

THOUGHTS ON A REVELATION

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Thoughts on a revelation by S. J. Jerram

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A REVELATION**

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BY
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THOUGHTS ON A REVELATION.

Few persons can have observed attentively the various phases of public opinion on religious subjects during the last twenty years or more, without noticing a growing tendency to the accumulation of difficulties on the subject of Revelation. Geology, ethnology, mythical interpretation, critical investigation, and inquiries of other kinds, have raised their several difficulties; and, in consequence, infidels have rejoiced, candid inquirers have been perplexed, and even those who have held with firmness decided views on the distinctive character of the inspiration of the Bible, have sometimes found it difficult to satisfy their minds entirely, and to see clearly the grounds of their conclusions.

The writer of these pages does not propose to attempt a detailed reply to the various difficulties which have been raised. Answers to objections arising from the pursuit of particular sciences are most effectually given by those, who have made those sciences their study; nor can there be any doubt that, if the book of nature and the Bible spring from the same source, an increasing acquaintance with both will tend to show their harmony with each other, and to dispel the perplexities which

have arisen from an imperfect acquaintance with either of them. It may be observed, too, that, as it requires special knowledge on the part of a writer to cope with special difficulties; so also does it demand acquirements, but rarely found, on the part of the reader, to appreciate the real value, both of the objections and answers which may be made on geological, critical, or other special grounds.

The writer thinks that there is another method of reply—a method which consists in giving as clear a view as can be had of the real character of the subject against which the objections are made; and this is the kind of answer which he proposes to attempt. The man who has a distinct and well defined knowledge of chemical, mathematical, or any other science, will not be greatly perplexed with difficulties which may be brought from other sciences, touching upon that with which he is acquainted. The knowledge which he possesses of his own particular science will enable him, in some instances, to perceive at once the weakness of the objections which are alleged; and, even when this is not the case, he will see such an harmonious proportion subsisting, between the various parts of that branch of knowledge which he has been pursuing, and be so strongly convinced of the certainty of it, that he will be justly disposed to attribute to his own ignorance his inability to give satisfactory replies to those difficulties which he cannot dispose of. *Real* knowledge cannot of course be overthrown; and, although it is often difficult to decide what knowledge is of this description, the task of arriving at a tolerably correct conclusion with regard to such subjects as fall within the range of our faculties, must not be regarded as an hopeless one.

When clear definitions have been given, disputants

have often found that there is no further room for discussion; and, even when this is not the case, the force of objections can, under such circumstances, be more accurately weighed, and the real points of attack and defence more clearly perceived. If a man were to say, in a mixed company, that there was no taste in an apple, many sensible men, unacquainted with his exact meaning, might be inclined to dispute the assertion, and to say that the statement was contrary to common experience; but, if he explained his meaning to be, that taste is a quality of a sentient being, and that there is nothing in the apple of this kind, or corresponding to it, everybody then would see the truth of his assertion, and all ground of dispute would be removed. We will take another case. Those who hold strong Protestant views frequently say, that the "religion of the Bible is the religion of Protestants." This, for most purposes, expresses their meaning forcibly and well, and the mind, in practice, usually supplies the necessary limitations. It does not, however, always happen that these limitations are consciously present to the mind, or that the person who practically receives the right impression might not be greatly puzzled by the subtle reasonings of objectors. The *dictum*, quoted above, does not mean, as might at first sight appear, that we are to make use of no other means than the Bible in the investigation of Divine truth, and that the wisdom of the present and past ages is to go for nothing. No one *could* thus isolate himself from other influences; and, if he could, it would not be *desirable*. What is really meant is, that all truth necessary for salvation is contained in the Bible, "so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be be-

lieved as an article of faith," etc.; in other words, that the Bible is the ultimate and sole standard of appeal. This of course may be, and is disputed; but, when the statement is put in a clear and well defined shape, many apparent objections vanish at once, and the real points of attack and defence are made evident. If, then, we can obtain ideas, on the subject of revelation, which shall be, upon the whole, distinct, and worthy of being received as true, much will be done to remove objections, and to satisfy a reasonable mind.

The proposed investigation will necessarily be, in some degree, of an *a priori* character; not, however, as we trust, so much so as to render it vague and without practical value. It will be *a priori*, inasmuch as it will not assume the existence of a revelation, and then proceed to examine its character. This would be to beg the question at issue. It will not be *a priori*, so far as it consists in instituting an inquiry into the faculties of the human mind, and their capacity to receive a revelation; and into this it will be found that the investigation will mainly resolve itself.

1. We may commence our inquiry into the subject by noticing, *that a knowledge of God, to be obtained in some way or other, seems almost essential to the well-being of man.* If it be granted, that there is such a Being—and few, it is presumed, would go so far as to deny this—it must be of great importance for us to know the relationship in which that Being stands to us, and we to Him. We can hardly suppose it possible that an Infinite Being, in some sense, as we suppose will be generally allowed, the Governor of the world, should not have an important relation to *all* other existences; much less, that the re-