

THE
WONDER OF THE BOOK

BY PROF. DYSON HAGUE, M. A.



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THE wonder of the Book grows on us as our experience is enlarged, for the more deeply we search it the more we feel that the Bible is not merely a book, but The Book. As Sir Walter Scott once said: "In the whole world it is THE BOOK; all other books are mere leaves, fragments."

Yes, it alone is the universal Book—the eternal Book. It is the Voice; all others are merely books for the hour. The Bible is the book for all time. It stands alone; unapproachable in grandeur; as high above all other books as heaven is above earth, as the Son of God above the sons of men.

The Wonder of its Formation

One of the first things about this Book that evokes our wonder is the very fact of its existence. Anyone who has studied the history and origin of the divine Word must be struck with wonderment at the mysterious method of its formation. That it ever was a book, and is to-day *the* Book of the world, is really a literary miracle. For there never was any order given to any man to plan the Bible, nor was there any concerted plan on the part of the men who wrote, to write the Bible.

The way in which the Bible gradually grew is one of the mysteries of time. Little by little, part by part, century after century, it came out in fragments and unrelated portions, written by various men, without any intention (so far as we can tell)

of anything like concerted arrangement. One man wrote one part in Arabia, another wrote another part in Syria; a third wrote in Palestine, another in Greece and Italy; some writers wrote hundreds of years after or before the others, and the first part was written many hundred years before the man who wrote the last part was born.

Now, take any other book; you know fairly well how it arose. In nine cases out of ten a man determined to write a book, thought it out, collected the material, wrote or dictated it, had it copied or printed, and it was completed within four or six or more months or years. The average book, we may suppose, takes from one to ten years to produce, though books like Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, or Tennyson's poems, took longer to complete. But, generally speaking, a book has been produced by one man within his own generation.

But here is a book that took at least one thousand five hundred years to write, spanning sixty generations of this old world's history. It enlarges our conceptions of God; it gives us new ideas of His infinite patience as we think of the wonder of His calm, quiet waiting as He watched the strain, the haste and restlessness of man across the feverish years, while slowly and silently the great Book grew. Here a little and there a little of it came on; here is some history, and there prophecy; here a poem and there a biography; and at last in process of time, as silently as the house of the Lord of old (1 Kings 6: 7), it came forth before a needy world in its finished completeness.

When Moses died there were only five small portions; when David sat upon the throne there were a few parchments more; one by one, prince, priest, and prophet laid on the growing pile their greater and smaller contributions, until in process of time

the whole of the Old Testament Bible was written in its entirety.

But the New Testament is a greater miracle still, from the literary standpoint, than the Old Testament. The Jews were not a writing people. Their training, as Bishop Westcott once said, was exclusively oral, and they had a disinclination for literary work. Not only so, but their Master never wrote for publication, so far as we know, and the idea of their writing an additional or supplementary Bible would never have entered the mind of His disciples. They would doubtless have shrunk with horror at the very idea of such a thing. So for fifty years after Jesus was born there was probably not a line of the New Testament written.

Then, by the overruling design of the Almighty Spirit, without any concerted collaboration or unity of plan, fragment by fragment, here a biography, there a letter, the New Testament grew.

But, remember, there was no pre-arrangement. It was not as if Matthew and Mark and Luke and John came together in committee, and, after solemn conference and seeking for the leading of the Spirit, Matthew undertook to write of Christ as the King; and Mark said, I would like for my part to write of Him as the Worker; and Luke said, I will undertake to delineate Him as the Man; and then John said, And I will crown it by writing of Him as the Son of God! It was not as if Paul met James one day, and, after talking and praying about it, Paul agreed to write of the dogmatic, and James of the practical aspects of Christianity. Nothing of the sort. There is no trace of such a thing. They simply wrote as they were moved to meet a present need, to express some earnest longing, to teach some glorious truth, by a letter, a treatise, or a memoir; and from this aggregation of memoirs,

letters, etc. came this miraculous unit that we call the New Testament.

Yes! The Book is a marvel; it is transcendental; it is the miracle of literature in its formation. It is altogether unexplainable, unless God is its Author.

The Wonder of its Unification

Another thing: We talk of this Bible as a book. We seldom think of it as a Library consisting of sixty-six separate volumes, written by between thirty and forty different authors, in three different languages, upon totally different topics, and under extraordinarily different circumstances.

One author wrote history, another biography; one wrote on theology, another wrote poetry, another, prophecy; some wrote on philosophy and jurisprudence, on genealogy and ethnology, and some, narratives of adventure and travel of romantic interest. Why, if these sixty-six books were printed separately, in large print and heavy paper, and bound separately, they would form quite a library. Yet, here we have them all, the whole sixty-six volumes, in a little book that a child can carry in its little hand!

And the strangest thing of all is, that though their subjects are so diverse and difficult—most difficult and abstruse to the natural mind—though there was no possibility of anything like concerted action, or transfer of literary responsibility (for it was impossible for the man who wrote the first pages to have had the slightest knowledge what others would write about 1,500 years after he was born), yet this miscellaneous collection of heterogeneous writings is not only unified by men in one book, but so unified by God, the Author, that we never think of it to-day as anything else than one Book! And one Book it is indeed—the miracle of all literary unity.

The Wonder of its Age

Again, it is a wonder that that Book is here to-day. It is a wonder that we have a Bible at all when we think of its age. When we compare the Bible as a book with any other book, in this respect it is a perfect wonder. I will tell you why.

You all know that one of the great tests of literature is time. Do you know of any book generally read by men to-day that was written one thousand years ago? Books that were the rage a few years ago are forgotten to-day. They were born, they were boomed, and they died. The cold hand of oblivion is laid upon them. Their force is spent. Their power is gone. Where, after all, is the book five hundred years old and read by *the masses* to-day? You can put it down for a certainty that the older a book is the smaller is its chance of surviving, or of being read by people of diverse nationalities.

Another thing. No book has ever had much chance to be widely circulated amongst a people from which it did not originate. No book, for instance, written by a Spaniard has much chance of being read by Germans. Germans, as a rule, read German works; Englishmen, English works. With a few exceptions, such as Dante, Cervantes, Goethe, Dumas, Shakespeare, what book do you know of that has been able to overleap the bounds of nationality? But the marvellous thing about the Bible is that it is the only book in the world that has, in this way and to this marvellous degree, not only overleaped the barriers of time, but has also been able to overleap the barriers of nationality. It was written largely in a dead language—the Hebrew, which is neither spoken nor written to-day—and yet that Book, written in a dead language, written by men who died between two or three thousand

years ago, is not only living to-day, but is the most widely circulated book in the world.

The Wonder of its Sale

Surely this is another marvellous thing. A leading bookseller was asked, What book has the largest circulation? He did not mention the most recent novel or the latest scientific work; he said that the book which out-sells all the other books in the world is *the Bible*. Other books compute their circulation by thousands; the Bible by *millions!* Every year sees it rendered into new languages and its circulation increased.

The Wonder of its Interest

Another marvellous thing about this book is that it is the only book in the world read by all classes and all sorts of people. You know very well that literary people rarely read a child's book; and children would not read books of philosophy and science even if they could. If a book is philosophical and scientific it commands the attention of literary people; and if it is a child's book it is read in the nursery. It is a wonderful thing that one book so differs from all others—that it is read by the wisest of men, read to the little child, and read by the old man as he trembles on the brink of the other world.

Years ago I heard the nurse reading a story to my child, and I asked: "What is that you are reading to the little one?" "I am reading the story of Joseph in the Bible," she answered. And the little child cried, "Please don't stop her, papa," as she listened with delighted interest to a story that was written in Hebrew, probably three thousand five hundred years ago! And, not far away from the room where the little child was listening, there sat one of the greatest of modern scientists, our foremost Canadian scholar, Sir William Dawson, Presi-

dent of McGill College, Montreal, reading with profound devotion, and a higher delight, the pages of that same marvelous Book.

Here is a phenomenon. One of the ablest of modern scientists delights in the reading of a book which is the joy of a little child in the nursery! Verily it is without a parallel in literature. Our boys and girls read and study it in myriads of homes and Sunday-schools; and great scholars like Newton and Herschel and Faraday and Brewster, and great statesmen like Gladstone and Lincoln, and great soldiers like Gustavus Adolphus and Gordon and Stonewall Jackson, have taken this book as the joy and the guide of their life.

The Wonder of its Language

Another wonderful thing is that this book was not written in Athens, the seat of learning in Greece, nor in Alexandria in Egypt. It was not written by men who received their inspiration from the ancient sources of wisdom. It was written by men who lived in Palestine. Many of the writers were what we should call illiterate. Not only were they not university men, or scholars, or original thinkers, they did not even speak their own language purely. You remember Peter was trapped because his dialect betrayed him. He spoke like a Galilean. So did John (Acts 4:13). And many of the men who wrote the Bible were men of that character. One was a farm hand, another was a shepherd, and some were fishermen. They were men of no literary reputation. And yet from such men has come a Book that God in His mysterious power has so divested of all provincialism that it has become the standard of the language of the most literary nations of the world.

And not only so. It is a Book that has gone to

the North and South and East and West. It is the strongest factor in modern life to-day, and yet it is of the ancient world. It is the most potent factor in the influence of the great nations of the progressive West, and yet it proceeded from the narrowest and most conservative people of the unprogressive East. Its authors were Hebrews; and Hebrews, by instinct and tradition, by education and sentiment, were the narrowest of all people. The Jew was not only separated from other nations but he had little or no interest in them. You know how Jonah had to be forced to preach to Nineveh, and what a time it took Peter to have an interest in the salvation of the Gentiles and preach to them the glad tidings. Only a miracle and special revelation did it.

How do you explain then the fact that these ignorant men, uncosmopolitan men, with all their provincialism, and exclusiveness, and insularity, were enabled to write a book which has become not only the book of the Jews, but THE BOOK of the world to-day? It is a wonder to think that an old Hebrew book has in God's mysterious Providence been so divested of all orientalism, and Judaism, and rabbinism, that the millions upon millions of boys and girls and men and women who read it never think of it as the writing of Hebrews, or the language of an ancient and oriental race. To them they are simply the words of their own dear mother-tongue. The English Bible is "the best that our literature can give in simple noble prose," as Fred-eric Harrison once said in a lecture at Oxford.

And yet, wonderful to think of, the German never thinks of it in any other way, too. To him it is "The German Bible."

The Wonder of its Preservation

Another wonderful thing about the Bible is that

it has stood ages of ferocious and incessant persecution. Century after century men have tried to burn it and to bury it. Crusade after crusade has been organized to extirpate it. Kings of the earth set themselves, and rulers of the church took counsel together, to destroy it from off the face of the earth.

Diocletian, the Roman Emperor, in 303 inaugurated the most terrific onslaught that the world has known upon a book. Every Bible almost was destroyed; myriads of Christians perished; and a column of triumph was erected over an exterminated Bible with the inscription: "Extincto nomine Christianorum" (extinct is the name of Christians). And yet, not many years after, the Bible came forth as Noah from the ark to re-people the earth, and in the year 325 Constantine enthroned the Bible as the Infallible Judge of Truth in the First General Council!

Then followed the prolonged mediæval persecutions. You all know how the Church of Rome denied the Scriptures to the people. The Church of Rome never trusted the people with the Bible. For ages it was practically an unknown book. Martin Luther was a grown-up man when he said that he had never seen a Bible in his life. No jailor ever kept a prisoner closer than the Church of Rome has kept the Bible from the people.

Not only so: in consequence of edicts of Councils, and bans and bulls of Popes, Bibles were burned and Bible readers sent by the Inquisition to rack and flame. Many of us have seen the very spot in Old London where baskets full of English Testaments were burned with great display by the order of Rome.

Yet perhaps the worst opposition to the Bible has been during the last one hundred and fifty years. Its bitterest foes, curiously enough, were men who

claimed liberty of thought, and Bolingbroke and Hume and Voltaire seemed so confident of the extermination of the Bible, that the Frenchman declared that a hundred years after his day not a Bible would be found save as an antiquarian curiosity.

Then came the German rationalistic host, with the fiercest and deadliest of all the attacks. Yet here the Bible is to-day, stronger than ever. It stands, and will stand. The adversaries have done their worst. They have charged their heaviest charge. They have fired their deadliest volley. Whatever unexpected adversaries appear in the future, no more destructive trios than Julian and Celsus and Porphyry, than Voltaire and Strauss and Renan, than Eichhorn and Wellhausen and Kuenen, will probably ever be confederate against it.* Yet, in spite of all these age-long persecutions and assaults, the Word of the Lord is having free course, and is being glorified.

The Bible is being circulated at the rate of about twelve million copies a year, in about 500 languages of the globe. It has been disseminated as never before. Verily, as we think of it we may challenge our proud age with the challenge of Moses, and cry: "Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?" (Deut. 4: 32).

* Let us remember here that the adversary has cunningly changed his tactics. Under a Christian garb, by professedly Christian men, under the high-sounding term of "higher criticism" the Bible is assailed in its very foundations as *God's* Word, *God's* revelation to man. It is no less Satan's work, and more to be feared than the violent opposition of former days.—[ED.]

Seven Crowning Wonders of the Book

But before I close I would like briefly to refer to seven other things that are to my mind the crowning wonders of the Book.

It is Self-authenticated

There is, first, what we might call its self-authentication. You need no historical critic or university professor to prove that the Bible is God's own Word. The Holy Ghost, who is the Author of this Book, makes it speak to our souls in such power as to give a divine conviction. If you will but hear the accents of His voice you will be assured beyond all possibility of argument that this Book is God's own Word. Men have come and still come to unsettle and destroy. The Spirit of Christ comes to validate and confirm with a divine conviction, with a certainty that is incommunicable by mere reason, and is impervious to the assaults of doubt.

You have perhaps heard Spurgeon's famous story of the poor woman who was confronted by a modern agnostic. He asked: "What are you reading?" "I am reading the Word of God." "The Word of God! Who told you that?" "He told me so Himself." "Told you so? Why, how can you prove that?" Looking skyward, the poor soul said: "Can you prove to me that there is a sun up in the sky?" "Why, of course; the best proof is that it warms me, and I can see its light." "That's it!" was her joyous reply. "The best proof that this Book is the Word of God is that it warms and lights my soul."

It is Inexhaustible

It is like a seed. You can tell how many acorns are on an oak, but you cannot tell how many oaks are in an acorn. The tree that grows from a seed

produces in turn the seeds of other trees; and each succeeding tree *ad infinitum*.

Its depth is infinite; its height is infinite. Millions of readers and writers, age after age, have dug in this unfathomable mine, and its depths are still unexhausted. Age after age it has generated, with ever-increasing power, ideas, plans, schemes, themes, and books. Yes, books; and in many cases books that are the only literature of the nation. The greatest minds have been its expositors. Myriads of students have studied it daily, and its readers from day to day can be numbered by millions.

The volumes that have been written on single chapters or even verses would fill the shelves of many a library, and to-day they are as fresh, as fertile, as inexhaustible as the day they were first written. The treasures yet to be found are as the stars of the sky, of infinite multitude.

It is Non-improvable

We do not gild gold. We do not paint rubies. We cannot brighten diamonds. And no artist can add any final touch to this finished Word of God. It stands as the sun in the sky. This proud age can add nothing to it. If the greatest Bible-lovers of our own or any other times had attempted to improve it, their work would have been a patch, a disfigurement. It has the glory of God.

It is Authoritative

This is another wonder. It breaks upon you as the Voice from heaven. Five hundred times in the Pentateuch it prefaces or concludes its declarations with the sublime assertions, "The Lord said," or, "The Lord spake!" Three hundred times again in the following books it does the same; and in the prophetic books it does so twelve hundred times

with such expressions as: "Hear the word of the Lord," or, "Thus saith the Lord."

No other book dares thus to address itself to the universal conscience. No other speaks with such binding claim or presumes to command the obedience of mankind, and men in every age and clime acknowledge this claim. The Book speaks to their inner consciousness, with authority, the authority of God Himself.

It is Living and Operative

Men think of the Bible as a book that *was* inspired. But the wonder of the Bible is that it is vivifying and operative *now*. From the far-distant heights of time it comes sweeping into the hearts of men to-day, and the same breath of God that breathed into it its mystic life makes it living and energizing to-day. It is the Living Word, vital with the life of the Living God who gave it and gives it living power.

The twenty-third psalm was inspired. But again and again to-day, as it is whispered in the hush of the death-chamber, or read with the hidden cry, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," it is a living Word, and the Spirit breathes life through it once more.

And this is the most remarkable and unique feature of the Bible: I feel that it is *mine*. Its promises are mine. As I read the 103d psalm, it is not ancient Hebrew, it is present-day power; and I, a living soul, overwhelmed with gratitude, cry out: "Bless the Lord, O my soul."

The other day I took up an old Bible that my mother gave me, and I noted a verse in Genesis with a date written on the margin. There floated back upon my mind a time, some years ago, when I was in great trouble. I had to leave my dear wife

and children, and to travel in quest of health in distant lands, and my heart within me was sad. One day, on opening my Bible at random, as men say, mine eye caught these words in Gen. 28: 15: "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land." Shall I *ever* forget the flash of comfort that swept over my soul as I read that verse! All the exegetes and critics in the world could never persuade my soul that that was a mere echo of some far-off relic of a Babylonian legend, or of an Oriental myth. No, no! That was a message to *me*. It came straight down to me. It swept into my soul as a voice from heaven. It lifted me up, and no man will ever shake me out of the conviction that that message was God's own Word to me—inspiring, because inspired; inspired, because inspiring.

It Creates and Transforms

It changes men's lives. It alters their destinies. It inaugurates world-wide movements. One of its texts transformed Luther and was the beginning of the greatest of modern epochs. It comes into communities of unrighteousness as a regenerate force. Great enterprises—philanthropic, redemptive, and educational—arise and stand as tributes to its vitalizing power. Ten thousand times ten thousand are the evidences of the regenerative power of the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.

It Reveals Christ

But the supreme wonder of the Book is Christ—He is its fulness, its centre, its great subject. Old Testament and New Testament alike tell of Jesus, the great Fact of history, the great Force of history, the great Future of history; for of this Book

it can be said: "The glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the Light thereof."

And as long as men live upon the face of this globe the Book that tells of that Supreme Personality, the Centre of a world's desire—Christ, the great Arch that spans history, the Key-stone of prophecy—Christ, the Revealer, the Redeemer; the Risen, the Reigning, the Returning Lord—Jesus, the Desire of all nations; so long will this Book draw men's hearts like a magnet, and men will stand by it, and live for it, and die for it.

In closing, let me say this one word more. Do not think, and do not say, as I have heard men say, that we ought to read this Book as we read any other book; that we ought to study and analyze it just as we do any textbook in literature or science. No! When you come to this Book, come to it with reverence. Read it with a plea for the Spirit's help. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

Other books are of the earth. This is from heaven. Do not think and do not say that this Book only *contains* the words of God! It *is* the word of God. Think not of it only as a good book, or even as a better book, but hold it in your heart and faith, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God; nay more, as the living Word of the Living God: supernatural in origin; inexpressible in value; infinite in scope; divine in authorship, though human in penmanship; regenerative in power; infallible in authority; personal in application; inspired in totality.