

How do we regard the Bible?

F. B. Hole.

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In the age-long conflict between the truth of God and the lie of the devil, between faith and unbelief, the attitude which we adopt towards the Holy Scriptures is decisive — *decisive as regards ourselves*.

It is not at all decisive as regards God and His truth and the Book in which that truth is enshrined. You and I may regard the Bible in any light we please: the Bible and the God of the Bible are quite unmoved by our thoughts or words. If an airman attempts to fly over the Himalayas and, regarding Everest's mighty mass as an illusion, steers straight into it, he will not move Everest an inch. He will move himself and his machine in very disconcerting fashion, and the way he regarded the mountain will prove quite decisive to him and to the result of his flight.

Ever since the Bible reached completion in the apostolic age it has been the object of continual attacks. For long it was removed from the common people and buried in monasteries and the like. Since the Reformation it has been widely circulated and bitterly denied and criticised. more recent times the mode of attack has varied, and the fashionable thing, especially in religious circles, now seems to be to eulogise it to the skies as literature, and as a repository of beautiful religious conceptions, and a story of religious progress, whilst assiduously impeaching its real veracity and undermining its authority as the Word of God.

We have just received a four-page pamphlet bearing the same title as this article, which summarises the teachings of modern religious infidelity in small compass. We notice it here because it bears the imprint of the Social Problems Committee of the United Free Church of Scotland, and hence goes forth under the sanction of a substantial religious organization that once would have prided itself upon its orthodoxy.

No reader of this magazine is likely at first sight to find much fault with its opening words: —

"We Christians love our Bible. As life goes on most of us come to love it more and more. We go to it in sorrow and find comfort. We go to it in perplexity and find light. We go to it when we are weary and find inspiration. It never fails us. It is out of our own experience that we call it 'The word of Life.'"

Here are some quite nice sentiments, and our author undertakes to express them on behalf of Christians generally. He writes, you notice, not "some of us," not even "we Christians of the United Free Church of Scotland," but "we Christians" — speaking thus for the Church universal. We love our Bible, he avers, because of certain benefits it gives, — comfort, light, and inspiration — he does not state that we love it because it *is true*. He does not believe that it is true, as we shall soon see.

Comfort, light, and inspiration are quite good and desirable things if they are true and proceed from TRUTH. If not, they are but destructive opiates to the soul. How would this do for the opening of a pamphlet advocating Spiritism?

"We spiritists love our seances. As life goes on most of us come to love them more and more. We go to them in sorrow and find comfort. We go to them in perplexity and find light. We go to them when we are weary and find inspiration. They never fail us."

At this point many would wish to interrupt and observe that possibly spiritists do find what they

claim in their seances, but that the supreme test is not as to the subjective effect produced in the devotees of any cult, but as to the truth or falsity of the cult to which they are devoted. Exactly! But that only proves how poor and lame a beginning the pamphlet in question makes. Our author affirms the comforting and soothing properties of the Bible. We agree, but we affirm further that if this be the test, there are a score of false cults which, once implicitly believed, have remarkable powers of inspiration and soothing properties in the highest degree, and we ask — why applaud the Bible and reject them?

To such a question we should give immediate answer — because the Bible *is true* and they are *false*. Our author, however, has no such logical reason for his choice, since for him the Bible also cannot be said to be true.

Having reminded us that a great many people do not find the Bible helps them in the way he has described, but that, on the contrary, "a great deal of it has simply bored them," that it seems to them "childish," or "contradictory and incredible," he gives us what he calls "blunt answers to blunt questions."

"Do we hold that every word in the Bible is true? No! we do not. Do we accept the views of the Bible on scientific questions? No, we do not. Do we approve all the moral sentiments expressed in the Bible? No! certainly not. Do we regard the Bible as infallible history? No. Do we agree with all the Opinions of St. Paul? No! we do not."

Our author here is not alluding to the fact that here and there, in Scripture, we have words and sentiments of evil men and even of Satan recorded; and that obviously such words and sentiments are not to be accepted as of God. No. He just means what he says, that "we Christians" do not believe the Bible to be true and thoroughly trustworthy either as to its *words*, its *views*, its *moral sentiments*, its *histories*, or its *opinions*; and, if so, it is not easy to see that there is left any respect at all in which it can be said to be true.

Thus he asserts. But is his assertion correct? By no means. There are Christians by tens of thousands who utterly repudiate such unbelief on the one hand and such a weak and illogical position on the other. How comes he, then, to make such assertions in the name of "we Christians" generally? Because either he ignores the fact that there are Christians for whom he does not speak, or else he treats such as differ from him as no Christians at all.

Leaving that aside, however, let us address ourselves to the main question. Ought we or ought we not to accept the Bible in its words, its views, its moral sentiments, its histories, and its opinions, and we would add, its *assumptions*, as true? Let us allow the Bible to propound to us concerning itself the very question that the Living Word addressed to His critics, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin? and if I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?" (John 8: 46).

Take that tremendous Bible assumption, "Thus saith the Lord," repeated over and over again. Now, did the Lord say or did HE not say? *If He did say*, then to treat any thing He said after the fashion of our author is sheer blasphemy, and *if He did not say*, then to talk about anyone deriving comfort or inspiration from such deceitful utterances is to advocate a very silly form of sentimental, not to say, immoral, religion. Nor would it improve the position to urge that the men who prefaced their writings with "Thus saith the Lord" and its many similar variant forms were good men who genuinely imagined they had a divine commission; for it is not the *good men* but their *bad writings* that our author would have us derive our comfort from.

Now what underlies the sad unbelief expressed in this pamphlet? Our author strokes us with a

velvet paw, yet a sharp claw which scratches lies beneath the velvet!

We have no hesitation in saying — the steady refusal to see anything in the Bible beyond a purely human literature; the acknowledgment of nothing in the nature of a revelation from God, but only the history of the evolution of religious ideas in the minds of successive generations of men. Here are the words:-

"What, then, is the Bible to us?

"It is simply the story of how through long centuries men gradually worked their way from primitive religious ideas, and very primitive moral ideas, up to the loftiest heights of spiritual perception which the race has yet attained.

"The story is told us in very varied ways. The Bible is really a literature and not a book. It contains historical records, laws, poems, visions, books of teachings, proverbs and prophecies. Some of it is very dry; other parts of it are the most beautiful pieces of writing the world has produced.

"But the essential point about it all is that as we read it we can trace the great progress referred to. Israel began with what we should call pagan ideas about God. They believed in many gods, and about their own special god they believed some very strange things. They held him capable of such feelings as jealousy and the desire for revenge. They believed he could be pleased by animal sacrifices. They thought He cared only for one nation and could take pleasure in seeing others massacred. And yet, slowly and surely, such thoughts were left behind. Slowly they learnt that God is holy, and thinks not as a man thinks. Slowly they learnt to fill out the idea of His righteousness with ever nobler content. They rose to a belief in His mercy, and then in His love. They received the greatest of all evangelical thoughts and came to know that God suffers with and for His children. And as this progress went on they discarded their earlier ideas. Many of the earlier conceptions in the Bible stand condemned by the later teaching of the Bible itself. It can, therefore, only be used rightly by those who receive its final and greatest teachings, and use these as a standard for judging all the rest."

Having read these statements which purport to be an instruction as to the true character and value of Old Testament Scripture, we have just our one question to ask as to them. ARE THEY TRUE?

They are NOT true to the facts as stated by Scripture. That can easily be verified. Israel did *not* begin with pagan ideas of God, if the Bible account of their beginnings is to be relied upon. Israel himself and his immediate descendants began with the knowledge of the true and only God. At a later stage in Egypt they evidently caught the infection of Egyptian idolatry to a considerable extent. From this, they were again to some degree extricated by the wonders of Sinai and the law then given. Their subsequent history was the exact opposite to the picture drawn by our author. Not a steady upward evolution of religious ideas, but a steady degradation to the depths of polytheism {until the Babylonian captivity, only relieved by the faithful intervention of prophets sent by the Lord. And after the captivity, though they avoided idolatry, they degraded religion into a mere matter of ceremonies and pharisaic observances that was sternly denounced by our Lord. This, we repeat, is simply beyond all contradiction the plain testimony of the Bible. The only increasing light to which it bears witness is the increasing clearness of prophetic testimony to the Coming One which culminated in the COMING ONE Himself, the SENT ONE of the New Testament - the Lord Jesus.

Whence, then, did our author get all these assertions as to what Israel thought and how their ideas were evolved? Is there some other history of the chosen race extant, a history of such unimpeachable accuracy that he feels himself authorized entirely to rewrite their story? *If there were*, it would be honest of him to denounce our Bible as a fraud, and to say "We Christians despise our Bible": it would

not be honest for him to attempt to twist the words of the poor old discredited Bible to mean what they manifestly do not mean. *There is, however, no such other history.* Whence, then, come the ideas he foists upon the Bible? They represent the account of things now fashionable in speculative circles where evolution is still the rage. There is no other history. There is no proof. Our author just moves with the times and advocates the latest craze in evolutionary philosophy. He tells us he loves the Bible, but he loves his philosophic notions more, and in their favour he "handles the word of God deceitfully," and thus "corrupts the word of God" (2 Cor. 4: 2; 2: 17).

To him, of course, it is *not* the Word of God. He speaks of it, did you notice, as "writing" which "*the world has produced.*"

He is pleased, however, quite to approve of "Jesus." Here are his words:-

"The summit of all this progress is reached when we come to the person and teaching of Jesus. It is to that that all the earlier parts lead up. In Jesus we have the perfect revelation at last. He is all the best we ever dreamed that God might be. He is the final and complete picture of what God is. His teaching is the final word about the will of God for man. He satisfies perfectly man's craving for knowledge about God. And, therefore, the book that tells us about Him must necessarily be mankind's most sacred possession."

Quite a number of these statements are true, and yet the whole passage exemplifies how truth may be used to decorate falsehood. The main idea is that "Jesus" is the summit of human progress. The race had been striving upwards, and its dreams of goodness were consequently in advance of anything yet attained, when, lo! as the fruit of this evolution there appeared "Jesus" and fulfilled our dreams — "He is all the best we ever dreamed that God might be." Now for our question — *Is this a FACT?*

Not if the Gospels be true. Their history shows us that instead of the Lord Jesus Christ appearing as the summit of human progress, fulfilling human dreams of goodness, in which case He would have been rapturously acclaimed by all the leaders of this evolutionary progress, if not by the common people, He came fulfilling Isaiah's word, "when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him," and He was rejected.

Has our author access to some other "Life of Jesus" more authentic than the Gospels that he thus dares to rewrite the story? He has not. There is no other authentic history. He either is unable to read the sober objective facts of the Gospels without importing into them a strain of romance from his own subjective consciousness, or he so completely disbelieves their veracity that he feels quite at liberty thus fundamentally to alter the story. His "Jesus" is largely a figment of his imagination, and we compliment him upon the degree of intellectual honesty displayed in the fact that not once in the pamphlet does he speak of Him as his LORD.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect and final revelation of God, because He is God. He is not the fairest and most perfect expression of the genius of Adam's race, but the last Adam, the Lord from heaven, the Head of a new race (see 1 Cor. 15: 45-49).

This quotation from the Epistles will not count for much with our author of course. In his paper he proceeds to explain to us that the Old Testament, though hardly needed by us, has at least some value, as an interesting story of the preparation for Christ. So, too, the Epistles "are of value because they fill out our knowledge of Christ;" but he does not regard them as authoritative. St. Paul, for instance, "has written the greatest things that ever were written about the Christian religion," yet "he writes theology sometimes," "he expresses opinions now and then." "His is not the last word about Christian morality." If that be so, we clearly need not pay much attention to what he says. We may

accept what we like and discard what we like, and this is what our author does.

The Apostle John declares otherwise. Speaking of the false spirits in the world — the spirit of antichrist — he says, "We [the inspired apostles] are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (1 John 4: 6). The spirit of truth hears, and bows to the apostolic word. The spirit of error does not. Which spirit pervades the pamphlet we have before us? The issue is pretty plain. Our author considers the apostolic epistles quite open to question in many parts; the verses quoted from John's writing would, of course, be to him just John's opinions; he would regard John as "writing theology," and so we need not follow him. On the other hand, judged by that sentence of the Word of God through John, our author is deluded by "the spirit of error."

Now what is the upshot of this way of regarding the Bible? A closing quotation shall tell us: —

From all this it must be plain that the Bible which Christians love so much, and which proves so invaluable for life, is not the whole Bible. It is the greatest thoughts of the Bible which feed our souls and refresh our spirits.

"Possibly the amount of Scripture which is thus living, and which actually operates in the lives of some Christians might turn out to be little more than a tenth of the whole. But it remains true that in and through this book simple people find God, and learn year after year more of God.

"Probably every reader makes his own Bible. The parts that do not grip him he passes by. Certain books become so thumbed and worn that they can hardly be read. Others remain clean and white year after year."

A few more lines follow, containing a pleasing sentiment or two about the Bible, and the pamphlet thus closes as it opened, bestowing its blessing upon the venerable Book!

But we are left, if the pamphlet be true, with about one-tenth of the Bible's contents of any real use, and which can be said to be living. The remaining nine-tenths is dead. Nor are we given any assurance as to which tenth is the living part. We are just left at liberty to make our own Bible. So "we Christians" who "love our Bibles" are left each loving a different "Bible" --each loving what is in part totally condemned by the majority of other "Christians." We are thus presented with the melancholy spectacle of "Christians" every one of whom on a majority vote of other Christians would be condemned as foolishly credulous. This being so, who would not be an out-an-out infidel?

We do not know whether the author includes Luke 24. in his "Bible." He professes admiration for the "Jesus" of the Gospels; though why he should it is hard to tell, since we owe the very Gospels to the apostles or men under apostolic influence, and if such are not to be relied upon in their epistles, why trust them as to "Jesus" in the Gospels? Have we left anything reliable at all as to Him?

It may be, however, that he does include Luke 24 in his "Bible" which is one-tenth of our Bible. If so, we hope he may some day read that chapter, and note what our Lord Jesus said when He was raised from the dead: —

"O fools, and slow of heart to believe ALL that the prophets have spoken."

"Beginning at Moses and ALL the prophets He expounded unto them in ALL the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

"These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that ALL things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning

Me."

The issue between this Lord Jesus and the writer of the deceitful pamphlet is complete. He tells us, speaking of Paul, that "where he does not simply interpret Jesus we feel that we need not follow him. We follow Jesus." The case supposed never arose with Paul's writings, for he always did "follow Jesus." It arises, however, in most glaring fashion with the writer of this pamphlet. We thank him for his kind assurance that we need not follow him. We certainly will not; and neither, we trust, will anybody else, and least of all any reader of *Scripture Truth*.

Had the pamphlet been openly and honestly infidel we should hardly have noticed it in these pages. Its danger lies not in its negations but in its smooth professions of admiration. The "Jesus" of the author's imagination is eulogised in order the better to deny to the Bible its true character as A REVELATION FROM GOD. Did not the kiss of Judas prove of old a more effective weapon than the swords and staves of the multitude?

We welcome the opportunity, at the start of another year, to make once more manifest our glad and humble acceptance of the whole Bible as the inspired word of God.