

**A RATIONAL VIEW OF  
THE BIBLE; A COURSE  
OF LECTURES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649254323

A rational view of the Bible; a course of lectures by Newton M. Mann

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Cover @ 2017

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*Bibl. Lit.  
Gen.*

A RATIONAL VIEW

OF

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A COURSE OF LECTURES

BY

REV. NEWTON M. MANN,

ROCHESTER, N. Y.

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Toronto:

ROSE-BELFORD PUBLISHING CO.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE following lectures have been prepared for the simple purpose of presenting, in as concise and popular a manner as possible, modern ideas of the Bible. No way of indicating what that book is seems at present so promising as to inquire how and when it came to be. No amount of critical argument applied to the text itself is likely to convince many that the Scriptures are less than infallible, so long as the impression subsists that these writings were produced in some miraculous fashion, and therefore, as to their composition, are as distinct from other books as light is from darkness. But if it can be shown that these writings were a natural growth in Israel, that they are without exception severally the product of conditions and exigencies which are still traceable, that in many cases they bear a wholly fictitious date and authorship, there is no need to go further or make any direct assault upon infallibility. In every reasonable mind that theory surrenders without more ado.

A very great importance therefore attaches to this discussion. Whatever a man's views on the subject, he must

feel the need of looking well to the ground he stands on. If the Bible is, as is popularly taught, God's word, it is high time that we all knew it, for it is the most momentous fact within the bounds of conception. If the Bible is something very different from what it is popularly taught to be, there is equally imperative need of learning that fact. People in general have heard one statement from their childhood; is it not time now to listen to another statement?

The writer is aware that the views set forth in these lectures will strike many as nothing more than ingenious—an exercise in mental gymnastics, to be read, perhaps, as a curiosity, but without any actual bearing upon the subject discussed. If he had sprung upon the world a novel theory of his own, the writer might not demur at such a judgment. But he is in the main stating the conclusions of others, and these the foremost biblical critics in the world. He would also remind readers of this class that these views are not distinctively heretical, since they are largely shared by the author of the article on the Bible in the last edition of the "Encyclopædia Britannica," whom the Scotch Kirk has tried and *not* convicted of doctrinal sin, by Dean Stanley (*clarum et venerabile nomen*), and by not a few other prominent men "in good and regular standing."

In explaining the formation of the Bible on purely natural principles we but fall into line with the whole tendency of scientific thought since the modern revival of knowledge. The time was when men contented them-



selves with saying, "God made the world"; and no little opposition was offered when the scientists set out to learn, if they could, when and how it was made. But now certainly the universe is nowise hurt by the discovery that its transformations (and apparently its genesis) are the result of natural laws which we see constantly in operation. Thought in regard to the Bible follows the same order of development. It has been said "God gave the book." Now the question is again as to manner and time. And what if study into the making of the book, as before into the making of the world, leads to the positive conclusion that the process was a purely natural one? Are we the worse off for learning the ways of God in the development of history and of literature? Indeed there is no more reason why we should shrink from the conclusion that the government of the human world, the evolution of thought, of morals and religion, are by natural law, than there was for revolt against the now conceded doctrine that the earth has taken its present form and constitution solely from the operation of natural causes.

Nor is the distance between God and man widened by this mode of thinking. When it was said that God made the universe in a week, some six thousand years ago, the impression was apt to obtain that he then withdrew from the scene. At all events the mind seeking to contemplate his activity in nature was always inclined to go back to that memorable week. But since creation has been seen to be a beginningless, ceaseless process, the immanency of God in nature, the immediateness of his activity, has

been brought home to us. Similarly the teaching that the Bible alone is God's word has tended to foster a feeling that Divinity had removed out of speaking distance for the last eighteen hundred years. On the contrary the breaking down of this exclusive claim for old time inspiration, and the assertion that the sole essential quality of God's word is *truth*, bring the Eternal Presence into instant communication with every pure spirit.

Moreover a great wrong is done to the Scriptures themselves by the current notion that they are of a supernatural character. They are put under obligation to speak always in the tone of a god. There have been Bibles—our grandmothers had them—which were suited to the vindication of such a theory, opening infallibly to some sweet psalm, or gracious parable, or divine service of charity. But the Bibles now in use (or rather not in use) are apt to open perversely to the most inconvenient passages—which it must be confessed are the more common—confusing the ordinary reader with a vague sense of incongruity, and disposing him to close the book at once lest he commit the unpardonable sin of suspecting or misunderstanding the utterances of the Holy Ghost. So it goes with the many, but the few who teach *must* read. These, under the common prepossession that the book is the "word of God," are forced into the attitude of apologists, forever on the quest of ways and means to save the text from any imputation of error. The apologist is not concerned to discover the truth, but to make out that a given thing *is* the truth. It matters not that an ancient

book was written under entirely false conceptions of the earth and its motions, the contrary must somehow be established, and *Genesis* must be kept abreast the latest deductions of geology. So in the course of a hundred years, while a science is being developed, the sacred writer is made to tell a hundred different stories about one and the same thing. This is injustice to the Bible, and the longer this method is pursued the worse it will be for the book. On the contrary interest in the reading is quickened by the new and rational theory of its origin. It ceases to be an armory of texts with which to crush an opponent, and takes on a purely human quality which quite atones for all the mistakes it contains. We read it as the record of a people's highest life, a book unique, and yet natural as any in the world; a book in which are many discordant voices, as in every congress of strong and ardent minds; a revelation, not of what is in heaven or what is to come, but of what is present in the soul of man.

Some embarrassment has been felt in the preparation of these lectures from the largeness of the subject, and the comparative novelty of the views presented which would seem to require an array of proofs quite beyond the limits of a few addresses. The alternative was finally chosen of presenting as clearly as might be the modern view, with such leading evidence as time would allow, leaving the hearer to judge, from his own knowledge of the Scriptures and from further reading, of its probability. Advantage has been taken of this publication to supple-