

THE
PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW.

No. 26.—April, 1886.

I.

THE SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE A PROOF OF
ITS DIVINE ORIGIN.

SILENCE is sometimes big with testimony. Evidence does not all get syllabled in speech. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language." The praise does not get spoken audibly to the ear of men; but the swinging worlds are forever testifying to the "eternal power and divinity" of Him who fashioned them in the past, and holds them still in his resistless and measureless leash. All the starry hosts of the sky are "moving their rounds in silent rhythm and inaudible song."

Robert Hall has a sermon on the text: "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing,"* in which he says it is difficult to determine whether the glory of God appears more in what He displays or in what He conceals. "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself." Hiding, while yet revealing, He, in the very revelation, has given proof of the divinity that shaped it by the silences that thunder along the sacred text.

It would ill befit silence to claim for it everywhere the place of "Sir Oracle." Silence is not always a pearl of great price. It is not a pearl of any price when enforced by ignorance. It must be "cunning in dumbness"—not dumb from mere stupidity. Its worth lies in its withholding speech with a purpose, and for some high end. When it is of necessity, because of the utter paucity of its own

* Works of Robert Hall, London, 1845, vol. vi.

resources, then it is evidential of nothing but its own blankness. We all, like Gratiano,

“ Do know of these
That therefore only are reputed wise,
For saying nothing.”*

As connected with Scripture, silence, to be of any evidential value, must be shown to be of intelligent, far-reaching design, and not of compulsion, or chance, or forgetfulness. To be proof of the genuineness of the claim that the Bible is of divine origin, the silence of the Bible must be seen to be not only voluntary, but wisely voluntary, with a clear forecast of the advantages of it: a silence, too, where man, to a moral certainty, would have put speech.

This silence is not a lion among the Christian evidences. It does not come with the roar of signs and wonders. It is an unobtrusive thing. It needs perspective and the light of history for its fullest force of testimony. Time must prove its wisdom. Herein it is like prophecy. But this evidential voice without a sound—this testimony where “there is no speech nor language,” when once it is brought into court, makes a mighty case for the divinity of the Scriptures. We believe that the silence can no more be accounted for than the speech, save on the background of the supernatural. Let us see how far this conviction is borne out by an examination of some of the instances of the silence of the Bible.

I. The first instance inviting attention is the silence of Scripture as to Christ. He is the one central and supreme person in all the Bible story, the divine-human, God manifest in the flesh. He is written of, indeed, only in the Gospels, as to His birth, life, death and resurrection; but the prophetic face of the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi grows eager for His coming, and from Him the rapt and adoring face of the New Testament is never turned away. Revelation is meaningless without Him.

Mark now the significant reserve of the Gospel historians in their record of Christ, and consider whether aught else than divinity could have hedged them about, that they should leave just what they did to silence. Note their silence as to the birth of Jesus. Of this birth we know not the day, or month, or year. The weight of scholarly opinion as to the year is in favor of 4 or 5 B.C. As to the month, opinion is utterly at sea. Every month in the calendar has been held to be the month of His birth. Of the day we have no hint whatever. Lange says,† “All attempts at fixing an exact chronology of our Lord’s life from this indication of Luke (‘And

* Merchant of Venice, I. 1.

† Com. *in loco*. Luke iii. 23.

Jesus himself when he began to teach was about thirty years of age') have split upon this word 'about.'" Alford says the word gives a latitude of at least two or three years; and, summing up his discussion of dates, he adds, "It may be doubted whether in all these reckonings more accuracy has not been sought than the Gospel narrative warrants any expectation of our finding." * Dropped here and there incidentally, † are historical allusions, from which we may fix the date with absolute certainty within a half dozen years. Beyond this the record is silent. Four biographies of Christ, and not one tells us the date of His birth! And yet these men are writing of one whose birth they believe to be the event of history—the event that is to change the religion of the world!

But still more noteworthy is the silence concerning the infancy and early life of this central figure of the Gospel story. We are simply told that "the child grew" and "increased in wisdom and stature," and was "subject to His parents"; ‡ as if thus to anticipate and dissipate all doubt of the reality and naturalness of this infant and child nature. With the single exception of an incident occurring "when He was twelve years old," § this is absolutely all the four Gospel narratives tell us of Christ's life prior to His three years' public ministry. Not another detail of His boyhood, not a hint as to habit of conduct or speech, not an incident of any sort is put on record, by which we may look in upon this wonderful life along the track of its first thirty years. || Four biographies of Jesus Christ are thus given us by four different writers, whose claims for the hero of their story make Him the most unique and marvellous character among all the sons of men, and nine tenths of the life they portray is left almost a perfect blank! Such silence is surprising, and needs to be accounted for. Men do not write lives in this way. It is without a parallel, or the faintest approach to a parallel, in all biographical literature. It is at variance with the recognized, uniform, and established laws of human nature. It looks as if we were already face to face with something very like a miracle.

But we mark a further and strange silence concerning Christ. It is the absolute reserve of these Gospel historians touching His personal appearance. His height, carriage, mien, the color of His eyes and hair, the fashion of His countenance—these are details concerning which we have not a single suggestive word. The "Holy Child," the "Man of sorrows," the "*Ecce Homo*" that the genius of Art has

* Com. *in loco*. Luke iii. 1.

† Luke ii. 51-2.

|| See Farrar's *Life of Christ*, ch. v. p. 25.

‡ Matt. ii. 1; Luke ii. 1; iii. 1, 23.

§ Luke ii. 42.

pencilled on canvas and chiselled in marble, are purely the creations of the imagination. Before every physical feature of Christ the silence of the Gospel hangs an impenetrable veil. Men guess how He looked. They do not know. But they long to know. It is the instinct of love, as universal as the race, to give bodily form to a beloved memory—to dwell upon details of outward appearance. But when loving and worshipping hearts look into the New Testament for some trace or hint by which they may picture to themselves the personal appearance of Christ, the divine oracles are dumb. They answer not a word. All biographers seek to gratify this universal craving when they write lives. Why did not the Gospel biographers? In the presence of this silence we are again face to face with a break in the continuity of natural law. What if in this unsyllabled speech we should find one of the deepest voices of God!

Here, then, is this conspicuous, central, altogether unique and concededly supreme person, the Christ of the Scriptures, whose life is exhibited to us in fourfold narrative, with such significant, exceptional, and often absolute reserve touching the date of His birth, the particulars of His early life, and His personal appearance, that the strange, wide silence challenges attention, and demands to be accounted for.

On the supposition that the narratives are authentic and genuine, the silence cannot be accounted for *on the ground of ignorance*. Beyond a doubt these Gospel historians could have known, and beyond a doubt they did know, the exact date of Christ's birth. In all probability it was registered in the very place where the genealogies were found that have been transmitted to us by Matthew and Luke. Certainly it could have been gotten from Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose brooding spirit must have kept an exact and indelible record of the day when that "holy thing" was born of her that the angel named "the Son of God." Equally beyond a doubt they must have known many incidents touching the childhood, youth and opening manhood of the subject of their sketches. They had exceptional facilities for information. They were not separated far from Christ in space or time. Two of them, for three years of His life, were His intimate companions. And one of them was by eminence "the disciple whom Jesus loved." To his tender care was committed the mother of Jesus when Jesus died. And she, who kept all these early things and pondered them in her heart, must have been full of precious memories of those days and years at Nazareth, where the child Jesus grew and played and toiled; and, like every other mother, she must have talked of the incidents of the old family life, brooding over some scenes in the dear joy of maternal

reminiscence, and making John familiar with the life-like details. Yet it is John who passes over all this in absolute silence, and of the first thirty years of Christ's life tells us not a word.

But if ignorance cannot be urged as the cause of the silence, *no more can indifference*. These writers copied out of their hearts. They wrote as they felt. Their narratives breathe a spirit of ardent and reverent devotion. It is manifestly no perfunctory task to which they are committed in telling the story of this life. They are Christ's avowed and loyal disciples. They joyfully own Him as Master and Lord, and would willingly die for Him. One of them has been admitted to the most sacred intimacies of personal friendship with Jesus. All their hearts are aglow with the fervor of a warm and wakeful regard. Surely these are not the men to be indifferent to those things touching Christ of which, nevertheless, they have made no mention. We may be certain they were not indifferent. It is impossible to believe that they would not fix in their minds with tender interest the date of His birth; that they would not often go over with loving and delighted repetition some of the scenes of His life, never tiring of the personal and hallowed reminiscences; that they would not recall again and again the form of their Lord, the expression He wore, every lineament of that beloved face, and the very tones of the voice with which He had rebuked and blessed them. How could John, leaning upon Christ's bosom, ever forget the look of Christ at the Last Supper? How could Matthew ever lose that tender tone of authority which fell upon his ear and heart as he sat "at the receipt of customs," and which forever after he was so delighted to obey? Unquestionably their hearts were full of all this as they wrote; and to have told it along with the rest that is told, to have dwelt upon memorials of His infancy and youth, to have made faithful record of the very month and day He was born, to have lingered with a dear regard on some appearance of His when an infinite love looked out of His eyes—this surely would have been the way by which men, who loved as they loved, would have transmitted the beloved memory. That their four narratives are a perfect blank as to these matters is indeed a marvellous thing, but it is palpably absurd to attribute the silence to indifference. It is clear that neither ignorance nor indifference will account for the silence, supposing the narratives genuine.

But on the supposition that they are spurious, what is to be said? This must be said, in all fairness: that the silence involves an intervention upon natural law in the mental world so unnatural as to be supernatural. It implies a change so violent and absolute in intellectual process as to be a miracle more difficult of acceptance than

the miracle of inspiration ; because equally out of the order of nature, while utterly out of harmony with the purpose and spirit of the four Gospels, with which the doctrine of inspiration is in perfect accord.

Let us get back there in the first or second century, and see if this statement does not find its ample warrant in the facts.

The supposition is that somewhere along the track of the second century men sit down to forge a revelation. There is attempted—whether by four men or one man it matters not, and if by four, whether in collusion or otherwise it matters not—there is attempted a spurious life of a being who is to be represented as a divine incarnation, God manifest in the flesh, born of a woman yet without human father, growing up from infancy to manhood, living thirty-three years amongst men, claiming divine wisdom, accepting divine honors, doing divine works, declaring himself to be the centre of history, the light of the world, who is to draw all men unto Him, and whom these men that are writing of Him profess to believe in and adore and love with a passionate devotion ; yet they do not date His birth, they give no details or characteristics of His infancy, break the silence of His boyhood but once, leave thirty years of the life they are picturing *with nothing to picture*, and do not set Him before us by a single physical aspect that may help us to see His form or mien or fashion of countenance !

The conclusion is irresistible. These men did not forge these silences. They were born neither of hallucination nor of imposture. Their solemn reserve on so many points in connection with the life they were recording is the unchallengeable answer to the charge that the authors of these writings were unbalanced enthusiasts, borne away by personal attachments and unfounded beliefs. Had they been that, these very fields where silence now reigns would have been the most fruitful and vocal with their dreams and fantasies.

Had they been deliberate impostors, these blanks would have made the forgers feel they were leaving behind them in the record, confessions of ignorance, lapses, the perpetual proofs of their own fraud, to expose and confute them ; and they would have crowded the silences with speech. It was natural. It was inevitable. Read the “Gospels of the Infancy,” stamped undeniably as forgeries, and written to satisfy the cravings of curiosity. The pages are filled with marvels concerning this strange child. His swaddling-cloth does not burn in the fire, and the wise men kiss it. His parents flee with Him into Egypt, and the idols fall down at His coming, saying, “The unknown God is come hither.” Lepers are cleansed by the water in which the Babe has been washed. While with boys at play, Jesus

makes clay figures of animals and birds, and causes them to walk and fly. He turns boys into kids, and the kids back again into boys. He is sent to school, and teaches His teacher. Another teacher attempts to whip Him, and his hand is withered.*

We need not *conjecture* how forgeries would be written. Here they are. But to forge such a life as that of Jesus of Nazareth purports to be, and put absolutely nothing in nine tenths of it! Impossible! Such a forgery upsets all calculation based on uniformity of law, and is so at war with the nature of things as to be without conceivable cause or motive, save as the forgers are prescient with divine forecast, and so made capable of seeing the end from the beginning, as God Himself.

II. But the silence of Scripture is perhaps as remarkable concerning Mary, the mother of Jesus, as concerning Jesus. She stood in such relation to the central figure of the Gospel story that she must have been to these sacred biographers the object of tender and reverent regard. On every natural ground we should have heard of her variously and frequently in the progress of the narrative. And whenever she appeared out of the silence, on every rational and natural ground we should have expected for her loving recognition. We should have looked in every reference to her for something of the warmth and reverence befitting the woman who could sing "The Magnificat," and bear the Christ. Yet not a word is given us of her birth, not a word of her deep spirituality, or characterizing her spirituality in any way, not a word of her personal appearance, not a word of any intercession on her part with her son in behalf of any one in need (not a word but once, † and then the intercession was impliedly rebuked), not a word indicating that she had any special privilege or prerogative by reason of being the mother according to the flesh of this marvellous Christ, and not a word as to her death. Elizabeth, her cousin, is spoken of as "righteous, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless"; ‡ but no such word ever escapes one of these Gospel writers concerning Mary. How often, and with what peculiar tenderness, Christ must have talked with the mother who bore Him, and who pondered all the things she heard of Him, "keeping them in her heart." But thrice only do these strange narratives report any word of His to His mother: once, in the temple, when He was twelve years of age; § again, in Cana at a wedding; || and again, at the cross. ¶ And two of these are seeming rebukes. Twice only do these strange narra-

* I. Gospel of Infancy, chaps. 3, 4, 17, 20.

† Luke i. 6.

§ Luke ii. 49.

|| John ii. 4.

† John ii. 3, 4.

¶ John xix. 26.

tives tell us what fell from Christ's lips, suggested by some allusion to His mother. Once a woman in the crowd cried out in her enthusiasm, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee!" "Yea, rather," said Christ, "blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it."* Once, again, some one said, "Thy mother and thy brethren are without, desiring to speak with thee." But he answered, "Who is my mother?" And stretching His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold my mother and my brethren. Whosoever shall do the will of my father which is in heaven, the same is my mother."† Beyond these few words (and what words!) these narratives let fall nothing from Christ's lips to His mother, or about His mother. She is mentioned just once after Christ's resurrection and ascension, in the most casual way, catalogued with a few disciples as in an upper room at prayer before Pentecost,‡ and from that time on the silence concerning her is unbroken.

Here we are faced again with a marvellous thing. Why this significant and strange reserve of speech with reference to one who bore the Lord, and watched over His infancy, and reared Him in that home of Nazareth, and saw Him die?—a reserve which, when broken, is the more remarkable because of the thing revealed, making the silence a greater marvel still! Why do these narratives tell us *these* things, and tell us no more? These things, that seem to put a distance, almost a coldness, between Christ and Mary; while they tell us nothing of that world of tenderness, each for each, which often must have had a voice. This is not the way, surely we may say with a positiveness based upon the known laws of mind and the known methods of men—this is not the way the history would have gotten itself written if the historians had been left to themselves.

But the silence must be accounted for. It is there in the record. Neither the theory of ignorance, nor the theory of indifference, nor the theory of unbalanced enthusiasm, nor the theory of imposture can explain it as it relates either to the person of Mary or to the person of Christ. By every rational test they all break down when summoned to tell us why the sacred oracles are dumb on matters where men naturally would have been instant and full with detailed and loving speech. There is no escape from the conclusion. We must say, with Wordsworth, "This silence of Scripture is inspired." Nay, we may widen the application of the very words of Holy Writ, and reverently say, Holy men of old spake not only, *but were silent*, "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Along their pages of sacred history and biography they were here and there bidden "Be still,"

* Luke xi. 27, 28.

† Matt. xii. 46-50.

‡ Acts i. 14.

that men might know it was God's own hand that really held the pen. What Gaussen says of the whole historical field of inspiration is true of these silences touching Christ and Mary: "It was indispensable that the invisible and powerful hand of the Holy Spirit be placed upon that of the sacred writer, and that He guide it from the first even to the last. More than men was required, more than learned men, more than holy men, more than minds enlightened and superintended, more than angels and archangels—God must do it."* Clearly this silence tells us, and was meant to tell us when it was put alongside the wondrous speech, that these Scriptures are wholly out of the plane of human invention, and that they are written as men left to their own unguided and uncontrolled preferences would never have written them.

But what if we should find in this strange silence a *deeper* design—a design that needed the lapse of centuries for its full disclosure, and that now, in the long perspective of the Christian era in which the Scriptures have had their challenge and test, appears in bold relief and outline! How overwhelming would be the testimony that just where "there is no speech, no language," we have the image and superscription of God.

Well, what do the centuries show to be the tendencies of human nature in religion? Examine the religions of the world. They are chiefly made up of externals, of ritualism, of sacred days and times and forms and outward rites, of images and idolatries. Human nature is everywhere and mightily prone to that in worship which appeals to the eye. But the Gospel is God's summons to a worship "in spirit and in truth." Let us see, now, if in the light of this contrast we have not a deep design of God in the Scripture silences touching Christ and Mary.

Man makes "days" and multiplies them. The calendar of the Romish Church is loaded with them—well-nigh a hundred "festivals" alone being catalogued in her Missal in honor of Christ and Mary and apostles and incidents of Church and Scripture. Now mark the far design of God in the record of Christ's nativity. Men search and search, and get no date. Surely it is a purposed obscurity. The silence is a mute protest against the tendency to set apart days, birthdays and death-days, festivals and saints' days, and to invest them with peculiar sanctities. Even the birthday of this Son of the Highest is nothing, *as a day*; not worth the mention. Dates! Times! Seasons! What are these, that God's penmen should be

* Theopneusty, p. 182.

busy with their exact keeping, and so help men to a religion of externals. Let the oracles be dumb. Christianity is a spirit.

But note, again, another tendency. See what pictures, images, superstitions, legends, and forged gospels have been born of the idea of honoring the Infancy of Christ. The Babe of Bethlehem and Nazareth has been the favorite image and object of devotion. Now mark the far-reaching design of God in the studied reserve of the Gospel concerning this infant Child. The significant silence sends us on to the God-*man*, and bids us worship there. It is a perpetual rebuke of the spirit that would spend itself in rapt adoration of the Infancy.

See, again, how men, in answer to the craving for the visible in worship, multiply pictures and images of Christ. He was human and visible. He had a body. What was His form? How did He look? Men long to know. It is the instinct of all hearts. But the Scriptures give us no sign. Now suppose the disciple whom Jesus loved had broken the silence, and had set before us in minute and tender fidelity a vivid word-picture of Christ, telling us just how He looked. What sanction it would have seemed to give to the carved images and pencilled features, and how these would have been multiplied! And as we gazed upon them, and the feeling grew in our hearts, "This is, indeed, the Christ—the very image of Him on whose bosom John leaned at supper, and at whose feet the penitent and believing bowed and worshipped," how inevitable and almost universal would have been the idolatry! But no! In the deep design of God these men that wrote were kept from telling what we must believe it would have been a joy to them to tell, and not even the memory of a single feature or lineament of that loved and blessed face is allowed to go to record, that God might say in this silence, as He of old said in the thunder, *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in earth or heaven—not even a likeness of My beloved Son.*

But note still further the tendency of men to divest the mighty God of the gentler attributes of tenderness and sympathy. Under the Gospel see this manifest in the disposition, where mercy is to be invoked, to crowd out Jesus by Jesus' mother, until she is invested with divine honors, as "Our Lady of Help" and "The Queen of Heaven." Mark now the deep design of God in the silence of Scripture as to Mary—a design that nothing but the lapse of Christian centuries could have brought to view. What matchless foresight in laying the divine finger on the lip, so that nowhere should the sacred oracles be heard in the utterance of even a natural and usual regard for the mother of Jesus. Not a single word of affectionate mention

appears in all the record as coming either from Jesus or from these interested biographers telling the story of His life. How easily such a word might have escaped them—a word that would seem to be an apology, at least by inference or implication, for the wicked exaltation of Mary. But perfect silence reigns in the narrative, and the far-reaching design of it is seen now, in the perspective of centuries, as that silence speaks in its perpetual rebuke of Mariolatry.

Thus the strange, mysterious silence of the Gospel historians concerning Christ and Mary *is accounted for*. It ceases to be strange and is no longer mysterious, but pregnant with forecast and wise design. What seems irrational and without a possibility of intelligent vindication on the mere level of the natural, explainable by no law of nature or habit of mind, by no theory of fraud or of unbalanced enthusiasm, on no ground of ignorance or of indifference, is simply evidential of God. This silence of Scripture forces us to the plane of the supernatural, where it is not only rational, but eloquent of far-reaching purpose, making thus a mighty case of Christian evidence—a voiceless witness to the divine handiwork of the wondrous Book.

III. The third instance of Bible silence we cite, weighty with proof of the divine origin of the Scriptures, is the silence *as to scientific fact*—a silence *within an utterance*.

We turn to the first and time-worn chapter of Genesis, with which the Scriptures open. It is ostensibly a record of the beginning of things. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." And then follows that marvellously condensed Mosaic cosmogony which has been so long a battle-ground for scientists and exegetes. Details on either side, we have here and now no room for. Critical exegesis would not serve our present purpose. Nor would test of scientific theory. We are not going into the conflict-reconciliation business. It has been already sadly overdone. The voice of silence is what we are after. Has the silence of the Mosaic cosmogony a voice for God? Let us see.

Professor Dana, easily among the first authorities in geological science, has recently summed up some scientific certainties. He says,* "It is certain, in view of the facts of nature-science, . . . that the creation of the earth could not have preceded that of the sun and stars; that the creation of the sun, moon, and stars could not have taken place after the creation of plants and immediately before that of animals; that the creation of light could not, from its very nature, have taken place after that of the waters and a chaotic earth; . . . that the creation of the earth and its inhabitants in any six days

* Bibliotheca Sacra, April, '85, p. 203.

of twenty-four hours is inconsistent with every fact of astronomical and geological science." Professor Dana also says,* "The phenomena of light have been proved to be a result of molecular action, and to be dependent upon fundamental qualities of matter *as now constituted*." He says, also, of "the succession in the living tribes" given in the first chapter of Genesis, viz., plants, invertebrates, the lower vertebrates, mammals, and man, the head of mammals—that *this course of progress accords with "the readings of science."* And, further, quoting approvingly Professor Guyot,† "that the use of the Hebrew *bārā*, translated *created* on three occasions, and three only, in the chapter—the first at the creation of matter, the second at the creation of animal life, and the third at the creation of man—teaches that these events were distinct creations, *i. e.*, demanded divine intervention; and that evolution from matter into life, from animal life into the spiritual life of man, is impossible." With reference to the introduction of life, as thus declared by Scripture, Professor Dana, with characteristic modesty and reverence, says, "Science has no explanation: for no experiments have resulted in making from dead matter a living species. We can only say, 'God created.'"

Now take these scientific certainties and successions, these modern discoveries of age-long facts, and these very limitations before which science bows in confessed impotence and ignorance, and they fit into the Bible record with a beautiful ease and consistency. The Scripture does not anticipate, so as to reveal, these discoveries by its verbal expression, but it runs around the outer margin of them, and holds them in its capacious folds *in silence*; so that when they come to be revealed in creation, by spectrum and telescope, and the testimony of the rocks, they are found to be also in the Mosaic record of creation. Professor Dana says, *e. g.*, of the system in the divine record as corresponding to the system in nature, that "it is not a figment of the student's fancy. It is a fact: a fact that displays purpose in the author of the document, and knowledge beyond that of ancient or any time, and philosophy more than human."‡ He says, also, that "Geology has ascertained many details with regard to the earth's life and the upward gradations in the various tribes. *But the grand fact of progress and the general order in the succession were first announced in the cosmogony of the Bible.*" Yes, first announced. And this is indeed a surprising thing. But first announced, *and yet concealed*. This is the point we here press. The knowledge was there, in the record, but *was not known*. The silence

* Bibliotheca Sacra, April, '85, p. 208.

† Ibid., p. 218.

‡ Ibid., p. 208.

held it within the enclosure of the letter until science gave it a voice, and now it thunders along that first chapter of Genesis in its testimony for God. For who but God gave Moses that arrangement of order that he did not know, that rare precision yet roominess of terms, that silence in expression which led him through the deep intricacies of creative process without a trip, and enabled him into the very hidings of his speech to put the latest discoveries of modern science.

But it is not only in this opening word of Scripture that we find expression "coasting the outer margin of all possible discovery," yet keeping its treasures hid until the fulness of time should come for silence to find a voice. Listen to this word of Job: "He hangeth the earth upon nothing." That was not the received opinion when the fact went down on record. It was a bold, prophetic word. It expressed, but did not disclose, the swing of the earth through the boundless ether. It seemed the license of fancy—a wild extravagance of speech. But Scripture was content to keep its secret until Copernicus found, in the balancing spheres, how well the balances of silence and speech had been kept by the inspired penman.

Listen, again, to this word of Ecclesiastes: "The wind goeth toward the south and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. Unto the place from whence the rivers come thither they return again." Here is the law of circularity which is now known to govern winds and waters, hid away in this ancient speech, a silence within an utterance, and given a voice only when modern science harnessed the wind and compelled it to tell its track, "whence it cometh and whither it goeth"; and showed that no stream ever gave its cup of cold water to the meadows and went laughing to the sea that did not get its liquid offering back again, by sea and air and cloud, in the gentle rain and the drops of dew.

Who but God could have kept such silence while giving forth such speech! Who but God could have made these statements match the science that was not yet born! They are like prophecy, which matches unborn events—prophecy, which, Irenæus says, "in every case is an enigma before its accomplishment." There they are, the words anticipative of history and of science, up and down the Biblical record, interlarded thick with other Scripture, written centuries ago, by the confession of all. And as the centuries roll on, events come to pass that fit into the varied prophetic words with a perfect adaptation. And as science pierces the arcana of Nature, and unfolds her

secrets, it finds that room had been made for the secrets ages before, in the very words of Holy Writ—words that are consistent with every established conclusion of modern scientific research, and that often prove its best popular expression ; words that declare an order of succession in events and a system of operation in nature corresponding with an admirable and flawless precision to the succession and system as revealed in the actual record of rocks and stars and burning sun, and which succession and system there were millions of chances to one the Mosaic writer would not have hit, even had he been in possession of the facts. And that men should have written such things, and not told the secrets of which they wrote—that men should have been held in this silence while yet they were endowed with this speech, must be counted a mighty marvel, making the silence invincibly evidential of the divine origin of the Bible, and an unanswerable challenge flung at the feet of unbelief.

IV. A fourth instance wherein the silence has a voice of evidence is *the deep and significant reserve of Scripture concerning the future and unseen world.*

There is abundant speech on this point. The fact of a future life is made unmistakable. The doctrine of immortality stands out on the pages of this Book clear and indisputable. By prophecy and promise, by word of apostle and word of Christ, by statement and vision, and by the resurrection from the dead, it is put beyond the shadow of doubt, so far as this Scripture is concerned, that death does not end all. But beyond the speech that tells of the sublime fact of a future life, and that makes it impossible for us to mistake the inner and essential character of that future life, what silence reigns ! How profound and impenetrable the reserve of the Biblical writers ! They dwell upon no particulars. They indulge in no details. They relate no individual experiences. The mode of existence, the relation of body to spirit in the resurrection, the form of the body, through what channels knowledge is to be obtained, by what subtle processes thought will be transmitted, how spirit will commune with spirit, what will occupy the soul in the ceaseless round of timeless ages, the extent and method of heavenly recognition, the means of growth, the limitations and hindrances, the facilities and possibilities of motion, whether one world or all worlds will be open to visitation—these, and countless other things, into which men naturally and eagerly desire to look, have not one ray of light thrown upon them by the sun that Christianity has hung up in the sky. The gates of the eternal world are flung wide open, and the reality, the perpetuity, the contrasted, changeless character-conditions of that eternal world are spoken of with a vividness and emphasis and unal-

terableness quite beyond the possibility of intelligent challenge. But beyond this, not a word.

Search through the graphic and varied imagery of John in his Revelation, that was expressly intended to represent the tremendous realities of the last times and the powers of the world to come, and note the utter absence of such particulars as I have named. The multiplied details he gives are chiefly and clearly figurative and symbolic. When he lets us see, through his rapt vision, the state and circumstance of the dead, it is simply the same changeless character-conditions we see that have been already pictured by Christ. On the one side, no night, no sorrow, no death, no curse—whosoever is made white in the blood of the Lamb. On the other, blackness of darkness—whosoever worketh abomination and maketh a lie.

Now consider the insatiable, universal curiosity of man about the future. Juvenal, in his sixth satire,* says,

“ The curse is universal ; high and low
Are mad alike the future hour to know.”

Hence the mechanisms of the old religions by which the future might be forecast. Christianity, however, has not only appointed no oracular priesthood, but its written oracles are dumb as to the future where men would have certainly broken the silence with plenteous speech.

Neither here are we shut up to conjecture. Turn to any of the revelations of the future, born of the imaginations of men, and see how they sport themselves in what Paley calls a “ wild particularity” with respect to the condition of the departed. “ The exuberant prodigiousness of the Hindu imagination is strikingly manifest. . . . Visions pass before us of beautiful groves full of fragrance and music, abounding in delicious fruits and birds of gorgeous plumage, crystal streams imbedded with pearls, palaces of gems, crowds of friends and lovers. In some of the heavens the residents have no bodily form. In others they are many miles in height, one being described whose crown was four miles high, and who wore on his person sixty wagon-loads of jewels.”†

Read the sixth book of Virgil’s *Æneid*, and mark the elaborateness with which he portrays the unseen world—the recognitions, meetings, employments, and the like.

Look into the Koran and traditions of Mohammed, and see with what minuteness and particularity is there pictured the life of the

* As translated by Gifford.

† Alger’s *Doctrine of Future Life*, p. 108.

other world, disclosing a thousand details before which the Scriptures put a wall of unbroken silence.

Listen to the revelations of that so-called modern seer, Swedenborg, and note how he crowds his pages with minute and multitudinous particulars, gratifying the instinctive craving of human nature for a knowledge of that which is hidden and future.

We know, therefore, how these Scriptures would have been written if men had deliberately forged their revelation of a future life, or pictured that future life under the unbalanced and wild enthusiasms of a distempered fancy. In either case, whether they had been the devices of an impostor or the visions of an enthusiast, they would have abounded in food for a prying and prevalent curiosity. But, instead, they usher us into the eternal presences, and then leave us with the simple yet sublime impression of their reality, enshrouding the divine mysteries of that unseen world with the profoundest silence. "In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also."* Thus He speaks who came from God and went to God—the one perfect oracle of the heavenly world that ever trod the earth. These, and words like these, are all. No details, no particulars, no minutiae of scenes and experiences and activities. The great, transcendent, tremendous facts of endless life and death, the essential elements that go to make up that life and that death, and then silence. "Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "He that hath not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." Surely if Christ were a fraud, imposing upon His disciples, He would never have left the curious world with this scant proof of His knowledge of the future. If He were an unbalanced enthusiast, borne away by hallucinations and dreams, He would have revelled, as other victims of distempered fancy have revelled, in scenes of the unseen world. If He were a manufactured Christ, deliberately gotten up by imposture, or fashioned in the heat of a glowing and fervid imagination, who can believe the impostors or enthusiasts would have allowed Him to say what He does, and to say no more? That He speaks in the repose of sublimest confidence, and yet is silent in the sublimity of conscious reserve, tells at once that both the speech and the silence are of God.

* John xiv. 2, 3.

But this voice of evidence grows weighty with proof as we listen to it elsewhere in Scripture. There are four distinct and conspicuous instances on record in the New Testament of persons who, after they left this world, came back again. Paul, of whose historic existence doubt is as impossible as of Alexander's or Napoleon's, and of whose intellectual poise and power his letters are the resistless proof, was caught up into the third heaven, even into Paradise.* He tells us that he "heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Beyond this we have nothing whatever of that wonderful look into Paradise. Moses and Elijah are represented as appearing on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus. Moses had been dead fifteen hundred years. It was about a thousand years since Elijah passed away. They are back on the earth again after their long stay in the unseen world. But not a word falls from their lips about that world. The simple Scriptural record is, "They spake of the decease which Christ was to accomplish at Jerusalem."† Again, when they were bearing out of the gate of the city of Nain for burial one that was dead, Jesus came nigh and touched the bier, and said, "Young man, arise"; and the Scriptural record is, "He that was dead sat up, and began to speak."‡ Yes, he "began to speak." This much is told us, to make it sure the dead is alive again; but nothing more. And the young man passes as completely out of view as if he had remained among the dead. What things he told of his experience after death, what revelations he made of the world of spirits, are wrapped in the profoundest silence.

So, too, with Lazarus. His is the more signal case.§ He was dead four days—dead and buried. Jesus bade them open the sepulchre. And then He bade the dead come forth. And when the dead Lazarus arose they loosed him from his grave-clothes. And we know he went back to Bethany, and renewed the old home life; for the subsequent record is,|| "Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany where Lazarus was." There they made Jesus a supper, and Martha served, and Mary gave Him that anointing which has filled the whole world with its fragrance. And it is distinctly said that Lazarus—the very Lazarus "whom Jesus raised from the dead"—was "one of them that sat at meat with Him." Here the witness is unmistakably back from the world of death. But, marvellous silence! he is back with sealed lips. He goes in and out of the old home, he sups with his beloved sisters and with his beloved Lord, but concerning that world of death his voice is not heard. "There is no speech, no language." Of that mystery of life after death,

* 2 Cor. xii. 2-4. † Luke ix. 31. ‡ Luke vii. 14. § John xi. 17-44. || John xii. 1.

into which he has entered and out of which he has come, he is not represented by these Gospel writers as saying one word.

Here, then, are four instances of silence with reference to the life beyond death, which, on any theory of fraud or fanaticism concerning the Gospel record, are wholly unaccountable. A forger would never have deliberately concocted that incident of being caught up into Paradise simply to say about it that he heard what he could not tell. Manufacturing such a vision, he would not manufacture silence as to what he saw. On the violent supposition that Paul was a bewildered rhapsodist, mistaking a dream for an actual look into heaven, it is simply incredible that his rhapsody should halt at the bare recital he gives us in his letter, and that he should come from a supposed visit to Paradise lock-lipped and tongue-tied!

As to the appearance of Moses and Elijah, and the resurrection of the widow of Nain's son, and of Lazarus—who would coin these and bring the dead out of the world of silence, only to leave them as silent as if they had remained dead? Think of the conditions: the eagerness of all hearts to hear from the unseen world, the claim of this spurious Gospel that it is a *revelation* from that world, the wish on the part of the forgers to make their claim good! Is it conceivable that men would, in such conditions, concoct these returns of dead men and not let the dead speak? Nay, may we not say with unhesitating emphasis, If men had gotten up the story, the risen Lazarus's tongue would have been loosed. If men had forged that resurrection, *they would not have forged that silence.*

On the supposition of genuineness, is it the one whit more conceivable that Lazarus would never once break the silence concerning his four days' experience in the unseen world; or, if he did speak, that the Gospel writer would never once make room in his history for this amazing testimony of one actually risen from the dead, unless—unless God locked the lips or controlled the pen?

“ Behold a man raised up by Christ !
The rest remaineth unrevealed.
He told it not ; or, *something sealed*
The lips of that Evangelist.” *

Would men, left to themselves, omit such a mighty thing and toss it to silence, as if it were of no moment in evidence of the truth! We dare submit the point and ask judgment whether, with any rational consideration of the facts and on any rational ground, this is possible of belief.

And now if, over and above this silence about the future and un-

* Tennyson's In Memoriam, XXXI.

seen world where men to a moral certainty would have put speech, we find *a deep design of God in the silence*, the case becomes overwhelming in its testimony that where nothing is said in these Scriptures, there, often, are the infallible signs that the Spirit of Inspiration has kept the oracles dumb.

Turning to look at the religions of men, we see how they abound in details of the other life. We find everywhere proof of a seemingly inevitable tendency to emphasize *place*—to dwell upon appointments, belongings, surroundings, as if locality were chief : nay, as if locality were all, and heaven and hell two worlds of externals, where circumstances and not character, that which surrounds a man and not that which fills him, make the distinctive difference.

But Christianity is nothing if not a spirit. The kingdom of God is nowhere to us, if not within us. We shall enter on no heaven that is not already begun in our hearts. We shall find no hell that does not have its antepast and prophecy in the experiences and possibilities wrapped up in this present-world consciousness. And in this thought we discover the far design of God in the silence as to details concerning the future and unseen world. Externalities will take men's minds off fundamentals. The mechanism and mode of the life beyond death will absorb thought and interest to the exclusion of state and posture of spirit. Let the great, changeless character-conditions therefore be lifted up, but no more. Let the oracles be dumb as to a thousand things that, after all, are only the gratification of curiosity—that pertain to externals and relations and adjustments. Where, is nothing : what, is everything. Form is nothing : life is everything. Place is nothing : character is everything. He that is filthy, let him be filthy still. He that is holy, let him be holy still. Occupations, surroundings, modes of recognition, kinds of appearance, what shall we eat, wherewithal shall we be clothed—as to these and particulars like them, there is no speech nor language, and the very silence echoes and emphasizes the speech that fell from the divine lips : “ The words that I speak unto you, *they are SPIRIT and they are LIFE.* ”

There are other instances of this balance of silence and speech in Scripture that would justify and reward a full discussion. The limits of this article will permit scarcely more than their mention.

What silence the Book observes concerning creation, crowding the account into a few verses ! What speech about the tabernacle and its furniture, covering whole pages ! Read the cosmogonies of confessedly human origin. How their authors enlarge and amplify and sport themselves in this realm of the imagination ; and how they blunder ! Why did the writer of the Scripture cosmogony hold him-

self to such amazing brevity, and yet about the tabernacle indulge in such elaborate and minute description as to curtain and candlestick and table and needlework, that the details seem almost petty and frivolous? A look into the New Testament, written centuries later, discovers the ample reason. He wrote enough of Creation to show the silence was not from ignorance; hiding away in the brief record "the latest readings of nature." He wrote so much of the tabernacle, because for all ages it was to be typical of the great work of redemption. For the same reason, seventeen hundred years, from Adam to the Deluge, are crowded into two chapters; while a fifth of the Book of Genesis is given to an account of Joseph. Seventeen centuries, and not a word of human greatness! A few flashes from out the silence to keep us from the mistake of supposing that men were mere infants in wisdom and power before the Flood (they "buildd cities," "handled the harp and organ," were "artificers in brass and iron"), a few names given to keep up the line of descent from Adam to Christ, a few notices of glaring wickedness and glowing piety, a sweeping condemnation of the general corruption—and the waters close over one third of the world's life. Is this God's way of writing history? It certainly is not man's.

What marvellous balance of silence and speech we have, also, in the Gospel record of facts, with utter silence as to personal impression or feeling on account of the facts! What abundant and tempting occasions for moral reflections that are left unimproved; what sublime thoughts that get no emphasis, as if they were the merest matters of course; what tragic scenes are depicted, without one trace of emotion; what cruel and bitter insults, what foul charges, what expressions of scorn and contempt are recorded by these Gospel historians as having been heaped upon their Master and Lord, without even a single adjective expressive of their sense of the infamy! As if these men that wrote had caught the very spirit of Him of whom they wrote, who, amidst the babel of hell that surged and roared about Him during those last hours, in council-chamber and palace and guard-room and street and place of crucifixion, and in response to gibe and flout and jeer and blow and spittle and mock homage and taunt of impotency, instead of bidding His lightnings blast the impious lips, "*answered not a word.*"

Another significant silence of Scripture, testifying to the divinity behind it, is the silence as to forms of prayer and ecclesiastical order and "confessions," or "creeds," in the record of the Apostolic Church. This silence and the divine reasons for it are unanswerably put by Archbishop Whately,* furnishing full warrant for the conclu-

* Peculiarities of the Christian Religion: Essay vi.

sion he reaches, viz.: "That a number of Jews, accustomed from their infancy to so strict a ritual, should, in introducing Christianity as the second part of the same dispensation, have abstained not only from accurately prescribing for the use of all Christian churches forever the mode of divine worship, but even from recording what was actually in use under their own directions, seems utterly incredible, unless we suppose them to have been *restrained from doing this by a special admonition of the Divine Spirit.*"

So the silence that balances speech in *prophecy*, making it impossible for an enemy to thwart the prophetic word, or a friend to anticipate and hasten it, yet embosoming its fulfilment with a wonderful precision, as is shown by event after event matching and answering to Scriptural prediction—this, too, has a voice of testimony for God.

Turn, therefore, which way we will in our search through this wonderful Word—whether to persons or incidents, to the track of science or the track of history, to the record of the past or the record of the future, this silence confronts us. On almost every page of Scripture its voice is lifted up. How did the silence get into the Book? It is there. And it would not be there if men had written this Book as they write other books. We submit the case. We take the appeal to men of intelligence, men of judicial poise, men who insist on a reason for things. What will they do with it? We challenge them to make anything less or else of it than the strange, unnatural, mysterious, inexplicable *riddle of Scripture*—unless it be made the silence of God. Then all is plain. Then the darkness becomes luminous. Then the Sphinx speaks. Then the purposeless blank is seen to be filled with a wise design. Let us put our ear to this voice of silence, and listen! We have by no means swept the whole wide field of testimony.* May the God whose glory it is to conceal a thing show us His glory in this marvellous concealment, which is, at the same time, a great disclosure; and thus prove to us by what it does not say, no less than by what it does say, that the Bible was written by the infallible pen of inspiration.

Meanwhile three points are clear :

1. It must be a peerless book, easily alone in the world, that can say more while dumb than all other oracles can say by utmost cunning of adroit and abundant and long meditated speech.

2. It is clearly worth any one's while to look thoughtfully into and through a book whose very unspoken message is thus weighty

* See another phase of this silence of Scripture happily and forcefully presented in an argument on "The Origination of the Lord's Day." "*Eight Studies of the Lord's Day*," ii. pp. 45, 46, 54, 55.

with wise design. It would seem that such a book shut is a man's condemnation, whatever his belief.

3. The book that can make its silence speak and testify to its marvellous fashioning, that shows a power of reserve as mighty as its power of expression, that where it has no speech, no language, and where no voice is heard, is yet vocal with the deepest harmonies, like the music of God's silent spheres—such a book is going to hold its place in the world. We need not fear for it. And to affect contempt for it is to play the fool.

HERRICK JOHNSON.

Chicago.