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I. ILLOGICAL METHODS IN BIBLICAL CRITICISM.¹

I SHALL scarcely be expected, on an occasion like this, to speak on any other theme than Old Testament Criticism. When, eleven years ago, I was inducted into a similar chair in another institution, the discussion of this subject, in its present peculiar aspects, had just begun in this country; to-day it is the question of questions in the theological world. The movement, at once a sign and a fruit of the times, has passed far beyond its incipient stages. Its literature is already large. Even single phases of the subject have come to occupy no inconsiderable place in current thought. It is to one of these phases of the general theme that I shall invite your attention at this time. It especially concerns the style of reasoning adopted by those who advocate the newer views of the Bible. Is this reasoning in harmony with the accepted rules of logic? Can the critics of this class vindicate their often asserted claim to be scientific? On the answer to this question really depends the value of the conclusions reached.

Mr. Gladstone, not long since, speaking of modern criticism of the Bible, while confessing that he was no expert, gave this excellent advice. He said: "We must be on our guard against drawing warmth of affection into the field as having the force of argument. We should rather endeavor to defend the Scriptures upon the same principles of evidence and reasonableness governing our mental processes in other matters. When the arguments of specialists point to negative conclusions, we should beware of haste. We should reserve our judgment, even if yielding provisional as-

¹ Inaugural Address, May 3, 1893.

IV. GOD'S METHOD IN DIVINE REVELATION.

THE object of this essay is simply, by bringing together familiar facts in their natural relations, to endeavor, as far as possible, to account for the particular manner in which God has chosen to reveal himself to the world in the great scheme of human redemption.

The question has, no doubt, often presented itself to Bible readers, Why did not God, when he first made known his purpose to redeem our fallen race, give us a complete Bible, made by his own hand, as he wrote the law on the tables of stone at Sinai? For, no one doubts that when he made promise of the Seed of the woman, at the gate of Eden, he knew perfectly all the details of the plan of redemption, as subsequently revealed. Would it not, on first view, seem probable that, simultaneously with the establishment of a system of religion in the world, a book should be published, setting forth its principles, containing its constitution and laws, and showing the authority on which its claims rested? When Mohammed set up his stupendous system of imposture, he wrote the Koran; and with this in one hand and the sword in the other, he went forth offering the grim alternative between the two. The Book of Mormon, claiming a miraculous origin, was published to the world as the authority upon which the more modern imposture of Mormonism was founded. Why did not God give the Bible to the world when he established the religion that it reveals? And why should inspired *men* have been employed as vehicles of divine revelation, when God could as easily have communicated his will directly, without their intervention?

While we would not presume to be able to answer these questions exhaustively, or to comprehend fully all the reasons involved, yet, the devout study of God's way of working—even though but partially comprehended, and very imperfectly understood—not only yields a rich reward for the labor bestowed, but cannot fail to vindicate his transcendent wisdom and goodness, as manifested in the methods that he chooses.

In answer to the question, Why did not God give to the world a complete Bible when he made the first announcement of a Deliverer, it might be said, no doubt truly, that such a book, at the time, and under the circumstances, would have been, in a large measure, at least, unintelligible. Man needed a preliminary education. He required ages of training in the school of experience to show him his utter helplessness and indispensable need of an Almighty Saviour; and thus prepare him to understand and appreciate a *verbal* declaration of God's way of saving sinners. And it required a still more protracted course of instruction, through the use of types and symbols in various forms—in the rudimental principles of vicarious atonement for sin, before he was prepared to receive, understandingly or profitably, a verbal statement of the doctrine of salvation through the substitutional sacrifice and imputed righteousness of Christ. But we pass over this point, and others that naturally present themselves, without further remark, that we may have larger space to devote to the line of thought marked out for this short paper.

It needs no argument to prove that a revelation from God, in order to insure its acceptance as such, and, therefore, to subserve permanently the purposes of a divine revelation, must be so distinctly stamped with the seal of God as not only to evidence itself to those who are the immediate recipients of the communication, but it must contain in its very bosom, and carry with it down the ages, such permanent badges of its divine origin, as clearly to distinguish it from all merely human productions, and furnish to every generation to the end of time substantially the same convincing proofs of its divine authority. It cannot be confidently affirmed that this would all be true of the Bible if God had given it in the beginning. While our first parents themselves could have had no doubt of its divine source, and while their immediate descendants might have received it on their testimony without doubt or question, yet, after a few generations the fact would have become a mere tradition, to be first questioned, then doubted, then discredited; and we see no way in which it could have been conclusively proven. But the Bible, as God has given it to us, does unquestionably possess the essential characteristics above

mentioned by which it may be authenticated at any time or in any place. The evidence upon which its divine authorship is established is of a kind that is not weakened or obscured by lapse of time.

This result was secured by the method which God saw fit to adopt with reference to its communication. Several facts in this connection challenge special attention :

1. The long delay before a permanent written revelation was even commenced.
2. The equally surprising lapse of time between its commencement and its completion.
3. The large number of writers and their great variety in point of gifts, attainments, and circumstances.
4. The "sundry times" at which they were moved by the Holy Ghost to write the different parts of the book.
5. The employment of men, confessedly imperfect, as the vehicles of a perfect revelation.

These facts, under God, exercised a controlling influence in impressing upon the book thus produced, those distinguishing characteristics which so triumphantly vindicate its claims as "the Book of the Lord." We shall discuss them briefly without regard to distinct division or numerical order.

The first fact mentioned, the long delay in commencing the Bible, lifts it at once entirely out of the realm of human impostures. For it may be fairly assumed that every impostor has some selfish end in view—fame, fortune, position, power, or something else—which he hopes to gain by the successful outworking of his fraudulent scheme. But for this expectation he would have no motive to engage in it. Hence, he naturally desires to have it developed and matured with the least possible delay. No impostor would deliberately remit to future generations all the benefits of a system originated by himself. Mohammedanism was in its zenith during the lifetime of its author. Mormonism was brought to maturity in less than a score of years after its inception.

Widely different was God's mode of procedure. Twenty-five centuries devoted to the preparation of the world to receive the Bible, and fifteen centuries more to its production in God's own

chosen method—differing so widely from anything that man could have planned or conceived—cause it to stand out in majestic singularity and peerless grandeur; sublimely illustrating God's declaration: "My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways"; and proclaiming it to be the work of him with whom "one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day."

But we must be careful to guard against even the remotest suspicion that either the delay, or the slow progress in its revelation, was an indication of incompleteness or immaturity in the plan of redemption revealed in the Bible. In the mind of God, and for all the purposes of human salvation, that plan was not only complete, but absolutely perfect from the beginning. The delay in revealing it was not because God was not prepared to give it, but because man was not ready to receive it. When God made promise of the seed of the woman, redemption meant everything that it meant when Christ ascended in triumph to take his seat at God's right hand. As the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," his blood availed for Abel no less effectually than for the Apostle John, to whom it was given to finish and close up forever the book of Inspiration. No progress or development can be properly predicated of the plan of redemption, except in the sense of bringing it more clearly to human view. A painting, executed in the highest style of the art, of exceptional richness and beauty, exquisitely finished in its minutest details, is hung in a room but dimly lighted. Only its outlines and general proportions can be clearly discerned; and thus seen, it does not impress one as a strikingly handsome painting. But, as additional light is from time to time admitted into the room, its superior charms are by degrees brought more clearly into view, until, finally, under a full blaze of light, the beholder is enraptured with its transcendent beauty and grandeur. No change has been wrought upon the painting itself. It was as beautiful at the first as at the last. The change is simply in the additional light thrown upon it. So, divine inspiration and divine illumination have from time to time thrown increased light upon those mysteries of redemption, which from the beginning of the world have been hid in God (Eph. iii. 9); not enlarging, or in any manner changing, but simply bringing more clearly to hu-

man view God's eternally perfect and unchangeable plan of grace for saving fallen man.

The unity of the Bible, as a whole, cannot be accounted for on natural principles, when we consider the great variety of the sources from which it is compiled. If God had written it all with his own finger, this unity would be no marvel. But with so many different writers engaged upon its separate parts, under circumstances so widely variant, and at intervals of time so remote, that its different parts should so perfectly agree as to constitute a harmonious system of facts and doctrines, is itself a miracle as notable as any that it records. And after accepting the Bible with this miracle stamped upon its very face, there is no excuse for discrediting anything that it contains, on the ground that it is supernatural. Let us glance hastily at a few familiar facts confirmatory of these statements.

The Bible was written in sixty-six separate parts—thirty-nine in the Old and twenty-seven in the New Testament. These separate parts were written at different times, covering, in the aggregate, a little more than fifteen hundred years. The writers, about thirty-three in number, were men of various orders of natural gifts, and various kinds and degrees of mental culture. Some were comparatively learned, others illiterate. They lived in different localities and under different dispensations of the church. They were engaged in different secular callings, from the king on the throne to the humble fisherman. Their writings were in different languages, and embraced a wide range of subjects, including history, prophecy, biography, laws, proverbs, parables, sacred poetry, religious experience, doctrines, and practical duties. In the very nature of the case, must we not expect to find in these writings great contrariety in matters of opinion, and clashing in matters of fact? Under ordinary circumstances this would certainly be the case. Yet, when collected and compiled, instead of the confusion of tongues that might have been anticipated, one of the most prominent characteristics of the book which they form is its unity as a whole, with perfect consistency and harmony of statement in all its various parts. Its sublime facts, pure doctrines, and holy precepts, all circle round and centre in the one

grand theme of gospel salvation through Christ crucified. This we have said is a notable miracle, and we are not prepared to withdraw or modify the statement. For common observation and experience clearly prove that such a result would be impossible without a direct interposition of divine power. Take only two men, reared, if you please, in the same neighborhood, as nearly as possible under the same influences, and educated at the same institution of learning, and let them, without collusion, pre-concert, supervision, or the restraints of a creed previously adopted and thoroughly studied, write freely their respective views on moral and religious subjects, and the probabilities are more than a hundred to one that there would be such discrepancies between them that it would be impossible to harmonize their views as parts of one and the same moral or religious system.

The entire Koran is supposed to have been written by one man, and all within the space of about three years. Yet there were such inconsistencies and contradictions between some of the later portions and what had preceded, that it was found impossible to reconcile them. And when its author was appealed to on the subject, the only explanation that he vouchsafed was that God had a right to change his laws and modify the principles of his government whenever he thought proper.

In the ablest theological debate to which it was ever the privilege of the writer to listen, continuing through sixteen days, one of the disputants was more embarrassed by irreconcilable inconsistencies between different portions of his own writings, pointed out, from time to time, by his adroit opponent, than by anything else which he had to encounter in the discussion. Like Mohammed, he could not make a harmonious system even out of his own productions written at different times, although a man of ability and scholarship, and one who wrote with great care.

Our forefathers came to this country, moved by a common impulse. They were encompassed by common dangers, endured common hardships and had a common end in view. All the circumstances by which they were surrounded favored harmony of views and opinions on all questions pertaining to civil government. Yet, when they undertook to frame the Constitution of

the United States, they differed so widely as to some of its provisions that controversy waxed warm. Volumes were written in support of the theories of the respective parties; and it was at last found impossible for them to agree upon the provisions of that important instrument, except by compromise, each party yielding some things for the sake of securing others.

It is only by placing such facts as these alongside of those connected with the writing of the Bible, and noting the measureless contrast, that we can fully appreciate the irresistible strength of the arguments drawn from the latter in support of the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. We are not, however, pressing this view for the purpose of proving to our readers that the Bible is inspired. It is assumed that no one of them doubts it. We are only calling special attention to the particular character of this department of the proof, with the view of further illustrating our theme—God's method in Divine Revelation. In the first point which we noticed particularly—God's long delay before even commencing the work of giving his will to the world in permanent form—God appears simply as the Lord Jehovah, whose thoughts and ways are as far above ours as the heaven is higher than the earth; in whose sight a thousand years are but as yesterday; and who is, therefore, not impatient of results. In the point which we are now considering, however—the manner in which he chose to *communicate* his will—he appears in his benevolent condescension and loving interest in the welfare of our race. The process chosen seems, on first view, tedious and cumbersome, especially when we reflect how easily God could have communicated directly, or inspired one man to write the whole. We are compelled to believe that there were wise and good reasons for the particular mode selected. And when we begin devoutly to search for these reasons; when we reverently inquire why the Bible should have been so long in process of construction; and why such a variety of persons and characters should have participated, instrumentally, in furnishing its contents, no other explanation seems, in every aspect of the case, so plausible, none so obvious in fact, as that God intended, among other things, by this method to impress upon this book, ineffaceably, the evidences of his own "handiwork." That

he fashioned it in this particular mould expressly in order that it might be its own sufficient and perpetual witness. It was certainly of the greatest importance that a gospel which is for all lands, ages and generations, should carry with it wherever it goes self-evidencing marks of its divine source. No plan that could have been devised would more effectually have accomplished this result. Personal testimony fades into tradition and grows constantly weaker. But in this method the evidence is interwoven with the very structure of the Bible, securely attached to it as a conspicuous badge, inhering in it as a faithful ever-present witness, bearing a silent but constant testimony. No form of evidence could be more irresistibly conclusive. None is more easily apprehended. None appeals more readily or convincingly to the popular mind. None continues always and everywhere so entirely unchanged and unimpaired by lapse of time or change of circumstances. In the remotest islands of the sea, and in the latest generation of time its voice will be heard as distinctly as it is here and now.

But, besides this impregnable bulwark of evidence, there are other beneficent results due to the same causes, in whole or in part, which would well repay thorough study, if space permitted. But for the sake of brevity, we can refer only to a few of them, and to these but very briefly.

1. It was of the greatest practical importance to us that the Bible should contain a divinely inspired history of the church in the aggregate, as well as biographical sketches of the lives of God's individual children, embracing a period sufficiently protracted to illustrate the principles of his government, the sacredness of the relations that he sustains to his people, his unchanging love for, and providential care over, his chosen ones, and his unflinching faithfulness to his covenant promises. Still more essential was it that we should have a divinely authenticated history of the life, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the Saviour of the world. And inasmuch as history cannot be recorded *as* history until after the events have transpired, even if no other reason could be assigned, this would certainly have been an all-sufficient one for keeping the book of Inspiration so long open for addi-

tions to its contents. When we observe how large a proportion of the Bible is devoted to these histories and biographical sketches, and how many and how instructive and comforting the lessons derived from these sources, we need not be surprised at the delay which rendered their insertion in the Divine Record possible. Divested of its historical parts, the Bible would be the merest skeleton—in fact, no Bible at all.

2. Another very essential part of the book of Divine Inspiration consists of those inestimably precious and instructive records of religious experience in which it so richly abounds. In his consummate wisdom, God has provided for their incorporation into the Holy Oracles, in the most natural way possible. Along with its marvellous unity as a whole, and other distinguishing marks of its divinity, the Bible is characterized by almost endless variety of detail—diversity of styles, modes of thought, forms of expression, and numberless other things answering to the peculiar personal characteristics of the different writers.

From what we see to be actually true, we are authorized to say that God did not want uniformity of *manner* among the sacred writers, but just that sort of diversity and variety ordinarily found among uninspired writers. Hence, he did not inspire them all to write in the same style, but each in his own style. And to give this diversity the widest range, he chose men of every order of gifts and acquirements, and from every rank and station in life. It is not less certain that God chose every writer of the Bible, than that he inspired every thought and fact and doctrine that it contains; and not only that he chose them, but that, by his special providences, he gave them the training best adapted to fit them respectively for their particular work. This special training is clearly to be seen in a number of cases; notably, those of Moses, David, Solomon, Paul, and the writers of the four Gospels; and if the facts were as fully known, we should no doubt see that the same was true in every case. The first preparation, both in importance and in the order of time, and the one alike essential in every case, was that the sacred writers should be truly men of God—"vessels of mercy . . . prepared unto glory"—that they should have been subjects of a genuine religious experience. For

God did not use the sacred writers as mere automatons to utter abstractions in which they felt no interest and had no experience. When holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, they spake each through and in the light of his own individual experience. Hence, religious experience, as we gather it from the Bible, and as we find it in common life, is, in one respect, strikingly like the Bible itself—characterized by unity with diversity. Unity, in the fact that in every case alike a soul is delivered from the bondage of sin, and saved through the blood of the Lamb; diversity, as the inevitable result of great dissimilarity in personal traits, mental and moral, and an endless variety of circumstances. God had use for the peculiar personal characteristics of every one of the sacred writers. Representing, as they do, every order of mental gifts, and every grade of culture, every rank, position, and calling, every disposition and temperament; and all these under the modifying influence of an infinite variety of circumstances, and, although speaking “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,” yet, each speaking through the channels of his own experience, they show the practical influence of Christianity upon all classes of people, and under all circumstances. The Bible is, therefore, a rich store-house of religious experience, in which all may find something for instruction, comfort, and encouragement. And do we not find here another of the chief reasons why God chose to use men at all, and especially why he used so many in communicating his will? Had he given it from his own mouth, or by his own hand, while it would, of course, have been supremely excellent, still, it would not have been the utterances of human experience; nor have illustrated practically the influence of Christianity on the heart and life.

But “herein is a marvellous thing”: that the Bible is a perfect book, and yet written by imperfect men. The rules of conduct and the standard of character upon which it insists, are absolutely faultless; and yet, its writers frequently and sometimes flagrantly violated those rules and fell short of that standard. What then? Is this an exception to the law that a stream can never rise higher than its source? By no means; but only a proof that the real is higher than the apparent source. While the Bible as a whole is

manifestly the book of God, yet, in writing it, man is something more than a mere amanuensis. His experiences are interwoven with the great facts and doctrines of redemption in a way that exhibits constantly the imperfections of man, while it illustrates gloriously the perfections of God. Nor is the least disposition manifested by the sacred writers to conceal, excuse, or palliate, much less to justify their sins and shortcomings. The naked facts are stated with the utmost frankness and ingenuousness, without explanation or apology. This is without parallel among profane writers; and shows clearly that these men spake, not as they were moved by their natural impulses, but "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." We wonder, on first thought, that God should have used even the best and most faultless of an imperfect race, incapable of coming up to the rules which they themselves wrote, as the vehicles of a perfect revelation. But we are still more amazed to find among his chosen vessels for this purpose, men like David, Solomon, and Peter, upon whose characters are found dark stains and foul blots. But on more mature reflection we see that here, as everywhere else, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men." As the skilful artist uses the dark background, which possesses in itself no attractiveness, to bring out and set off more advantageously the beauties of the painting, as the diamond shines all the more brilliantly by contrast with the dross seen in the gold in which it is set, so the earthen vessel with its defects and blemishes serves, by contrast, to show more clearly the superior purity and preciousness of the gospel treasure; and our homage goes out to God its author, and not to the earthen vessel in which it is borne.

J. E. SPILMAN.

Flora, Ill.