

LECTURE V.

Different Theories of Inspiration—Natural Inspiration or Genius—Religious Inspiration or extraordinary Piety—Inspiration of the Sacred Writers not subjective, but objective.—The Spirit of God: not His ordinary Influences, but extraordinary Gifts, miraculous Endowments manifested by the Performance of Great Works—Bezaleel, the Seventy Elders, Samson, Jephthah, Saul—and especially the Communication of Divine Truth.—Three Stages or Steps in the Process—The Revelation to the Messenger; his Apprehension of it, or the State of his Mind prepared for receiving it; and the Power of embodying it in Language.—First, the Revelation, “the Word of the Lord,” came suddenly—Means of knowing the Word of the Lord—Not an Illusion of the Fancy—No private Interpretation.—Second, Different Modes of communicating the Divine Will—Condescending Familiarity to Adam—Face to Face in the instance of Moses—Afterwards by Dreams, Elihu, by Visions, and by Divine Illapses.—Third, Power of imparting the Truth revealed to Others—Necessity of this Power to stamp the Record with Divine Authority—Language emblematic, or modified by the Medium through which the Revelation was conveyed—Moved to speak and write—Hand of the Lord—Bodily Effects of the Communication, sometimes agitating—Prophets both active and passive—Instruments in communicating the Divine Will, but not unconscious Instruments—The Mechanical View of Inspiration adopted by Justin Martyr—This Dogma revived at Reformation—Coleridge’s sarcastic Description of it as Spiritual Ventriloquism—Inconsistent with the Laws of our Mental Constitution—Divine Element—Human Element—Individuality—Diversity of Style—Action of each Distinct, while the Union leads to harmonious Co-operation—Incomprehensible—Writers of the New Testament—A Calm and Permanent Inspiration.

INSPIRATION, meaning the agency by which the Scriptures were produced, is a primary and fundamental fact in its literary history; and every reader who has duly pondered the views propounded in the preceding pages, must have seen in the leading characteristics of the sacred volume a basis broad and solid enough for the full establishment of that fact. Looking to the contents of the Bible,—to the structure and style of the sacred history,—to the lengthened chain of prophecies pointing to a distant future, many of which have been, and are in the course of being accomplished,—to its sublime doctrines,—and to its reigning character and aims, so different from the principles and spirit that pervade human productions, it is impossible for an intelligent and candid person to come to any other conclusion, than that in the composition of this book, there is discernible a superior wisdom, which superintended, directed, or controlled its penmen. How and by what means this influence was communicated could not fail to become a subject of earnest inquiry, prompted alike by intelligent curiosity, grateful piety, and a laudable desire to learn all the ascertainable facts connected with so remarkable an emanation of divine wisdom. The Scripture does not present

to us, as an object of study, the nature or the manner of its inspiration. What it does propose to our faith is simply the divine inspiration of the word as delivered by the sacred writers; and after it has been admitted as a truth, that a spiritual agency was exerted on the penmen of Scripture, the *modus operandi* is unquestionably a matter of minor interest and importance. Nevertheless, men of speculative tendencies, who delight to investigate the causes and trace the course of things, were naturally led to consider the possibilities and probabilities of a divine influence being put forth in superintending and guiding the movements of the human mind in the production of the Bible. These being conceded, they were led further to inquire who were the privileged persons selected to communicate the mind of God to man; in what manner they were qualified by the inspiration of the Spirit for the office to which they were appointed; whether they were merely passive or active recipients of the divine afflatus, co-operating with all their energies in the discharge of their divine mission; what was the special fitness of the times and places when the intermittent spring of inspiration gave forth its purifying waters; for what immediate or remotely prospective ends the

communications were made; and whether these communications received a colouring from the distinctive idiosyncrasies of the inspired messengers, or exhibited an unvarying uniformity of style and character. These questions, all of which cluster around the central idea of inspiration, though of secondary importance in religious practice, possess great interest in philosophy and speculation; and as numerous theories have been advanced and keenly advocated by eminent writers, it falls within the province of a work of this kind to examine whether and how far they are adequate to explain all the phenomena which appear in the Scripture. Whatever interest the question may possess in a metaphysical or psychological point of view, inspiration as a practical subject remains; nor can an intelligent belief in the reality of inspiration be affected by any hypothesis which theorists may form for determining the confines of the close mysterious influence that was exerted by the spiritual over the material, the divine over the human.

Rationalists, though professed believers, entertain in general a low idea of the character and authority of the scriptural record; and after eliminating the supernatural element entirely from the sacred

volume, they are only carrying out their principle to its legitimate consequences, when they deny the reality of a miraculous influence in the production of the Bible. That denial, however, has been made in a variety of forms. Some maintain that the sacred writers communicated their religious teaching in myths, which, according to the tastes and habits of their age, were embodied in narratives invented as a literary framework for their public exhibition; others hold that the prophets and apostles, under a mental hallucination, mistook their own impressions and thoughts for realities, and recorded them as objective facts; while a third party, considerable both for numbers and influence in this country, as well as on the Continent and in America, virtually deny the inspiration of the sacred writers, while affecting to recognise them as men gifted with superior natural talents. They use the term inspired in the loose and secondary sense in which it is frequently applied; and in one point of view, there can be no objection to that application of the word: for, as "the inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding," so every person of high intellectual endowments must be regarded as having received them from "the Father of lights, from whom cometh down every

good and perfect gift." Accordingly, an eloquent Rationalist has said: "All genius is inspired. It is a scintillation of the Infinite, a beam of the great universal mind. Homer, Milton, and Shakespeare were inspired to sing; Socrates and Plato to teach men the philosophy of mind and morals; Newton and Laplace to investigate the laws of nature; Tell and Washington to vindicate the cause of liberty." And he considers that the prophets and apostles were in *like manner* inspired, by their showing themselves animated by a spark of the *mens diviniior*, which is lighted up in the breasts of all nature's aristocracy. A little consideration, however, is all that is necessary to show that the sacred writers occupy a position peculiar to themselves, and which none who have risen to greatness in literature, science, or art, have equalled or can equal. The poet, even of that order to which is ascribed the power of creative genius, can only idealize the scenes of the natural world, and in his highest moods, when "his eye is in a fine frenzy rolling," and "his fancy from her pictured urn throws thoughts that breathe and words that burn," can do no more than take of the things of earth to form new and imaginary combinations of nature for himself; whereas the pro-

phets were favoured with "visions of God," and sung of times when, all old things having passed away, there shall be "a new heaven and a new earth." The philosopher who, like Newton, described the laws of the planetary system, or, like Locke, marshalled the shadowy tribes of mind, discovered laws important in their bearing upon the enlightenment and welfare of mankind, but still laws which, though long hidden, were reachable by patient research and well-directed labour; whereas the sacred writers communicated a knowledge of heavenly and divine things which no human industry or penetration could have disclosed, and which never could have been known except through persons employed by God Himself in revealing these mysteries. The promoters of social progress, by the introduction of the steam-engine, the telescope, and the telegraph, have triumphed over the obstructions of time and space, and brought the most distant and opposite parts of the earth, as it were, into close proximity; but the writers of the Bible, by proclaiming faith in Christ, and "the new commandment which He gave," have announced principles which, when established, will not only draw all the scattered families of mankind into a state of happy union

and brotherly intercourse, but reconcile all things in heaven and earth to God. The fact is, that there is no common ground on which men of genius in the literary, scientific, or political world can be compared with the sacred penmen; and that the object of the Rationalistic party, who are ready to recognise their inspiration, is not to elevate them to the first ranks of humanity, but to reduce them to a level with mere naturally able men. Besides, the sacred writers do nowhere claim the prestige of genius. With the exception of a very few, the greater part of them were men who would have passed their lives in obscurity, and left the world unnoticed and unknown, but for being called to the honourable office of proclaiming the divine will. It was not their intellectual power nor their extensive qualifications that brought them into the notice of their contemporaries, and still holds them up to the admiration of posterity, but their being the bearers of a message supported by the credentials of heaven, and the authoritative announcement of "Thus saith the Lord."

Further, this theory is founded on the erroneous assumption, that the inspiration of the sacred writers was subjective, whereas it was wholly objec-

tive. It did not spring from within, or was produced by the exaltation of the natural faculties to an unwonted pitch of energy and action: it came upon them from without, emanating from a quarter above and beyond themselves; and that source is uniformly described in Scripture to be the Spirit of God. Now the Spirit is promised equally to all the people of God; and in whatever form or degree any of them require His heavenly influences, they are bestowed. Those who enjoy them show the effects by their being led to understand the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures, to perceive it in all the analogies of divine truth, and to feel its importance and its power in sanctifying the whole tone of their characters and lives. Nay, wherever the truth is brought home to the understanding and the heart with the demonstration of the Spirit, it has also the moral power of bringing all the faculties and passions of their souls into healthful and harmonious exercise,—of not only imparting light and peace, but of giving to the uneducated, the humble, and the weak, a dignity of sentiment, a purity of feeling, and a moral energy which philosophy never gave, and never can give. The sacred writers, as good men, would enjoy those common influences of the Spirit; but that they were

not all in a sanctified and saved condition, is evident from the fact that amongst the number were a Balaam, a Judas, and others, of whom our Lord declared: "Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you." The inspiration of the sacred writers, then, was not a religious inspiration, the effect of transcendent piety and high-toned spiritual-mindedness. It was an inspiration not necessarily implying a regenerated character, and was amongst those extraordinary gifts which the Spirit conferred upon some who were employed in advancing the kingdom of God. Thus the Spirit of God is described as qualifying Bezaleel and Aholiab¹ for the work of erecting the tabernacle. It is the explicit doctrine of Scripture, that intellectual power or genius is derived from God (Job xxxii. 8; Jas. i. 17); and in reference to those two persons, it is said that even excellence in the mechanical arts is a divine gift. The statement that the Spirit of God filled, invigorated, and animated the minds of these head workmen, is so particularly made, and so often

¹ Ex. xxxv. 35.

repeated, as to convey the impression of a divine afflatus, and it is generally thought that they were endowed with the gifts and qualities necessary for their work to a degree which amounted to inspiration. In fact, the tabernacle was to an ancient Israelite nearly what the Epistles of the New Testament are to a modern Christian. Everything in it and about its apartments, and their furniture, was to possess the sacredness of a faithful exhibition of the scheme of divine grace. Nothing could have been added, subtracted, or in the least degree altered, without leading to fatal errors. To have changed the form and use of an altar, or to have confounded the furniture of the holy with that of the most holy place, would have been a corruption, the same in kind and tendency as to pervert or obliterate the most important passages of the New Testament Scriptures; and hence it was just as necessary that Bezaleel and his associate should be filled with the Spirit of God for giving a faithful transcript of the divine will in the tabernacle, as it was that the apostles should be inspired for unfolding the mind of Christ in the Epistles. The former were chosen to provide the means of religious instruction, by signs and symbols, to babes in understanding and knowledge;

while the latter were called to do it in a written form to grown-up men: and thus all Scripture, whether pictorial or alphabetic, was given by inspiration of God. The Spirit of God is described as qualifying leading men under the theocracy for the performance of public duties requiring extraordinary measures of wisdom, fortitude, and daring, as the seventy elders under Moses, Gideon, Samson, Jephthah, Saul, and others. It may be thought a Hebraism to ascribe to the Spirit of God what in our day would be called an unwonted exertion of wisdom and energy, suited to the exigencies of the occasion or the habits of the place. But if the form of expression be Hebraistic, so also were the actions themselves; for nothing like them is related in the history of any other people. But the principal work for which the Spirit of God is described as endowing men with His extraordinary gifts, is that of fitting a select few by inspiration for the delivery of divine truth to men. "God at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers *by* the prophets."¹ This implies that He spoke first *to* the minds of

¹ The Greek original (Heb. i. 1) has *ἐν τοῖς προφήταις*—*ἐν* for *διὰ*, *ἐν* for *ὑγ*; *διὰ τῶν προφητῶν*—as *διὰ στόματος τῶν ἁγίων προφητῶν*, by the mouth of the holy prophets, Luke i. 70.

the prophets, and then spoke *by* them. For this important office three things were necessary: the revelation of the truth to the chosen messenger; his apprehension, or the prepared state of his mind to receive it; and the power of imparting the revealed truth to others.

1. The revelation, or "the word of the Lord." This form of expression is a phrase of frequent occurrence in the later Scriptures, and it is almost invariably used to announce some direct communication from heaven, or the relation of a prophetic message, such as that which the seers or prophets of Israel were charged to deliver. The term naturally suggests the idea of audible and articulate sounds, by which the Lord made an oracular announcement of His will to men; and the revelation was made sometimes through the medium of a vocal address, at other times without the employment of this external agency. In the instances of Moses, when he entered the tabernacle (Num. vii. 89, viii. 1), of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iv. 30), of our Lord at three eventful periods of His ministry (Matt. iii. 17, xvii. 5; John xii. 28), and of Paul (Acts ix. 4), a real voice, miraculously produced, uttered sounds which were heard and understood by those to whom they were addressed; and that fact is

announced in a manner so express, that there can be no room for doubting. But the phraseology, in general, implies no external phenomena, and the *usus loquendi* of the sacred writers leads to the conclusion, that when "the word of the Lord came" (Heb. *was*) to any one, it was by a direct influence upon his mind, originating a train of ideas so far from the ordinary range of human thoughts or the penetration of human sagacity, and impressed with such unusual vividness, as was sufficient to determine it to be a supernatural communication. This is the formula with which the prophets generally introduce their communications, whether in reference to a direct special mission to individuals,¹ or to a more detailed and elaborate prediction against the nations, or to a solemn denunciation of God's judgments against the apostate people of Israel. It intimated that the *burden* or subject of their prophetic announcements was not the invention of their own minds, the result of their own observations, the fruit of their own cogitations,—not deduced from intelligence brought to them, nor

¹ Word of God came : 1 Sam. ix. 15, 27 ; 2 Sam. vii. 4, 27, xii. 7, xxiv. 12 ; 1 Kings xii. 22, xvii. 2, xviii. 1, xix. 9, 15, xx. 13, 14, 28, 42, xxi. 19, 28 ; 2 Kings iii. 17 ; 1 Chron. xvii. 3. The word of the Lord came : Num. xxii. 18 ; Deut. v. 5 ; 1 Sam. iii. 1, 7, xv. 3 ; 1 Kings xi. 27, xii. 24, xiii. 1, 2, 5, 9-32 ; Isa. ii. 1-3 ; Jer. i. 2, xxv. 3 ; Ezek. i. 3.

perhaps fully comprehended by the bearer of it (1 Pet. i. 10, 11),—but was a message with which the prophet was charged by God, and which bore such unequivocal evidence of its divine origin, that neither the messenger, nor the party to whom it was addressed, entertained any doubt as to its being a communication from heaven.

2. As to the way in which the word of the Lord came, it is interesting to consider the different modes employed by the Divine Being of making known himself and His will at those early periods of the world's history, when the word was in the course of being revealed, and before it was embodied in a permanent form. There is observable a gradual change from the time when, with condescending familiarity, God deigned to converse with His recently formed creature man, and to instruct him by word of mouth, down to the present age, when He no longer lets His voice be heard, and no longer commissions the prophets and apostles to make new revelations of His will to the chosen people. Having spoken to men at large by His Son, whose advent and ministry shed the full blaze of light on all that pertained to our present duty and future salvation, and the canon of Scripture being now complete under the dispensa-

tion of the Spirit, there is no necessity nor ground to look for any further knowledge or additional communication of the divine will than what we possess in the Scriptures. But in giving out the matter which was progressively embodied in a written form, God was pleased to reveal His will in different ways. Not to dwell upon that singular form called speaking face to face¹ and mouth to mouth,² and to enjoy which, whatever the phraseology means, was during the time of the Jewish church the distinguished and exclusive privilege of Moses, one of the most common channels by which revelation was communicated was through the medium of a dream. "If there be a prophet among you," saith the Lord, "I will speak unto him in a dream."³ And Elihu was declaring the experience of the age of Job, when he said, "In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed, then He openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction."⁴ Accordingly, it was in a dream that Jacob was promised the land on which he lay for an inheritance; and the future Saviour, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed, was obscurely

¹ Ex. xxxiii. 11.

² Num. xii. 8.

³ Num. xii. 6.

⁴ Job iv. 13, xxxiii. 15, 16.

shadowed forth to him. And it was by the same means of communication that Solomon received the rare and enviable privilege of asking the best gifts of heaven.¹ Nor was it merely to His own devoted servants that God imparted a revelation of His will; but on several important occasions, even to heathen princes also: as to Pharaoh He pre-intimated the famine with which He was about to afflict the land of Egypt; and to Nebuchadnezzar the awful calamity that was impending on that proud sovereign. But in such cases there was this marked difference, that while a prophetic dream was given to heathen or ungodly men, the power of interpretation did not accompany it—they knew not what the dream meant till the interpretation was sent by some servant of the Lord; whereas the prophets and people of God received usually the interpretation along with the dream.² But a still more frequent method of communicating the will of God was in a vision (Heb. *bamahazeh*), Sept. *ἐν ὄραμτι*. The recipient of a divine communication in this form was fully awake; but his mind, supernaturally elevated, was entirely absorbed in the contemplation of objects apart from the

¹ 1 Kings iii. 5.

² Gen. xv., xxviii., xlvi.; Dan. vii.; Matt. i. 11.

influence of material impressions, as well as unconnected with any former experience; and the supernatural scene was, by the intense excitement of his faculties, as distinctly exhibited to his mental vision as if he had obtained the knowledge through the medium of the bodily eye. It was in respect to this most frequently adopted method of revelation the prophets were called *seers*; and the scenes exhibited as *tableaux vivans* to their imagination or their senses were described as the visions of God.¹ Of such a character was the vision granted to Jacob,² to Moses,³ to Elisha,⁴ to Isaiah,⁵ to Jeremiah,⁶ Daniel,⁷ and Zechariah,⁸ to Peter,⁹ Paul,¹⁰ and John.¹¹

There was still another way in which the will of God was intimated to His servants, viz. by immediate impulses and suggestions of the Holy Spirit, as recorded in the experience of David,¹² of Philip,¹³ and of Peter.¹⁴

Thus, not to mention appearances of angels in human form,¹⁵ as well as of prelusive manifesta-

¹ 2 Chron. xxvi. 5; Ezek. i. 1, viii. 3.

² Gen. xxxii. 24-32; cf. Hos. xi. 4.

⁴ 2 Kings vi.

⁵ Isa. vi. 1.

⁷ Dan. ix.

⁸ Zech. i. 8.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. xii.

¹¹ Rev., *passim*.

¹³ Acts viii. 29.

¹⁴ Acts x. 19.

³ Ex. iii.

⁶ Jer. i. 11.

⁹ Acts x. 11.

¹² 1 Chron. xxviii.

¹⁵ Gen. xix.

tions of the Saviour,¹ God spake of old in divers manners to the fathers; and as "there were prophets" or inspired messengers of God "since the world began," so the mode of revealing the divine will to each was adapted with divine wisdom to the circumstances of time and place, as well as to the character and state of the recipient. By what means he was satisfied that the communication made to him was of divine origin does not always appear, although on some occasions its supernatural character was established, in the case of a dream, by its being doubled,² or, as in the instance of Nebuchadnezzar, by its vivid impression and portentous character; in that of a voice speaking, where there was no person present to utter articulate sounds, by its repetition;³ and in other instances, by the hand of Providence preparing a train of circumstances, which led to the direct end of attesting the word of the Lord that the prophet had received.⁴ He himself might be unable, as was frequently the case, to penetrate the hidden significance of the matter he was called to reveal, but his mind was supernaturally enlarged and invigo-

¹ Ex. xxxiv. ; Josh. v. 13 ; Judg. xii. 1.

² Gen. xxxvii., xli. 32.

³ 1 Sam. iii.

⁴ Jer. xxxii. 6-8 ; Zech. xi. 11.

rated to apprehend the mystic truth set before him; and the extraordinary clearness of his conceptions is indicated by the formula with which the prophetic books usually open: "The vision of Isaiah,—which he *saw*;" "The words of Amos,—which he *saw*;" "The word of the Lord that came to Micah,—which he *saw*."

3. The power of imparting the revealed truth to others. A revelation might have been given; but if the publication of it had been left to the discretion of the messenger, it might have been in some points of vital importance imperfect or erroneous, and at best it would have been a mere human testimony. Had the writers of the Bible stated what they saw and heard in the supernatural ways described above, delivering their reports from the stores of memory, and according to the dictates of their judgments,—not requiring any special assistance, and not receiving it,—what they announced as religious instruction in the name of God would so far have the sanction of divine authority; for, possessing the credentials of their prophetic office, they would claim the same confidence for the narration of what they witnessed on earth as for the voices and visions of heaven. But it would only be the substance of their in-

structions which would have a religious nature ; to this only would their credentials refer ; and only as it respects this could our confidence in the instructions of the Scripture conduce to our moral and spiritual improvement. The record in which they were embodied would be possessed of no authoritative character ; and as its authors might have mixed up a variety of irrelevant and secular subjects with the divine communications they had received, it might be a delicate and difficult matter to separate the divine from the human, and truth from unavoidable error. The necessity, then, of the ambassadors chosen of God to reveal His will being not only qualified to *apprehend* the revelations made to them, but being endowed with the adequate power of embodying it in language, is obvious. It rendered them not omniscient,—for their knowledge was limited to the truth revealed,—but infallible, and it has stamped the record with divine authority : for we have thus a solid and comfortable assurance, not only that the word of God is in the Bible, but that the Bible is the word of God.

It was thus that all to whom God was pleased to reveal a portion of His will were qualified by the Spirit to receive and impart it ; and as He was

from time to time making partial revelations in all ages down to the advent of Christ, there were always some inspired messengers in the world, such as Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and his immediate descendants, Isaac and Jacob. With Moses, a new era was begun in the impartation of inspired power ; for as a particular people were chosen and trained to preserve the knowledge and worship of God for many centuries amid the darkness, superstitions, and polytheism of all other nations in the world, a direct course of religious instruction and warning was always kept up through the instrumentality of divinely called and qualified ambassadors. The measure of inspiration, as well as the number of inspired messengers, was always proportioned to the exigency of the times. And hence, as an unbroken succession of prophets appeared in the later and declining ages of the monarchy, so the greatest of those messengers flourished, and some of the grandest predictions of the glorious state of the kingdom of God in the future ages of the gospel were delivered, in the darkest and most degenerate times of the Jewish church. Elijah and Elisha rose in the reign of Ahab. Isaiah continued his prophetic functions through the time of Ahaz. And during the protracted period of

captivity, several eminent prophets alternately consoled, encouraged, and edified their exiled countrymen. But with Malachi inspiration ceased, and the Jews were left like other people to their own resources. The reason was, that their national character had undergone a total change; and having been completely cured of that strange fondness for idolatry, to protest against which, as a breach of the national covenant, had been the immediate occasion of the prophetic office, they no longer needed the services of those extraordinary ministers: for they thenceforth became as distinguished for their blind and bigoted adherence to national institutions, as they had formerly been for their woful departures from the law and the worship of God. The miraculous provision which had been made by the institution of inspired instructors was withdrawn or suspended for a period of four hundred years. But "as, in the material world, Providence has everywhere proportioned the means to the end, the forces being not greater than the occasion requires; so it would seem that, in His spiritual communications, extraordinary aids are only granted when ordinary influence is insufficient." ¹ The advent of Messiah being the greatest

¹ Clinton's *Fasti Hellenici*, vol. i. p. 283.

and most momentous era in the world's history, demanded the renewal of miraculous aid; and accordingly inspiration, after a long suspension, was revived in the church to the apostles and evangelists, to qualify them for the extraordinary duties they had to perform in laying the foundation of the Christian church. But there is discernible a marked difference in the character of the inspiration which was imparted respectively to the ancient prophets and the apostles of Christ; and it is proper, therefore, to take a brief notice of the characteristic distinction.

The prophets, doubtless, enjoyed the ordinary influences of the Spirit in delivering their public instructions, as preachers do in modern times; but those influences were bestowed only in a partial degree; and hence, as in working a miracle a considerable time was previously spent in prayer,¹ so the illapse of the Spirit on a prophet, to whom the word of the Lord came for some special mission, was usually marked by circumstances that arrested attention. "The Spirit of God came upon the prophets." "Searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was *in* them did signify, when He testified beforehand the sufferings

¹ 1 Kings xvii. 21; 2 Kings iv. 34, 35.

of Christ, and the glory that should follow." "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." These and many other passages of a similar import intimate the fact of direct revelation, the result of the extraordinary influence of God acting upon the minds of the prophets and apostles, by which they were supernaturally illuminated, and had the ideas, objects, and events vividly impressed upon them, a knowledge of which they could never have acquired in a natural way, or which, without such an interposition of divine aid, they could never have been qualified to communicate to the world. These passages, viewed separately, and still more collectively, convey the impression that the recipients were wrought upon directly and immediately by the Holy Spirit, who enlightened and prepared their minds to perceive the things which they were to promulgate to others; disposed them to give earnest attention to them, to view them with intense interest; and furnished them, as the exigency of particular circumstances required, with the power of announcing in correct and appropriate language the matters which they were inspired to make known. In the nature of things, the engrossing occupation of the mind with any subject of un-

usual interest and importance tends to produce excitement. And how much more so, when the subject is wrapped in impenetrable mystery, and is borne upon the attention by the master-potency of the Spirit of God! At the time when the prophets were favoured with their mystic visions, their minds were commonly in a state of more than ordinary excitement. Their attention was so absorbed with the visionary scene that flitted before their fancy, as to make them totally insensible to what was actually passing around them. They were sometimes awake, but they were also sometimes in a trance; or, as it was generally in the season of deepest slumber that the prophetic afflatus came upon them, the effect was to rouse their imaginations into the most vivid exercise; and while their senses were dormant, or ceased to hold any communication with external nature, the faculties and emotions of their minds were kept in the most intense action by the strange and unknown images that were successively submitted to their eyes. Nor was this all, for sometimes violent effects were produced upon the body; and although there is no ground to suppose that the light of reason was under an eclipse, and the mental faculties were overpowered, yet the cor-

poreal frame was sometimes subjected to so extreme an agitation, that the traces of it were felt many days after. Some indication of this overmastering power is conveyed by such statements as these: "The Spirit of the Lord came upon" the prophet. "The hand of the Lord was strong, or fell upon" him.¹ "Holy men of God spake as they were moved² by the Holy Ghost." The first of these expressions implies that the prophetic afflatus was usually sudden. No premonition was given of its descent, and no mental effort made to procure it; for although Elisha sought on one occasion the aid of a minstrel, previous to the utterance of a remarkable prediction,³ that act was a personal expedient of his, to soothe and tranquillize his mind, which had been agitated by the presence of an idolatrous king. The inspiration, for the most part, was unexpected by the recipient at the time when its influence began to be felt; and sometimes that influence bore upon him with a pressure which greatly affected his physical frame. Sudden and painful intelligence frequently gives rise to such violent emotions as to agitate the

¹ Isa. viii. 11; Ezek. viii. 1, iii. 14, xi. 5.

² Gr. *φερόμενοι*, "borne along, carried forward," as a ship by the wind.—ALFORD.

³ 2 Kings iii. 15.

bodily frame to its extremities; and is it wonderful that, when the prophets were charged with the astounding disclosures of impending judgments upon their own nation or the neighbouring countries,—disclosures of grinding famine, deadly pestilence, desolating wars and protracted exile, the fall of great monarchs, and the ruin of flourishing empires,—or, on the other hand, with the animating announcement of the glorious advent and the inestimable blessings of Messiah's reign,—the strangeness of the visions they witnessed, and the magnitude of the thoughts with which their minds were filled, were followed by nervous excitement, physical prostration, and even swooning?¹ Besides, the symbolic acts they were commanded to perform before the country—although some of them were merely ideal and visionary—were calculated by their singularity to expose the prophets to public derision and obloquy, so that they must have entered upon the discharge of the prophetic office with great reluctance. Isaiah's naming his son Maher-shalal-hash-baz (hasten-booty, speed-spoil), walking naked and barefoot three years,² and Hosea's marriage with

¹ Dan. viii. 18, x. 10, 11.

² Isa. xx. 2, 3, naked, *i.e.* loosing the sackcloth from his loins.

Gomer: these and the many grotesque actions and gesticulations exhibited by men of the prophetic order,—for they taught by act and sign as well as by words,—gave rise to the proverbial taunt, “The prophet is a fool, and the spiritual man (man of the Spirit) is mad.”¹ Accordingly Jeremiah, with reference to the public sneers with which he was assailed by the people of his degenerate times, says, “Thou hast persuaded me, and I was persuaded; Thou wast stronger than I, and hast prevailed.”² The reproaches that were daily heaped upon him preyed so much upon his sensitive mind, that he resolved to prophesy no more. And he did discontinue his duties for a while. It was then that the word of the Lord, which he had been commissioned to speak, became as “a burning fire shut up in his loins,” and “he was weary with his forbearance;” so that he could not refrain from speaking, and he resumed his prophetic functions as formerly. Thus they “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;” and they wrote also under the influence of the same divine Agent the different portions of the Scripture which they

¹ Hos. ix. 7, comp. 2 Kings ix. 11.

² Jer. xx. 7. *Pittithani*, Gr. *πειθω*, *persuaded*; not *deceived*, as in the Authorized Version.

respectively contributed, some of them being prompted by the pious and benevolent motive of teaching the principles of faith and duty, others having received an express command to record the revelations made to them.¹

That the seers themselves remained in partial or complete ignorance of the real import or character of many of the scenes supernaturally disclosed to them, appears not only from the evident bearing of several passages of Scripture, but from the nature of the case ; as the objects revealed often referred to times and circumstances so far remote from their actual experience, that no explanation could have made these level to their comprehension. They were therefore, strictly speaking, reporters of what they saw, retailers of communications they had been selected as the honoured instruments of receiving from heaven. The pictures exhibited to their enraptured fancy made a deep and indelible impression, though the receivers could tell little or nothing of what their dreams portended. They could describe with the invigorated powers and from the faithful records of memory what they had seen ; but they were often left in as painful

¹ Ex. xvii. 14, xxxiv. 27 ; Isa. viii. 1 ; Jer. xxx. 2 ; Hab. ii. 2 ; Rev. i. 11.

perplexity as to the meaning of their visions, as the people to whom their predictions were delivered. Accordingly, we read that "they searched diligently what and what manner of time the Spirit of prophecy that was in them did signify." And who does not see in this remarkable circumstance a proof of the inspiration of the prophets? Not only did the predicted events belong to periods so remotely future, and involve contingencies so many and so great, that no sagacity, however far-sighted, could have made the discovery of them; but they were wrapt up as in an unknown tongue, or in a sealed book, from the ken even of the persons employed to record them. And how, in such circumstances, could they have been the authors of a cunningly devised fable? There must have been, had they attempted to palm an imposture on the credulity of mankind, an incoherence in the parts of their story, which no ingenuity could explain or reconcile; or it would have been pervaded by a rhapsody or extravagant rant, which in the judgment of intelligent readers would have been sufficient to detect their fictitious character. But, on the contrary, when through the well-known and uniform symbols of the prophetic style one arrives at the plain meaning of the prophecies, he perceives

a close connection, a beautiful harmony in their details, as well as a minute accuracy, a graphic faithfulness to historical truths, such as establishes beyond a doubt the inspiration and divine authority of the Old Testament prophets.

The inspiration that was given to the New Testament writers, though proceeding from the same Spirit, was marked by a very different character; for it was not sudden and intermittent, but permanent: it produced no violent or sensible effects upon the mind and body; for although the Holy Ghost descended, on the day of Pentecost, with "a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind,"¹ it was ever afterwards calm, persuasive, and gentle, invigorating their faculties, and guiding them into the knowledge and inculcation of sanctifying truth. The Spirit, which was formally and without measure imparted to Christ at His entrance into His mediatorial office, is said to be upon Him,² or, as it is in a parallel passage, to "rest upon Him;"³ thus intimating a marked and most important distinction between Him and former messengers of God: for, while the Spirit fell on them only occasionally, when they were charged with some special mission, it was to continue upon

¹ Acts ii. 2.

² Isa. ix.

³ Isa. li. 1.

Him. And as the apostles were to prosecute the ministry of the word which He had begun, He qualified them for their important work, by the extraordinary gifts and endowments of the Holy Spirit, who was to abide with them individually and collectively for ever. The history of the first plantation of the Christian church shows how fully, freely, and permanently the Spirit was with the apostles and their coadjutors.

It has been maintained by many eminent writers that the Hebrew prophets were deprived of the free and conscious use of their faculties while under the influence of the prophetic afflatus. This was the theory of Philo and the Alexandrian school, that the consciousness of the seers was entirely suspended so long as the inspiration lasted; for, as Philo expresses it, "the human understanding takes its departure on the arrival of the Divine Spirit, and, on the removal of the latter, again returns to its home; for the mortal must not dwell with the immortal." This view has had its advocates in modern times, amongst the most eminent of whom is Hengstenberg, who holds the doctrine, that a cessation of human agency and intelligent perception is necessarily connected with a state of prophetic ecstasy; and the basis

on which he rests this principle is, that it was not the prophets who spoke, but God who spoke in them. He reduces them to the condition of mere passive instruments; and when he carries his hypothesis further, by maintaining that, besides losing their consciousness, the Hebrew prophets were raised to a state of furore, or raving, like that which is described by Virgil,—

At, Phœbi nondum patiens, immanis in antro
Bacchatur Vates, magnum si pectore possit,
Excussisse deum, tanto magis ille fatigat
Os rabidum, fera corda domans, fingitque premendo,—

in what respect did the inspired seers of Israel differ from the *μαντις* of the Greeks or the Vates of the Romans? Hengstenberg says that the heathen Pythian priestess lost her consciousness, “because the inferior part of the soul was excited to a contest against the superior part of it;” in other words, she *raved* through the influence of the vapour which issued from the fountain in her temple, or else that a great part of the maniacal excitement was the result of dissimulation and pretence. “But what an immeasurable distance,” says Moses Stuart, “between a raving man or woman, uttering incoherent sentences, or (which was more common) a dissembling hypocrite, uttering cunningly and artfully and equivocally constructed sentences and

poetical riddles ; and a Hebrew prophet, animated by the strongest and deepest feelings of reverence for Jehovah, and a holy ardour in the cause of true piety ! Is there ambiguity, flattery, self-seeking, enigmas, in the message of the latter ? None. Are not all these stamped on more or less of the heathen oracles ? They are. And such being the case, we would separate the Hebrew prophet from the heathen seer, not by discrepancies of a mere physiological or psychological nature, which lie beyond our ken, in case they exist at all ;¹ or rather, which involve contradictions and impossibilities ; but by a rational, enlightened, holy, zealous state of mind, which raised the true seer above all false ones, and did this by making him in a high degree like to the Author of his inspiration.

Now it is doubtless true, and universally admitted, that the prediction of future events which the prophets announced was not the result of their natural sagacity, nor the conclusion of their observant minds, but was communicated to them by Him who “ knows the end from the beginning,” and who has all the events of futurity as well as of the present spread out as a map before Him. But if He was desirous to remove the veil that

¹ *Bib. Repository*, vol. ii. p. 231.

shrouds the distant future from the knowledge of the world, He could have done it in many ways,—though the medium of an inferior creature or inanimate thing, or by a direct utterance from heaven; and since He did not make choice of any of these methods, but employed the services of men in making such communications, it is impossible to resist the conclusion, that the consciousness and intellectual powers of rational creatures were necessary to be enlisted, as subservient to the peculiar work of prophesying. This opinion is confirmed by considering the radical import of the Hebrew as well as Greek word, prophet, which combines both an active and a passive sense, or conveys the idea of activity springing from a preceding state of passiveness; as appears from the passage in Exodus, where the Lord says to Moses,¹ “See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet,” or spokesman, *i.e.* should receive from Moses a knowledge of the successive demands to be made, and then communicate them to the Egyptian monarch. The Spirit of God acted upon the minds of the prophets, not by suspending or paralyzing their consciousness, but, as we formerly remarked, by enlightening and

¹ Ex. vii. 1.

invigorating their faculties; and it seems to have been in consequence of their æsthetic feelings and their imagination having been excited to an unwonted pitch by the visionary scenes presented to them, that the great majority of the prophets embodied their prophetic songs in poetry,—a far more probable hypothesis than that they first delivered them in plain prose, and afterwards at leisure wrought them into a poetic form.

It has been the opinion of many both in the ancient and modern church, that the prophets were the mere mouthpieces of the Spirit. Balaam is appealed to by Philo as an example of a humble, involuntary, unconscious instrument through whom God spoke.¹ And Josephus represents Balaam himself as apologizing to Balak on this ground: "When the Spirit of God seizes us, it utters whatsoever sounds and words it pleases, without any knowledge on our part; for when it has come into us, there is nothing in us which remains our own."² This mechanical view of inspiration was adopted by Justin Martyr, who considers that the mind of the prophet under the influence of the Spirit resembled a plectrum,—a mere organ, the instrument giving out particular sounds according

¹ *De Vita Mosis*, lib. i. t. ii.

² *Jewish Antiq.* iv. 6. 5.

to the chord that is struck. From the Fathers this theory was handed down till the time of the Reformation, when the dogma was revived, and strenuously maintained as doing the greatest honour to the Divine Spirit. Many pious and enlightened Christians hold it still,—either supporting it by the same illustrative comparison as Justin, or representing the sacred writers as amanuenses, merely putting on record what was dictated to them by the Spirit, and having no more control over their pens than a piece of mechanism over the wheels that belong to it. This theory was ridiculed in mingled strains of eloquence, mysticism, and heresy as “a kind of spiritual ventriloquism,—a colossal Memnon’s head, a hollow passage for a voice,—a voice that mocks the voices of many men, and speaks in their names, and yet is but one voice and the same; no man uttered it, and never in a human heart was it conceived.”¹

Such a theory is opposed to the constitution of the human mind; and as God, in enlisting the services of man to communicate a supernatural knowledge of His will, would undoubtedly proceed in accordance with the laws of that intellectual and moral nature with which He has endowed

¹ Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*.

mankind, His agency, in imparting the necessary inspiration to His commissioned servants, must be considered as put forth in a manner fitted alike to distinguish the divine from the human element. The influence and operation of the Spirit of God are seen, both in applying to the ends of revelation truth already known and available, and in suggesting new and hitherto unknown truth; in the wonderful harmony that reigns throughout all the successive revelations made of the divine will; in the sublime sentiments inculcated, in the holy spirit that is breathed; and in the only adequate explanation of many phenomena in the procedure of God. The influence and operation of the man also are seen in the composition and structure of the Scriptures. There are such evident and unequivocal signs of human instrumentality — of human modes of thinking, feeling, and writing,—such striking peculiarities of human temperament and disposition, and such idiosyncrasies of thought, association, and manner, distinguishing the style of the various penmen of the Scriptures from one another,—that it is impossible to ascribe these to any other cause than the free and independent, while yet infallibly guided and guarded, action of the inspired mind. Thus in the sacred volume

we trace a divine and a human element. The action of both is distinct, while the union of both leads to harmonious co-operation. Further than this, in our present state of knowledge, we cannot go. In the words of Moses Stuart, "the fact that the Spirit of God did inspire the sacred writers,—that He guided, illuminated, and aided them, and preserved them from all error, is one thing: their physical or metaphysical state, while under His special influence,—the physiology, so to speak, of inspiration,—is a thing quite different from this; and as the sacred writers have not described their feelings, while none since their time have had any experience of inspiration, that, so far as I know, has never been made out." The union of the material with the spiritual is in many things that fall within our daily observation so close, and yet so mysterious, that we cannot determine the confines that separate the one from the other. Thus, for instance, in every age, the attention of thoughtful men has been directed to the great problem, how the moral freedom of man can be reconciled with the superintending direction and control of Providence; but, notwithstanding all the attainments and researches of philosophy in the present day, it is as great, as profound and inscrutable a

mystery as ever. Speculatists have recently turned their inquiries into a different channel—to discover how the efficacy of prayer is consistent with the reign of material law; in other words, how the great Being whose propitious ear we invoke can grant the fulfilment of our desires, as He has promised in the Scriptures to do, without departing from the course He has apparently prescribed to Himself in the uniform operations of nature. Every Christian believes that there was a union of two natures in the person of Christ; and those natures, though perfectly distinct, were yet so intimately connected, that the sacred writers sometimes speak of Him under the name of God, as performing actions which could be done only by man.¹ Just as inexplicable as the subject either of providence, prayer, or the hypostatical union, is that of inspiration: how the Spirit of God acted upon the minds of the sacred penmen, while leaving them to act in accordance with their personal idiosyncrasies—how they were all inspired, and yet Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, Peter, Paul, and John, appear as distinct in their characteristic style as the writers of their respective portions of Scriptures, as these individuals were from all other men.

¹ Acts xx. 28.