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I. THE CONTRA-NATURAL CHARACTER OF THE MIRACLE.

NONE but the maintainers of a rigid process of evolution, enforced by a law of blind, immanent necessity, would deny that man has degenerated from his primitive condition. He has fallen from the estate of holiness and happiness in which he was created into one of sin and misery. That being admitted, it is obvious that the scheme of religion which he originally possessed is now utterly inadequate to his wants. The law which it contained as a rule of action has been violated, and its condemning sentence renders impossible an acceptable obedience to its requirements. So far as that scheme of religion is concerned man is doomed.

On the supposition that God the Moral Ruler were willing to reveal to sinful man another scheme, not merely legal but redemptive, as a directory of faith, a guide of life and a basis of hope, it would be just, if not indispensable, that its credentials should be so clear as to admit of no reasonable doubt. They ought to be not so much deductions from speculative premises however apparently well-founded, as phenomenal facts easily apprehended by consciousness, or immediate and necessary inferences from those facts, and therefore of equal validity with the original data themselves: the concrete results of observation and experience, or good because logical consequences from them. While the revelation itself is to be proved, its proofs ought to be as nearly as possible autopistic.

II. THE UNCHANGEABLE WORD.

To a literary man there is something remarkable in the improvements made in the science and literature of the present day. There is a restless activity of mind that urges men forward in the pursuit of knowledge. Old ideas that were considered fixed and definite are now becoming obsolete. Old principles that were esteemed fixed and eternal are now seen to be fallacious. Old conceptions that once startled the world by their grandeur are now looked upon as ridiculous and discarded with contempt. Indeed, there is a constant fluctuation, a constant enlargement, a constant development in almost all branches of human knowledge. Men are not satisfied with present attainments, but are stirring up every energy of thought in order that they may make subservient to their use all the elements of nature.

It is the opinion of some wise men that this world will last until some use is found for everything that God has created in it; that mind will progress in its mastery over material until all natural objects are brought under control and made conducive to the welfare of its master; that discoveries in the realm of true science will continue to be made until everything in air, earth and sea has been made to subserve the comfort and happiness of man. Of course no finite mind can say whether this is true or the empty speculation of those who have been roused to a lofty height of enthusiasm by recent discoveries and inventions. We know that most startling changes have been made in the past few years. Old, settled systems have been revolutionized. The whole order of things has been changed. Mind has been progressing. Some of the wisest maxims of ancient sages are now seen to be absurd, and the profound wisdom of other days is yielding the palm to the superior intelligence of the present.

But while these things are true as to human knowledge, let us ever bear in mind that there can be no changes in that book which God wrote for the light and the life of the world. The great truths that were originally written in the Word of God are un-

alterably the same. No lapse of time can make them obsolete, no hypothesis nor actual discoveries of human science and philosophy can change their true meaning or design. They are fixed, definite, unalterable, eternal. "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven."

These words of the Psalmist do not mean to assert that no improvements can be made in the knowledge and understanding of Scripture truth; they do not mean to assert that all the facts and dogmas of the Bible are so clearly understood that there is no room for honest argument and controversy among able and conscientious scholars; nor do they mean to deny that there are some things in the Bible which the highest human minds are unable to grasp and to comprehend.

This is readily granted, and stands as one of the grandest arguments to prove the divine origin of the Bible. There are truths, and *ex necessitate* there must be truths, in a revelation from an omniscient God, that are beyond the utmost scope and reach of finite human reason. There are some things written by Paul which Peter, another apostle, declared to be hard to understand. There are some statements which, at first sight, seem to be positive contradictions of others. There are many things, clearly revealed to ransomed sinners of the human race, which the angels desire to look into. And to the ransomed sons of Adam it will ever be a subject of adoring wonder, that the Lord Jesus "took not on him the nature of angels, but took on him the seed of Abraham." It may be that there are many such mysteries that will baffle our ransomed powers, even when they are no longer clogged with sense and sin, but shall "see as we are seen, and know as we are known."

But for all this, the Psalmist has taught us to say, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." The canon of inspiration is closed forever. The Bible, as originally written, was never to be altered or amended. It was perfect, complete, finished and forever settled, as far as God designed it for the use of man. Transcribers and publishers may have marred its perfection, in the manuscripts and revisions that have brought it down to us through the ages; but when it came from the hand of God, it was as per-

fect as Adam was when God made him from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living soul.

That this must be so, we argue, (*a*), from the fact that the same God inspired the whole of it, from Genesis to Revelation. It is true that in the Bible we have certain peculiarities of style that belong to the different authors of the various books. Moses does not write like Daniel, nor does Isaiah write like David. Matthew does not write in the same style as Luke, nor does Paul write in the same style as Peter, James or John. The subjects on which they wrote were not always the same, and their own personal peculiarities are apparent in all their writings. Carlyle and Macaulay are not more marked and conspicuous in their difference of style than are some of the inspired men who were called of God to write out these lively oracles that have come down to us from the olden times.

The fact is, this wonderful book is a most unique embodiment of what is known as "unity in diversity." There is all manner of variety about it. It is in some parts doctrinal, in others practical; in some parts historical, in others prophetic; in some parts didactic, in others pathetic; in some parts it is written in the simple and purest prose, and in others in the most elevated and oriental poetry.

But while all this is true, so that, as a mere book, it might seem like a combination of Cæsar and Horace, or Thucydides and Homer, in the Bible, in all its pages, "holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;" they were each and all inspired by "that self-same Spirit who divideth to every man severally as he will." "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," and hence, every word, as it was originally written, was an expression of the mind of God, and was used by him to express just such thoughts as he intended to convey. Every writer was, at the time, completely under the control of God, just as much so as he could have been had God taken hold of his hand, and guided him in the writing of every sentence, and in the choice of every word in the book.

This is the true idea of plenary verbal inspiration, that the

same Being indited every sentence and enunciated every sentiment that is there recorded. It was the same divine mind that was writing through the human hand of each of these inspired writers, from Moses, the man of God, to John, the exile on the Isle of Patmos. It was the same knowledge, the same perfect understanding, the same divine wisdom, from which emanated through these amanuenses every word that gilds and glorifies the sacred pages of this paragon of all the books that ever have been written.

But if this be so, and the Bible is really the production of the same Holy Being, then the book must be as complete and perfect as its divine author. He may seem to say one thing in one place, and a different thing in another, but such cannot be the case. There is, there must be, some rational way in which these apparent contradictions can be reconciled. "The axe did swim," whether we ever saw an axe swim or not. The water was turned to wine, whether we ever saw such a mode of making wine or not. The people did go over dry-shod, whether we ever saw such a wonderful work or not. We are "justified by faith," and we are "justified by works," and there is a method by which all these statements of God himself can commend themselves to human reason, and there will be no mistakes to be charged to Moses, or to any other man who wrote what God himself had told him to write. It was God, the same God, who wrote it all, and it must be true.

(*b.*) This will be more apparent when we think of God's attributes, those characteristics which set him forth as a perfect being.

Human authors have sometimes changed their views and thus been constrained to contradict what they had written in all honesty at some former time. They have learned to reason or to modify their conceptions of truth by subsequent investigations. There is, perhaps, scarcely an author of prominence who has not seen cause to retract or to modify opinions that he has been in the habit of asserting as if proved beyond all contradiction. There is many an author, too, that is so carried away by the impulse of the moment or the enthusiasm awakened by his subject, that he uses unguarded expressions or advances ideas that he would in cooler moments have to modify or to withdraw and repudiate.

But of course no such things as these can be thought of touch-

ing those scriptures which God has written. God is never moved by a mere impulse nor actuated by what we know as sudden and excessive emotion. We cannot conceive of him as forgetting what he once said or as adding one iota to his present and perpetual knowledge. He is perfect, and therefore must be absolutely beyond all changes of mind. There is a symmetry, a completeness, a perfection in the mind of God which is actually inconceivable to the wisest of all mere men.

Now, if God has chosen to give us a revelation of himself, of his character, and of his will, and of his person, and of his works, must we not conclude *a priori* that such a revelation would be, must be, complete and perfect? It is not like creation; for while that was "very good" as it came from the great architect, God knew that it was liable to be cursed on account of Adam's sin. He knew that it would become a scene of carnage, and be scarred all over with the graves that sin would dig upon its surface through successive ages. He knew that it would have to be washed with a deluge and be purified with fire on account of the blighting, withering, blasting curse that sin would spread all over its surface.

But not so with "the word of God." That was an expression of God's will, a reflection of God's character, and was intended to be an accurate statement of all those great principles that underlie his moral and spiritual kingdom. It must of course then partake of the general character of God himself. It could not be imperfect, unfinished, liable to improvement or detraction. It must be a perfect revelation, or no revelation at all. If it claims to be written or dictated by the mind of God it must show the attributes of that infinite and perfect mind that dictated it. It certainly is more impossible for God to write what is false or fallible than it would be for the wisest and the most accurate writer that ever lived on earth. God cannot lie; God cannot change; God cannot make a mistake. And hence, when we are once sure of the fact that we have what God wrote, no matter how long ago, we can rest assured that we have that which "liveth and abideth forever."

(c.) We argue the unchangeableness of the Scriptures from the great object for which they were written. What, then, was the

grand purpose of revelation? The ultimate aim and object was to teach all nations and all ages the one great method of God's mercy to man. We must remember that there never was, and we are forced to believe that there never will be, but one scheme of redemption. It has been revealed, under different forms and phases, to suit the peculiar tastes and comprehension of different generations of men.

But the same gospel was preached to Adam that is preached at the present day. The same great plan of redemption was laid before the minds of patriarchs, prophets, evangelists and apostles. It was not a new revelation to each succeeding age, but the gradual unfolding of the same spiritual plan of reconciliation with God, adapted to the different degrees of light and knowledge. God was just gradually unfolding his scheme of mercy to the human race; but the one great, radical, fundamental truth is taught in all: "This is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

This must be apparent to any one who will reflect for a moment on the true state of the case. We are all descended from the same parentage, are partakers of a common nature and heirs of a common degeneracy. Descended from Adam by ordinary generation, we all "sinned in him, and fell with him in his first transgression." Since, then, we are partakers in "a common heritage of woe," have the same hearts of wickedness, and are alike candidates for immortality, it was right and proper, yes, necessary, that God should give the same revelation to all. Hence, the same Bible is suited to the salvation of Asia, of Africa, of Europe and of America.

In making a plan of salvation, God was making it not merely for one nation, but for a whole world. It was to be adapted to all the human race, because they were in a like condemnation. They are all suffering from the same deadly malady, and for that malady there is but one remedy, suited to all, and which must be applied to all who are to be finally saved.

Thus have we tried briefly to show that the word of the Lord

is settled forever. It can never be altered or amended. It can never be changed or modified. It partakes of the grand and unique character of him who wrote it. It has the stamp of his own unsullied perfection about it. He has concentrated in it his own infinite wisdom, and he intends to make known in it all that is needful to make men happy on earth and happy in heaven. There is no improvement that can possibly be made to it. God has said all that he thought was necessary to be said. He has written just what his infinite wisdom dictated, and he does not intend to improve that revelation to suit the imagined improvement of the human intellect. Men may warp and twist its doctrines to suit their own conceptions, and may try to adapt it to their own preconceived theories. God will not directly interfere with them while doing so, but it would be well for all such to meditate on these closing words of the Bible: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the books of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life and out of the holy city and from the things which are written in this book."

PRACTICAL INFERENCES.

The mere discussion of what may be regarded an abstract question like this is useless unless we can deduce from it what will be of practical importance. But, properly looked at, the truths here taught are the very foundation of the christian religion. The Bible is our "only infallible rule of faith and practice," and if that be liable to any change, there is no stability in the kingdom of Christ; there is no fixedness, no definiteness, about christian principles, and no right and wrong about christian practice. But if the word of the Lord is settled forever, then

(a.) All the great doctrines of the Bible are fixed and eternal. We do not mean that all the points which are involved in what is known as speculative theology are necessarily fixed and eternal. These may vary, and have varied, with different degrees of intelligence. But wherever we find a doctrine that is clearly taught in the "word of God," there is "the end of all controversy." Explain

it, modify it, speculate upon it as we please, still it is fixed and unalterable. It may not meet with universal acceptance, but may be rejected by large denominations of christians. It may be differently understood and expounded. It may be beyond the reach of human reason, so that we can scarcely apprehend, much less comprehend it. Still, if it is clearly and unmistakably a doctrine of revelation, we are bound to accept it and to act upon it. In all such cases we are obliged to kneel, with uncovered heads, and say: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Of such doctrines we reckon "the Trinity." This is perfectly incomprehensible by the human mind, and yet it is taught in the Bible. And so we might speak of the "divine-human nature" of our Saviour. And then we find here "the fall of man," "original sin," "total depravity," "predestination and election," "regeneration," "justification by faith," "sanctification," "the perseverance of the saints," "the resurrection of the dead," "the final judgment," "the everlasting joys of the saved and the everlasting punishment of the lost."

These and such as these are distinctive doctrines of revelation. They are taught in God's Word, not formulated as dogmas in distinctive language, but taught there as truths not to be denied. Some of them may come in conflict with our "intuitive convictions," and may seem to contradict the reason of some and to be beyond the power and scope of thought. But if they are taught in God's own book, they are fixed, settled, eternal. We must accept them on faith, although we may not know how to explain them. We must receive them as what God has taught, as a blind man must believe what another man with good eyes tells him he can see. If there is a plain "thus saith the Lord" to substantiate them, then loyalty to God demands that we accept and heartily believe them.

(b.) The moral law as laid down in the Bible is forever the same. Its principles are fixed and eternal. The law of God was originally stamped upon human nature by God himself in creation. It is true that the law was somewhat obliterated by sin, and hence God had to rewrite it upon tables of stone. But even now we read, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against

all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." "For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law"—*i. e.*, the written law; "and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law." "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves. Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing, or else excusing one another."

Here, then, is a clear intimation of the fact that the law of God was written upon the original constitution of man, and of course it must last and be in full force as long as man's nature shall continue. We are told that Christ came "not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it," "to magnify it, and make it honorable." And Paul, anticipating some objections that might be made to the doctrine of "justification by faith," says: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; nay, we establish the law." So far from detracting from its claims and removing its obligations, we magnify these claims, and enforce its universal obligations. We recognize the fact, that every creature is under law to the Creator; that every human being is bound to obey all the requirements of God. And especially do we hold that every christian is obliged to look upon the decalogue as "the rule of his life." He is not only bound by law, but bound by love and gratitude to be loyal to him "who loved us, and gave himself for us."

The truth of the matter is, that the precepts and penalties of God's law are as fixed and eternal as God's own nature. The angels are under law, and they lose not their first estate in heaven by reason of their perfect obedience. Every christian will be under law in heaven also. In other words, the law of God never will be, never can be, abrogated, because it is but a reprint of God's own holy nature. It is not to be changed by any of the mutations of earth, because it is independent of all human legislation. God himself framed these laws for the good of his own creatures. Love to God and love to man is the sum and substance of that law; and so, while God lasts and man lasts, this law will be as fixed and eternal as God the law-maker. "Forever, O Lord, thy word is SETTLED in heaven."

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