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The Bible
and
Modern Criticism

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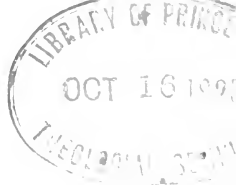
FRANCIS J. HALL, D.D.

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THE BIBLE
AND MODERN CRITICISM

By
THE REV. FRANCIS J. HALL, D.D.

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CHAPTER I

THE WORD OF GOD

MY aim in these articles is to define the ancient doctrine of the Church concerning the inspiration of the Bible, to point out some common mistakes about it, to show that modern criticism has not shaken it, and to give some hints as to the proper use of the Bible.

1. *What the Bible Is*

The Bible is a library containing a great variety of documents, documents which were written at different stages in the growth of true religion. Moreover, when we separate its books and documents from each other, and consider them without reference to their mutual connections in the Bible at large, we find that they

have very unequal spiritual values. But when we consider the completed library—I mean the existing Bible as a whole—we learn that it has a much higher spiritual value than that of a miscellaneous collection of ancient documents. It reveals to those who study it rightly, an organic unity, and a spiritual quality in its unity, which cannot be found in any other library known to man.

Its unity is explained by the fact that a divinely inspired selective principle and purpose has controlled the Church—Jewish and Christian—in forming the Sacred Canon. In obedience to this principle those documents, whatever their origins and separate values may have been, and those only, have been incorporated into the Bible which serve to exhibit for the edification of true believers the divine education of Israel, and the growth of true religion.

Its spiritual value as a whole is similarly explained. Even the parts which, by themselves, seem inferior, are found to afford illuminating contexts to the superior parts. And they help us to understand how patient God was with the low

ideals of His sin-blinded chosen people, not displacing them suddenly, but even using them until He could educate His people out of them. The Bible contains memorials of a long process of very gradual divine teaching. But it also exhibits Israel's own mind at each stage, his pagan traditions, the kind of history that he preserved, and the notions of God, and of His Will, at which he had arrived. Just because the Bible does so faithfully do this, it enables us more intelligently to interpret the *comparatively* defective elements of divine teaching which the Old Testament preserves, and to see in them the *best* teaching that the then existing conditions permitted to be given. We see how patiently God accommodated His revelations to the slow growth of Israel's spiritual understanding.

If the Holy Spirit had inspired Old Testament writers in such wise as to eliminate from what they wrote every trace of historical, moral and religious error—that is, all defective elements of their mental traditions,—the Old Testament would fail to serve the purpose for which the Spirit has guided the Church to edit,

collect, preserve and canonize its contents. This purpose is not to furnish us with a series of oracles, all equally spiritual and inerrant. Rather it is to edify us in the faith which is in Christ Jesus, by showing us how God's people were prepared for the proclamation of that faith.

Accordingly we read the Old Testament in the light of the New. This does not require us to think that Old Testament writers meant all that we Christians find in their writings. It shows that, *in the biblical context* in which the Holy Spirit has given their words to us, these words have acquired new values. They help in exhibiting to us the progress of a divine purpose which, from the nature of things, could not have been so clearly understood by Old Testament writers as they are by those who have since received the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The sum of the matter is that *the Bible is given to us in order that we may deepen our hold upon true religion by considering its growth, as well as its final form.* In the light of this purpose of God's gift, and because the Bible is His gift, we call it the Word of God.

2. *Biblical Inspiration*

That the Bible as a whole—the Bible which we have—is a special product of the Holy Spirit’s overruling work, and that it has been given us by God to be read for edification in the faith which we have received from Jesus Christ, this is the doctrine of biblical inspiration.

It is the *doctrine* of inspiration, as distinguished from *theories* which men have set forth concerning the manner of its production, or the inspiration of its writers. We need carefully to distinguish here between the inspiration, or divine authority, of the Bible, and the inspiration of the writers of the documents which have gone into the making of the Bible. It is the divine authority of the Bible, of the finished and unified product, that is necessary for us to receive, if we would accept God’s holy Word.

We of course believe that “no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 St. Pet. i. 21, R. V.); and that God spake unto the fathers by the prophets (Heb. i. 1. Cf. Nicene Creed, “Who

spake by the prophets"). In many prophecies of Scripture it is declared, "Thus saith the Lord"; and supernatural inspiration of the writers is made apparent in many parts of the Bible by their marvellous spiritual quality. But not all parts of Scripture are prophecy; and some parts do not *in themselves* betray any supernatural quality. The divine inspiration of the Bible does not depend upon all parts of it having been originally produced by supernaturally inspired writers, certainly not upon equal degrees in their inspiration. It arises from the fact that, whatever kind of labor may have gone into the manufacture of the Bible's documentary materials, these materials have been built together by the Holy Spirit into unity—into one Bible,—and this Bible has been given to us by God as His Word.

The Bible, thus fused into unity, is the Word of God. This does not mean that God either dictated its language, or made all of its writers infallible. It means that He has somehow made and sanctioned the Bible for a specific purpose; and that for this purpose He has given it to us through

His Church. How it serves its purpose, and how we are to read it, must be determined by reading it *with its purpose in mind*—the purpose, that is, of making us “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. iii.16).

3. *Illustration*

The Bible is the product of a long process of building, and may be helpfully compared in certain ways to a great cruciform Church. The Church is inspired, has its structure and coherent beauty determined by its architect and by the purpose for which it is designed. But all sorts of work enter into it—intelligent and unintelligent, skilled labor and unskilled labor. Some of the shapers of its materials have, partly at least, understood the architect’s plan, and have been consciously guided thereby. Others—day laborers—have not understood it.

The assembled materials have been used in different relations to the whole, and have unequal values. Some of them—for example, rough blocks of stone—owe their meaning wholly to the use made of them in the building. And they would

instantly lose this meaning if they were removed from the building. And the meaning is determined by the edifice as a whole—by the architect's plan, and by the purpose which the building is to serve.

This central meaning and purpose dominates the building throughout. Its cruciform structure shows that the purpose is Christian. The sanctuary, with its glorious altar, obviously interprets the entire Church as intended for the eucharistic worship of God through Jesus Christ. It is a Church—not a mere assemblage of fine building material. In fact its significant value is not interfered with in the least, if some of its materials, the foundation materials, are found to be rough boulders.

So it is with the Bible. The mere assemblage of documents does not make the Bible, nor are its documents of equal value and interpretative meaning. Some of them came from alien quarries, perhaps, and retain much of their original crudeness. But a divine Architect has ordered their bringing together, and has put men to building out of them something grander and nobler than the builders them-

selves have understood. The Cross shapes the whole, and Christ is its sanctuary, its interpretative climax. And the completed whole is the Bible, the unified and coherent Word of God. What matters where its materials were obtained! As might be expected, some of them are glorious, shaped by inspired workmanship. But what determines the combined result, and the ultimate meaning of each and every part, is the dominant purpose of the whole—Jesus Christ and the mysteries of His kingdom. Such is the Bible, the Word of God.



CHAPTER II

MISTAKES ABOUT THE BIBLE

CHRISTIANS of old received the Bible in its completed form from the Church, and on her authority believed it to be the Word of God. They received it uncritically, no doubt, but they put its claim to the very best possible test—that of the Bible's working value in making them "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Moved by reverence for the Bible, they quickly inferred that its several contents were unlike any other literature, and developed theories concerning its production which this same reverence dictated. These ideas gradually came to be regarded as necessary parts of the doctrine of biblical inspiration; and this explains the alarm which is felt when they are disproved by critical investigation of biblical documents. But abundant reasons exist

for believing that, when criticism has done its work, the doctrine that the Bible is the Word of God will be strengthened rather than weakened thereby.

1. *Mistakes as to its Production*

As the Word of God, the Bible has divine authority throughout. This is expressed by the phrase "plenary inspiration." But such inspiration does not necessarily determine how the Bible was produced. It merely defines the authority of the organic whole.

Christians have inferred, however, that no ordinary or natural methods could have been used in producing the literary materials of the Bible; and in support of this, the fact has been urged that many parts of the Bible show plain traces of supernatural illumination of their writers. And so it has been generally believed that all biblical writers were supernaturally assisted; and many have added that *all the sacred writers were inspired to an equal degree*. Some have even declared that *every word of the Bible was dictated by the Holy Spirit*. This is called the verbal theory.

It has not been realized that the biblical value of a given part of Scripture may be due to its place and connection in the Bible, rather than to its human writer's illumination. Perhaps no part of Scripture has failed to acquire, in its biblical context and connection, higher value and richer meaning than its writer was conscious of.

We need not suppose that, if God intended to make a Bible for our use, He must have resorted to peculiar methods at every stage in the process, and must have immediately controlled each biblical writer. It is as if a cathedral could not truly embody the idea and purpose of its architect, unless he gave direct personal guidance to all the workmen (in the quarries and elsewhere) who were employed in shaping its materials. We know that the workmen in such a case have very unequal knowledge of the parts they are performing, and unequal skill. Yet their labour ministers to a structural result which transcends their highest thought.

The Scriptures retain clear traces of their making, and biblical scholars have been examining them for evidence as to

the degree of inspiration enjoyed by biblical writers. The results of this study have seemed conclusive, and can be verified by any serious student. Some parts of Scripture show traces of high degrees of inspiration, and others of lower degrees; while still others might have been produced, seemingly, without any personal inspiration.

\ Verbal dictation by the Holy Spirit becomes an incredible supposition in the light of such results. Moreover, in very many instances, the Bible does not preserve the exact original wording of the documents contained in it. This fact is of no moment to us; but, if the verbal theory had to be maintained, we should have to confess that we no longer have the Word of God.

2. *Mistakes as to its Qualities*

To many Christians it has seemed to be an irreverent idea that imperfect materials should be discoverable in the Word of God. And so it has been urged that no errors of any kind can be found in Scripture, whether historical, scientific, doctrinal or moral. All the writers, it is

urged, must have been assisted at least so far as to make their several contributions to the Bible inerrant. How, it is said, can we accept the authority of the Bible in certain statements and teachings, if we reject any of them?

Praiseworthy as is the motive which dictates such an argument, the argument is neither required by belief that the Bible has divine authority for its inspired purpose, nor consistent with verifiable facts. If God had designed the Bible to be a library of universal information, we should be justified, no doubt, in treating everything in it as absolutely conclusive in the subjects involved. But the Bible was really given to make men "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," by affording for their devout study such memorials of the long growth of true religion as were calculated to show them the manner in which God prepared His chosen people for the revelation of the Gospel.

It was inconsistent with this purpose that the errors and spiritual misconceptions of early ages should be expunged from Scripture. It is just because the

writers were true to the imperfect historical, scientific and spiritual conceptions of their own times, that what they wrote affords to us an illuminating context to the progressive divine teaching which they also contain. The errors found in the Bible are not divine but human, and they are left uncorrected in the Bible because they lend themselves to the practical purpose for which God has given Holy Scripture to us.

Many of these errors, while they help us to understand the conditions under which true religion grew, have no other bearing on the Christian use of the Bible, and are harmless. To give an important illustration, whether the story in Genesis of Adam's sin and punishment is to be taken as exact history, or as largely symbolical, should be decided by the likelihoods of the case, as viewed in the light of our accumulated knowledge. But our decision can in no case disturb the catholic doctrine of man's fall; because this doctrine was not derived from that story, but from the New Testament doctrine of redemption. Because we already believe the catholic doctrine, we discover on read-

ing the Genesis narrative that, whether taken historically or symbolically, it is true to Christian doctrine. We therefore naturally regard it as confirming our belief.

It is the "faith which is in Christ Jesus" with which we are concerned in our use of the Bible; and so long as the facts upon which this faith depends for certainty are well established, errors of detail in Scripture are of no moment to us, provided they are not such as to upset the suitability of the Bible as an illuminating memorial of the growth, under divine guidance, of true religion.

3. *Mistakes as to its Use*

These are chiefly two: to treat the Bible as the source of Christian doctrine, and to depend upon its several passages as so many proof-texts—self-sufficient, self-interpreting and of equal value. These two are practically one.

Everyone can verify for himself the historic fact that the Christian faith was being taught by the Church, and was applied by believers to daily life, before one word of the New Testament had been

written; and at every stage of divine revelation, the several Scriptures were written *after* their doctrine had been given to the Church, whether Jewish or Christian. Speaking generally, the Bible is a product of the Church's faith, rather than the source of it.

The Bible does indeed bear witness to all saving doctrine, although not after the manner of a definitive manual of reference, so much as incidentally and often very indirectly. Let us take St. Paul's epistles as an illustration. They were episcopal charges, in which Bishop Paul, to use modern description, dealt in a practical way with passing emergencies, and, to enforce his admonitions, reminded those under his episcopal jurisdiction of the truths which they had already learned. He did not define these doctrines in a formal way, but used such informal terms as the circumstances required. The Church's "form of sound words" is everywhere taken for granted.

Nowhere in the Bible is the Christian faith given formal definition. Its doctrines are often alluded to, and in ways that help us to verify our own knowledge

of them. But, without the knowledge which the Church gives us, we should fall into difficulties. The protestant world treats the Bible as the sole source of Christian doctrine. The result is a confusing babel of many faiths, all professedly deduced from the Bible. The catholic world treats the Bible as the Church's book, and as presupposing the Church's teaching. The result is that the catholic faith is substantially the same everywhere.

Because the Scriptures do in informal, incidental and manifold ways bear witness to all necessary doctrines, they serve as a means of verifying and confirming what the Church teaches; and any doctrine which cannot thus be verified we know to be non-primitive and not necessary to be believed for salvation. We cannot safely divorce the Bible from the Church, because when we do so the Bible becomes obscure, and confusion results.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS OF MODERN CRITICISM

BY results of modern criticism I mean the conclusions which, in the present state of investigation, are generally thought to be established. They may, of course, be modified hereafter in details, but in their general substance they seem to be permanent.

1. *Literary Criticism.*

Literary or “higher” criticism has shown that some of the books of the Bible are made up of several documents by different authors, e.g. the Book of Isaiah; also that some of them are pseudonymous—not written by the author named. This was according to recognized ancient practice, and was not the result of fraudulent intention. But the practice has led, none the less, to mistakes in later ages. The

Book of Daniel is a case in point. It was not written by Daniel, but by some writer of the second century before Christ.

The most startling result of literary criticism, however, is the discovery that the so called Books of Moses are an interweaving of several documents, no one of which reached its present form until centuries after Moses died; and it has been urged that our Lord was in error in ascribing the Law to Moses.

But, according to the Gospels, Christ did not assert that Moses wrote anything. He simply quoted the Pentateuch in the customary manner. He did not at all concern Himself with critical questions. If I should quote Homer as saying thus and so, I would not commit myself to any opinion as to the controversy concerning Homeric authorship.

The vital question *for us* is not at all whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch, but whether that collection of documents lends itself to the real purpose of the Bible. Does it contain illuminating memorials of the growth of true religion? It certainly does, and is therefore a suitable part of the Bible. Its authority for us rests

neither upon its authorship, nor upon the dates of its documents, but upon the fact that God has given it to us as part of His Word.

2. *Scientific and Historical Criticism.*

(a) The sciences of astronomy, geology, biology and ethnology have made great advances in recent generations, and have upset traditional ideas—including those imbedded in the Book of Genesis—as to the antiquity of man, the deluge and the manner of the physical origin of the human species. Many have unsuccessfully tried to show, by new interpretations, that the biblical accounts of prehistoric developments of the universe and of man are scientifically accurate. But the attempt is futile.

Genesis embodies the ideas on such subjects which prevailed when its documents were written; using them, however, as vehicles of the true doctrines that God is the maker of all things, and that human sin originated in creaturely perversity—not in any necessity for which God is responsible. Thus was preserved for our edification a picture of the conditions of hu-

man knowledge and opinion under which these doctrines were imparted to Israel. It was not necessary that a scientifically accurate cosmogony should be revealed to Israel, for growth in true religion is not dependent upon this; and God does not reveal things merely to gratify curiosity, in advance of scientific investigation. Rather He uses men's existing ideas of natural things as means of spiritual teaching. All experience shows this to be the wisest and least confusing method of teaching human beings concerning such things.

(b) Historical criticism has also been much improved in modern days, and it has brought into very clear light, what the more thoughtful readers of Scripture have always suspected, that the interests of historical accuracy, *as we understand them*, were not keenly felt by biblical writers. Indeed the ancients did not look at this subject as we do, and were satisfied if they gave a true general impression of the past. As ancient histories go, early literature contains no collection of histories that can compare in illuminating value with the Old Testament historical books. But many inconsistencies of de-

tail are found in their narratives; and their statements are not always in accord with reliable knowledge obtained from contemporary inscriptions and other credible sources.

Even the Gospel narratives, unquestionably true as they have been proved to be in their general tenour, and in the vital elements of their accounts of our Lord's earthly life and teaching, cannot be harmonized in some details. Thus the first three Gospels describe our Lord as eating the Passover feast in the evening of His betrayal, while the fourth Gospel does not agree with this. In several instances the language of our Lord is reported with variations which cannot all be in exact verbal accord with what He said.

But it does not matter. That we gain a true impression of Christ and His teaching from the Gospels, and that all the vital facts there given can be depended on, is far more certain than would be the case if no minor divergencies and inconsistencies were discoverable. These variations show the absence of collusion; and although the Gospels are not wholly inde-

pendent of each other, they give clear evidence that each writer had trustworthy information concerning all that is vital in the matters of which he wrote. No other ancient life is so reliably and informingly presented to us as is the earthly life, work and teaching of Jesus Christ. With this we should be content, for it enables us to verify the truth of the faith in Jesus Christ which the Church has ever since proclaimed.

3. *Criticism of Biblical Teaching.*

Modern criticism has brought into bold relief the defective and even grotesque quality of much Old Testament doctrine. The ideas of God, of justice and of marriage which are found in the Books of Joshua, Judges and elsewhere, ideas freely alleged to have divine sanction, are not in accord with the Christian mind and conscience. What Christian could consistently make the Song of Deborah (Judges v, especially from verse 24) his own, and certain vindictive passages in the Psalter, that is, taken in the meaning of their human authors? Yet they are in the Word of God. Why is this?

The answer is simple and conclusive. These sentiments and ideas were characteristic of the childish stage of religious education at which the chosen people had then arrived. They had to be tolerated, even by God, until the Israelites had reached a stage of spiritual growth which would enable them to understand and assimilate higher teaching. A barbaric race cannot be educated in divine truth except bit by bit, and God shows His mercy in patiently accommodating His teaching to this condition of human progress.

Little by little ideas were instilled which helped the Israelites to outgrow their crude notions of God and of His Will. In many parts and in many manners, with slowly advancing meaning, God taught the Israelites, finally enabling the spiritually minded among them to understand when He at last spoke to them in His Son, Jesus Christ (Heb. i. 1-2). And it is His teaching in Jesus Christ which enables us to take the Old Testament as He wills us to take it—as an enlightening picture of the slow growth of Israel in true religion.

But it is said that Christ Himself fell into error, for example, with reference to

the time of His second coming. This cannot be established. It is true that He submitted in His Manhood to the mental laws of human experience, and that He *learned* things in the human way. But at the centre of His personality was His Godhead and His divine intelligence. This intelligence could not obtrude itself into His human consciousness, and thus disturb its processes and limitations, but it did act after the hidden manner of divine grace so as to guard Him from error in teaching.

He did not say that the second coming would occur in the lifetime of some of His listeners, as some moderns suppose. He said that the *signs* of His coming would thus be fulfilled, and they actually were. The truth is that they have been fulfilled in every successive generation. Our Lord was not telling when the end would come, but was describing *recurring* signs by which we can detect its continual approach, lest we should conclude in the long waiting that there is no such movement towards the end as He declared. Signs of the end are not signs of its immediateness, but of its constant coming nearer—

a fact which we need imperatively to be reminded of.

So far from regarding biblical criticism as disastrous to the Bible, we ought to be thankful that the Holy Spirit is using such criticism to clear away the false notions with which men have encrusted the true doctrine of biblical inspiration. The Bible is the Word of God not as an infallible encyclopedia of universal information, but as preserving significant memorials of Christianity's growth and establishment, and as enabling us to verify the harmony of Church doctrine with the teaching of Jesus Christ and of His Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER IV

HOW TO USE THE BIBLE

TO revert to an analogy used in my first chapter, if my present subject was "How to Use a Church," I would not need to discuss the nature and use of the materials with which it is built; but I would reckon wholly with the purpose of the completed structure, which is divine worship. Similarly, in treating of the use of the Bible I am not concerned with the nature and use of the documents, *independently regarded*, which are built into the Bible; but I have to consider how the completed Bible is to be used so that its divine purpose, of fortifying and edifying believers in Christ, may be fulfilled. Moreover, it is the Bible, *as built and ordered by the Holy Spirit*, with which I have to do, not with a collection of

ancient documents as critically and chronologically re-arranged.

1. *Its Use As a Whole.*

The purpose for which the Bible is given to the Church is to edify in the faith and religion which was taught by Jesus Christ, and which was received from Him by His Church. This faith and religion has for its subject matter and form Jesus Christ Himself and His Kingdom—a Kingdom of which He constituted the Church to be the earthly machinery.

It is this purpose of the Bible that determines how it is to be used by us; and upon practical observance of this principle depends our success both in discovering the divine meaning of its several parts, and in maintaining its authority. It is as reasonable to ascertain the time of the day by taking a time-keeper to pieces for separate consultation as it is to look for the biblical meaning of Scripture by critical exegesis of its documents, *considered in mutual isolation* or in non-biblical arrangement. And one might as well expect to preserve the value of a

watch while employing it for hammering tacks as to do justice to the Bible while putting it to uses other than that for which the Holy Spirit constructed and adapted it.

The first principle to be adhered to in the use of Scripture, therefore, is to interpret all its parts in the Christian connections which the Bible supplies, when it is considered as one organic whole. We should read all the Scriptures as being Christian, that is, as put in the Bible by the Holy Spirit for Christian purposes. And when we do this, we shall find a unity and fulness of meaning which will otherwise escape our notice. We shall find that the end of sacred history is present, or implicit, in the beginning; and that even the earlier parts, which were originally written without knowledge of Christ, have acquired in their later and divinely provided biblical context a meaning which fortifies the Christian faith. And this is the real meaning of Scripture. It is not something that we have fancifully read into the Bible, but it is the meaning which the Holy Spirit has imparted to it by uniting the

Old Testament with the New, and by inspiring New Testament writers to interpret the Old in the light of Jesus Christ, God-incarnate.

The Bible exhibits, and in that spiritual order which the Spirit wills, the memorials of a progressive revelation of Christ and of His messianic Kingdom; and in this fact we find the unifying idea in all the Scriptures—the golden thread which connects part with part, and which glorifies the inferior parts by relating them all to one Gospel event. In other words, the messianic thread is the means by which we can trace God's coherent meaning in the Scriptures. This thread runs through the successive stages of prophetic preparation for Christ, of His manifestation in flesh, of His redemptive victory over sin, suffering and death, of the coming of His Kingdom with power, and of the apostolic interpretation of Him. All hangs together; and all the Scriptures can be seen to embody either the text or the helpful context of the gradual revelation of the Christian faith and religion.

2. *The Law and the Prophets.*

The religion of Israel was not the product of a purely natural development, but was determined in its growth by divine tutelage, and by supernatural teaching and education. Accordingly, as in all wise education, external precepts came first—the law—and then came the more advanced teaching of prophecy, and finally of God's incarnate self-manifestation.

It is now maintained by critical scholars that the documents of the Old Testament which contain the law are not as ancient as the prophetic books; but this is not inconsistent with what I am saying. These documents confessedly preserve traditional matter. Probably they represent compilations of literary materials of much earlier date. The existing arrangement of the Old Testament, therefore, while it does not conform to the chronological order of the documents which it contains, does agree with the divine purpose of teaching us how Israel was educated in true religion. In his childhood Israel was put to a kindergarten school of significant ceremony; and he was sub-

jected, as children should be, to external precepts and regulations. It was to those under the law that the higher teaching of the prophets was addressed.

The ceremonial law, as I have said, constituted a sort of kindergarten school. Its usages were to a large extent traditional and not peculiar to the Israelites, but there was a marked advance none the less, for these usages were purged of pagan associations; and were given symbolical meanings, prefigurative of Christ and of the higher and more spiritual ritual of His Church.

Along with all this went a marvelous divine overruling of the fortunes of the chosen people—an overruling which dates back to patriarchal times—which converted the very history of the ancients into a parable of prophetic and messianic meaning. Attention is called to this in the seventy-eighth Psalm.

So it is that the messianic thread which unifies the Old Testament contains three strands—prefigurative ritual, manifold type, and messianic prophecy. The meaning of it all was, of course, largely enigmatical to the Israelites, necessarily so

until the manifestation of Christ in flesh laid open the mystery. But the growth of the messianic hope was the fruit of Israel's peculiar experience under God, and the meanings which Christians are able to detect in this experience, as exhibited to us in God's Bible, constitute the higher and divine significance of the Old Testament.

Too often the Old Testament is used merely as a source of moral tales. No doubt it can furnish many of them. But its true use is to fortify Christian teaching. To give an example, the story of Joseph is more than a morally edifying tale. In its divine and biblical meaning, it is the story of Jesus Christ in terms of ancient Israel's life—a life that was continually, although unwittingly, rehearsing, so to speak, the drama of Redemption. Type after type, figure after figure, and prophecy after prophecy, make up the woof and warp of a literature which could never have exhibited so many signs of this kind, all pointing Christward, if a supernatural inspiration had not gathered them there for our edification, in

order that we might see in Jesus Christ the explanation of all the ages gone by.

3. *Evidential Use.*

Thanks to the wide-spread habit of regarding the Bible as the original and sole source and rule of faith, it has too often been degraded to the level of a manual of proof-texts. And this method of treating the Bible leads people to miss the wood because of the trees—that is, to overlook the larger, structural and organic meaning of Scripture through excessive absorption in critical scrutiny of fragmentary parts. Text is cited against text, and the Bible is practically reduced for each contentious reader to a collection of testimonies to the truth of his favorite doctrines.

The Christian faith came not from Scripture, but from Christ to His Church, and through the Church to us. The Bible undoubtedly contains this faith, but not in the form of definitive proof-texts. Rather it is a varied literature, which *to believers* is seen to confirm the Church's teaching and to make the faithful wise unto salvation.

Biblical proof of doctrine lies in the marvelous harmony of the Bible as a whole—as a flashlight on the growth of true religion—with the faith once for all delivered to the saints, a faith which sums up the doctrinal meaning of that growth. Consequently the evidential use of Scripture is to confirm believers in their faith, rather than to supply arguments for use with unbelievers; although some of its contents, considered simply as historical, and without reference to inspiration, can thus be used.

If I had space, I might vindicate the real, although incidental value of critical exegesis, as a necessary adjunct of an intelligent evidential use of Scripture. It is more pertinent to my purpose to call attention to a very common and mistaken idea that each biblical writer's personal meaning is the whole divine meaning of his language in the completed Bible—as if the mind of each workman in building a cathedral were an adequate measure of the significance which his product acquires in the finished structure of God's temple.

We must use the Bible as a whole and

for its divinely intended purpose, if we would see what it teaches and what it confirms; and this means that the devout believer is the only successful interpreter and user of Holy Writ. Critical scholarship will undoubtedly help him; but only as a Christian believer can he gain the spiritual standpoint of its divine Inspirer, and assimilate its sacred meaning.

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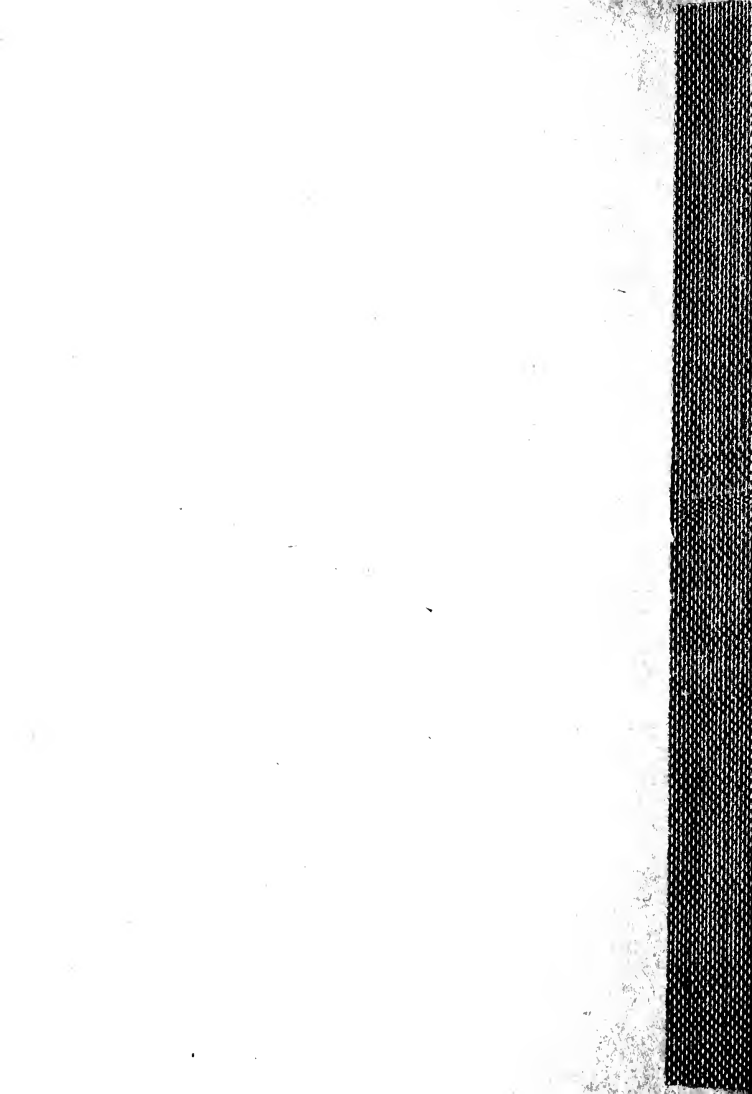
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