

THE PULPIT

A Magazine of Sermons.

Volume xix.

January to June

1900.

"And how can they hear without a preacher?"—ST. PAUL.

**PUBLISHER:
G. HOLZAPFEL,
• CLEONA, PA.**

INSPIRATION.

BY REV. CHARLES H. PARKHURST, D. D., PASTOR MADISON SQUARE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK, N. Y.

TEXT.—All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.—II Timothy iii: 16.

CUR present interest will connect with the word "inspiration," rather than with the particular sort of work, viz., Scripture writing, which inspiration is stated to have done. There is a larger meaning in the fact that God can inspire, and that man is such a being that he can be inspired, than there is in the fact that the Bible or any other particular product has come as the fruit of such inspiration. Inspiration then is our theme; not primarily the inspiration of the Bible, nor the inspiration that can yield some inspired product other than the Bible, but inspiration pure and simple—the entrance of God's Spirit into a human life and into a human worker, in a way to guarantee that life's character and that worker's work, and to season it with inerrant and indestructible elements of divineness. The ground we are on therefore is high ground, and high ground is safe ground. It is easier talking about things that are thin; safer talking about things that are deep. Boats that are wrecked are usually wrecked near shore, where there is too little water to keep them off the sea bottom. So pulpit instruction, when it comes too close to the spot where men do their ordinary thinking, is in danger of degenerating into discussion, and of producing as its effect diversity, rather than concertedness of judgment and intention. When the Samaritan woman was talking with Jesus at the well, she proposed to Him to debate the rival claims of Jerusalem and Gerizim as the true seat of Jehovah worship. Matters that were mixed with her own little

prejudices, the discussion of matters that ran in the tiny grooves of her own petty contemplation, were not matters that could help the Samaritan woman out into the clear, even though it were the Lord that was the debater; and so He passed Jerusalem quietly by and led her gaze from Mount Gerizim to regions farther heavenward even than Gerizim, and discoursed to her upon "God is a spirit."

And let me say in passing that I feel the significance of this point with a keenness that is akin to pain in these days when the thoughts of young thinking people are crumbling themselves up into small interrogations about the subsidiary questions of our holy Christian religion. That does not mean that these subsidiary questions may not be laden with an abounding and a vivid significance. So when Nicodemus asked Jesus how a man could be born when he was old, Jesus declined to answer his question, not because there was not a great deal in it to answer, but because the answer to it would not just then have been any help to Nicodemus, and because secondary truths will not suffice to satisfy a man's primary necessities.

The real truth of this inspiration matter, as of any great matter, is in its entirety, not in its details. You cannot understand the whole by the inspection of its parts, but you may be able later on to understand the parts through your appreciation of their whole. The young man of whom I once told you tried to find his way to Christ along the rather rocky highway of the Gospel miracles. He lost his way and did not find his Christ.

Subsequently, at the suggestion of one who deeply appreciated the principle I am trying to emphasize, he put himself alongside of Christ—close enough to Him to come under the pressure of His personality—and found in Him all that he needed in order to the disentanglement of the threads of the miracle problem. That is, he found Christ Himself so much greater and more wonderful than anything He did that there was no difficulty in crediting anything that Scripture says that He did. Christ he discovered to be more miraculous than His miracles, and as compared with that bigger miracle of himself the smaller miracles He did became natural and commonplace. You can thread the narrow valley of a mountainous country a great while without coming to any comprehension whatever of the country in the grandeur of its wholeness. One square yard of that country situated away up where the sky and the mountain tops meet will tell you more of the real structure of the region and of its consummating meaning than a thousand miles of defile that have been plodded through interrogatively and analytically. The mountains will show you the valleys, but the valleys will not show you the mountains.

In the same manner that particular truth of the inspiration of Scripture has been put at very serious disadvantage by the small way it has been approached and the quizzing glass style in which it has been so often handled. The conception that men have of religion is such that any treatment of religious questions that has not in itself an element of width and magnificence tells depressingly upon all religious minds charged with a burden of inquiry. When I speak of the small way in which the truth of the inspiration of Scripture has been approached and handled I mean, in particular, just now that it has been set off and made a truth by itself and exhibited as something that could be studied up on its own grounds, just as the young man referred to a moment ago imagined that he could study up, and get into the heart of the meaning of miracles without taking into his thought, confi-

dence and experience certain larger realities of which miracles are the mere symptoms and suburbs.

I can make clear my meaning here by saying that if it were advised that a certain preacher were going to discourse on "Inspiration," ninety-five out of a hundred would confidently conclude from the advertisement that the inspiration he was going to speak upon was the inspiration of the Scriptures. The word has in that way been pared down to a limited and a technical significance. It has become replete with suggestions of hermeneutical apparatus, higher criticism, and a lot of other matter that touches the spot in a young thinking mind where are lodged its intellectual misgivings and its possibilities of scepticism. The impression that any truth will make upon an earnest mind will depend almost as much upon the quarter from which it is approached as it will upon the truth itself. It is like the effect produced by the elegant paintings put upon cathedral windows; they are all of them daubs, the finest of them, till they are viewed in range with all that worldful of outside light that empties itself through them into the beholder's eye and heart.

In like manner we want to get the particular truths of our holy religion hung in the draft of all the outside and encompassing light that is possible. A man never learns to believe in the miraculousness of a miracle if the only thing he looks at, and the only thing he lends himself to, is the miracle. We have just seen that, in the delight produced in you by the cathedral windows, so in the conviction of mind touching any particular religious truth there is something which is not in the truth, something, I mean, which is not in that particular truth. If you look up among the stars in the night time, the thing which thrills you is not the starlight, but the vastness, invisible but felt, in which those weird lights are hung. Just as the human eye is made oval to match the sphericity of the heavens, so the human mind and heart are framed to fit the wide swing of things and their long reach, and there must be a breadth in our vision if there is

going to be fulness and immensity in the assurances that our vision brings to us; and if your optical instrument is a microscope, the stronger that microscope the smaller becomes the world you live in and the more hopelessness and profound your unconsciousness of the heavens.

So then in our search after all that is betokened by such words as stand in our text—"inspiration of God"—I am concerned that we should set no frontiers to their wide and thrilling intention. We are not thinking just now whether God wrought inspiringly in some or in all the records that are now combined to compose our Bible; whether His inspiring Spirit worked with the intelligence of those to whom those records are humanly credited, or whether that spirit superseded the exercise of man's intelligence in such sense as would make the records solidly divine. Indeed, our thought at this moment is not upon the Scriptures at all, but upon this larger fact, that the spirit of man, with all its humanness and frailty, is nevertheless to such degree laid down upon lines identical with those of the Spirit of God as to be an intelligent medium in which infinite intelligence can work, as to be a moral instrument upon whose keys the moral impulses of God can play themselves out till they become in us a tone and a harmony.

Inspiration means, above all, that God keeps an open door between the realm in which His own personal sovereignty works and the little realms in which our little personal sovereignties respectively work, and that through this open door there enter into us impulses which we may not be able to distinguish from those that are native to us, but which are, nevertheless, an importation from divine territory, and work in us, therefore, with a divine intensity and inerrancy.

I am interested in and believe in an inspired Bible, but I am a great deal more interested in an inspired manhood, for an inspired Bible denotes only that at particular times, and from two to four thousand years ago, God used to assert Himself in the domain of

human thought and passion; but an inspired manhood means that not only yesterday, but to day, to morrow and always, man is only on the edge of being a man till impulses dating from that divine world have really begun to invade him.

A man's life needs to be inspired to-day in order to make a true, strong and certain thing of it, as much as the Epistle to the Romans needed to be inspired in order to make a true, strong and certain thing of it. The best thing about a man is his ability to be rounded out to a divine finish, just as the finest thing about the human eye is its ability to be premeated with light that empties into it from out the sky. The effect that comes from a certain emphasis sometimes laid upon the inspiration of the Bible is to put men upon conceiving that a few prophets and apostles of olden times were the only ones that ever were exactly candidates for the divine infilling, and that there can be no inspiration to-day but inspiration at second hand, and that, if we want, in this generation, to have our souls permeated with the same mind of God that made Isaiah able to write prophecies and Paul indite epistles, we must be contented to bale the water of life out of some old reservoir dating from two thousand or more years back. We are not forgetting the earnest faith that we all have in the Bible as the Word of God, but even that Word with all its divineness can prove to us a source of mischief rather than of blessing, if we take the personal light and divine fervor which God breathed into Moses and John as substitute for the same sort of light and the same quality of fervor breathed in the same divine and direct way into us. There seems to be in some quarters the feeling that the Bible, in particular our printed Gospel, is the principal fact of our religion. So far from its being such, Christ never intimated the likelihood of there being a written Gospel, and never by any kind of implication suggested the necessity of such a written Gospel.

I want to guard myself against being misinterpreted here, and you very well know the position of dignity and

authority that is ascribed to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament in our sanctuary service; and yet the Bible is the record of the men who were once filled with the Spirit of God and does not take the place of our being ourselves filled with the Spirit of God. We may to-day enjoy the fruits of the labor of those who wrought in the light that the sun shed upon the earth ten years ago, but the light shed upon the earth ten years ago will not suffice to brighten our eyes while about the work that we are doing to-day. The finer any gift or bestowment, the greater the frequency with which that gift requires to be replaced with more of the same. There is a possibility that even so divine a thing as the Bible may come to be treated by us as a fetich, due not to any fault of the Bible, but to our mode of regarding it. It is a great deal easier to read the words of some one whom God has personally illuminated than it is to be in such accord with God and in such relations of chastened intimacy with His Spirit as to gain from Him a personal illumination intended specifically for us. We were reading here not long ago that wonderful record, in the fourth chapter of John, descriptive of Christ's conference with the woman at the well of Samaria, and the world would suffer a very distinct impoverishment were that record to disappear from its literary and religious treasures, and were we to lose our confidence that that record has correctly preserved to us the words of the woman and the words of our Lord. But right in the heart of that record is lodged a lesson that teaches us that the final tie which knits us to the mind and life of God is no record, however divine its inditement, and that the well of water from which we are to drink is no fountain of divine overflow set up two thousand years ago in the soul of Luke or Peter, but a fountain of divine overflow which God will set up in each man's own bosom. Said Jesus to the woman, "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water." The Bible is primarily a record of religious experience, not of our experience, but of experience dating anywhere from two

to six thousand years back, and to call that record, or even to call our belief in the authenticity of that record, a constituent factor of our personal religion would be very much the same as for a schoolboy whose penmanship is so illegible as to defy his own perusal of it, to point to the elegant headlines in his unfilled copy book and to call that an exhibit of his chirography.

I know how easy it is, when we are sympathetically inspecting the stirring scenes of the Bible story, and when in particular we are observant of the way in which God worked mightily in the hearts of such men as Elijah and Peter—I know how easy it is imaginatively to identify ourselves with them and to feel, in witnessing the giant movings of God's Spirit in them, that somehow the stirring that that Spirit works in them imputes itself to us, and that because we have seen God at work in our life and making Himself great in our experience. And undoubtedly there is no better preparation for our own inspiration, for our own personal uplift by the agency of God's Spirit, than to be witnesses, more or less remotely, of others who are, or who have been, the subjects of that agency. But to see the Apostles wrought upon by the Holy Ghost at Pentecost is in no way the same thing as being ourselves wrought upon by the Holy Ghost, even though we believed every word of the Pentecostal narrative to have been written down by the pen held in God's own hand. And to see Jesus at the Jordan, and the Holy Ghost descending upon Him in miraculous baptism in the form of a dove, has no validity except for Him, whatever be the wondering sympathy with which we peruse the narrative or the absolute confidence that we have in the divine accuracy of the narrative.

These earnest words proceed from an earnest conviction I have that while there is a good deal of religious thinking in the world, and of Christian philosophy and Biblical study, we are as churches and as individual believers far too weak in that feature which really constitutes the genius of all religion, and particularly of the Christian religion, viz, the personal

entrance into us and the personal management of us by the Spirit of Almighty God, in such a way as that He shall think Himself out through us, feel Himself into us, and work Himself out by means of us. That is itself the spinal marrow of religion. That thought is written in large and in detail all through the Holy Word. It is not religion merely to think about God. It is not Christianity merely to read the Gospel. Religion is not thinking, Christianity is not reading. Religion and the Christian religion is the opening up in us of a fountain of divine life, so that we are invaded with celestial impulses and pushed forward in pursuit of divine ends. It is an affair of God's inbreathing. That is what inspiration means, inbreathing; God's putting of His breath into us, the lodging of His Spirit in us. Perhaps there is no need of such inspiration in order to the production of more Bible. Perhaps there is already Bible enough. But we need inspiration in order to the wise and safe doing of our work just as much as Moses, Jeremiah, Daniel and John needed inspiration in order to the wise and safe doing of their work. Any line of effort that will not be better pursued by having God's inspiriting to administer us and reinforce us we had better get off from. Why, away back in the old times, as long ago as when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, we read how God called Bezaleel, and how He breathed upon him—inspired him, that is—"filled him with the Spirit of God." the thirty-first of Exodus says; inspired him to do what? to preach? to compose prophecies? to write divinely gifted records? No; inspired him "to work in gold, in silver, and in brass, in cutting of stones and in carving of timber." Six chapters earlier in Exodus we read how divine inspiration was brought into play in order to qualify Moses to be the architect of the Tabernacle, and here in the thirty-first of the same book we read how the same sort of divine inspiration was availed of to qualify Bezaleel to be one of the contractors. And that is the thought for which the Bible stands all the way through. There is in the Bible the steady re-

cognition of religion as a relation wherein men and women become personal points at which Almighty God localizes himself; scattered centres out from which God works in divine radiation, so that they become channels through which He does, eyes through which He sees, mouths through which He speaks, consciences through which His own infinite integrity and divine holiness asserts itself. Your own knowledge of Scripture will bear me out that in all this I am distinctly inside the clear line of Bible intention. However astutely we may reflect upon religious questions and however profoundly we may bore into the depths of Christian truth, we are not yet fairly risen into the domain of religion, pure and simple, till inside our own lives and experience the domain of God's Spirit and the domain of our spirit touch frontiers and overlap, so that we can say with St. Paul. "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

We are leaning too heavily on old inspiration. I am not saved by believing in Paul's inspiration, even though he used it to write the Epistle to the Ephesians. I am not saved by believing that the men who wrote the Bible were inspired. I am saved by being inspired myself; not inspired to write Scripture, it may be, but inspired to be what God would have me be, and inspired to do what God would have me do. I need inspiration as the Beloved Disciple needed it in writing to the seven churches in Asia, and I need it, not because I am a preacher. The particular complexion of a man's business has nothing to do with the question if it is a decent business; I need it not because I am a preacher; but because I am a man, a human thing, and, without inspiration, nothing but a human thing; and that is saying dreadfully little for me; and in that particular we are all on the same footing.

Of that which I have urged upon you, you can say that it is difficult. Yes, ascent is always difficult. You may say of it that it passes human comprehension. Yes, and what an occasion for joy it ought to be to us that there are things that do pass our comprehension, and that the world is

so immense that when we have gone as far in it as we can there is a good deal left over for outskirts. You may say of it that it is impracticable. No, not impracticable. The Bible is a voluminous witness against the charge that it is impracticable. The great men of the Bible and the great women of the Bible have fulfilled over an area of a good many thousands years, the ideal that I have held out before you in this article. It cost them something. If God drew near to them it was because they had drawn nigh to Him. If God entered into their hearts with His ennobling presence it was because they had cleaned out the rubbish

that was in their hearts sufficiently to make room for that presence. The entrance of God is always with power. The presence of God in the heart is therefore always the inspiration of God in the heart. The unnatural thing is not that some men are inspired, but that all men are not inspired; that by cherishing sin we keep God out, veto the doctrine of God's omnipresence, and thus leave within us little arid spots never mellowed by anything but the warmth of our own hearts, never greened over by influences that enter from without and above.