

LECTURE VI.

Are there different Degrees of Inspiration?—Maimonides—Rabbinical Views—Different parts of Scripture exhibit more or less of the Spirit—Job, the Psalms, the Prophets, and Apostles—Some of the Sacred Writers more prominent and copious than others—Moses, Paul—Quotations from Turretine—Some books do, others do not, bear internal evidences of Inspiration—Pye Smith's Ideas on Inspiration—Doddridge, Dr. Arnold—Things that are supposed to detract from the Plenary Inspiration of Scripture—Ezra's Interpolations—Introduction of Secular Matter—Excessive Population of the Hebrews—Spoiling the Egyptians—Life and Reign of David—Solomon—Abishag—Voluptuous and Luxurious Life—God hardening Pharaoh's heart—Command to avenge the Midianites—Bethshemites and Uzzah—The Public Execution of Saul's Descendants for the Satisfaction of the Gibeonites—Slaves—Property—Cruelties of Ancient War Practice—Alleged Errors of Apostles—Not proved—Errors in Conduct—Jonah, Judas, Peter—Line of Demarcation—Were the Words of the Sacred Writers inspired?—Words in some instances inspired—Thinking in Words—The true Theory that the Spirit prompted the thoughts of Prophets and Apostles—The Inspiration Plenary.

A QUESTION of great interest and importance remains for consideration. Admitting that the Scriptures are possessed of an inspired character, does the quality of inspiration pervade all the books of which it consists, extending even to the minutest portions of every book, and impregnating all of

them in an equal degree? From the progressive manner in which the revelation of the divine will was made, some parts of the Scripture record are comparatively obscure, while the strictly local or episodic character of others exhibits a very small, indirect, and remote bearing on the great design of the sacred volume. Accordingly, there has prevailed both in the ancient and the modern church, a strong tendency to consider inspiration as communicated on different occasions with a greater or less amount of fulness; and although nothing is said in the Scripture to countenance such an idea, the hypothesis that there are certain degrees of supernatural influence easily discernible has been widely entertained. Maimonides, the celebrated Jewish writer, reckoned no less than eleven degrees of inspiration; but the rabbinical schools generally held to three, the highest being ascribed to Moses, the second to the prophets, and the third or lowest to the writers of the Hagiographa, the didactic and devotional books of the Old Testament. A similar persuasion has existed in most periods of the Christian church; and in modern times, men of piety and learning have endeavoured to classify the different parts of Scripture according to the scale on which they conceived in-

piration had been imparted or was necessary. This has been done by Twesten in Germany, and by Pye Smith, Dick, Wilson, Henderson, and others in this country,—all of them believing in the general inspiration of the Bible, but not in its equal extension to every part. I do not intend to enter into an examination of the theoretical opinions which speculative writers have advanced on this subject, as to whether there are degrees of inspiration, and how many, from simple suggestion and superintendence up to plenary and verbal dictation. All these are distinctions made by men; and therefore, rejecting them all as arbitrary, partial, and destitute of authority, I lay it down as my grand and only principle, that inspiration was universal, the inspiring power being communicated to all the writers of the Bible in common. Although all Scripture was given by inspiration of God, the measure of it was vouchsafed in exact proportion to the necessity of the circumstances; while the form and extent of it was such as the nature of the case demanded, to preserve the sacred penmen from all error, and to guide them into all the truth. Let this principle be adopted, and there will be no difficulty in perceiving what estimate ought to be formed of the character and authority of every

part of the Scripture. A slight acquaintance with the sacred volume will suffice to show that some of the sacred penmen appear in a more prominent character, and that their writings occupy a larger space than others, as Moses in the Old, and Paul in the New Testament. It might have been anticipated, from the varying measures of mental ability which naturally exist among men, that a similar inequality would be found amongst those whose ordinary powers were illuminated and strengthened by the supernatural influences of the Spirit; and accordingly, in looking into the sacred volume, while all the commissioned servants of God spoke and wrote under the guidance of the Spirit, there was a great diversity of spiritual gifts, some of them being endowed with miraculous gifts, with "the word of knowledge," with "the word of wisdom," and with a capacity for useful service in the church, to a larger extent than others. Thus Moses, who was instrumentally the founder of the Jewish church, partook so fully of the Spirit of God, that the posthumous record by a later hand testifies of him, "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses." Paul, too, who took so active and influential a part in the organization of the Christian church, was by physical and

mental exertions in labours more abundant than all the apostles ; and through his preaching as well as his epistles, contributed beyond all his contemporaries towards the development of the doctrines and duties of the gospel. The superior services rendered by these two writers show that, while all Scripture was given by inspiration of God, it was not given to all in the same degree ; and that although all the books of Scripture were composed by inspired men, they do not all declare the glory, unfold the mind, and illustrate the ways of God with equal clearness and fulness. Some parts of the Old Testament have a higher tone of spirituality ; the book of Job and the Psalms, for instance, than the books of Numbers and Leviticus, which are occupied with the dry and detached statutes of the Mosaic legislation. At the beginning of the Christian dispensation there was a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit ; hence the apostles gave a larger revelation of the grace of God than the prophets ; and the books of the New Testament are full of brighter disclosures and a purer morality than those of the Old. In the words of an eminent divine : “ As one star differs from another star in lustre, so in the firmament of Scripture some books emit more splendid and

ample, and others more faint and inconsiderable, rays of light; as the exigencies of the church more or less required, and as they relate to doctrines of greater or less importance. Thus the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul send forth those radiant beams far more copiously than the books of Ruth or Esther. Yet it is certain that each of them exhibits such evidences of truth and majesty, as prove of themselves that it is divine and authentic; or, at least, nothing is found in them that can render their authenticity doubtful.”¹ It is always a cause of great satisfaction, when the internal contents of a Scripture document are such as to leave no doubt of its divine origin and authority; and when a reader, instead of appealing to external evidences of its truth, can reply somewhat like what was done to the woman of Samaria by her fellow-townsmen: “I believe, not because of thy saying, but because I have read the book myself, and know that it is of God.” But there are some books of such a character, that they do not contain internal evidences of inspiration. In this class must be ranked the genealogies which, embodied in the Chronicles and other parts of the historical books, were probably copied from the

¹ Francisco Turretine, *Institutio Theologiae*, vol. i. p. 71.

national registers ; and a few other books, which appear so unlike in form as well as spirit to the other books of Scripture, that some men of piety and undoubted reverence for revelation have hesitated to recognise them as parts of the word of God. "Whether," says Dr. Pye Smith, "the whole of the Chetubim or Hagiographa, though of undoubted genuineness and authenticity as historical documents, can be considered as indited by the Holy Ghost, and as forming part of the rule of faith, is by no means so clear as to warrant our demanding an unqualified assent and agreement from all Christian men. Our canon may possibly include books not inspired."¹ Dr. Doddridge has expressed similar sentiments on the book of Esther,² and Dr. Arnold on some portions of Daniel. The opinions of such men as Dr. Doddridge, Pye Smith, and Dr. Arnold are worthy of respect even by those who may entirely differ from them ; and though it were true, as they allege, that these books may be excluded from the sacred record without affecting one doctrine of faith or one precept of duty, yet as the book of Esther details

¹ *Eclectic Review*, 1826.

² Doddridge's *Dissertation on the Inspiration of the New Testament*.

a remarkable interposition of Providence for the preservation of His ancient church, as the Song has been signally useful in fostering the devout affections of multitudes of spiritually-minded Christians, and the authenticity of Daniel has been established on the most solid basis, we feel it impossible not to recognise such testimonies to the divine character of these books.

Not only are there some books whose title to inspired authority has been called in question, but there are numerous isolated portions in various books both of the Old and New Testaments which have been thought to vitiate the claim of Scripture to plenary inspiration. These are the interpolations of Ezra in Genesis, and others of the early historical books; and besides, there are other insertions, incorporated with the sacred text, of such a nature as plainly indicates their human origin: viz., the poetry of Lamech, the song of the well, the edicts of Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, the letter of Claudius Lysias to Felix, the speech of Tertullus, the account of the disastrous voyage from Alexandria, the detailed conversations of bad men, and even of Satan himself. Now Ezra was an inspired man, who acted under divine guidance; and when, in his revision of the Scriptures, he

inserted explanatory notes referring to the obsolete name of a place or to a people who were unknown, because they had become extinct in his day, he was influenced by the same Divine Spirit which indited the Scriptures at first; so that his interpolations must be considered as equally inspired with the original text. With regard to the snatches of popular ballads, the legal documents of foreign countries, and the other purely secular matters which have been referred to as finding a place in the sacred volume, they have been made use of by the writers of the Scriptures because they were necessary to elucidate the history, or served to promote the cause and interests of religious truth. They are not to be considered, therefore, as a mere setting to adorn the pearl of great price, or like the mass of worthless earth in which precious ore being embedded, has to be detached from it as an unsightly encumbrance, but as historical facts enlisted by the superintending direction of the Spirit in the service of revelation, and therefore as forming an essential part of the inspired word. Still further, there are statements interspersed throughout the historical books of what purport to be facts, but which have been pronounced in certain quarters to be monstrous exaggerations, that tend

seriously to affect the plenary inspiration of the record in which they are made. As some of those writers professedly believe that the Scriptures contain the word of God, they do not lay the responsibility of such statements on divine inspiration. But they deny that the passages which contain those statements are inspired, and ascribe them to the interpolation of later editors, who, being led by national vanity to magnify the prosperity of Israel from the earliest times, have blended popular traditions with the facts of sober history to such an extent as to render the sacred books no longer documents of reliable truth and authority. Foremost in this class of objections is the vast increase of the Israelites, who, consisting only of seventy persons,—all, it is alleged, that emigrated with Jacob,—rose within the space of 198 years, the duration of the sojourn in Egypt, to the prodigious amount of more than three millions. Such an excessive population in so short a time, and from so small a stock, is justly pronounced to be, on natural principles, and according to the ordinary rate of calculation, altogether incredible.¹ But a careful examination of the Scripture record shows that nothing like the alleged statement is made by

¹ Colenso on the Pentateuch.

the sacred historian. The immediate descendants of Jacob, who went down with him to Egypt, did indeed amount only to seventy souls ; but along with them was a large number of home-born servants or retainers belonging to the pastoral tribe of which he was the acknowledged chief. The conjunction of these different parties was intimated by Joseph, when he spake of " his brethren " and his " father's house," *i.e.* servants ;¹ and how numerous these were, may be inferred from what is said of Abraham² and of Isaac.³ The rapid increase of the Hebrew population is indicated by the fact that " the land," *i.e.* of Goshen, " was filled with them ;"⁴ but the subsequent history shows that they were dispersed in vast numbers throughout the Delta or Lower Egypt, as artisans or tradesmen, and that by their energy, wealth, and extensive influence, they wielded almost the whole powers of the country. This amazing increase excited the jealous fears of the new king of Egypt, who devised a persecuting policy to check it. Notwithstanding this, contrary to all natural expectations, they " grew and multiplied," till, at the Exodus,

¹ Gen. xlvi. 31 ; cf. Gen. xxx. 43, xxxii. 5, 7, 16, xxxvi. 7, xxxiv. 25.

² Gen. xii. 16, xiv. 14.

³ Gen. xxvi. 13-16.

⁴ Ex. i. 7.

those that were of an age fit for war amounted to 600,000 men. Assuming, what is now ascertained by statistical tables, that the number of males above that age is as nearly as possible the half of the whole number of males, the entire male population of Israel would amount to 1,200,000; and adding an equal number for women and children, the aggregate number of Israelites who left Egypt would be 2,400,000.¹ The calculations of Colenso and others, who object to this vast amount of population as a legendary tale, have been founded upon the genealogical list of Jacob's descendants, which was constructed on the principle of recording only the heads of families, the ancestors of the Israelitish nation born in Canaan, and omitting all others. No mention is made in that register of the servants who certainly accompanied the patriarch into Egypt;² and although it is impossible to specify their numbers, yet, considering that Jacob inherited the tribal property and honours of his father and grandfather, they may be reckoned at upwards of a thousand. Such retainers are usually considered, according to Oriental custom, as forming parts of their masters' families. It is a fact that they were incorporated with the patriarchal families; for,

¹ Ex. i. 7; Ps. cv. 26.

² Gen. xlvi. 6, 32.

having become Hebrews, included in the covenant by the rite of circumcision and the participation of the passover, they constituted a portion of the Hebrew tribe equally with the natural descendants of Jacob. And along with these servants, "a mixed multitude went up also with them." On these grounds, then, it appears that an egregious mistake is committed by those who found their conclusions solely on the catalogue of Jacob's descendants, as if they comprised the entire emigrants to Egypt, instead of making their estimates on the broader basis of the numerous body who had become, in accordance with divine directions, incorporated with Israel.

Another circumstance connected with the time of the Exodus has been considered as inconsistent with the idea of inspiration. God is described as saying to Moses, "I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: but every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons and your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians."¹ It is utterly impossible,

¹ Ex. iii. 22, xi. 2, 3.

it is alleged, that God could have inspired such actions as these words describe; the ascription of which to Him is an insult to His majesty, degrading to His justice and goodness, and outraging the purity of His perfect character. The word which our version renders *borrowed*, signifies properly to *demand*, or *ask*; and the circumstances were these: The Israelites, having received little or no wages for all their laborious service in the house of bondage, were very poor. They made a demand for adequate remuneration for all their toil; and it was paid in light but valuable articles of wearing apparel and personal ornament. The demand, however, was not made only at the last moment, as if it had been extorted to ensure their departure; for the order was issued, and doubtless acted upon, previous to the infliction of the last plague.¹ But the effect was, that the accumulated earnings of so many years' unrequited labours proving so heavy a demand all at once, the Egyptians were impoverished, and the Israelites were enabled to leave the country like a victorious army laden with spoil.²

A part of the Old Testament history which has provoked more scoffing ridicule on the Scripture

¹ Ex. xi. 2.

² Ps. cv. 37; Ezek. xxxix. 10.

as an inspired book than most other parts, is that which relates to the son of Jesse. The life and reign of David, it is said, were full of deceit and intrigues, of grossly immoral and criminal conduct, of inhuman cruelty to his enemies, and of a vindictive spirit even to the close of his days. And yet this king, whose memory is blackened by such flagrant offences both against God and man, is prominently held forth by a commissioned prophet of the Lord as "a man according to God's own heart." But it must be observed, that it was in his youth, before he was anointed to the royal dignity and elevated to the throne of Israel, that he was specially designated. This honourable testimony is borne only once in the Old Testament, and once in the New in allusion to the former;¹ and it was given long before his adultery with Bathsheba, or his murder of Uriah. It was not meant to indicate him as a person of spotless purity and virtue in his private character and conduct; but one who as a king of Israel would act in the spirit of the constitution, promoting the grand objects for which the nation had been selected by God, and securing the good which lay within the scope of the nation's reach at the period. Solomon imitated, it is said,

¹ 1 Sam. xiii. 11; Acts xiii. 22.

the deceitfulness of his father ; for while he pretended to condone his brother Adonijah for his natural ambition as an elder brother to attain the crown, he betrayed his smothered resentment on the paltry occasion of that brother wishing to marry Abishag. And yet Solomon was endowed, through the special favour of God, with the highest gifts of wisdom. There is no ground for charging Solomon either with cruelty or precipitation in this case. According to Oriental usage, he that obtains the former king's wives has a claim upon the throne. Solomon penetrated the artful scheme of Adonijah ; and, considering this new attempt was rebellion against the viceroy appointed by the Divine King, resolved on condemning him to the punishment of treason. These, not to speak of the polygamous excesses and the luxurious splendour of Solomon, are represented as enormous exaggerations,—as betokening, in the whole tenor of the Jewish history and the current of national events at that period, a desire to embellish the narrative, and aggrandize the character of their nation. They have been introduced, it is alleged, by later writers as interpolations on the simplicity and unpretending plainness of the original writers, and thus have so vitiated the present historical

books, that they are no longer trustworthy records. But for this allegation these sceptical critics have no ground whatever but their own fancy, which is father to the thought; and that the accounts of Solomon's unconstitutional reign are quite true, and have been recorded to show that they led to the decline of the Hebrew monarchy, was shown in Lecture II.

Incidents of another kind are dwelt upon, as tending even in a stronger degree than those already noticed, to detract from the plenary inspiration of Scripture. God is described as saying to Moses, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart," and after the interview it is recorded that "Pharaoh's heart was hardened."¹ This declaration, it is said, is so utterly unworthy of God, and opposed to His holy, benevolent character, that it cannot have been uttered by Him, or given by inspiration in this record. But God is often said to do a thing which, in the natural course of His providence, takes place. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart would be the *result*; but the divine message through Moses would only be the *occasion*, not the cause, of the king's determined obduracy. Most assuredly God did not harden the Egyptian monarch by any

¹ Ex. vii. 3, 13.

direct influence upon his mind. But the circumstances in which the applications of Moses and Aaron were placed, operating along with his constitutional impetuosity of temper, would produce the effect anticipated, and lead to his assuming an attitude of stern and immoveable hardihood. Similar incidents, representing the divine character in a still more offensive light, are recorded in the historical books; as the command of God to "avenge the children of Israel upon the Midianites."¹ This was a very special case, calling for the direct interference of God to punish an infamous scheme for the destruction of the chosen people. Though the Moabites and Midianites had leagued together in inviting Balaam to curse the Israelites, the latter had taken the lead, if not acted alone, in practising the detestable art of idolatrous licentiousness; and therefore they were singled out as the objects of condign punishment by Him "to whom vengeance belongeth." It is observable that, in the command of God to commence hostilities against the Midianites, no order was issued for the slaughter of the women, and in ancient warfare they were usually reserved for slaves. But the Midianitish women had been the chief actors in the scheme of

¹ Num. xxxi. 2-18.

seduction, and therefore they had forfeited all claims to mild or merciful treatment. This was to be a war of extermination,—for the Midianites, like the Canaanites, were enormously wicked sinners, and therefore the only class to be spared were young girls, who would be treated according to the humane rules prescribed to the Hebrews for their conduct to female captives.¹ A third instance of this kind is sneered at—the excessive severity ascribed to God for so trivial an offence as that of the Bethshemites² looking into, and of Uzzah touching, the ark.³ The sanctity of the ark was so strictly guarded, that not even the Levites who carried it were permitted to behold it uncovered;⁴ and as this jealous care which God took of His symbol was well known in Israel, it was an unwarrantable and presumptuous act of the Bethshemites to look into it. In the case of Uzzah, who died in a moment by the visitation of God, there was a noticeable peculiarity. He was a Levite, and the whole proceedings connected with the removal of the ark were contrary to the express regulations of the law. Instead of being carried on the shoulders of the Levites, the ark was con-

¹ Deut. xxi. 10-14.

² 1 Sam. xv. 32, 33.

³ 2 Sam. vi. 6, 7.

⁴ Lev. xvi. 2; Num. iv. 5, 6.

veyed in a wheeled vehicle. Instead of being enveloped in its coverings, and thus concealed, it was kept exposed to the rude gaze and profane curiosity of a crowd. Uzzah, as a Levite, should have known and prescribed the order of removal according to the law. There is observable a gradation in the severity of punishments for profaning the ark, proportioned to the opportunities of knowledge possessed by the offenders. The Philistines, who were ignorant heathens, suffered by diseases from which they were afterwards relieved. The Bethshemites, who were prompted to look into it thoughtlessly, and through the impulse of curiosity, suffered also from a pestilence severely, but, as many think, not fatally; while Uzzah, who, being a Levite, headed the procession, and ought to have been dutiful, was struck with sudden death, because he was flagrantly transgressing in the public view of the people.

The painful episode of the Gibeonites and the descendants of Saul¹ appears an outburst of such fierce superstition, that it has been unhesitatingly pronounced a legendary tradition, inconsistent with the character of an inspired history. The circumstances were these:—A famine which occurred

¹ 2 Sam. xxi.

early in the reign of David, of protracted duration and unusual severity, was regarded as a judgment inflicted for national sins ; and the king, having in his anxiety inquired of the Lord, was informed by the oracle, that it was "for Saul and his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." There is no record of the origin or design of the persecution of that people. There is reason, however, to believe that, while it occurred in the course of Saul's sudden fit of fanatical zeal to extirpate the remnant of the ancient Canaanites in the land, he was actuated by a grasping ambition to seize their possessions for the aggrandizement of his family. By the slaughter of this people, a solemn covenant made with the heads and representatives of the nation had been broken ; and the offence was the more outrageous, that the Gibeonites, renouncing idolatry, had been since the days of Joshua attached to the service of God in the sanctuary. There is ground to believe, also, that the younger members of Saul's family, who were his "captains of hundreds" and "captains of thousands," had been active and zealous agents in executing his sanguinary orders. Guilt had been incurred by them as well as by him ; and therefore it is said that the famine was "for Saul and his bloody

house." In consequence of the massacre having been authorized by the highest officer in the kingdom, the surviving Gibeonites had submitted in silence. But by the answer of the oracle to David, they had been constituted Goëlim, or blood-avengers; and as, by the Hebrew law, a pecuniary compensation for murder, though accepted by many people in the East, was an unlawful commutation, there was no alternative but to demand satisfaction in blood, *i.e.* the death of the nearest kinsman of Saul; and as the massacre stimulated by his authority had been of a wholesale description, a full reparation was required and given by the execution of seven males of his royal line, seven being a complete number. Now it is observable, that while the divine oracle announced the moral cause for which the calamity of famine was inflicted, it issued no instructions respecting the mode of expiation. Nor did David make any suggestions on that point. The sacrifice of Saul's sons was the spontaneous demand of the Gibeonites, who, though they had formally renounced idolatry, still retained the lingering influence of Hivite superstition. The entire responsibility of this revolting execution lay on the Gibeonites. God did not command nor sanction it. But He in His *providence permitted*

it as an act of justice, not only to ensure equitable usage to the Gibeonites, lest they might be threatened with future oppression, but to remove the flagrant dishonour brought on His church and people by the guilty infraction of a solemn national treaty. There is no approval of the transaction expressed by the sacred historian, who simply relates the painful incident as it occurred; and the king gave his assent to it, as the only appointed means of purging the land from blood.¹

Another passage of a similar kind is objected to, on account of the degrading view in which it is supposed to represent the Divine Being: "If a man smite his servant or his maid with the rod, and he die under his hand, he shall be surely punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished; *for he is his money.*"² This enactment occurs in the midst of many other regulations, pervaded by a humane and considerate spirit, to provide for the protection of the poor and the dependent; and such enactments were indispensably necessary in a country where slavery was tolerated, in order to secure male or female slaves from the oppression of tyrannical

¹ Num. xxxv. 31-34; Deut. xxi. 1-9.

² Ex. xxi. 20, 21.

masters. The punishment of undue severities, especially such as terminated in a fatal result, was left to the discretion of the magistrate on a full consideration of the circumstances. But where the slave who had been severely dealt with survived the harsh treatment for a while, no proceedings were to be instituted against the master, as it was presumed that an owner would not willingly injure a slave who *was his property*. It was this expression, *he is his money*, which, according to Dr. Colenso, proved so revolting to the mind of a simple Zulu, and from reflecting on which that writer was first led to the conclusion that the Pentateuch was unhistorical. For it asserts, as he alleges, "the horrid idea, that the great and blessed God, the Father of all mankind, would speak of a manservant or a maid as mere 'money,' and allow an execrable crime to go unpunished, because the victim of his brutal usage had survived a few hours." A more strange and complete misconception of the meaning of this clause in the act can scarcely be imagined. Every reader of ordinary intelligence, whose mind is free from prejudice, must perceive that it is a reasonable consideration, based upon the principle that it was clearly against the master's interest to destroy his property; and

that, so far from detracting from the sacred character of the book in which it stands, it furnishes one of the minor evidences of its divine origin, as it was a merciful provision for mitigating the evils of slavery, and a provision utterly unknown in the legislative code of any other nation before the Christian era.

Even more unworthy of a place in this book, which claims to be all given by inspiration of God, has been declared by many critics the eulogy pronounced by the prophetess Deborah on the unnatural, treacherous, and cold-blooded conduct of Jael to Sisera. She certainly rendered a service of the greatest importance to Israel. She would be regarded by admiring contemporaries as a heroine, and her deed celebrated in future ages, as effecting one of the most signal deliverances which the ancient church and people of God experienced. But the real character of this daring act cannot be appreciated, unless it is viewed in the light of the Sinaitic covenant, to the obligations and privileges of which Jael and her tribe had been admitted. She and her husband had been incorporated with the people of God, and were bound by a command paramount to all other considerations to extirpate idolaters. In this light the words of Deborah

must be viewed; and the eulogy on Jael must be considered as pronounced not on the moral character of the woman and her deed, but solely on the public benefits which, in the providence of God, would flow from it. Remarks to the same purport may be made on a similar passage in the Psalms, where the sacred writer, predicting the sacking of Babylon, exclaims, "O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones."¹ Such horrid cruelties were perpetrated in ancient warfare; and the sacred writer prophetically declared that the same atrocities which the Babylonians had perpetrated in Jerusalem, would be re-enacted in their capital by the victorious enemy who should sack it. The Psalmist does not indicate *any joy of his own* in anticipating this massacre of the helpless infants. He merely announces the fact that the Medo-Persian invaders would be jubilant amid those scenes of blood, as all victors do exult when they have laid a proud and formidable foe prostrate in the dust. And the little infants are particularized as a class of the inhabitants whose

¹ Ps. cxxxvii. 8, 9.

sufferings were sure to be conspicuous spectacles in the predicted scene of desolation.

These passages, and others of a similar import, which have often been paraded by scoffing critics hostile to the Scriptures, are, when rightly understood, in no way inconsistent with its character as an inspired book. Instead of presenting false or perverted views of the Divine Being, as has been alleged, they declare the will of God, and His method of dealing with men as they were able to bear it, in the early imperfect state of the church; and although many enactments of the Mosaic law, as well as many incidents recorded in the sacred history, appear coarser and harsher than what is agreeable to modern ideas, refined and elevated by the pure spirit of Christianity, it must be borne in mind that the Hebrew statutes, where it was impracticable at once to extirpate inveterate evils, contained many elements of improvement upon the laws and usages of all ancient nations.

Objections to the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures have been raised on a totally different ground, viz. the supposed errors of the sacred writers. "They were fallible men," says Dr. Williams, in *Essays and Reviews*; "and they have committed mistakes in history, chronology, geo-

graphy, and other departments, like other authors." It is admitted that they were men of like passions and infirmities as others, and in their private conduct as individuals did occasionally do things which were wrong. Moses, for instance, was betrayed into undue heat of temper; Nathan, through mistaken zeal, committed an error in judgment, by encouraging David in his contemplated project of erecting a temple; Jeremiah was hurried, through the pressure of suffering, to curse the day of his birth; Jonah was querulous and discontented; Peter dissembled; Paul was intemperate in speaking to a magistrate; he and Barnabas rose into fierce contention respecting John Mark. Besides, in the ordinary intercourse of life they possessed no greater knowledge than their natural sagacity or memory enabled them to acquire; and hence we find them using such vague statements as Paul,—“hoping to come *about* winter;” “not knowing the things which were to befall him in Jerusalem;” he “baptized the household of Stephanas; besides, he knew not whether he baptized any other;”—these, and many other things that are incidentally mentioned in the Epistles, show that in the common familiar intercourse of life they were left to act for themselves, as others.

But there is observable a broad line of demarcation between the conduct of the prophets and apostles as men, and their procedure as the commissioned servants of God and witnesses for Christ; for while they were betrayed through constitutional weakness or violence of temper into occasional errors in private life, they were infallible in the discharge of apostolic offices. It is alleged, indeed, that the apostles did err through imperfect knowledge at first, as when the evangelists, in accordance with the reigning notions of their age and country, recorded that demons entered into the bodies of men and animals, and that the coming of Christ was close at hand. In regard to the former, it has been the belief of all sound interpreters in every age of the church, that in the time of our Lord there were such formidable calamities as demoniacal possessions, several incidents in the evangelical narrative being absolutely unintelligible except on that hypothesis. And as to the apprehension which prevailed in some of the early Christian churches of the second coming of Christ, it probably arose from a mistaken interpretation of some expressions which were used by men who, themselves living under the powers of the world to come, and viewing the future with

the telescopic eye of faith, spoke of them as near at hand. But they fell into no error in expecting the immediate end of the world; and Paul expressed his own uniform conviction, as well as that of his brother apostles, when he wrote to the Thessalonians, "that they should not be shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." In short, although discrepancies and apparent inconsistencies are found in many parts of the sacred writings, they are all capable more or less of explanation and reconciliation. No serious error has ever been proved;¹ and the Scriptures, possessing plenary inspiration, must be regarded as an authoritative and infallible rule in all matters of faith and duty.

We consider that this conclusion has been established by the arguments adduced in the preceding lectures, independently of the admission or rejection of the dogma of verbal inspiration. By verbal inspiration is meant a suggestion not merely

¹ Note I.

of ideas and sentiments, but of the very words in which these are expressed. Now there can be no doubt that there were cases in which the Spirit of God put the precise and actual words into the mouths of the inspired persons who uttered them. Thus, for instance, when the prophets predicted future things of which they had no knowledge, and others spoke in languages they did not understand, it is obvious that the expressions must have been supplied to them. Besides, there were cases in which arguments of the greatest importance are founded on the precise use of a single word. Thus, when our Lord said, "Before Abraham was, I am," is it not evident that the change from the past to the present tense in this declaration has great doctrinal significance? Our Lord Himself argued from the use of a word; for He proved the reality of a future state from the words addressed to Moses at the burning bush, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." "God," He concluded, "is not the God of the dead, but of the living." The apostles also founded on the use of a word; as a weighty inference is drawn from the use of the word "seed" in the singular, and not in the plural;¹ another is dependent on the word

¹ Gal. iii. 16.

“all,”¹ and a third on the words “once more,”² as employed by the prophet Haggai. But although in rare instances, as those just specified, the importance and even necessity of verbal inspiration must be conceded, the *theopneustia*, which the apostle claims for all Scripture, indicates a rational influence on the mind of the sacred writers, rather than a mechanical control of the lips; and as it is usual and natural for men to think in words, so the action of the Spirit of God on the minds of apostles and prophets would, in accordance with the principles of their mental constitution, prompt and stimulate them to the adoption of such words as would most exactly express the divine mind they were commissioned to make known. Thus the sacred writers were left each of them to speak and write in his own natural manner,—some in a plain, prosaic, and humble, others in a poetical and embellished, highly rhetorical, and argumentative style; and a satisfactory explanation is obtained of the phenomena of inspiration.

The plenary inspiration of the Scriptures renders that book the supreme standard of authority in religion. This conclusion cannot be affected by objections that have been brought either from

¹ Heb. ii. 8.

² Heb. xii. 27.

within or from without the sacred volume. The multiplicity of various readings cannot affect it: for they do not invalidate a single doctrine or statement; and their existence affords the prospect that enlightened criticism will ere long establish a perfect text. Nor is the authority of Scripture endangered by the dogmas of scientific men. Science is progressive, and many of its once favourite doctrines, as the nebular theory and others, she has been compelled to abandon. Let the students of the Bible and the students of science prosecute their independent courses, and we have a confident assurance, that through a sound exegesis of Scripture, and a patient study of nature, there will be found a perfect harmony between the works and the word of God.¹

¹ Note K.