

## XII.

### The Holy Scripture.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”— *2 Tim iii. 16, 17.*

Among the divine works of art produced by the Holy Spirit, the Sacred Scripture stands first. It may seem incredible that the printed pages of a book should excel His spiritual work in human hearts, yet we assign to the Sacred scripture the most conspicuous place without hesitation.

Objectors can never have considered what this holy Book is, or any other book, writing, or language is, or what the putting down of a world of thought in a collection of Sacred Scripture means. We deny that a book, especially such as the Sacred Scripture, opposes a world of divine thought, the current of life, and spiritual experience. A book is not merely paper printed in ink, but is like a portrait—a collection of lines and features in which we see the likeness of a person. *Standing* near, we see not the person, but spots and lines of paint; but at the right distance these disappear and we see the likeness of a person. Even now it does not speak to us, for it is the face of a stranger; we may be able to judge the man’s character, yet he fails to interest us. But let his child look, and instantly the image which left us cold appeals to him with warmth and life, which were invisible to us because our hearts lacked the essentials. What appeals to the child is not in the picture, but in his memory and imagination; the cooperation of the features in the painting and the father’s image in his heart makes the likeness speak.

This comparison will explain the mysterious effect of the Scripture. Guido de Brès spoke of it in his debates with the Baptists: “That which we call Holy Scripture is not paper with black impressions, but that which addresses our spirits by means of those impressions.” Those letters are but tokens of recognition; those words are only the clicks of the telegraph-key signaling thoughts to our spirits along the lines of our visual and auditory nerves. And the thoughts so signaled are not isolated and incoherent, but parts of a complete system that is directly antagonistic to man’s thoughts, yet enters their sphere.

Reading the Scripture brings to our minds the sphere of divine thoughts so far as needful for us as sinners, in order to glorify God, love our neighbor, and save the soul. This is not a mere collection of beautiful and glittering ideas, but the reflection of the divine life. In God life and thought are united: there can be no life without thought, no thought not the product of life. Not so with us. Falsehood entered us, *i.e.*, we can sever thought from life. Or rather, they are always severed, unless we have voluntarily established the former unity. Hence our cold abstractions; our speaking without doing; our words without power; our thoughts without working; our books that, like plants cut off from their roots, wither before they can blossom, much less bear fruit.



The difference between divine and human life gives Scripture its uniqueness and precludes antagonism between its letter and its spirit, such as a false exegesis of [2 Cor. iii. 6](#) might suggest. If the Word of God were dominated by the falsehood that has crept into our hearts, and in the midst of our misery continues to place word and life in opposition as well as separation, then we would take refuge in the standpoint of our dissenting brethren, with their exaltation of the life above the Word. But we need not do so, for the opposition and separation are not in the Scripture. For this reason it is the *Holy* Scripture; for it was not lost in the unholy tearing asunder of thought and life, and is therefore distinct from writings in which yawns the gulf between the words and the reality of life. What other writings lack is in this Book, perfect agreement between the life reflected in the divine thought and the thoughts which the Word begets in our minds.

The Holy Scripture is like a diamond: in the dark it is like a piece of glass, but as soon as the light strikes it the water begins to sparkle, and the scintillation of life greets us. So the Word of God apart from the divine life is valueless, unworthy even of the name of Sacred Scripture. It exists only in connection with this divine life, from which it imparts life-giving thoughts to our minds. It is like the fragrance of a flower-bed that refreshes us only when the flowers and our organs of smell correspond. Hence the illustration of the child and his father's picture is exact.

While the Bible always flashes thoughts born of the divine life, yet the effects are not the same in all. As a whole, it is the portrait of Him who is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His Person, aiming either to show us His likeness or to serve as its background.

Notice the difference when a child of God and an alien face that image. Not as tho it has nothing to say to the unregenerate—this is a mistake of Methodism which should be corrected.<sup>3</sup> It addresses itself to all men as the King's Word, and every one must receive its impress in his own way. But while the alien sees only a strange face, which annoys him, contradicts his world, and so repels him, the child of God understands and recognizes it. He is in holiest sympathy with the life of the world from which that image greets him. Thus reading what the stranger could not read, he feels that God is speaking to him, whispering peace to his soul.

Not as tho the Scripture were only a system of signals to flash thought into the soul; rather it is the instrument of God to awaken and increase spiritual life, not as by magic, giving a sort of attestation of the genuineness of our experience—a fanatical view always opposed and rejected by the Church—but by the Holy Spirit through the use of the Word of God.

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3 For the author's sense of Methodism; see section 5 in the Preface.

He regenerates us by the Word. The mode of this operation will be discussed later on; let it suffice here to say that the operations of the Word and the Holy Spirit never oppose each other, but, as St. Paul declares emphatically, that the Holy Scripture is prepared by the Spirit of God and given to the Church *as an instrument* to perfect God's work in man; as he expresses it. "*That the man of God may be perfect,*" (2 Tim. iii. 17) *i.e.*, a man formerly of the world, made a man of God by divine act, to be perfected by the Holy Spirit; wherefore he is already perfect in Christ through the Word. To this end, as St. Paul declares, the Scripture was inspired of God. Hence this work of art was prepared by the Holy Spirit to lead the new-born man to this high ideal. And to emphasize the thought he adds: "That he may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. iii. 17)

Hence Scripture serves this twofold purpose:

First, as an instrument of the Holy Spirit in His work upon a man's heart.

Secondly, to qualify man perfectly and to equip him for every good work.

Consequently the working of Scripture embraces not only the *quicken*ing of faith, but also the *exercise* of faith. Therefore instead of being a dead-letter, unspiritual, mechanically opposing the spiritual life, it is the very fountain of living water, which, being opened, springs up to eternal life.

Hence the Spirit's preparation and preservation of Scripture is not subordinate, but prominent with reference to the life of the entire Church. Or to put it more clearly: if prophecy; *e.g.*, aims first to benefit contemporary generations, and secondly to be part of the Holy Scripture that is to minister comfort to the Church of all ages, the latter is of infinitely higher importance. Hence the chief aim of prophecy was not to benefit the people living at that time, and through Scripture to yield fruit for us only indirectly, but through Scripture to yield fruit for the Church of all ages, and indirectly to benefit the Church of old.

### XIII.

#### The Scripture a Necessity.

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”—*Rom. xv. 4.*

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That the Bible is the product of the Chief Artist, the Holy Spirit; that He gave it to the Church and that in the Church He uses it as His instrument, can not be over-emphasized.

Not as tho He had lived in the Church of all ages, and given us in Scripture the record of that life, its origin and history, so that the life was the real substance and the Scripture the accident; rather the Scripture was the end of all that preceded and the instrument of all that followed.

With the dawn of the Day of days the Sacred Volume will undoubtedly disappear. As the New Jerusalem will need no sun, moon, or temple, but the Lord God will be its light, so will there be no need of Scripture, for the revelation of God shall reach His elect directly through the unveiled Word. But so long as the Church is on earth, face-to-face communion withheld, and our hearts accessible only by the avenues of this imperfect existence, Scripture must remain the indispensable instrument by which the Triune God prepares men's souls for higher glory.

The cause of this lies in our personality. We think, we are self-conscious, and the threefold world *about* and *above* and *within* us is reflected in our thoughts. The man of confused or unformed consciousness or one insane can not act as a man. True, there are depths in our hearts which the plummet of our thinking has not sounded; but the influence that is to affect us deeply, clearly, with outlasting effect upon our personality, must be wrought through our self-consciousness.

The history of sin proves it. How did sin enter the world? Did Satan infuse its poison into man's soul while he slept? By no means. While Eve was fully herself, Satan began to discuss the matter with her. He wrought upon her consciousness with words and representations, and she, allowing this, drank the poison, fell, and dragged her husband with her. Had not God thus foretold it? Man's fall was to be known neither by his recognized nor by his unrecognized emotions, but by the *tree of knowledge of good and evil*. The knowledge that caused his fall was not merely abstract, intellectual, but *vital*. Of course the operating cause was external, but it wrought upon his consciousness and bore the form of *knowledge*.

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And as his fall, so also must be his *restoration*. Redemption must come from *without*, act upon our *consciousness*, and bear the form of *knowledge*. To affect and win us in our personality we must be touched in the very spot where sin first wounded us, viz., in our proud and haughty self-consciousness. And since our consciousness mirrors itself in a world of thought—thoughts expressed in words so intimately connected as to form, as it were, but *one word*—therefore it was of the highest necessity that a new, divine world of thought