The Inspiration of the Bible.

BY E. M. SAUNDERS, D. D.

NO. 4.

The claims made by Christ so amply sustained by his holy life and "abounding miracles"—miracles crowned by his resurrection, the strangely different life he led after he came from the dead, and his ascension to Heaven in the sight of his disciples and attested by the angels, were restated and confirmed by his apostles and followers immediately after the departure of their Lord. He told them that it was necessary for him to die and on the third day to rise from the dead; but that upon them should come the promise of the Father. They were, however, commanded to tarry in Jerusalem until they "were endued with power from on high." "Through the Holy Ghost he gave commandments to his apostles, to whom by many infallible proofs he showed himself alive after his death." The power of the Holy Ghost, promised his followers, came with majesty and glory at the day of Pentecost. The sound as of a rushing mighty wind, the tongues of fire and the sudden gifts of speech in languages, other than those of the people, fully established and vindicated all that Jesus had arrogated to himself of humanity and divinity, as also all the doctrines he taught, and the true and real mission for which he came into the world. The multitudes were indeed "baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire." The Galilaean speakers preached, and were understood by the people assembled from Parthia, Elam, Media, Mesopotamia, Judaea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene and Rome and Jews from different parts of the world, and men of other nations who had been converted to Judaism and people from Crete and from Arabia.

At this point Christ stands between the Old and the New Testaments, grasping them in his pierced hands, saying directly of the former, "these are they which testify of me" and indirectly the same of the latter. How these men imbued by the Spirit of their risen and ascended Master, went abroad preaching and founding churches is made known by Luke, the beloved physician, in the Acts of the Apostles. The men and women of the Old Testament received their messages from Heaven. The Lord spoke to them. His voice sounded in their ears, and of the reality and genuineness of the communications they received they had no doubt. Whatever the modes may have been, in their consciousness it was God who spoke to them. Of this, to them, there was no doubt, no uncertainty. Nor were the people left to accept the unsupported beliefs of those who professed to be moved by the Holy Spirit. Doubt or unbelief could not exist in the presence of miracles and signs by which the messages of their prophets were confirmed.

As has been stated, Jesus adopted similiar means to convince all classes of the people in regard to himself and his work. The diseased and maniacs healed by him were reckoned by multitudes. The extraordinary works performed by himself, he predicted would be followed by even greater works, when his followers had been baptized by the Holy Ghost. And so it was. The gift of tongues, the general conviction and conversion among the people; the baptism of thousands, the breaking down of national and racial prejudices—prejudices, adamantine, thick, deep and high—fulfilled the predictions of Christ when the new dispensation was introduced at Penecost. As it had been with the prophets of old and with Christ, so now the same agencies are employed to overcome opposition and complete the undertaking of giving a full and sufficient revelation to the world—to both Jews and Genthes. On taking the babe in his arms in the temple, the impulse of Simeon's heart flashed light on the worldwide mission to the infant Jesus—"A light he was to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people Israel. At Pentecost Jesus Christ and Simeon were seen to be true prophets. Another flash of emotional prophecy came from the lips of Elizabeth on meeting her cousin Mary. Men who found deliverance from their traditional narrowness and bigotry, from their darkness and superstitutions, went abroad preaching Christ and him crucified. Believers were multiplied and gathered into societies in their several localities. This work made phenomenal progress after the staff of heralds had been reinforced by the irrepressible little Jew who was by special means converted near the western gate of Damascus. He could say that he had a gospel for the world, which had not come to him by inductive or deductive methods of thought, although capable of such exercise; but a gospel received from heaven in an unmistakable and convincing vision. At Jerusalem, the Antiochs, Ephesus, Colloage, Philippi, Thesalonica, Rome and many other places, these new brotherhoods sprang up—men and women who for the first time in the world learned and understood in their high and low sense the terms, not wisely employed in our day—the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man—the fatherhood of God they knew as the father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and all his brethren who are brothers in the highest sense—the brotherhood of man, as God is the father of rebellious children. According to the records of historians, both Christian and heathen, Christianity was founded about A. D. 30. By the end of the century all the books of the New Testament had been written and circulated among the churches. This date assumes that the birth of Christ was four years earlier than A. D. one.

As early as the end of the first century the religion of Christ had spread over the Roman empire. It is recognized in the writings of Pliny in his reports to the Emperor, Tacitus, Suetonious refer to the crucifixion. Enseleius asserts that Christ suffered death under Pontius Pilate who was a procurator of Judaea from A. D. 26 to A. D. 36. All the Christian writers who refer to the death of Christ, testify that he died about this time. Those of the first, second, third and fourth centuries agree that the books of the New Testament were written before the end of the first century. The writers claim to have been either eye witnesses of the ministry of Jesus or to have known those who were. The second and third epistles of John may be taken as silent on this point. In the books of the New Testament are many specific references to persons and events of the first hundred years of the Christian era. The early Christian writers affirm that nearly the entire New Testament was written by apostles or their associates. Their references to the four gospels, thirteen epistles of Paul, the Acts of the Apostles and one epistle of Peter and one of John are unmistakable. With some qualifications, some of these writers refer to the remainder of the books of the New New Testament. The same claim of authorship is made either directly or indirectly by many of the New Testament scriptures, themselves. The person, work, character and mission of Christ, exhibited in the four gospels, have similiar and harmonic treatment in all other parts of the New Covenant. All unite in sustaining the claims of the New Testament to infallibility. "What I have seen with the Father, that I speak." "No one knoweth the son but the Father," "and my Father are one."

Christ promised to give the Holy Spirit to his apostles. "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Helper; he will bring all things to your remembrance." "He will tell you things to come;" "He will guide you into all truth."

Early writers state that Mark received his information from Peter. They also admit that all the New Testament, except Mark and Luke, the Acts, the epistles of James and Jude, the second of Peter and the epistles of the Hebrews, were written by the apostles. The contents of the other books make it evident that these also were inspired. The instance found in the first and second Corinthians, Romans and Galations, where Paul seems to disclaim inspiration are capable of interpretations which do not make such exceptions necessary. He is conscious of writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; but in two cases of matters not taught by Christ. His language is permissive and not a command. Other books than those of the New Testament were produced in the first and late centuries, some of which were used in the churches. But the accuracy of the inspired books, their originality and consistency with the early Scriptures, the divine authority which the writers claimed, rate them high above the apocryphal writings.

This may be tested by the readers of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR. Clement of Rome, the pastor of the church in that city, died about the year A. D. 100. He wrote an epistle to the church of Corinth intending to instruct that church in some serious trouble then distracting the church. This epistle was by some regarded as inspired; but by the test of time it was finally rejected. It abounds with wholesome truth, but mostly drawn from other inspired books of the Bible. Clement quotes from ten books of the New Testament and fifteen of the Old. The quotations in some cases are long—for instance, seventeen verses of the fifty-first Psalm. He does not claim inspiration. Indeed he writes just as the pastor of one city church would write to the pastor of another.

Here is a quotation:—

"The apostles have preached to us from the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ from God. Christ, therefore, was sent by God; the apostles by Christ, so both were orderly and according to the will of God. For having received the command, and being thoroughly assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and convinced by the word of God with the fulness of the Holy Spirit, they went abroad, publishing that the Kingdom of God was at hand. And thus preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first fruits of their conversions to be bishops and ministers over such as should afterwards believe, having first proved them by the Spirit. Nor was this any new thing; seeing that long before it was written concerning bishops and deacons. For thus saith the Scripture in a certain place: I will appoint their overseers in righteousness, and their ministers in faith. And what wonder if they to whom such a work was committed by God in Christ, established such officers as we before mentioned; when even that blessed and faithful servant in all his house, Moses, set down in the Holy Scriptures all things that were commanded him."

This is elevated and sound truth; but let me now quote from another part of this epistle, and matter of another character will be found. He was referring to the resurrection, and had compared it to the dead day and the rising morn; to the seed sown and raised again in the new fruit. Then he writes as follows:

"Let us consider that wonderful type of the resurrection which is seen in the Eastern countries—that is to say Arabia. There is a certain bird called the Phoenix; of this there is never but one at a time, and that lives five hundred years. And when the time of its dissolution draws near, that it must die, it makes itself a nest of frankincense and myrrh and other spices, into which, when its time is fulfilled, it enters and dies. But its flesh putrifying breeds a certain worm, which, with the juice of the dead bird, brings forth feathers; and when it is grown to a perfect state, it takes up the nest in which the bones of the parent bird lie, and carries it from Arabia into Egypt to a city called Heliopolis, and flying in open day in the sight of all men, lays it upon the altar of the sun and returns from whence it came. The priests then search into the records of time, and find that it returned precisely at the end of five hundred years. And shall we then think it to be any very great and strange thing for the Lord of all to raise up those that religiously serve him in the assurance of a good faith, when even by a bird he shows us the greatness of his power to fulfill his promises?"

No intelligent church would take a long time after reading this bird fable, given seriously as a remarkable fact in bird-biology, to come to a decision that the writer, good and true though he doubtless was, lacked the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and that his production must be relegated to the uninspired class of religious literature. Such fables as this cannot suryive in a scientific age. The thrusts of Darwin and Spencer would be their death. Indeed the spiritual insight of believers ruled this letter out of the New Testament canon.

Clement in the belief of the Baptists, was perhaps the third pastor of the Baptist church at Rome. They however can consistently account for this instance of his credulity in biology; but what can our Roman Catholic friends do with Clement, whom they regard as the fourth pope of Rome, reckoning Peter, Linus and Anacletus as his immediate predecessors? There is a heavy job on the hands of those who would prove his infallibility.

There are about twenty five apocryphal New Testament books which are now in existence. That from which the above quotations have been taken, is among the best of them. In them there is much religious truth; but about all of it can be traced to the inspired books. Much however of these writings are trivial and some of them silly. Between this epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, and Paul's epistle to the same church, there is a wide chasm. The difference between the writings of the two authors is essential, like that between the monkey tribe and the human family. Were the canonical books and the apocryphal writings submitted to any intelligent Baptist church, there would be no difficulty in separating the one from the other. Reasons for doing so would be apparent.

* * *

The Blessing Before the Meal.

BY HENRY CROCKER.

A little gem of a picture is preserved to us in the words, "And looking up to heaven he blessed." Place it in its original setting: sunset hues on clouds and lakes and hills; a broad expanse of grass land, brilliantly green; an immense company of people, thousands of men and women and children, brightly clad, and arranged like beds of flowers in orderly companies, all seated upon the grass, a tired and hungry multitude, but now eager and expectant, and all gazing intently toward a group of disciples in the midst of which is Jesus. There is a momentary hush of voices as Jesus takes a position in full sight of them all, and taking the five loaves and two fishes, he lifts his eyes to heaven and blesses, and then breaks the loaves and the fishes and gives to the disciples to distribute to the multitude.

Describing the events of the next day, John says, "Nevertheless there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after the Lord had given thanks." The marvel of the miracle did not efface the mementary blessing that preceded it.

In the second miracle of feeding a multitude this scene was repeated. At the Paschal supper he gave thanks, and when he instituted his memorial ordinance, before he brake the bread, and again before he passed the wine he blessed.

After the walk to Emmaus with the two troubled disciples we find the risen Christ seated before their humble evening repast; and before they partake, this unrecognized friend blesses and then brakes the bread and gives to them, and just then their eyes are opened and they know him.

Evidently the reverential blessing before a meal was an habitual act with Christ. Wherever he might be, in whatever company, before however scanty or sumptuous a meal, with heavenward glance and true devotion returned thanks to the gracious Father.

The blessing before the meal is a constant reminder of the unceasing and personal providence of God. How near it brings us to the Heavenly Father, who feeds the ravens, and clothes the lillies, and notes the sparrow's fall, and hears the prayers of his children. He taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Every meal is a gift. The blessing is our acknowledgement of this direct and fatherly supply.

The blessing is a tender reminder of our utter dependence upon God. God's supplies are so abundant, his interpositions so hidden, our part in securing supplies so conspicuous that we may easily forget our dependence. But the table