

SOME THOUGHTS ON INSPIRATION

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Some Thoughts on Inspiration by J. Armitage Robinson

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J. ARMITAGE ROBINSON

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ON INSPIRATION**

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BY

Presented to
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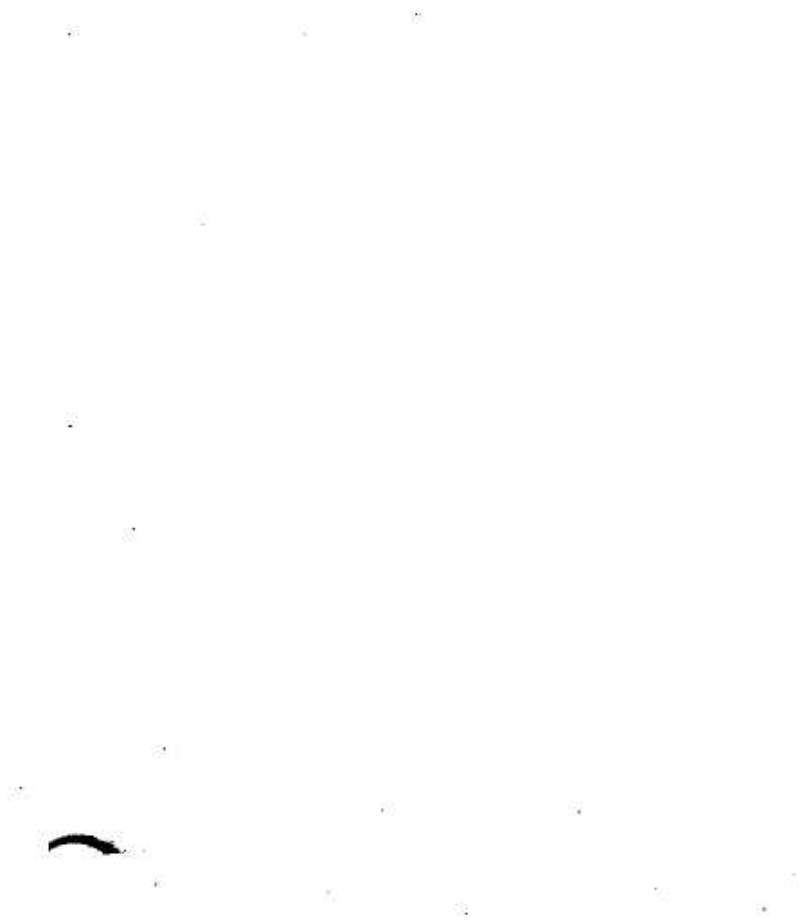
Trinity School

PREFACE

THE three lectures here printed were delivered in Westminster Abbey on Saturday afternoons in Advent, 1904. I have appended to them an Address which I gave a few weeks before to a select body of Sunday School teachers who had gained the prizes offered by the Church of England Sunday School Institute, as this Address evoked an unexpected interest and so determined the choice of the subject for my Advent lectures. I have also suggested in a Note, in answer to an inquiry which is constantly reaching me, a few recent books which may be helpful to the layman who desires some further guidance in regard to the Old Testament.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

Christmas Eve, 1904



SOME THOUGHTS ON INSPIRATION

I

THE purpose of these lectures is to suggest some thoughts in regard to the Inspiration of Holy Scripture, which may possibly be helpful to two classes of minds, which, while approaching the question from different sides, are alike perplexed by the conflict between modern knowledge and traditional views of the Bible.

There is a large and constantly growing body of men who have come to recognise that the facts of physical science and of the early history of our race are at variance with the conceptions which they learned in their younger days as to the creation of the world and the origin of mankind. They are profoundly assured of the general uniformity of nature, and though they do not in the least wish to deny the possibility or reasonableness of a miraculous interference with it for some adequate purpose, yet they feel that each recorded miracle challenges an ever-renewed investigation

of its historical evidence, and can only win their acceptance when they are able to perceive something of a spiritual necessity for it which reinforces and confirms its external testimony. To such men the historical criticism of the Old Testament comes as a kind of relief, weakening (as it undoubtedly does) the historical evidence for some of the recorded interferences with the course of nature which involve the most serious scientific difficulties. But the process which affords this relief plunges them, at the same time, into a new perplexity. If the Bible is inspired by the Divine Spirit, how can it record what did not actually take place? If an element of human misconception and mistake is to be recognised in the Bible, how can we regard it any longer as an inspired book, or use it as an infallible guide of life? An uncertainty prevails which, as a matter of fact, closes the Old Testament to them, and leads them to doubt whether their whole position in regard to the Christian religion itself is not seriously affected with unreality. They do not wish to disbelieve, but the mainstay of their faith seems to be broken, and there are many voices around them ready to proclaim that they have forsaken the truth and have no part or lot in the Christian Church.

Another class of persons is no less anxiously perplexed. They have hitherto regarded as unquestionable the literal accuracy of the whole

Bible from beginning to end. They have indeed noted some difficulties in the apparent contradiction between certain statements in different parts of the Bible, some discrepancies hard to reconcile. But these things have not really troubled them; they have supposed that a fuller knowledge would in every case provide a satisfactory solution. They are profoundly convinced of the Divine character of the book; they owe to it their very souls; they rest their whole hope for the future on its sacred promises; they know by experience its spiritual power. They are not much impressed by the considerations which make difficulties for others. Miracles, for example, are no stumbling-block to them; confident in God's power to intervene at any point in His own universe, they readily accept all recorded miracles without distinction. By devout and prayerful reading they derive spiritual nourishment from all parts of the sacred book; it always responds to their need, and is its own perpetual justification.

Their perplexity only arises when difficulties are urged upon them from outside; when they see earnest and devout men questioning what to them seems absolutely certain; when the date and authorship of various books is disputed on literary grounds, or when narratives which they have always taken as plain records of facts are interpreted as allegorically, but not literally, true.