

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

BIBLICAL Criticism has often been regarded with suspicion by devout members of the Church ; it has been denounced and deplored, as if it were injurious to the interests of the Christian religion. Even in this scientific age, when everything else is subjected to the strictest examination, there are some who would make an exception of the Scriptures, and who look upon Criticism as an enemy of the faith. But no such immunity can be granted, and none should be sought by the defenders of the faith. If it be guided by sound principles, Criticism cannot injure the interests of truth ; only error and falsehood have anything to fear from its conclusions. It cannot be denied, indeed, that its history has been marked by many indiscretions and many blunders ; its representatives have often seemed to forget

the momentous nature of the interests involved in their inquiries, and to be more influenced by the hope of winning distinction through the originality of their speculations than by a desire to advance the interests of the religion they profess. This is especially true of the nineteenth century,¹ when ecclesiastical prejudice has been more than counterbalanced by academic license, and veneration for received opinions has given place to restless love of novelty, the boldest theorist being too often regarded as the most enlightened critic, whose lead should be followed by all who desire to keep abreast of the age. It must also be admitted that great part of the labour spent on the discussion of critical questions in connexion with the study of the Bible has fre-

¹ In a wider sense it has been said by Prof. Saintsbury: "It has been the mission of the nineteenth century to prove that everybody's work was written by somebody else, and it will not be the most useless task of the twentieth to betake itself to more profitable inquiries." Speaking with reference to New Testament Criticism, Sir Wm. M. Ramsay says: "We are no longer in the nineteenth century with its negations, but in the twentieth century with its growing power of insight and the power of belief that springs therefrom."

quently been of little use except to bring out the scholarship and argumentative powers of those who are engaged in theological pursuits, the result of such inquiries being either to bewilder the reader with conflicting theories, or to concentrate attention unduly on minute points of controversy which are of no real importance. But, when all this is said, it still remains true that there is a legitimate field for Criticism in connexion with the Bible—in other words, for the application of scientific methods in the solution of its literary problems; and in the long-run such studies cannot fail to advance the cause of righteousness and truth.

While tradition is never to be disregarded, and is often to be treated with the greatest respect, it can never be held to be an infallible guide in the settlement of critical questions. Such absolute authority cannot be conceded to it even when the testimony of the Church is unbroken, much less when it is divided. No Protestant, no one acquainted with the history of the Canon or with the wider history of the Church, can accept the principle laid down by Bishop Wordsworth when he says: "If any book which the Church universal

propounds to us as scripture, be not scripture ; if any book which she reads as the word of God, be not the word of God, but the work of an impostor,—then, with reverence be it said, Christ's promise to His Church has failed, and the Holy Spirit has not been given to guide her into all truth.”¹

Although it was not till last century that New Testament Criticism came prominently into view, its history can be traced back to the first century of the Christian era. There is a sense in which it may be said to be older than the New Testament itself. Before the sacred volume came into existence, the various writings of which it is composed had for many years to submit to the judgment of the Christian communities in which they circulated, before they could be admitted to a position of respect and honour in the Church at large. If they bore the name of an apostle, their authorship had to be established ; if they made no such claim, they had to depend for a favourable reception on the intrinsic value and importance of their contents. All of them

¹ Wordsworth's "Greek Testament ; The General Epistles," p. 77.

had thus to go through a period of probation, in common with many other writings which competed with them for the confidence of the Church; and it was only because they commended themselves to general approval that the writings which we find in the New Testament gradually obtained a position of authority similar to that which the Old Testament held among the Jews.

In this respect the history of the New Testament may be contrasted with that of the Koran. The sacred book of Islam was invested from the first with the authority of Mahomet himself, who claimed to have received its contents by Divine revelation from heaven, and imposed it on the faith and obedience of his followers. On the other hand, with the exception of the recorded words of Christ Himself, than which nothing could have been more authoritative for the early Christians, the adoption of the New Testament writings as a rule of faith was the result of a gradual process, being due to the estimate put upon the several writings by Christians themselves as the result of experience, rather than to any high claims made for them by their authors, who never

dreamt of their productions being put on a level with the Old Testament.

It was only by slow degrees that the influence of these writings spread from the communities in which they originated, or to which they were addressed, to the congregations of the Church at large. They were found suitable for reading in the public services of the Church; they were quoted and appealed to by the leaders of the Church when contending for the "tradition of the apostles" against heresy and schism; they were translated into various languages to meet the wants of Christians in different parts of the world; and in consequence of the use thus made of them they tended more and more to acquire a sacred character, and came to be regarded as a supplement, and ultimately as a counterpart, to the Old Testament. Some of them had to wait for a considerable time before they gained recognition in parts of the world where they were little known, or where some heresy prevailed which could not be reconciled with their teaching; but by the end of the second century we find the idea of a New Testament fully recognized by representative men in all parts

of the Church, with a consensus of opinion in favour of the great majority of the writings which have a place in our Canon. In the Muratorian Fragment, as it is called, a rough Latin translation of a Greek original which is supposed to have been written by a Roman ecclesiastic before the end of the second century, we find an interesting statement regarding the books which were to be received as authoritative, showing what a serious question this was felt to be, and what care was taken to exclude from the number even useful and edifying books which could not claim any kind of apostolic authority. At the same time, so much freedom of opinion was permitted on the subject, and there was so little of an attempt on the part of the Catholic Church to fix a definite Canon as an article of the faith, that in some quarters we find permission given for the public reading of certain books which were not acknowledged as authoritative; and some of these books we find included in several of the oldest manuscripts.

One of the most important witnesses on the subject of the Canon is Eusebius, Bishop of Cæsarea, who lived in the early part of

the fourth century. No man was better acquainted with the history of the Church, or in a better position to know the views of his contemporaries; and he tells us that, while opinion was divided regarding five of the shorter Epistles, and, in some quarters, about the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Apocalypse of John, the rest of the books which have a place in the New Testament, and no others, were unanimously accepted. As time went on, even those writings which had been looked upon as doubtful were regarded with increasing favour, so that by the end of the fourth century a collection of sacred books, identical with our New Testament, was generally accepted by the Church at large, both in east and west.¹

For the next thousand years the history of Biblical Criticism is almost entirely a history of interpretation dominated by tradition. Being regarded as all alike Divine, the Scriptures were too often treated as if they had little or nothing in common with other literature,

¹ Such a list is given in the Easter letter of Athanasius (367 A.D.) and in the 39th Canon of the Council of Carthage (397).

and every endeavour was made to find even in their most casual and homely references a meaning that would be worthy of their Divine Author. It was in this way that the allegorical method of interpretation, which has played so great a part in the history of the Bible, came into vogue. As might have been expected, the Old Testament was the first to suffer. The fanciful exegesis of the Jewish Elders reappeared in the writings of the Church Fathers, who exercised their ingenuity in the attempt to justify the statements, and spiritualize the teaching, of the Old Testament. The idea of a progressive revelation was still a great way off. There were some bold thinkers in the Church who thought to get rid of their difficulties in connexion with the Old Testament by regarding it as the work of an inferior Being, whom they called the Demiurge, as the Creator of the physical universe; but most of the early theologians, abjuring this and other Gnostic heresies, were content to have recourse to the allegorical mode of interpretation, availing themselves of it more or less in their treatment both of the Old and the New Testament. If the Gnostic views

had prevailed in the Church, they would soon have destroyed the historic foundations of the Christian faith; and for that reason they were discountenanced and condemned by the ecclesiastical authorities, who insisted on the reality of the evangelical facts, received by tradition from the apostles, which were to be found in the Gospels. Unfortunately, in the endeavour to counteract such heretical teaching, they gave their *imprimatur* to a traditional exegesis, that too often coloured the facts of the Gospel with ideas of a mystical character which the sacred writers had never intended to convey. For illustrations of this tendency we need only refer to the works of Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, the last named representing the tendency in its most highly developed form.

During the Middle Ages, when the Bible fell into the hands of sacerdotal and monastic Orders, the interpretation of Scripture became more and more artificial, more and more arbitrary. To the infallibility which had been long claimed for Scripture itself there was added a claim to infallibility on the part of its authorized interpreters. Under the Papal

Supremacy this claim was enforced, the result being that the laity were practically debarred from the study of the Bible. Although the Church of Rome never denied the authority of Scripture, she practically nullified it by her tradition, confining its use to a privileged class, and preventing her members generally from coming into direct contact with the living and abiding truth which it enshrined.

But in the good providence of God the time came when the barrier thus erected was to be thrown down. For hundreds of years before the Reformation, forces were at work, both in Church and State, which tended to dispel the darkness in which the Scriptures had been shrouded, and to bring them out of their sacred isolation into touch with the new knowledge which men were everywhere acquiring. The change was due partly to the revival of classical learning, partly to the powerful stimulus given to the intelligence of the laity by the discovery of the New World. A spirit of inquiry was awakened, and when the Reformers set the Scriptures free from the bondage of ecclesiastical tradition and put them into the hands of the people, they met one of the great needs of the

age. The advantage was specially great in the case of the New Testament, as it was in no sense the product of a priestly or a hermit class, but represented the thought and experience of men who lived among their fellows, and had for its chief subject the ministry of one who was made like unto his brethren, associating with them in their homes, their streets, and their market-places, as well as in their synagogues. It was an immense gain for the right understanding of such a book when it was set free for the study of all ranks and classes; but in course of time the exigencies of the Protestant position tended to impair this freedom. Disowning the authority of the Church, the Reformers were tempted to lay undue emphasis on the authority of Scripture and to claim for it something very like infallibility. In theory both Luther and Calvin held that the rightful claimant to authority in opposition to the Church was not the Scriptures but the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures—the true antithesis to Scripture being the Tradition by which it had been superseded in the Church of Rome, as the Old Testament had been superseded by the teach-

ing of the scribes and Pharisees. But while the Reformers repudiated the Romish superstition they fell into the ancient error of reading into the Bible a great deal that was not warranted either from a grammatical or historical point of view. Even Calvin, who professed to adhere to the literal sense, and did so to a much greater extent than any of his contemporaries, was so much under the influence of dogmatic prepossessions as frequently to pervert the true meaning of Scripture.

Still, with all its shortcomings, the Reformation was essentially a critical movement; it was based on the principle laid down by Paul, "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, and he himself is judged of no man" (I Cor. 2¹⁵). On this principle Luther argued for the absolute necessity of private judgment in the recognition of Divine truth.¹ He held that

¹ "The Romanists say, Yes, but how can we know what is God's word and what is true or false? We must learn it from the Pope and the Councils. Very well, let them decree and say what they will, still say I, Thou canst not rest thy confidence thereon, nor satisfy thy conscience: thou must thyself decide; thy neck is at stake, thy life is at stake. Therefore must God say to thee in thine heart: This is God's word, else it is still undecided." (Disputation with Eck.)

Scripture required no outward testimony, the Gospel message being authenticated by the Holy Spirit in the heart; and everything else in Scripture was to be judged by its relation to the sovereign truth. In the application of this test he was led to set special value on certain books of the New Testament which contained, as he said, the very marrow of the Gospel, and to call in question the claims of other books which seemed to be less evangelical. "That which does not teach Christ is not apostolic, though Peter or Paul should have said it; on the other hand, that which preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if it came from Judas, Annas, Herod, and Pilate." Again: "The Church cannot give more authority or force to a book than it has in itself. A Council cannot make that to be scripture which in its own nature is not scripture." Luther's test was subjective and spiritual, but without some regard to the testimony borne to them by the early Church, it is difficult to see how he could have justified the exclusive attention which he paid to the books in the Canon,

The same principle was laid down by Calvin, though in a somewhat different form.¹

¹ "There are several in this pernicious error that the Scripture has no more weight than is given to it by the consent of the Church, as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God were founded on the pleasure of men. For they, showing contempt of the Holy Spirit, make this demand : Who will certify to us that the Scriptures come from God ; who will assure us that they have been preserved in their entirety down to the present day ; and who will persuade us that one book is to be received and another rejected, if the Church is not our guarantee on all these matters ? Hence they conclude that it lies in the power of the Church to determine what reverence we owe to the Scriptures, and what book ought to be included among them. Thus these blasphemers, wishing to exalt an unlimited tyranny under cover of the Church, care not in what absurdity they involve themselves and others, provided they can gain this point among the simple that all things are in the power of the Church. Now, if this be so, what would become of the poor consciences that seek certain assurance of eternal life, when they saw all the promises concerning it based solely on the judgment of men ? . . . If we wish to make provision for consciences, so as to keep them from being agitated in perpetual doubt, we must take the authority of the Scriptures as higher than human reasoning or proofs or conjectures. In other words, we must found it on the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. . . . For granting that, in their own majesty, there is sufficient ground for reverencing them, yet they begin truly to touch us when they are

From the authority of the Church Calvin appealed to the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the reader, as an all-sufficient evidence of God's Word; but in doing so he made Scripture the sole outward standard, leaving no room, in theory, for the authority of tradition, and taking for granted that the testimony of the Holy Spirit would always prove the Bible to be the Word of God. While Luther considered that there was room for difference of opinion with regard to the inspiration of certain books and portions of books,¹ Calvin regarded the whole Bible as a

sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Being then illuminated by His power, we believe, not on our own judgment nor on the judgment of others, that the Scriptures are from God; but above all human judgment, we decide beyond dispute that they were given us from the very mouth of God, just as if with the eye we were contemplating in them the essence of God." (*Institutes*, Bk. I, Chap. vii, from Reuss on *The Canon*, E. T., p. 294 f.)

¹ Using a freedom of criticism which had been already claimed by Erasmus on literary grounds. Luther put Hebrews, James, Jude, and the Apocalypse on a lower level than the rest of the New Testament. Karlstadt went farther, arranging the New Testament books in three grades of merit, and attributing Second and Third John not to the Apostle but to "John the Presbyter"—in which he was followed by Hugo Grotius, the Arminian, in the next century.

homogeneous revelation, and did not hesitate to appeal to any statement contained in it as resting on Divine authority, although he held independent opinions regarding the authorship of certain books.¹ Strictly speaking, he was only entitled to claim authority and infallibility for those parts of Scripture which could be verified by the Christian conscience. But the time was not yet ripe for such a discrimination between the essential and the non-essential; and the practical needs of Protestantism could only be met by maintaining and enhancing the authority of the traditional Bible which had been acknowledged by the Western Church for a thousand years.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the critical efforts of the Reformers were largely directed against the claims of the Jewish Apocrypha, their object being to justify its exclusion from the Canon in such a way as not to prejudice the claims of the books which were retained in the Protestant Canon.

At the same time, any critical treatment of the canonical books was to a large extent precluded by the Confessions which now became

¹ Hebrews, James, II Peter, and Jude.

general, embodying the settled opinions of the Reformers, and forming the Protestant equivalent to the Decrees of the Council of Trent.¹

When the Confessions gave a list, as many of them did, of the books accepted as canonical, the natural effect of this was to render almost nominal the idea, so dear to the heart of the Reformers, of applying a personal test to the Scriptures. Their successors, instead of keeping the Bible subject to the judgment of the Spirit, tended to make an idol of it, claiming for it absolute infallibility, or inerrancy, as it is now called. This led to a theory of Verbal Inspiration which culminated in the declaration of the Helvetic Convention of 1675, that "the Hebrew text, both as regards consonants and

¹ These Decrees determined the Roman Catholic Canon by giving full and final sanction to the collection of sacred books which had been translated into Latin by Jerome and was known as the Vulgate. The Decrees at the same time stated that the Church "receives and venerates with an equal piety and reverence the Traditions pertaining both to faith and to morals, as proceeding from the mouth of Christ, or dictated by the Holy Spirit, and preserved in the Church Catholic by continuous succession." Appended to this decree is a catalogue of the books "which the Synod thus receives."

as regards vowels—or, if not the vowel points themselves, at least the significance of the points—is divinely inspired.” Perfection was claimed for the form as well as for the substance, for the letter as well as for the spirit, and it was accounted by some a heinous sin, “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost” (to use the language of the Wittenberg theologians), to criticize the diction or style of the Greek Testament. Even such a sensible and sober-minded man as John Owen, the Puritan, maintained that “the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament were immediately and entirely given out by God himself, His mind being in them represented unto us without the least intervening of such mediums and ways as were capable of giving change or alteration to the least iota or syllable.” In accordance with this view the sacred writers were often spoken of as God’s pen-men or amanuenses, as if He were to be held responsible for every word they committed to writing. It is only of recent years that this view has been questioned by the Churches. Yet it is difficult to understand how it could ever have been held by any one who had a thorough knowledge of the Scrip-

tures. That it was not the view of the Old Testament taken by our Lord and His apostles may be inferred from the manner in which they quote its words. Out of two hundred and seventy-five Old Testament quotations in the New Testament there are only sixty-three which agree exactly with the Hebrew; in thirty-seven cases the quotation is taken from the Septuagint or Greek translation,¹ where it does not correctly render the Hebrew; there are seventy-six cases in which the correct rendering in the Septuagint has been modified; and there are ninety-nine passages in which the New Testament differs both from the original Hebrew and the Septuagint.

If there are any utterances that we might expect to be preserved *verbatim et literatim*, it would surely be our Lord's discourses. But we find that in reporting them the evangelists are far from adhering to the letter. Their several reports frequently differ from one another, reproducing the sayings in the spirit, and not in the letter. This is the case even as regards the Lord's Prayer, the

¹Begun in the third century B.C., but probably not completed till about the beginning of the Christian era.

Beatitudes, and the words of institution of the Lord's Supper. A similar variety is found in the several records of events in the history of our Lord and of His Church. The accounts given in the Gospels differ so much in matters of detail that it is almost impossible to construct out of them a perfect harmony of the life of Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles there are sometimes more than one account of the same incident, for example, the conversion of Saul, and the vision of Peter at Joppa; but in such cases the accounts differ from one another in a way that would have been impossible if the speakers and writers had been under the influence of verbal inspiration.

Even if it had been otherwise, however, even if the words of the speakers and writers had been secured against the slightest inaccuracy, it is difficult to see of what use this would have been to Christendom, unless the Greek or Hebrew text had been preserved intact through all generations, and the translations into other languages had also been kept free from error. Hence we can understand John Owen's contention when he said that "the notion that the Bible had not been

properly protected, bordered in his mind on Atheism," as well as the claim which the Westminster Confession makes for the original Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek, that "being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, they are therefore authentical."¹

The more closely we examine the Scriptures, the more are we led to the conclusion that the sacred writers were left to the free exercise of their natural faculties, and that any influence brought to bear upon them from above was merely for the purpose of securing their efficiency as witnesses to Divine truth. It is to this we owe the striking variety in their writings which is one of the great charms of the Bible, but is quite incompatible with the literal accuracy and verbal infallibility which many people desiderate in a Divine revelation. Most of us would like an infallible Bible if we

¹This is one of the points of doctrine on which the more liberal formula of subscription to the Confession of Faith recently adopted by the Church of Scotland is fitted to afford relief to tender consciences: "I hereby subscribe the Confession of Faith, declaring that I accept it as the Confession of this Church, and that I believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith contained therein."

could get it. It would save us so much trouble and perplexity, affording unerring guidance on every question. In this as in so many other respects the Roman Catholic Church has taken care to adapt her teaching to the cravings of human nature. In a papal encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII we find it stated that "those who maintain that an error is possible in any genuine passage of the sacred writings pervert the Catholic notions of inspiration and make God the author of such error."

But the truth is, as Bishop Butler said long ago in his "Analogy": "We are in no sort judges, by what methods, and in what proportion, it were to be expected, that this supernatural light and instruction would be afforded us." The only question concerning the authority of Scripture is "whether it be what it claims to be; not whether it be a book of such sort, and so promulged, as weak men are apt to fancy, a book containing a divine revelation should. And therefore, neither obscurity, nor seeming inaccuracy of style, nor various readings, nor early disputes about the authors of particular parts; nor any other things of the like kind, though they had been much more considerable in degree than they

are, could overthrow the authority of the Scripture; unless the prophets, apostles, or our Lord, had promised, that the book, containing the divine revelation, should be secure from those things." If this reasoning be sound, it is evident that instead of bringing to the Scriptures a preconceived theory of inspiration we ought to study them humbly and reverently, with the view of ascertaining their real nature and characteristics. In other words, we ought to form our theory of inspiration by the method of induction. The result of an impartial examination of the Bible is to show that there is no such thing as Verbal Inspiration in the sense of every word being equally authoritative and equally Divine. In some passages there is no sign of any supernatural influence having been exerted on the writer, his natural faculties being sufficient for the task assigned to him,—as, for example, in the compilation of historic facts such as were collected by Luke; while in other cases, where a mysterious influence can be traced, it appears to have varied greatly in the case of different writers, and even in different compositions of the same writer, rising to the greatest height

in those prophetic utterances in which the writer or speaker is lifted above himself and so overborne by the Divine Spirit as to bear witness to Divine truth even against his own inclination, under the influence of a will that is stronger than his own, the will of the Eternal.

When we speak of the inspiration of the Bible, therefore, it is well to remember that we are not using an exact scientific expression, but are merely describing the general character of the Scriptures as being in some sense of Divine origin. Great mischief may be done by claiming for the Bible more than it claims for itself. The effect of making claims that cannot be substantiated is to alienate thoughtful and honest men, who are repelled by false pretensions, especially when made in the supposed interests of religion. Many a man's faith has been weakened when he has found the Bible not to be what his teachers represented it to be. On this subject the "judicious Hooker" justifies the epithet so commonly applied to him when he says: "Whatsoever is spoken of God, or things appertaining to God, otherwise than truth is, though it seem an honour, it is an injury. And as incredible

praises given unto men do often abate and impair the credit of their deserved commendation, so we must likewise take great heed, lest, in attributing to Scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that do cause even those things which it hath most abundantly to be less reverently esteemed." Much to the same effect is the caution given by Richard Baxter in his "Catechising of Families": "The Scripture is like a man's body, where some parts are but for the preservation of the rest, and may be maimed without death: the sense is the soul of the Scripture; and the letters but the body, or vehicle. The doctrine of the Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Decalogue, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, is the vital part, and Christianity itself."

It is remarkable how carefully those who framed the Confessions and Articles of the Reformed Churches have refrained from laying down any definite theory of inspiration. In the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England the term is not applied to Scripture at all; while the Westminster Confession, after enumerating all the books of the Old and the New Testament "under the name of Holy

Scripture, or the Word of God written," simply adds: "all which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life." It is also remarkable that the word "inspiration" which has figured so largely in theological controversy, occurs only twice in the whole Bible, once in the Old Testament (Job 32^s, A.V.), and once in the New Testament (II Tim. 3¹⁶, A.V.); and in neither case is there any indication of the nature or the limits of the Divine influence exerted on the sacred writers. A great deal of labour has been spent both by Jewish and Christian writers in the attempt to define in a scientific manner the various degrees of inspiration which may be traced in different parts of the Bible. But it is much better at once to recognize the fact that the operations of the Holy Spirit are beyond our comprehension, whether they relate to the intellect or to the heart, whether they tend to illuminate the understanding or to sanctify the soul. In either case the co-operation of the Divine with the human is as inscrutable as the union of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. It is quite beyond our power to analyse the forces which have been at work,

though we can discern and appreciate their result.¹

The word "inspiration" is now so commonly used in other connexions that it is too late to contend for its exclusive application to Scripture. Even the "Word of God" is an expression which theoretically we have no right to confine to Scripture. It is one thing to say that Scripture contains the Word of God and another thing to say that it is the Word of God, although the distinction has not always been recognized in the Reformed Churches. In the fullest sense Jesus Christ alone is the "Word of God." As John says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was

¹ Dr. Sanday offers a definition of biblical inspiration in his article "Bible" in the "Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics": "If we were to try to sum up in a single word the common property which runs through the whole Bible and which, broadly speaking, may be said to distinguish it from other literature of the kind, we might say that it consists in the peculiar energy and intensity of the *God-consciousness* apparent in the writers." The same tendency that during the last half century has led commentators to dwell more than formerly on the human side of our Lord's life and ministry, has also shown itself in the greater attention now paid by critics to the personal idiosyncrasies and historical environment of those who committed the Divine truths to writing.

with God, and the Word was God. . . . There was the true light, which lighteth every man, coming into the world. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." We can therefore understand what Ruskin meant when he said that it is a grave heresy to call any book, or collection of books, the Word of God. "By that Word, or Voice, or Breath, or Spirit, the heavens and earth and all the host of them, were made; and in it they exist. It is your life; and speaks to you always, so long as you live nobly; dies out of you as you refuse to obey it; leaves you to hear, and be slain by, the word of an evil spirit, instead of it. It may come to you in books, come to you in clouds, come to you in the voices of men, come to you in the stillness of deserts. You must be strong in evil, if you have quenched it wholly; very desolate in this Christian land, if you have never heard it at all." ("Fors Clavigera," 36^s.)

All that we are entitled to claim, or have any need to claim, for the Bible is that it contains the Word of God to a degree unequalled in any other book or in any other literature. In doing so, we may admit, with Luther, regarding certain portions of Scripture, that

the gold and silver and precious stones are mingled with wood and hay and stubble. Or we may adopt the language of a learned divine who took part in the composition of the Shorter Catechism and was one of the clerks of the Westminster Assembly : "The Scriptures themselves are rather a lanthorn than a light ; they shine indeed, but it is *alieno lumine* ; it is not their own but a borrowed light. . . . It is a light as it represents God unto us, who is the original light. It transmits some rays, some beams of the Divine nature ; but they are refracted, or else we should not be able to behold them. They lose much of their original lustre by passing through this medium, and appear not so glorious to us as they are in themselves. They represent God's simplicity obliquated and refracted by reason of many inadequate conceptions ; God condescending to the weakness of our capacity to speak to us in our own dialect." (From a sermon by John Wallis.)

So many tributes have been paid, from many different quarters, to the intrinsic value of the Scriptures, that the question of inspiration is not one about which we need be greatly concerned at the present day. There are more

vital and pressing questions of a critical nature, the chief of these being whether we may rely on the historic truth of the Gospel narrative and the Book of Acts, and whether the Epistles were really written by the men whose names they bear.

The Church demands, and has a right to demand, that these questions be fairly considered, and that a decision be given in every case according to the evidence adduced. If a document be proved to be otherwise trustworthy, the mere fact that it bears witness to the supernatural, whether in a physical or a spiritual sense, cannot be allowed to invalidate the evidence in its favour. The Church could not consent to this without turning its back on its own parentage, since all history shows that it was founded on belief in the supernatural. While ready to give due weight to all that scholars and philosophers have to say, the Christian community cannot give up the right which belongs to it as a spiritual jury to come to a verdict on all that pertains to the essentials of the faith.

It seems now to be practically certain that the literary criticism of the New Testament

will never of itself destroy the foundations of the faith. No investigation of documentary sources is ever likely to discredit the character of the witnesses whose testimony is embodied in our sacred books. But it is always open to those who are sceptically inclined to explain away such testimony by one means or another. Behind all questions of criticism there lies a region of mystery in which philosophical pre-suppositions and personal predilections can hardly fail to make their influence felt. In this region new problems have recently presented themselves, arising out of the discovery of a new world of Jewish thought in the form of an apocalyptic literature of the last century B.C. and the first century A.D., as well as from the fuller recognition of various Gentile influences which are supposed to have contributed to the religion of the primitive Church as represented in the New Testament. It is coming to be seen that the teaching of our Lord and His apostles was not so exclusively related to the Old Testament as was at one time believed to be the case; and we cannot deny the possibility of their having been influenced in some degree by ideas derived from

other sources, which were current in the communities whose intellectual life they shared.¹ To trace such tributary sources of thought and expression outside of the Old Testament comes fairly within the scope of Historical Theology : but the ultimate question for critics and for theologians, as for all other human beings who hear the Gospel, is whether that Gospel is a unique and supernatural manifestation of Divine love, to which there is nothing similar and nothing parallel ; or whether it is only one—the highest and best, it may be—of the numberless forms of religion which have been evolved in the course of human history. This is a question which no examination or analysis of the New Testament will ever be sufficient to settle. We have a striking illustration of this in the fact that recently a book was published by a learned critic, entitled “Myth, Magic, and Morals,” which did away with the

¹ According to Dr. Clemen in his “Primitive Christianity and its Non-Jewish Sources” (1912), the influence of such sources on the New Testament writers was very slight, affecting the form and expression of their teaching, rather than its substance. Prof. Kennedy, in his “St. Paul and the Mystery-Religions” (1913), comes to a similar conclusion.

historical character of the Gospels and left as little of the personality of Jesus Christ as the most reckless of random magazine articles, making him out to be an ideal creation of the Apostle Paul. Yet the critical opinions of this writer with regard to the date and authorship of the New Testament books are as conservative as those of many who firmly believe both in the humanity and the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. This shows that no results of criticism, however favourable to the traditional view, can ever compel men to accept the Christian faith; in the last resort their attitude towards it will be determined, not by the intellect, but by the conscience and the heart, operating on the will. In this sense every man must judge of the Gospel for himself, and is bound to study the Scriptures for himself.

At the Reformation, as we have said, the people regained possession of the Bible. But it was not long before they allowed it to fall into the hands of specialists as before,—not monks or priests, but academic theorists who treated it as a theological text-book and left too much out of account its human and homely character. In recent times, however, there

has been a strong reaction, and the discussion of Biblical problems is now engaging the attention of all classes of the people, especially in Protestant lands. Handbooks dealing with questions affecting the genuineness, authenticity, and exegesis of the Scriptures, have now a wide circulation in forms more suitable for popular use than at any previous time. In some quarters, especially in Germany, such literature is too often dominated by naturalistic theories regarding the origin of Christianity and the person of the Saviour, with a tendency to exalt the life of the nation above that of the Church, and to merge theology in a philosophy which can find no room for the supernatural.

In these circumstances we can scarcely wonder at the recent papal encyclical denouncing Modernism, especially in view of the fact that the more prominent Roman Catholic critics, such as Tyrrell and Loisy, like Renan in the previous generation, have taken an extreme position on some of the most vital questions involved. The consequence is that the Church of Rome, which was at one time less disposed to assert the infal-

libility of Scripture than Protestants, is now claiming for it inspiration in the hardest and most mechanical sense. Fearing that criticism may undermine its whole dogmatic system, it has set itself once more in opposition to the principle of private judgment and to the rights of the laity. In this, as in so many other respects, it has departed widely from the spirit of the primitive Church, in which there is little or no trace of official or ecclesiastical domination in matters affecting the reception and interpretation of the New Testament writings.

In this connexion it is interesting to find that the result of recent research among the *papyri* and other ancient memorials has been to show that with very few exceptions the books of the New Testament are written in colloquial Greek, and were intended for the use of the common people. This still further justifies the Protestant position, and it is fitted to exert a salutary influence on professional critics, checking any tendency to heartless pedantry, and bringing home the fact that humanity and piety have even a more important part to play than learning and philosophy

in the just appreciation and the right use of the New Testament.

As Professor Deissmann says: "The New Testament is the people's book. When Luther, therefore, took the New Testament from the learned and gave it to the people, we can only regard him as restoring what was the people's own. And when at some tiny cottage window, behind the fuchsias and geraniums, we see an old dame bending over the open Testament, there the old Book has found a place to which by right of its nature it belongs. Or when a Red Cross sister finds a New Testament in the knapsack of a wounded Japanese, here too, the surroundings are appropriate. . . . Time has transformed the Book of the people into the Book of Humanity."

But it is the Book of God as well as the Book of Humanity, and for that reason it will always maintain its supremacy as the Book of Books. Thomas Carlyle said of it: "There never was any book like the Bible and there never will be another like it." That is a verdict that will stand, not merely because of the unparalleled influence which the Bible has

exerted and is still exerting as a moral and intellectual force, but because it is the abiding record and the true interpretation of a manifestation of God in human history, culminating in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, that can never be repeated while the world lasts.