

## EDITORIAL

THE Bible is God's Word written—'It is written' was a phrase often on our Lord's lips, and on those of the Apostles he commissioned to carry his word to the uttermost parts of the earth, as the phrase 'Thus saith the Lord' was constantly in the mouths of the prophets who preceded them. These formulas stand as a sign that the speaker is proclaiming and expounding the Word of God with God's authority—'What things so ever were written aforetime', says St Paul, 'were written for our learning: that through patience and the comfort of the scriptures, we might have hope' (Romans 15. 4).

For our learning. The Bible contains God's revelation first *spoken* to men, and then *written* down under divine inspiration. St Paul's saying corroborates the second half of this statement, as do the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews the first: 'God who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, last of all in these days hath spoken to us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the world' (Hebrews 1. 12). The New Covenant between God and man and all that flows from it, sealed by the redeeming blood of Christ, was prepared for and foreshadowed by the history of the chosen people under the Old Covenant, 'at sundry times and in divers manners'. What the Son of David came to do for his people lay hidden in that history till, being fulfilled and made manifest in his earthly life, it was proclaimed to the world, and in due time written down in the pages of the New Testament.

The whole Bible then from Genesis to the Apocalypse is the divinely preserved record of God's revelation to men. It is inspired; this does not mean that every word, thought, assertion and theme contained in it was introduced into the minds of the human authors of its books as new knowledge supernaturally communicated by the Holy Spirit. Some truths, however, especially such truths as men could never have attained to by their natural reasoning power, were communicated in this way by revelation; partially at first, in the minds of the leaders and prophets of Israel and Juda interpreting, each to his own genera-

tion, the will of God in the events which made up the life of his chosen people; and, in the end, fully and completely, in the human mind of God's own Son, interpreting for all time the events of his life on earth, for which the life-history of the chosen people had been the prelude and preparation. The Bible is the story of this long-drawn-out process of revelation, set down in writing subsequently to its first communication and oral proclamation.

The human authors of this story written 'at sundry times and in divers manners', in history, drama, prophecy and sacred song; in vision and didactic teaching, were guided in their work by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, illuminating their minds and directing their wills in the choice of the materials which came to hand or memory as they wrote. They were God's instruments, but instruments who under the Spirit's special guidance retained their individual characteristics and natural modes of thought. God therefore, by his Holy Spirit, *revealed* his purposes in the minds of human instruments by the supernatural communication of knowledge and interpretation of events otherwise unattainable, and also, by the same Spirit, *inspired* human instruments to write the record of that revelation, guiding them in the use of knowledge already within their reach by ordinary human processes. Not all the human authors received supernatural revelation, but all who wrote were directed in judgment and choice by the supernatural light and power termed *inspiration*. God and man, therefore, were authors of the Scriptures, responsible, jointly as it were, for every word, thought, assertion and theme that the very disparate books which make up the Scriptural canon contain; each in his own way and on his own level of being, the infinite wholly including and giving being to the finite. God did not surrender his divine attributes of incapacity to deceive or be deceived, nor were the human authors deprived, by the overwhelming power of omnipotence and omniscience, of freedom of choice. Their freedom indeed was such that it could function only within the scope of the culture, ethos, temperament and idiom of thought to which by nature they were heirs, and within the limits set by the state of human knowledge in their time.

As Christ in his incarnate life is not divided but, by the power of the Spirit, combines the completeness and therefore the per-

fection of both divine and human nature, so, by analogy, the written Word of Scripture is not divided, but combines by the same power both a divine and a human completeness and perfection. We may not therefore say or think that the Word of Scripture is divided, that part is the Word of God and part the word of man, the two to be distinguished only by human discernment. The whole of it is one Word, divine and human, an indivisible unity. Every word, thought, statement and theme in Scripture is designed to find a place and purpose in that unity, and makes sense only as an integral part of it; and the whole combines, as it were, into a single assertion compact of many assertions each of which points to and completes it; the assertion of the fact of Christ the Redeemer and King. This single overall assertion and the countless assertions which go to make it up are the combined assertions of God and man, and therefore, as the Church has persistently maintained, they are, as such, wholly immune from error; for God cannot deceive or be deceived.

Just how far any particular statement in the Bible, however, can be held to be, as such, an assertion, and if so, what exactly it asserts, is in a large number of instances a complex problem. The reason for this is the varied and often difficult idiom of biblical concepts and language which at many points can only be fully understood by arduous scientific research into the human ideas and modes of expression which were the natural background of the biblical writers, and are by no means ours. The Word of God could find expression in human words in no other way than within the scope and range of these ideas, which must be seen in the relation they bear to scientific and historical fact, morality and the concept of God and God's dealings with men. To think otherwise would be to postulate that God should have done violence to the human nature he has created by taking it out of the context of its own particular stage of development in knowledge and its own peculiar modes, symbolic imaginative or poetic, in which that knowledge is expressed.

The revelation thus contained in the inspired biblical record God's Word, is the source of the *depositum fidei*, or the Faith which is under the care of the Church to guard, interpret and proclaim. That is why the Church maintains that her teaching is and must be rooted in the Scriptures as their source, and why she urges upon her scholars the necessity of using every scientific

means at their disposal of ascertaining the original text of each biblical document and the meaning its author intended to convey. That is why, too, except in times of extreme danger from current erroneous interpretation, she has always encouraged the faithful at large by study to make the Scriptures the primary basis of their devotional reading and prayer, always with the proviso that they must be guided, both in prayer and in scientific study, by the voice of authority which is the final arbiter of truth and error in matters of faith and morals.

Non-Catholic biblical study, in spite of the great contribution in scholarship it has made towards the elucidation of the literal meaning of the text of the Bible, has fallen into chaos as far as the nature and authority of the Bible itself is concerned, because it has knocked away the foundations of that authority by its rejection of the traditional doctrine of biblical inspiration and the corollary of inerrancy that follows from it. This has led to the setting up of a fatal division within the Bible itself between God's Word and the word of man, a division which only the authority of the Church is capable of eliminating, because, in the long run and finally, only the authority of the Church, by Christ's ordinance and the leading of the Holy Spirit, can judge what in the pages of Scripture is an assertion and what it asserts.

The present number of *THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT* is devoted to articles which deal with the study of the Bible as the source of doctrine and the basis of prayer. These articles will be continued and concluded in the August number. The theme therefore of both numbers will be *GOD'S WORD WRITTEN*.



## ON READING THE BIBLE: I

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**T**HE Bible is a book, or rather the book above all others, to which we feel that we need no introduction. It is found lying everywhere; we all know of it; and still more, have so many of its phrases and personalities in our everyday talk, that we can be quite surprised to find they are 'from the Bible'; and begin to wonder just how much we do take from it.