xviii. 14), chiefly memories of the Jerusalem road as Jesus went up to die. It begins with the solemn introduction, "Now when the time was well-nigh come that He should be received up He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." We know that Paul was collaborating with him, and as they travelled together they were continually meeting old disciples who had been with Jesus thirty years ago, and coming on well-authenticated memories of incidents and discourses not yet gathered into the central tradition. Thus came the priceless parables of the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal. The Christmas story would probably come through the Virgin Mother or her intimate friends.

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Twenty-five years later comes the great Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of St. John. It differs materially from the other three. They were compilations made up of earlier existing material. This is an original work "dominated throughout by a great personality who has so meditated on the facts and truths he announces that they have been as it were recast in his own experience and bear traces everywhere of his genius."

St. John was at that time an old man, living far away from the scenes of his boyhood. The young peasant of the Lake of Galilee is now the beloved bishop of the Church of Ephesus. But he is still in heart just "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The old man's eyes are ever turning back to that time, those three wonderful years when he had walked the fields of Galilee with his dear Lord, when, as he says, "we beheld His glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." James and Peter and Andrew and Philip are long since departed to be with their Master in the Unseen, and he is left alone brooding, as an old man will, on the precious memories of the past.

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I'm growing very old. This weary head
That hath so often leaned on Jesus' breast
In days long by that seem almost a dream,
Is bent and hoary with the weight of years.
I'm old, so old, I cannot recollect
The faces that I meet in daily life,
But that dear Face and every word He spake
Grow more distinct as others fade away,
So that I live with Him and the holy dead
More than the living.

And how his people at Ephesus loved to hear the old man's memories of these years! They had probably at least one or more of the other three Gospels in writing. But it was so different to hear the living voice of their dear old bishop telling what he remembered. And he remembered so many things not written in their Gospels—his first meeting with Jesus; the marriage at Cana; the mysterious sacramental teaching about the Bread of God which cometh down from heaven; the solemn Last Discourse at the First Communion; the story of the awful desolation when he saw Jesus dead; his personal memories of the Resurrection joy, especially of that exciting race for the tomb when he did outrun Peter; also his tender memories of the strange forty days which followed. Year after year he had been telling them

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what he knew, and as he told it repeatedly the story grew into shape, and so there came the Gospel of St. John—the Gospel of an old man's memories. He wrote it with the solemn purpose in his heart that "ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name."

So we close the touching story of that wonderful first century, taking us back to watch the beginnings of the Gospel, to live with those earnest, simple-hearted men whose one central feeling was tender, grateful personal love to Jesus. "Tell us about Jesus. Tell us what He said and did, how He looked and spake—our dear Lord who loved us and died for us."

IV. HOW THE CANON WAS FORMED

Now we come to the question of "The Canon of the New Testament," i.e. the decision as to what books should or should not be received into the New Testament Scriptures.

In the making of the Old Testament we saw first the importance of the Divinely-appointed, Divinely guided religious community, the

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Church, wherein, as in a cherishing home or nest, the Bible was to grow.

Then we saw that there were two stages of the making of the Bible in that community, which two stages must be carefully distinguished.

First, the gradual growth of a religious literature.

Second, the gradual selection or acceptance or recognition of certain parts of that literature by the Church as authoritative inspired Scripture.

This is true of the New Testament equally with the Old, except that the process in the New Testament occupied but one generation.

We have watched now the first stage, the growth of the Christian literature—the Epistles being written according as they were needed—the Gospels growing gradually like the Old Testament Books, oral tradition followed by fragmentary written summaries and completed by the writing of our present Four Gospels.

The Church, then, about the year 100 had first and foremost its Holy Bible, the authoritative inspired Books of the Old Testament. This was the sole "Canon of Scripture" in Apostolic days.

And it had also its Religious Literature, the

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Gospels, the Epistles, the Revelation of St. John, and also other religious books which ultimately found no place in Scripture. This literature was highly treasured and regarded as most valuable for edification, but certainly was not at first regarded as "Bible."

The Christian literature was regarded as the human teaching of apostles and disciples, and was valued by them because of all it could tell about the ministry and life and death and resurrection of that dear Lord whom they so deeply loved.

Now we come to the second stage, the admission of the main part of this Christian literature into the Canon of Holy Scripture.

How did it come about? Practically in the same way as that of the Old Testament Books. Let me repeat what I said of them, that the Canon of Scripture was formed not suddenly by some startling miracle, not officially by some decision of council or synod or bishop or prophet or saint, but slowly, gradually, half unconsciously by the quiet influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men in the Church. "The Bible was formed even as the Church

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itself was formed, by that Holy Spirit which was the life of both."

As it was in the Old Testament, so was it also in the New. Humanly speaking, the matter was decided half unconsciously by usage rather than by criticism or deliberate choice. Men in the Christian Church did not start out to make a new Bible or to add to the old one, but almost before they knew they had done it.

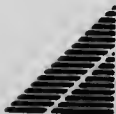
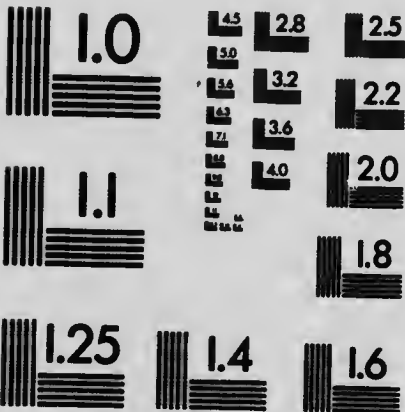
It came about mainly through the reading of the Lessons in Church. The question about any book was not whether it should be put into a Bible—that was not thought of at first—but whether it was worthy to be read in the Church services.

There is clear evidence that the Canon of the Gospels was the first part of the new Bible, that is to say that they first rose into the position of being read along with the Divine Teaching (the Old Testament). As the years went on and the Lord had not returned, and the witnesses of His life and death and resurrection had passed away, these written Gospels became exceedingly precious to the Church. They were all they had of Jesus in permanent record. Men felt that they contained at any rate *words*



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of the Lord Jesus, which surely should rank higher than any word of Moses or the Prophets. Indeed, men must inevitably have felt that from the very first. And the sacredness attaching to the words of Jesus must have attached itself to the books which contained them. We should certainly be right in saying that this was the first step toward the accepting of the Gospels as Bible. So we are not surprised to find at the close of the first century the Gospels beginning to be read as Scriptures in Church and quoted authoritatively in letters and sermons side by side with the words of the Old Testament Bible.

By the silent influence of the Holy Spirit in the Church the idea was quietly taking root of a new series of Divine authoritative documents. The formation of the New Testament Scriptures had begun.

In the writing of the great churchmen who came after the Apostles we can trace this interesting process step by step. But I have no space to follow these separate steps. I can only glance at a few points in the line of evidence which ended in the recognition of the complete New Testament.

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Notice just these two : (1) Justin Martyr was a prominent member of the early Church. He was born about the year 100, about the time that St. John died. It was probably about the year 140 that he wrote his famous "Apology" to the Emperor, which gives a valuable picture of early Church life. "On the day of the Sun [Sunday] all those of us who live in the same town or district assemble together, and there is read to us some part of the Memoirs of the Apostles, which" (he says elsewhere) "are called Gospels, and the Writings of the Prophets as much as time permits. Thus whoever is presiding gives us a sermon, after which we rise for common prayer; afterwards bread and wine are brought, etc."

What concerns us here is the explicit statement that about forty years after St. John's death the Gospels are being regularly read along with the Old Testament. Nay, they are even mentioned before them as if even more important. This is a clear indication of the growing recognition of their position as Scripture.

(2) Here is another important document for our purpose, an old, torn, mutilated fragment, date about A.D. 170, discovered several years

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ago in the Ambrosian Library of Milan. It is called the Muratorian Fragment, and contains at any rate the earliest list in existence of the Church books, if it be too much to call it the first known judgment of the Catholic Church as to the books of her New Testament.

It almost certainly must have been begun by mentioning St. Matthew and St. Mark as the first and second Gospels, for this torn piece begins by telling us that "the Gospel of St. Luke, the physician, companion of St. Paul, stands third." The fourth place it assigns to the Gospel of St. John, "a disciple of the Lord who wrote at the request of his fellow-disciples and bishops. As he says in his epistle, 'What we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life.' For so he professes that he was not only an eyewitness, but also a hearer."

After the Gospels it places the Acts. Then the thirteen Epistles of Paul, pointing out that "though four of them, Philemon, Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy, were written from personal feeling and affection, yet they are hallowed in the respect of the Catholic Church."

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“Moreover,” it adds, “there is in circulation an Epistle to the Laodiceans and one to the Alexandrians forged in Paul’s name, and several others which cannot be received in the Catholic Church. The Epistle of Jude, however, and two with the name of John are held in the Catholic Church. We receive also that Revelation of John and the Revelation of Peter, which latter some of our body will not allow to be read in Church.”

This old fragment is very valuable, not only for the distinction it notes between our books of Scripture and the other books, but especially as showing that about seventy years after the Apostles nearly all our present New Testament was in use as Scripture. It omits the Epistles of James, 1 and 2 Peter, and Hebrews, which were not universally known and accepted for some time after this. And it tells of other books which still hung on the borderland, such as the Revelation of Peter, etc.

Here I desire to emphasise the fact that even yet there was no definite concerted action of the Church, no definite synodical statement determining the exact boundaries of the New Testament. For which we may be thankful.

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For no single decision of any body of men would have the weight that comes from the silent conviction of many generations on whose consciences the Sacred Writings were winning their way.

I close with one last reference after the "Canon of the New Testament" had finally settled itself throughout the whole Church.

ATHANASIUS AND JEROME

It is Easter Day, A.D. 365, in the city of Alexandria. In all the churches of the city the clergy are reading to their people the Easter Pastoral Letter of their great archbishop Athanasius, the champion who saved the Church from heresy. Every year he has issued his Pastoral, but this year it is especially noteworthy for its clear, definite pronouncement about the Canonical Scriptures :

"I shall use for the support of my boldness," says the Archbishop, "the model of the evangelist Luke and say as he does, Forasmuch as some have taken in hand to set forth in order for themselves the so-called Apocrypha and to mix these with the inspired Scriptures, which we most surely believe, even as they delivered it to our fathers, which from

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the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word ; it seemed good to me also having been urged by true brethren . . . to publish the books which are admitted in the canon, and having been delivered unto us, and are believed to be Divine, etc."

Then after giving a full list of the Old Testament Books, relegating the Apocrypha to a sort of appendix, he turns to give a list of the New Testament, and *this list is exactly that of our New Testament to-day.*

This decision of the whole Church was finally stereotyped in the issue of the great Vulgate Bible begun by St. Jerome, A.D. 393. It was the Vulgate, or "Common," when it became the common Bible of the Western Church. For a thousand years it was practically the Bible of all Europe ; therefore when we say that *the Books of its New Testament are exactly what we have to-day* we may consider our inquiry closed as to the growth of the Canon.

So we close the story of the Making of the Bible. In one sense it has shown us that the Church made the Bible. The Church by her great sons received the inspired words ; the Church through many ages decided its contents. But I trust it has shown more clearly the awe-inspiring truth that the Bible was made for man

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by the Holy Spirit of God. He it was who gave the holy words to His Church. He it was who by His silent influence on that Church decided what its contents should be. Surely it was no chance that made the Canon of Scripture. For if anything is clearly taught by this story it is this, which I said at its beginning, that the Canon of Scripture was formed not suddenly by some startling miracle, not officially by some decision of synod or bishop or prophet or saint, but slowly, gradually, half unconsciously, by the quiet influence of the Holy Spirit on the minds of men in the Church. "The Bible was formed even as the Church itself was formed, by that Holy Spirit who was the life of both." God give us grace to use it !

BLESSED LORD WHO HAS CAUSED ALL HOLY SCRIPTURES TO BE WRITTEN FOR OUR LEARNING ; GRANT THAT WE MAY IN SUCH WISE HEAR THEM, READ, MARK, LEARN AND INWARDLY DIGEST THEM, THAT BY PATIENCE, AND COMFORT OF THY HOLY WORD, WE MAY EMBRACE AND EVER HOLD FAST THE BLESSED HOPE OF EVERLASTING LIFE WHICH THOU HAST GIVEN US IN OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

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