

# THOUGHTS ON A REVELATION

by Samuel John Jerram

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*Samuel Jerram's systematic examination of divine revelation, covering the knowledge of God, conditions necessary for revelation, its transmission, acceptance, and biblical authority.*

11 Chapters

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## Thoughts On A Revelation

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## THOUGHTS ON A REVELATION.

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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 believed 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.

## Section 1. We may commence our inquiry into the subject by noticing

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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 relation which He bears to man, the most noble existence of which we have any actual experience, should be of an insignificant character. Looking, too, upon man as a free and moral agent, accountable, as conscience declares, for his actions to his fellow-men, it seems almost certain that he must be also responsible for his acts in relation to the Deity. The general belief of mankind, in all ages and in all places, tends to the same conclusion; and, if it be admitted that there is an eternal world into which the consequences of our actions follow us, a knowledge of the relationship in which we stand to God becomes of still greater importance. But if this knowledge probably may be, and, should the general belief of the world have a foundation in fact, certainly is, of great importance, it can hardly be supposed that a God of love would allow us to remain in ignorance of it; and the question arises, how it is to be obtained. It may be observed, first of all, that the Deity does not, like other objects, come within the direct cognizance of our perceptive faculties. We have an organization, by means of which we are enabled to perceive various objects around us; and, by travelling to other lands, we can obtain a knowledge of many things of which we had before been ignorant. We perceive also what is going on within us. The telescope and the microscope reveal to us wonders which, without their intervention, we could never have discovered. But we cannot through the instrumentality of any of our faculties perceive God. Travel where we will we cannot find Him out. No appliance of art has availed to disclose Him to us. If any philosophers conceive that they can intuitively gaze upon God, other philosophers declare their ignorance of any intuition of this kind, and assuredly the common people, who most stand in need of clear notions on the subject, and who would hardly be neglected by a beneficent God, are altogether unconscious of it. The knowledge of Him, therefore, if obtained at all, must be had in some other way. But may not an adequate knowledge of God be obtained by the exercise of the faculties of the human mind upon external nature, or in some other way? The Apostle St. Paul says something which rather favours this view, when he declares that "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse" (Rom. i.20): and we believe that a considerable insight into the nature of God, and the probable character of His dealings with us may be obtained in the manner to which we have referred. Still we have only to look at the ever varying and degrading notions which have, at all times, prevailed in many parts of the world respecting the Divine Being, to perceive that a more clear method of obtaining knowledge about Him would, to say the least of it, be a most valuable boon. The method under

consideration has not practically issued as we might have hoped that it would; and therefore there is reason to expect, that God might make use of some more direct way of communicating to us a knowledge of Himself. Another possible mode of communicating a knowledge of God would be, by implanting in the mind of man, an idea corresponding, so far as might be needful, to the nature of God. But a belief in the existence of anything of this kind is open to several objections. If such an idea existed, it must, to answer the required end, be sufficiently clear and well defined to give at least a tolerably accurate notion of the Deity, and must also bring with it a well-grounded conviction of its correspondence to the reality. But the variety of opinions which have been entertained on the subject forbid us to believe that any such idea as this exists. Search as far as we can into our own minds, we are unable to discover anything approaching to such a notion of the Divinity. It appears too, that, notwithstanding some speculations as to time and space, which, in the opinion of some, bear a slightly exceptional character, there is no good reason to believe that we acquire other kinds of knowledge in the manner under consideration; and, if this be so, there is a strong presumption against a knowledge of the Deity being obtained in this way. As however some confusion of mind not uncommonly prevails on this subject, we will endeavour to explain our meaning more fully. We possess, as it appears to us, certain capacities for obtaining knowledge, and for retaining, and disposing our knowledge, when obtained, in different ways; but we are not born with the actual possession of knowledge; nor, so far as we can see, is knowledge, at any subsequent time, obtained by us, except by means of the capabilities to which we have referred. We have by nature powers of knowing objects, both external to our organization, and internal; but the objects themselves, and not the representations of them, are presented to us before we know them. We are conscious of seeing, and smelling, and tasting, and feeling, etc.; but they are the things themselves which we see, and smell, and taste, and feel, in the first instance, although afterwards we are able to contemplate the representations of them which are formed in the mind. There is within us, no doubt, a capability of apprehending, in a sufficient degree, the perfections of God, when they are declared to us; but a knowledge of these perfections does not naturally exist within us. We conclude, then, that, as the Deity is not directly perceived by us, has not in practice been adequately discerned by any process of the mind, and is not made known to us by any connate, or subsequently implanted idea, we must be indebted to revelation, in the main, for any knowledge we may obtain respecting Him. We do not consider it necessary to enter into a discussion of Pantheistic views, inasmuch as we have yet to learn that Pantheism has ever furnished any definite ideas respecting the nature of God which will bear the test of a close examination as to their reality. We think, too, that it is destructive of the personality of either God, or man, or both, and thus does away with all real relation between the two. Before proceeding to the investigation of what we mean by a revelation, we will endeavour to answer an objection which may be raised. It may be alleged that, if a true knowledge of God is of such great consequence to man, it appears strange that such differing opinions should have been held on the subject, and that God's revelation -- on the supposition that there is one -- should not have been more extensively promulgated, and declared with more irresistible evidence. There is no doubt a difficulty here. It does not however attach especially to the subject of a revelation; but meets us at all points, when we consider the unequal distribution of the blessings of nature. Why many persons should be destitute of the advantages which others enjoy, and why some should pass a life of suffering, while others are surrounded with every comfort, are questions which naturally arise in the minds of reflecting men, but which have hitherto remained without full and satisfactory

answers. He who would give a complete reply must have clearer views, than have yet been obtained, with regard to the origin of evil. It may be observed too that, on the supposition that the Bible is a real revelation from God, and bearing in mind the vast number of the human race to whom it has already been given, and its capability of future communication, it far more nearly meets the difficulty, than abstruse speculations respecting the Deity, which can scarcely be apprehended even by philosophers, and which are to the mass wholly unintelligible.

## **Section 2. Let us now examine the conditions under which a revelation may be expected to**

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2. Let us now examine the conditions under which a revelation may be expected to be given to the original recipients. It may be observed in the first place that a revelation must possess some distinctive character. Even, if it should turn out that there is no such thing in reality at all, at least the notion which we form in our minds must possess such points of difference as to distinguish it from all other notions. It appears needful to bear this in mind, obvious though it is, because there are not a few, in the present day, who deprive the word, revelation, of nearly all the distinguishing features which have commonly been supposed to attach to it, and so extend the meaning of the word inspiration as "sometimes to believe it in poets, legislators, philosophers, and others gifted with high genius," (Essays and Reviews, p.140). What this means it is hard to say. Shakespeare, Milton, Newton, and others certainly did not imagine that they had direct communication with God; that they revealed to us His nature, and the relation in which He stands to us; predicted future events, etc., in the same sense that Moses, David, Isaiah, and the other writers of the Bible are supposed to have done. If they actually did anything of this kind, they were assuredly wholly unconscious of their power; nor, we may add, has common opinion held that they afforded information on the same subjects as those which the writers of the Bible handled. Admirers of our poets, and philosophers, have not considered it necessary to promulgate what they have found in their writings, as matters in which the spiritual, and, possibly, eternal interests of man are vitally concerned; although believers in the Bible, and even in Mahomet, have done so. The word inspiration, in fact, as used in the passage above quoted, involves a confusion of ideas which we should hardly have expected to find in the writings of any one who professed to speak accurately, and appears scarcely pardonable, or even honest, in the case of so acute a thinker, as the late Mr. Baden Powell. We are not now saying that the Bible is a revelation from God, or even that there is such a thing as a distinctive revelation at all. All we assert is, that the idea of such a thing is a very common one, and that it is very different from that which is usually held with regard to the works of Newton, Milton, and other gifted sages and philosophers. We might add, in passing, that, unless the Bible be an imposture -- in which case it ought to be regarded as far inferior to the works of genuine and truthful poets and philosophers -- it does correspond, as we trust will be seen, on an examination of its contents, to the idea referred to. Still further, revelation must not only have some distinctive character; but, in order to be effectual for its purpose, it should carry along with it, to the original recipients, a reasonable conviction of its authenticity. The Bible speaks of several professed modes of communication, and accepting them according to the ordinary meaning of words, and not in any mythical, or ideological sense, they appear to be such as might answer for the purpose of authentication. The Lord talked with Abraham. He appeared in a burning bush to Moses, spake to him and the children of Israel on Mount Sinai, and conversed with him afterwards on the top of that mountain, during a period of forty days. He spake in the night to Samuel. He appeared in a vision to Isaiah and others. To some He made Himself known in dreams. Christ spake to His disciples. All these are evidently ways in which God might communicate with man;

and there is no difficulty in supposing that the attendant circumstances, such for instance as some of those recorded in the Bible, might be of such a kind as to authenticate the communication. It would be idle to argue that, because God does not make Himself known in any of these ways now, He has never done so; for, to omit other considerations, we may observe that, in accordance with the economy which prevails in the works of God, we have no reason to suppose that He would make special revelations to more persons than might be necessary for the purpose He had in view. If He revealed Himself to them, the promulgation of the revelation would be naturally and safely left to more ordinary instrumentality. At the present time, so far as Christians are concerned, they do not expect a special revelation to themselves, because, as they believe, God has already communicated all that He desires them to know. But supposing a revelation to be sufficiently authenticated, -- What may be reasonably expected as to the extent of it? It is, we think, clear in the first place that no perfect knowledge of God and His relation to us could be communicated. Even if a direct presentation of the Infinite were given, the capacity of man could not grasp it, and therefore the result would be a finite conception; and, if the revelation were made by words or other signs, it is plain that these can only express the finite ideas of which they are the symbols. Nor is there anything in this which need excite our surprise; for the limited nature of our knowledge with regard to God would be analogous to that which we have about other things. There is nothing with regard to which our knowledge is not limited. Some may be ready to affirm that we do not know things in themselves at all, but only the effects produced upon us, or their relation to us. We are not about to maintain this proposition; but it is at any rate plain that the most familiar objects, as science advances, often disclose to us new qualities, and that we have no reason to suppose that we are fully acquainted with all the qualities of even the simplest substances. There is no reason to expect that the book of revelation should be more explicit than that of nature. Not only, however, must our knowledge, derived from revelation, be, in some degree, limited; but it is not difficult to see, why it would be probably kept even within the range of what it is possible for us to know. We can readily understand that the object of God in making a revelation would be to inform us about those things only, a knowledge of which might be essential to our interests; and here again the analogy of the natural world comes in to assist us. God has given to each existence such qualities as are requisite for the position in which it is placed. Ascending through the various classes of animals, we find, as we advance, the capacities for knowledge increasing, and bearing a relation to their actual circumstances. The mole is not endowed with the far-seeing vision which is essential to the well-being of the eagle: nor, on the other hand, has the eagle the power of threading its way through the earth, without which the mole could not exist. Viewing man in relation to the natural world, we find that he has the power of obtaining that kind of knowledge which is necessary to his welfare here, although, in many respects, he is far surpassed by the keener perceptions of the inferior animals. God has in fact ordered and limited his knowledge with an express reference to the position which he is called upon to occupy. This throws light upon the subject of revelation. It is reasonable to expect that God would limit the knowledge communicated in that way also, by a consideration of the state in which man is placed here, and of that which, upon the supposition of a future state, he is to occupy hereafter. So far as we have yet gone, there does not appear to be any reason why the knowledge, although limited, should not be accurate as far as it goes. Though we do not know all the properties of particular objects, we may know some of them, and may also safely reason about those with which we are acquainted, so long as we are careful not to introduce into the reasoning anything which does not result from our actual

knowledge; and so, turning from nature to a revelation, we may learn much from it about God, as for instance, that He is a God of love and holiness; that He will act towards us in a particular manner; that He will punish some actions and recompense others; and this knowledge also may be a true knowledge, so far as it goes, and one that we may safely act upon, although we may still be in ignorance of His exact nature and many points of our relationship to Him. There is, however, a light in which revelation must be viewed, which involves considerations of a somewhat different character from those hitherto noticed, and to this we now turn. A revelation must not only be limited by the extent of the human capacity for receiving it, and by the proposed object of it, but also, in a considerable degree, by the state of knowledge existing in the world at the time it is made. In fact, without some such limitation, it would be unintelligible, and, consequently no revelation. As this truth has frequently been misapplied, we will endeavour to explain, as accurately as we can, our meaning. God could, perhaps, if He thought proper, give in an ignorant age a revelation, as full and explicit, as in a more enlightened period -- a revelation we mean which should be understood -- but it must be remembered that this could only be effected by altering the conditions under which human knowledge is acquired. For example, to have given a correct theory of the motions of the heavenly bodies, before the age of Newton, would have been impossible, without an entire change both in the existing state of knowledge, and also in the method of acquiring it. Down to the present time all history and experience testify to the fact that the acquisition of knowledge is gradual; but such a revelation, as that to which we have referred, would require that it should be made per saltum. If knowledge were given in this way the usual course would be completely changed; and not only so, but the knowledge communicated would be altogether out of proportion to that possessed on other points, and would place those who had it in a false and unsatisfactory state with regard to the world in which they lived. To see this we have only to picture to ourselves the condition of a man living in a savage, or only partially civilized state of society, with his mind preternaturally expanded to that of a Newton, and put into possession of the knowledge which he had on some of those subjects which the Bible touches on. How entirely out of harmony would he be with his fellow-men, and everything around him! and, how unable would he be even to pursue his studies for want of those instruments, books, and appliances which a more advanced state of society alone can produce! A revelation of this kind would clearly not be a boon, but an injury to him. It may be observed, moreover, that a revelation, adapted to the knowledge even of a Newton, would neither exactly correspond with facts, nor obviate all the difficulties which a more enlightened age might discover. We do not stop to dwell upon the obvious fact, that such a revelation, as that which we have been noticing, would require not only a preternatural expansion of faculties in the person to whom it was made, but also a similar expansion, or, if not, a long educational process in the case of all those who should receive it. We conclude, then, that a revelation must be adapted to, and in a great degree limited by, the state of knowledge existing in the world at the time when such revelation is made. This leads us to a consideration of the necessarily phenomenal character of some portions of a revelation, respecting which objections against the Bible have been frequently raised. We will, to explain our views, take as an example, the familiar instance of the sun and earth. According to appearance the sun moves, and the earth is stationary: but science has demonstrated that the opposite to this is the real state of the case. What line might it be expected that a revelation would take, when it had to deal with a case of this kind? Should it speak according to appearances, or realities? This, we believe, is the exact point to be considered, and we do not think, when fairly put, that it is one

about which there is much difficulty. If a revelation were given to an ignorant people, in accordance with the reality, it is quite clear that they would not be in a condition to receive it, and would therefore, probably, reject it as absurd; but if the description were given according to the appearance presented, then no difficulty would be felt. The question, however, is pressed -- whether such a mode of representation is consistent with the truthfulness which may be expected in a revelation. It might, we think, be a sufficient reply to say that, as, according to our former reasoning, it is, in many cases, the only possible mode of revelation consistent with the established order of things, we may well be content with it; but we will pursue the subject a little further, with the view of making clear how the matter stands. It may be observed that, if absolute truth on a particular subject cannot be communicated, the nearest approximation to it is, not only all that can be expected, but is in itself highly desirable. If a man is unable to receive as full an apprehension of a thing as we have ourselves, we must endeavour to give him the most perfect information which he is capable of receiving. We do not injure him by doing this, but we should injure him if we omitted to do it. If a man, who had lived all his life in the Arctic regions, and had never heard of any other country, were to be brought to England, it would not be necessary to tell him, with a view to his comfort here, the motion of the earth with regard to the sun, and the causes of the length of our days and nights, and of the variation of the seasons. To enter into these matters would confuse his mind, and the man, if he had to earn his living, would starve while he was acquiring the knowledge of them. By such a course of proceeding we should, in reality, do him a great injustice. Instead of attempting anything of the kind, we should naturally give him such information as might be requisite for his practical guidance, in a popular manner, and leave to himself the acquisition of such scientific truth as he might be desirous of becoming acquainted with. In a word, we should describe to him things as they appear to be, and in this respect our description would be, in a certain sense, true; we should not describe them as they really are, and so far our description would not be in strict accordance with the facts of the case. We were about to say that it is a choice of difficulties; but, is there any real difficulty in the case? Does not the common sense of mankind declare that the mode of proceeding which we have described is the only proper one, and that there is no real untruthfulness in it? It may be noticed too that even scientific men continually make use of it amongst themselves, and in their intercourse with others, and this without any charge of untruthfulness being brought against them. What objection then can possibly lie against the adoption of the same method in a revelation? {17} The supposed object of a revelation is to save the soul, or, at least, to advance in a material degree our spiritual interests. Is that to be put aside till the world has learnt scientific truth, and is able to converse in scientific language? We feel no difficulty in leaving the answer to this question to the common sense of mankind in general. We conclude, then, that as phenomenal truth is in many cases the only truth which can possibly be afforded, and the imparting of it is a boon, and not an injury, there is no reason why the Deity should not, when He sees fit, make use of this mode of communication in revelation. We will now notice, distinctly, words as a medium of revelation. It is plain, that in communicating knowledge, they are only effectual by calling up in the mind of the hearer ideas already existing. To speak to a man who has been blind from his birth, of colours would be useless, because he has had no experience of them, and consequently no ideas corresponding to them. Words may bring up ideas in a different combination from any which had previously existed in the mind of the person spoken to; but they cannot create ideas. They may make the hearer acquainted with something which he has never actually perceived; may cause him to reason in a

new manner; to see a familiar object in a fresh light, or, in some other way, bring the faculties of the mind into play; but still the mind, so far as instruction by words is concerned, can only act upon its previous stores, and analyze or combine them into new forms. This being the case, it is clear that a revelation, so far as it is made by words, must be limited by the ideas previously existing in the mind of the person to whom it is made. These ideas, too, however numerous and refined they may be, are limited by the experience which a man has had of the external world, and of himself. He cannot get beyond these. If, then, God should think fit to reveal, in words, a knowledge of Himself, or any other object which does not come within the direct cognizance of our perceptive faculties, this can only be effected by calling up in the mind, through the words, some new combination of ideas already possessed. This may not correspond precisely with the object, respecting which the revelation is made; but, as it is the only way in which a revelation by words can be effected, we have no just reason to find fault with it. All we have a right to expect, is that the words should call up in the mind those ideas which best represent the object designed to be revealed. This may tend to throw some light upon what are called anthropomorphic ideas of God. These have sometimes been spoken of as inadequate, and degrading. Inadequate they certainly are, as every notion which we can have of the Deity must be; but we are unable to see in what way they are degrading. Almost every nation, following apparently the necessity of our nature, has clothed its gods in the objective form of some familiar animal, or other existence, and endowed them with qualities of which they had experience. What wonder then if God, seeing that He must, unless the conditions of our nature were altered, make use of ideas with which we are already familiar, should adopt an anthropomorphic representation of Himself, purified, exalted, and adapted, as far as possible, to His own infinite perfections? In fact, we know not how God could declare Himself as just, righteous, pure, and loving, or reveal our responsibility to Himself, without a reference to man, inasmuch as he is the only being, of which we have any actual experience, who possesses, even in a limited degree, qualities of such a description. Assuredly then it cannot be a degrading notion of the Deity to regard Him as invested with the highest attributes of which we have a conception. We are aware that some philosophers talk much of the Infinite, and the Absolute, as conveying more exalted notions of the Divine Being. What the exact meaning of those terms is philosophers find it difficult to declare, and the common people are almost wholly unable to understand. Certainly such highly abstract terms convey little distinct meaning. It will be found upon examination, that the word "Infinite," to stir in any degree the depths of our nature, must be combined with some quality with which we are familiar. Infinite love, infinite justice, infinite purity, are things which we can in some degree understand and appreciate; but the point which we understand best is not the "Infinite," but the finite, -- the love, -- the justice, -- the purity; and these are ideas taken from what we find in some imperfect degree in ourselves. To those who believe that man was made "in the image of God," and that the Word, being God, became also man, the train of thought here indicated will come home with additional force. What has been said with regard to a revelation, made by words, applies, in its main points, to a revelation made directly to the mind through ideas, without the intervention of words. To see this clearly, let us bear in mind the distinction between a perception and an idea. An idea is the result of a perception. We perceive a rose when it is presented to our senses, and we see, smell, or touch it. We have an idea of it, when, not being any longer presented, we think of it, and call to mind its qualities. We are said to have a perception of anger, or love, or any other emotion, when those feelings are present to the mind. We have ideas of them, when we think about them. It is not our object to enter

upon any abstruse discussion as to the origin of ideas. What has been just advanced will be generally admitted by metaphysicians, and readily understood by others. Hoping, then, that the distinction between an idea and a perception will be carried in the mind, we will proceed with our argument. There is no difficulty in supposing -- and this, we believe, corresponds very closely to an opinion commonly entertained respecting inspiration -- that God could, without the intervention of words, call up in the mind such ideas as He might think fit. For instance, instead of speaking the words, "Thou shalt do no murder," He might, in a preternatural manner, excite in the mind the ideas corresponding to them. Still, however, unless we suppose the conditions of human thought to be altered in a manner for which we have no analogy, the ideas of a man, killing, etc., must previously exist in the mind, or the revelation would be unintelligible. Whether, then, the ideas are called up, through the instrumentality of words, or in some other way, is immaterial to our present argument. The point we insist on is that, except in the case of actual perception, the communication of knowledge, by revelation, or otherwise, must be limited by the ideas previously existing in the mind of the person to whom the communication is made. These ideas may be combined into new forms, and new relations may be discovered between them, or they may be analyzed into their constituent parts, but we cannot transcend the ideas themselves, except by new perceptions. Let it not, however, be imagined that a revelation, conveyed through the instrumentality of ideas previously existing, must be so narrow as to convey little or no new information, or instruction. We have only to look at the works of Milton, Newton, Shakespeare, and other great men, to see the almost endless variety with which ideas, and the relations in which they stand to each other, may be so combined and disposed, as to minister to the imagination, or enrich the mind with fresh stores of knowledge. All the information which we derive from books, or conversation, is obtained in this way, and to it we must probably attribute by far the largest portion of our mental acquisitions, after the period of childhood. So far, indeed, as the promulgation of a revelation by its original recipients is concerned, it appears plain that it must be made, almost necessarily, through the instrumentality of words, inasmuch as they are the best signs which can be made use of in the communication of knowledge. Before, however, proceeding to this portion of the subject, it appears desirable to make a few additional observations with regard to a revelation by perception. We have already had occasion to notice that "the Deity does not, like other objects, come within the direct cognizance of our perceptive faculties" (p.5), and that, "even if a direct presentation of the Infinite were given . . . the result would be a finite conception" (p.12). It may, however, be imagined that a direct presentation, even though issuing in a finite conception, or a representation either addressed ab extra to our perceptive faculties, or brought before us in a vision, or a dream, or otherwise, would convey to the mind a more correct apprehension of God's nature than could be obtained in any other way. These cases, though differing in some particulars, may, for our present purpose, be regarded as identical, and treated as perceptions. Now there can be no doubt that a perception conveys a more vivid impression to the mind than a description; and we may, therefore, reasonably suppose that, in a revelation, God might use this method of communicating knowledge in those cases to which it might be specially adapted. Thus, for instance, if God designed to give an idea of some place or being which we had never seen, He might effect this, in a very perfect manner, by bringing such a place or being, either in reality, or by representation, within the range of our perceptive faculties. The appearance vouchsafed by God to Moses (Exod. xxxiii.19-23), the vision of Ezekiel (Ezek. xxxvii.1-10), and the description given by St. Paul (2 Cor. xii.1-4), will serve as illustrations of our meaning. It must not, however, be taken for

granted that such a mode of revelation would, in every case, be possible; or that, if possible, it would always be the best method of communication. So far as we can see, no mere presentation, or representation of the Deity, could, in itself, give any deep insight into His moral character, or the relation in which He stands to us. Even if the Deity were constantly present, we know not how we could obtain any accurate knowledge of His attributes, except by observation of His words and acts. If we had been introduced to the philanthropist, Howard, we could not have become acquainted with his excellence by merely gazing at his countenance. We must have listened to his words, and followed him to those scenes of misery which he was in the habit of visiting, if we would obtain a clear understanding of his benevolence. So too, the holiness, love, and other moral perfections of the Deity, are not matters which can be apprehended from any mere intuition of the Divine nature. A glorious exhibition of the Divine presence, such, for instance, as that described in Exodus, as having occurred on Mount Sinai, might inspire feelings of awe, and enable those who witnessed it to apprehend more clearly, perhaps, than could have been effected in any other way, the dignity and majesty of God; but, for a revelation of His moral nature, and the relation in which He stands to man, we must look more to words -- such words, for instance, as He is said to have spoken to the children of Israel at that time, and afterwards, during forty days, to Moses. While, then, we think that a revelation by perception, with regard to some things, might be expected, we do not consider that it would convey a large amount of information, unless it were combined with a revelation through words. Words are, in fact, the most natural and effectual mode of imparting most kinds of knowledge, and we may, therefore, reasonably expect that, in any revelation which the Divine Being might think fit to make to man, they would form a chief method of communication. When we thus speak of words in connection with a revelation, we do not mean only words addressed actually to the ear, but also such, as in a dream or vision, may appear to be spoken. We desire also that it should be remembered that, for the main purpose of our argument, it is not so much words as ideas which we wish to keep in view. What we chiefly wish to leave on the mind is, that a revelation, except so far as a new perception may be given, must be limited by the ideas previously existing in the mind of the person to whom it is made. It may be reasonably expected that God would make use of those ideas which were best adapted to His purpose, but not that He should transcend the ideas themselves. If, too, we suppose that a new perception is given, that perception could not be explained to others, except through the instrumentality of such ideas as those to which we have referred. Our object hitherto has been to explain the conditions under which a direct revelation from God may be expected to be given. If we have been able to remove from the minds of our readers vague and indefinite notions on the subject, and to put, in their place, something clearer and more distinct, our object thus far will have been answered. It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to state that, by what has been said above, we do not intend to intimate that the recipient of a direct revelation must, necessarily, always understand the exact meaning of such a revelation. It may contain a hidden meaning, to be evident at some future time. Thus, for instance, on the supposition that the first chapter of Ezekiel is a revelation from God, it is probable that the meaning of it was as unintelligible to Ezekiel, as it is generally considered to be at the present time. But the meaning of the words themselves, and their connection with each other are clear. It is in the application that the difficulty arises. So, too, as advances are made in knowledge, words, and the ideas belonging to them, acquire a more extended and fuller meaning. The ideas involved in the word, sun, are very different to the philosopher and the peasant; and some ideas contained in a revelation may be of such a kind as not to be fully understood till more knowledge

has been acquired, than existed at the time when the revelation was made. But to suppose that the words convey no meaning to the original recipient of the revelation, is to say that no revelation is made to him at all, and it certainly hardly appears probable that the Divine Being should make a communication which could answer no end to the person to whom it was addressed.

### **Section 3. We now proceed to an examination of the conditions under which a revelation may**

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3. We now proceed to an examination of the conditions under which a revelation may be recorded, or otherwise made known by the person who has received it. Here we see at once that, for all practical purposes, the method of communication must be words; for it is not necessary to take into account such visual representations as might be made to the eye by painting or otherwise. Words may be oral, or written. As the latter are more likely to be well weighed and definite than the former, and are, moreover, better calculated to hand down a truth from age to age, we shall confine our attention to them, although what we have to say is, in a great degree, applicable to spoken words also. We start with the supposition that God has already made known to some particular person, as perfectly as He has thought fit, and, it may be, as perfectly as the nature of the subject admitted, or the capability of the person to whom the communication has been made would allow, some truth which is to be recorded for the benefit of the present, and future generations. The question we have to answer is, -- how this may be most effectually accomplished. It is obvious that, in the case of a revelation, made by words, the words might be recorded exactly as they were delivered. The words which God is said to have spoken on Mount Sinai, and to have written afterwards, on two tables of stone, may serve as an exemplification of our meaning. In this case God is described as writing them with His own hand: but they might have been written, with equal truthfulness, by any of those who had heard them. If future generations had convincing evidence that they possessed a faithful record of what God said, and the meaning of the words had not changed during the lapse of time, the revelation would be as perfect to them as it was to the original recipients. So, too, if God, instead of speaking the words of the ten commandments, had, in some way which should authenticate the reality of the revelation, called up in the mind of Moses the ideas corresponding to the words, and he had faithfully written them down; those words would convey as full a revelation to those who read them, as that which Moses himself had experienced. Both these would be verbal revelations in the strict sense of the word. They would be, in fact, the very words of God Himself. If any book, professing to be a revelation from God, could be proved to be entirely of this description, there would be little or no room for discussion about it. The only things which could give rise to dispute would be such as attach to the interpretation of all records. Questions might be asked as to the exact meaning of the words, and inquiries might be raised as to whether they retained the same meaning which they had when they were originally written down: but any dispute which might arise on these points would be confined within very narrow limits, and would moreover be of such a character, as could not be avoided, unless God were to make a revelation afresh in every age, and we may add, perhaps, to every individual, -- a supposition which would be contrary to analogy, and in the highest degree improbable. Thus far there is no practical difficulty. Is it, however, necessary to the idea of a recorded revelation that the exact words, neither more nor less, as spoken by God, or as expressing ideas which He has called up in the mind of the person to whom He has revealed Himself, should be written down? A recorded revelation, we must remember, is designed chiefly

for the benefit of future generations, and it may therefore very properly leave out much which was only of passing interest. God might have revealed many things to Abraham, which were highly important for him to know, but in which we may have no interest. We can easily see then that, in any record which God might authorize, such things would very probably be omitted. Thus far again there is no practical difficulty. To proceed a step further. Is there any reason to expect that, in a record of a revelation, the original words, either as spoken by God, or as expressive of the ideas which He had called up in the mind of the recipient, might be in any decree altered? -- and, would every alteration necessarily make the record less a revelation from God than it was before? These are questions which we shall endeavour to answer. It may be observed, in the first place, that the same train of thought which applies to an original revelation from God, applies also, in its main points, to the record of it. Both in the one case, and the other, it appears reasonable to expect that God would not, to a greater extent than was absolutely necessary, transcend or interfere with those natural powers in man which He had Himself implanted. As the giving of a revelation would, as already shewn, be conformed in a great degree to the usual conditions under which knowledge is imparted, so also, it seems reasonable to expect that the record of a revelation would as far as possible be conformed to the usual conditions under which knowledge is recorded. In looking at the conditions under which a revelation must be recorded, it is obvious that the difference of languages, which prevails in this world, presents an insuperable obstacle to an exact record of words being continued. It may indeed be alleged that God could cause a revelation to be recorded, in its exact words, in each distinct language. We hardly think however that such a view as this will be seriously entertained by any one. Not to mention how completely contrary this would be to what analogy would lead us to expect, we may observe that, as languages are continually undergoing changes, such a method of recording must be continually renewed; and, moreover, as language does not convey precisely the same ideas to any two individuals, it would be almost needful that a separate record, or rather a separate revelation, should be made for each person. Such views as these require only to be stated to shew that they are untenable; but, if they are untenable, it is plain that the continuance of an exact record of words cannot be expected. But may it not be expected that, at least, one exact record would be made of any revelation which God might think fit to give, and that this would afford the best guarantee which could be had for future truthfulness? In answering this question it is very important to draw a distinction. The words of the record may be exactly such words as God approves of, although they may not be the precise words in which the original revelation was made. In some particular instances God might determine that the precise words of the revelation should be used, while in others He might think fit that it should be otherwise. In either case the record would be a true one, and each method of recording might have its own peculiar advantages. Under some circumstances it might be desirable that not the slightest deviation from the precise mode of expression which God had communicated should be made; while under others, the human view -- by which we here mean the view of the particular person to whom the revelation is made -- might be recorded, and add to it a force which could hardly be had in any other way. So long as the record is such as God approves of, every requisite to a true record is complied with. If a minister of state were commissioned to make a communication to a foreign court, he might write down the whole or a part of it in his own words, and, if his own court approved of the words, contained in the writing, the object in view would be answered. We can even understand that, in some respects, the communication might gain force by this mode of proceeding. The [Greek text] of the writer would be manifested, and carry with it a

certain degree of weight. There would be the weight which attached to the document as emanating from the government, and there might be an additional weight from the character of the person who had been entrusted to write, and, perhaps, carry out, in some degree, the requirements of, the dispatch. In the case of a recorded revelation, it appears then probable that God would permit those feelings and powers which He has implanted in man, and which exert such a strong influence on others, to do their work, subject, however, to His own control and guidance. In this way there would be a Divine and a human aspect of the record; a Divine and a human power in it. All of it would be the truth of God, and it would be presented to us in a manner peculiarly adapted to our condition, and likely to ensure our acceptance of it. At the very least such a method of recording would be exactly consistent with truthfulness. We may go a step further, and say that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to conceive any circumstances under which the record should not bear a human aspect. If the views propounded in the former part of these "Thoughts," with regard to the conditions under which a revelation must be made, and especially with respect to anthropomorphic views of God, be correct, a revelation must assume, in some measure, a human aspect. But if the human aspect must exist in the presentation, it must also in the record. The only question which is really open to discussion is, whether there should be the same human aspect in the record, as in the original revelation; in other words, whether it may be expected that God would always present that particular human aspect in the original revelation which He considered best adapted for the record. For the reasons already assigned it does not seem probable that this would be the case. It must be remembered, moreover, that in the case of a revelation, made at different times, and to different persons, either the character of each individual writer must be manifested in the record, or some other character, alien perhaps to that of the writer, and certainly not equally adapted to that of all the readers, must be adopted. Which method of record appears the most probable, and the most calculated to promote the object of a revelation -- namely, to instruct and influence mankind -- it does not appear very difficult to determine. It seems, then, that a variety of style may be expected in the records written by different persons of the revelations which they have received. As has been before observed, all that is essential to the truthfulness of the record is that God should approve of it. A question may possibly arise here as to the precise manner in which the words may be so recorded, as to convey a true account of God's revelation. In endeavouring to supply an answer, it should be remembered, in the first place, that in the ordinary affairs of life no great difficulty occurs with regard to the transmission of a message. If the person who has been selected to convey it, has sufficient intelligence to understand it, and is, moreover, desirous to deliver it faithfully, he is, in most cases, able either to speak, or write it, in his own words, in such a manner as to convey the right meaning to others. So, too, with regard to a revelation; if the person to whom it has been made rightly apprehends it, and endeavours to record it honestly, the probability is great that the record which he makes will be a true one. If, too, we are prepared, in accordance with the common belief in all ages, to admit that God can, and at times does, exercise a control over the minds of men, it is reasonable to believe that He would do this, when the object was to furnish a correct record for the benefit of future ages. This control might be exercised either consciously, or unconsciously to the writer. All that would be needful for the truthfulness of the record is, that it should be exercised in some way.

## **Section 4. We will now proceed to offer some remarks as to the conditions under which**

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4. We will now proceed to offer some remarks as to the conditions under which a revelation may be expected to be transmitted. Much of what has been said, with regard to the recording of a revelation, by the person to whom it was originally made, applies to the transmission of such a record to future generations, and its translation into other languages. If a belief (in what way originated we do not now stop to enquire) in the reality of the recorded revelation existed, the greatest care would naturally be taken in making copies from it, and also in translating it. Well-known examples of this are to be found in the care which the Jews of old used in making new copies of their sacred books, and also in the fact that, in our own country, no printers, but those appointed by the Queen, are permitted to publish the authorized version of the Bible. It can hardly be considered possible that those who believed in the reality of a recorded revelation, and valued it, would not take care to hand it down in a correct form to others; and, although incorrect, mutilated, and interpolated copies, might, in some instances, be made by other persons, it does not seem likely that these would prevail to such an extent, as to prevent the true record from maintaining its ground. Such dishonest copies would hardly be made at all, till considerable interest had been manifested in the revelation; and then any variations from the correct copies would scarcely pass without challenge, and correction. It appears then, that, as the ordinary mode of recording, copying, and translating important communications are usually found sufficiently adequate for their several purposes, such methods might be employed with success in regard to a revelation: and it also seems probable that God would not interfere with such methods more than was absolutely necessary for the purpose He had in view. If we suppose that God exercised, throughout the whole process of transmission, that controlling power to which reference has been made; then there would be a correct record in each age. That God should exercise that power to such an extent as to prevent every possibility of error, in the transmission of the record, or of mistake as to its meaning in the minds of those who read it, would be contrary to the analogy of His dealings with us in other things. We possess faculties, by the due exercise of which we are enabled to arrive at a sufficiently accurate knowledge of those things which are essential to our wellbeing, but we are not, by infallible guidance, preserved from error. If we were, our responsibility would to a great extent cease. All that can be reasonably expected, in the case under consideration, is that the record should be transmitted with such exactness, as that an honest inquirer should be able to ascertain its authenticity, and understand its meaning, so far as God designed that he should know it. We say -- so far as God designed that he should know it, -- because it is quite conceivable that there might be mysteries in a revelation, the meaning of which would not be made clear till the time determined beforehand by God should arrive.

## **Section 5. To enter into a full examination, as to what would constitute sufficient grounds for**

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5. To enter into a full examination, as to what would constitute sufficient grounds for accepting a professed revelation, would open too wide a field of enquiry for our present purpose, and would necessitate a discussion of that very difficult branch of metaphysics which relates to the laws which regulate our belief. Without, however, attempting to discuss the subject fully, a few points may be indicated for consideration. It is clear that the evidence, with regard to the record of a professed revelation, will vary in its character at different times. The evidence will be more direct, and, in this respect, more clear, at an earlier period of the record, than at a later: while, on the other hand, a record which has been translated into different languages, and has exercised a widely spread influence, will possess a peculiar force of its own. On the supposition that God made a revelation to Moses, it is not difficult to suppose that convincing evidence, as to the truthfulness of what he might say, or write about it, might readily be afforded to those who lived in his times. If such miracles, as those recorded in the Pentateuch really occurred -- and certainly if God so far transcended the usual course of nature as to give a revelation, it does not seem hard to believe that He might also so far transcend it, as to authenticate it in some special manner -- the evidence would be of a very strong kind. To say, however, that no reasonable conviction of the reality of a revelation could be afforded, without the aid of miracles, is an assertion which we are not prepared to hazard; though we certainly think that, as calculated to excite attention, and implying a power superior to that of man, they would serve as excellent credentials. To human view, in fact, a miracle does not necessarily imply the agency of the one God. It might, for anything that can be proved to the contrary, be the work of some power, inferior to that God whom we are bound to obey, and yet superior to man. The various circumstances therefore, connected with the miracle, would be properly taken into account by the person who was investigating a professed revelation. He would not only examine with care the evidence as to the reality of the miracle itself, but also the circumstances under which it was worked, and its aspect. The character of the person who professed to have received the revelation would very fairly come under consideration. Inquiries would be made as to whether he was one whose word could be safely trusted, and whether he possessed sufficient intelligence, to render it probable that he would arrive at a right conclusion. A man of known truthfulness and intelligence would justly meet with more ready credence, than a person of an opposite character. The revelation itself, too, would be closely scrutinized. In some cases it is conceivable that the revelation would go far to prove itself. It might make known things which, though not perhaps discoverable by man's reason, were nevertheless so agreeable to it, as to carry with them an almost irresistible conviction. As, too, a revelation would be given for the practical guidance of man, it would probably be attended with threatenings and promises, or other predictions; and when the things which had been foretold actually took place, the reality of the revelation would be, to a great extent, established. If, for instance, the remarkable occurrences which Moses, on various occasions, foretold, as about to take place in the land of Egypt, really occurred, it would, we think, be very difficult to avoid the conclusion that

he had received a revelation from God, and that what he said, or wrote, was to be depended upon. A candid inquirer would also examine, in a reverent spirit, whether the professed revelation was likely to promote a pure morality, and to further the best interests of mankind. He would not, indeed, enter upon such an examination, with the feeling that he was competent to decide, in every respect, as to the justice and excellence of the statements which professed to be revealed; for his reason, if consulted, would tell him that many circumstances might be hidden from him, without which a correct judgment could not be formed, and that, possibly, his capacity might not be able to grasp them in all their relations, even if they were put before him. Still, such an examination as that which we have just referred to, would properly form an element in leading to a conclusion, and, when combined with others, would give as reasonable grounds for arriving at a decision with respect to a professed revelation, as we should be willing to act on in the usual business of life, and would, therefore, be suited to the conditions of our being. The decision arrived at would commonly be the result, not of a single proof, but of many concurrent circumstances. What has been said in reference to an examination, instituted by persons living at the time when a professed revelation was made, is obviously applicable, in many respects, to those who should live in later times, and also to the original recipients themselves. With regard to evidence in later times, it may be added that the original believers in the record, and their followers in each succeeding age, would naturally be subjected to an examination, as to their truthfulness and intelligence, and thus a chain of evidence would be continually kept up. The larger, too, the number, and the more intelligent the character of those who believed in it, the greater would be the presumption in its favour. If the record were received generally by any nation, the onus probandi would in that case lie with those who impugned it. The record itself also would, from time to time, be submitted to such fair rules of criticism as apply to other documents, the fact however being remembered, that it professed to be the word of God, and, therefore, that evidence of its authenticity, rather than of its exact coincidence with human reason, was to be mainly looked for. We have now indicated, although very briefly and imperfectly, a few points for consideration, as to the transmission of a recorded revelation, and what might constitute sufficient grounds for accepting it as true; and we trust that what has been said will suffice to show that there would be no great difficulty in so handing it down, as that it should convey to the candid inquirer, in each succeeding age, reasonable evidence of its reality. It may, however, be argued, that, although such evidence, as has been indicated, might well convince those who had time and ability to institute a searching examination, the case is different with regard to others; and that, as a revelation may be presumed to have a most important bearing upon the interests of all, there should be some more easy method by which it may be tested. Now, we are quite prepared to admit that every one should have sufficient grounds afforded him for arriving at a decision; but, at the same time, we do not conceive that a thorough examination of the evidence, made by each person for himself, is the only, or even principal, method by which a safe conclusion may be reached. Each individual has commonly some peculiar talent, in the exercise of which he reaches an excellence, which others, whose abilities and pursuits are of a different character, do not attain to. The astronomer works out conclusions, which, those, whose attention has been directed to other subjects, could never have reached, but which they may nevertheless, with propriety, accept as true. It is not every one who has time or ability to sift evidence on theological subjects, or to criticise manuscripts; but the labours of those who have given their attention to such things may, it is evident, justly be available for the benefit of others. Even the wisest person accepts as true much on the testimony of others,

and that often on subjects with which he is conversant. When his judgment is most independent he will find, if he analyzes it, that much is borrowed. There is nothing contrary to sound reason in all this. Without it, little progress could be made in anything. Without it, each succeeding age, instead of standing on the platform which had been raised by that which preceded it, would have the weary task of commencing afresh, and could thus make few accessions to knowledge. Trustfulness is as much a part of man's constitution, as reasoning or any other intellectual process. Should it be said that men often trust wrongly; it may be replied with equal force that they as frequently reason wrongly. Probably there is less difficulty in ascertaining where we may safely trust, than in weighing evidence properly, or carrying out correctly a train of reasoning. Certainly people have little difficulty, if they use their faculties aright, in selecting a fit adviser in law or medicine. Why should there be a greater difficulty with regard to religion? We do not mean that anyone would be justified in so placing himself under the guidance of another, as to give up the exercise of his own judgment altogether; but, that he may properly make use of the counsel of others, and that often to such an extent as to overrule his own views in forming his judgment. There is another consideration, connected with this portion of the subject, which well deserves attention. A conclusion may be a very correct one, and may have been reached by a very satisfactory process, although the person who has made it, may be unable to state the grounds upon which it rests, or meet the objections which may be made against it. This applies not only to those cases, where the conclusion mainly rests upon trust, but also to others. An eminent statesman recommended a person going out in an official capacity, to give his decisions confidently, but not to venture to declare the reasons. The decisions would probably be right, but the reasons, as stated by him, might not be. It need not be inferred from this that the reasons upon which he would really act were wrong, but rather that from want of practice, or power of analysis, or some other cause, he would be unable to bring them out correctly. The processes of thought pass so rapidly through the mind, that even the most practised thinkers often find it difficult to arrest them in their progress, and state the various steps by which they have arrived at their conclusions. The simplest and most certain grounds of our conclusions are, in fact, not unfrequently those which it is most difficult to bring out into distinct view. They have so often passed through the mind that we have ceased to notice them, although, all the while, they contribute essentially to the judgment which is formed; or they lie so far back, in the depths of our consciousness, that it is almost impossible to recover them. Necessarily, nothing can be so simple, or so certain, in one sense, as intuitions, that is, those things which we know or believe without any intermediate process of thought, and yet, down to the present time, those who have most deeply studied the subject hesitate to decide exactly as to what are intuitions, and what are not. We conclude then that, while, on the one hand, we should not discredit the rational powers of men, as if they were unequal to perform the task allotted to them; we must not, on the other, be easily shaken with regard to conclusions which have been made with care and consideration, because we may be unable to trace out accurately the arguments by which they are supported, or answer the objections which are made against them. We have now considered revelation with regard to the conditions under which it may be expected to be given, recorded, and transmitted, with a view to its being accepted and believed. We do not for a moment suppose that we have removed every difficulty; but if we have upon the whole, made clear to our readers the nature of these conditions, or, where this has not been done, indicated the points at which difficulties exist, our chief purpose will have been answered.

## **Section 6. Here we might leave the subject, but we cannot forbear adding some further observations**

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6. Here we might leave the subject, but we cannot forbear adding some further observations in reference to that professed revelation of God's will which is to be found in the Bible. It is not our intention to attempt a summary of the various evidences which exist to show that it is a real one; nor is it our design to reply at length to the objections which have been made to invalidate it. There are however some obvious facts which meet us on the threshold of the inquiry, and which can be estimated at their just value by any candid inquirer, to which we would direct attention. We find for instance that the Bible contains a purer system of morality, and conveys a clearer insight into the unity and nature of God, than is to be found in any other book; and that, although it is the composition of men, many of them ignorant and unlearned, who have lived at different times, and occupied very dissimilar positions in life, there is, nevertheless, a wonderful similarity in the main outlines of religious truth, as delivered by all the writers. We know, however, still further, that the morality and precepts of the Bible, although confessedly of a pure and holy character, are, nevertheless, not of such a kind as to fall in with the wishes and passions of mankind. To believe that morality must extend to thoughts as well as actions, and that an all-seeing God notices, and will one day call all men to a strict account, is not a matter which, if we may judge from what we see around us, is agreeable to the feelings of most men. Nor, if we look to the great remedy proposed for the sin of man, such, we mean, as it is supposed to be, by the great majority of professing Christians, namely, the atoning sacrifice made by the Son of God, do we find here again a matter which either the reason or the feelings of men generally are ready to lead them to adopt. We see too, that in all ages unbelief has, more or less, existed, and objections have been, from time to time, brought forward which appeared likely to have considerable power in undermining the existing belief in the Bible. Persecution also has exercised its influence, and, it might frequently have been supposed, according to human calculations, that it would have availed to destroy all credence in it. And yet, notwithstanding all these circumstances, to which we have referred, it is an incontrovertible fact that a professed belief in the Bible, as a revelation from God, exists most widely. It is, we may add, not a little worthy of being remarked that the nomenclature of the Bible has obtained such a strong hold on the public mind, in our own day, that many who deny inspiration in any distinctive sense, still retain the use of this and other words, as if afraid to make it plain how far they differ from those opinions which are commonly received. The present age is certainly more enlightened than any which has preceded it; but, hitherto at least, a professed belief in the orthodox doctrines of religion has increased rather than diminished. We find moreover that persons of all ranks, and every kind of mental calibre, have declared that they find something in the Bible which they do not find in any other book; something, in fact, which, when duly received, comes home to their hearts as men, and seems admirably adapted to the deepest wants of human nature. We see too that those who appear to have accepted the Bible most fully, and to hold it most firmly, have been so much impressed with a sense of its importance to the world at large, as to have endeavoured, often at considerable risk and expense, to communicate to others, both

at-home and abroad, the knowledge of those things which they have received as truths -- a method of proceeding which has not been adopted, and, in fact, could not have been, without a manifest absurdity, by those who profess to believe in the inspiration of Plato, Milton, Shakespeare, and other great, but, according to common opinion, uninspired men. All these and various other considerations which might be adduced seem to mark out the Bible, as being a book at least different from all other books, and to lead to the presumption that it may contain that knowledge of God which, as has been remarked in the earlier part of these "Thoughts," it appears most important for men to be acquainted with, and a revelation of which, in some way or other, has been very commonly believed in. Assuredly there is a strong presumption in its favour, and the onus probandi, in our own day, lies with those who deny its claims to acceptance. Whether however the Bible actually is, or contains a revelation from God is still a fair subject for reverent examination. Without attempting to enter upon such an examination here, we may, without impropriety, offer a suggestion as to the spirit in which it should be conducted. It must be remembered that the examination of a theological, or any other subject which bears upon the interests of our daily lives, involves principles of a very different character from those which are connected with an investigation of the science of number, or any other abstract science. Mathematical and numerical investigations advance from principles which are clearly defined, and almost universally acknowledged to be self-evident; the reasoning also is of such a kind as to preclude the admission of error. In theology the case is different. There, it is difficult to define with accuracy the points from which the reasoning commences, and also to exclude, with certainty, the possibility of error in the reasoning itself. There is, too, another essential difference between abstract sciences and other subjects of inquiry. It is not only self-evident that two straight lines cannot enclose a space, but the judgment which the mind gives on the subject is not in any danger of being disturbed by the feelings. In theology, however, the matters which come under consideration are so mixed up with our nearest and dearest interests, that the feelings are called into play at every step of the investigation, and a just balance of the judgment cannot be preserved without the exercise of much care. Hence the necessity of endeavouring to preserve a candid and unruffled spirit in all enquiries connected with religion. No doubt those feelings which a beneficent God has implanted with a view to assist us in deciding, are to have their due weight; but certainly there is need of caution, lest they influence us unduly. If the judge thinks it needful to charge the jury to dismiss from their minds everything which might tend to influence their judgments in an improper manner, and attend only to the evidence, even though the matter about which they have to decide is usually one in which they have no personal interest; it certainly does not appear unnecessary to give a similar caution on a subject, with regard to which feeling has assumed so strong a form as to give rise to the name, odium theologicum. We deceive ourselves, if we imagine that we approach the subject without any danger of judging it unfairly. This caution, undoubtedly applies to all who discuss theological questions; but we think that we shall not be making an unwarranted assertion, if we say that it applies in a special manner to those who impugn the Bible revelation, when it is remembered that the doctrines contained in it, as they have generally been received by those who are called orthodox Christians, are of such a kind as very commonly to excite, in the first instance at least, a strong feeling of opposition. The Bible itself intimates this, and common experience bears witness to it as being a fact. We are not now saying that the doctrines of the purity and holiness of God, the dreadful nature of sin, the need of an atonement, the inability of man to present himself before God in merits of his own, and others of a similar kind

are true; but we may properly say that, whether true or false, they are such as frequently raise a strong feeling of opposition; and therefore that those who examine them, with the view of ascertaining their character, stand in special need of the caution to preserve a calm and candid spirit. It will not be out of place to introduce here another consideration which has a bearing upon this part of the subject, namely, the supernatural aid which the Bible offers towards the understanding and acceptance of its doctrines. It is quite conceivable that a state of things might exist in which such aid would be wholly unnecessary. We might suppose a case in which the nature of man was so entirely in harmony with itself, and so exactly attuned to the truths of a Divine revelation, as readily to accept it, when it was presented; but the question we have to decide is, whether man's nature is actually in this state or not. Observation leads us to believe that it is not. Whether we accept the scripture statement of the fall or not, we must not shut our eyes to the fact that it is difficult for virtue to force its way, while vice has many votaries. However convincing, abstractedly, the reasons may be to enforce the claims of virtue, it is evident that they possess but little power to lead the large majority of mankind. History and experience testify to this. Scarce any deny the evidence in favour of virtue, although few are content to be governed by it. Now it may be fairly presumed that any revelation which the Divine Being might make would be in the interests of virtue; it may be reasonably expected too that it would be supported by strong evidence: but, if, as actual observation makes it clear is the case, the feelings of mankind are more inclined to reject than accept the claims of virtue, the evidence, however strong, will not produce the effect which it would, if the mind were more justly balanced, and thus the revelation will be in danger of being rejected. Such rejection, be it remembered, need not result from any deficiency of evidence, but may arise from an indisposition to receive it. For our own part we believe that the evidence in favour of the orthodox views of scripture statements is far stronger than can be found in support of any other subject of a like kind: but, at the same time, taking into consideration the actual tendencies of human nature, we are not surprised that it does not produce the effect which it should do; and therefore it appears to us not unreasonable to suppose that God might exercise some such supernatural power upon the mind, as the Bible speaks of, with the view of disposing it to the reception of a revelation. That God does at times interfere in a manner, out of the usual course of His Providence, with regard to other matters, especially in answer to prayer, is believed almost universally. We cannot enter here into a discussion as to the foundation of the belief; but, certainly so long as the records of mankind go back, and so far as the experience of the present day conducts us, the belief has been entertained, and prayer seems to be the natural expression of man's heart in all cases of difficulty. Men will believe in, and appeal to, a supernatural power, and it is hard to suppose that a tendency so universal and deeply seated, should have no solid foundation. But if prayer, for aid and direction from above, is the natural outpouring of man's heart with regard to the more ordinary affairs of life, there appears to be no reason why prayer should not be offered up for counsel and guidance with regard to a professed revelation, and that an answer should be expected. At least, it can hardly be said that those have fairly tested the claims of scripture to be received as a revelation from God, who have not complied with the conditions which it has laid down as to the manner in which it should be studied. We now leave the subject, drawing the attention of our readers to the prayer of one of our greatest poets, and earnestly hoping that his prayer may be theirs: -- . . . What in me is dark,

Illumine; what is low, raise and support;

That to the height of this great argument

I may assert Eternal Providence,

And justify the ways of God to man. Paradise Lost. LONDON: WERTHEIM, MACINTOSH, AND HUNT. By the same Author, THOUGHTS ON MIRACLES. PRICE SIXPENCE.

## Footnotes:

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{17} On the subject of the Mosaic cosmogony, see a very interesting Letter from Sir Isaac Newton to Dr. Thomas Burnet, in Sir David Brewster's "Life of Newton," pp.450-453.

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