

## THE WONDER OF THE BOOK

BY

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The wonder of the Book, my friends, 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. Sir Walter Scott in his dying hour was right when he asked his son-in-law to read to him out of the Book, and in answer to the question, "What Book?" replied "There is only one Book, the Bible. In the whole world it is called 'The Book.' All other books are mere leaves, fragments." Yes. It alone is the perfect Book. It is the eternal Book. It is the Voice; all others are merely echoes. Of course, you all know that The Bible literally means The Book. It is a translation of the Greek title of the Bible, He Biblos; in English, The Book. It is the Book that stands alone; unapproachable in grandeur; solitary in splendour; mysterious in ascendancy; as high above all other books as heaven above earth, as the Son of God above the sons of men.

### *The Wonder of its Formation:*

Now, 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 overwhelmed with wonderment at the mysterious method of its formation. That it ever was a book, and is today the Book of the modern 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 through the centuries grew is one of the mysteries of time. Little by little, part by part, century after century, it came out in disconnected fragments and unrelated portions (Heb. 1: 1), written by various men, without any intention, so far as we can tell, of anything like concerted arrangement. One man wrote one part in Syria, another man wrote another part in Arabia, a third man wrote in Italy or Greece; some writers wrote hundreds of years after or before the others, and the first part was written about fifteen hundred years before the man who wrote the last part was born. Now, take any other book you can think of on the spur of the moment, and think how it arose. You know fairly well how it arose. In nine cases out of ten a man determined to write a book, thought out the thoughts, collected the material, wrote it or dictated it, had it copied or printed, and it was completed within two or three or more months or years.

The average book, we may suppose, takes from a year to ten years to produce, though a book like Gibbons' "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," or Tennyson's poems, took longer to complete. But, generally speaking, the average book you think of has been produced by one man within his own generation. Now, here is a book that took at least one thousand five hundred years to write, and spanned the span of sixty generations of this famous 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 and the haste and the restlessness of man across the feverish years, as slowly and silently the Great Book grew.

Here a little and there a little of it came on; here a bit of history and there a bit of prophecy; here a poem and there a biography; here a letter, there a treatise; 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 princes and priests and prophets 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, word for word, letter for letter, sentence for sentence, book for book, precisely as we have it now, intact and complete; and, as Josephus testifies, no one through the ages has dared to add or take away, nor has the Old Testament text been altered in the slightest degree from that day to this.

But the New Testament is a far greater miracle from the literary standpoint than the Old Testament. The Jews, you all know, were not a writing people. I hardly know of a Jew who ever wrote a book, except Josephus, and I doubt very much if a man or woman here could mention two. Their training, as Bishop Westcott once said, was exclusively oral, and they had a disinclination for literary work. Not only so, but their Master was not a writer. Jesus never wrote a line for publication, so far as we 'know, and the idea of their writing an additional or supplementary Bible would never seem to have entered the mind of His disciples. They would doubtless have sprung back with horror at the very idea of such a thing, and for fifty years after Jesus was born there was probably not a line of the New Testament written. But then, by the mystic suggestion and overruling design of the Almighty Spirit, without any concerted collaboration or unity of plan, fragment by fragment, here a little letter, there a biography, the New Testament grew. But remember; there was no pre-arrangement, no plan. It was not as if Matthew and Mark and Luke and John came together in committee, and after solemn conference and seeking or 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, "And I think I will undertake to delineate Him as the Man," and then John said, "Well, 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 some passing need, to express some earnest longing, to teach some glorious truth, by a letter, or a treatise, or a memoir; and so this composite of fragmentary memoirs and disconnected letters came into this miraculous unit that we call the New Testament. Yes! The Book is marvelous; it is transcendental; it is altogether unexplainable. It is the miracle of literature in its formation.

### ***The Wonder of its Unification:***

Another thing: We talk of this Bible as a Book. We seldom or never think of it as a Library. Very few of us, save those who have of its studied the matter, ever think of this book 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, another about sanitary science and hygiene; one wrote on theology, another wrote poetry, another, prophecy ; some wrote on philosophy and jurisprudence, others on genealogy and ethnology, and some on stories of adventure and travel of romantic interest. Why, if these sixty-six books were printed separately, in large-sized print and heavy paper, and bound in morocco, I doubt if they could all stand on that table! And 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 so difficult, the most difficult and abstruse of all conceivable subjects, 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 the men would write about who wrote one thousand five hundred years after he was born; yet this miscellaneous cento or collection of heterogeneous writings is not only unified by the binder in one book, but so unified by God the Author, that no one ever thinks of it today as anything else than One Book! And One Book it is, the miracle of all literary unity.

### ***The Wonder of its Age:***

Again, it is a wonder that that Book is here today. I say 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 the greatest test of literature is time. Do you know of any book that is read by anyone to-day to speak of, that was written one thousand years ago ? Books that were the rage a few years ago are forgotten today. Whoever thinks nowadays of reading "Robert Ellesmere," or asks at a bookstore for Rider Haggard's "She"? Why, poor "David Harum" is almost unsalable, and we will soon hear nothing of "The Rosary." These books were born, were boomed, and died. The cold hand of oblivion is laid upon them. Heb. 8:13. Their force is spent. Their power is gone. They were literary sky rockets; they are like Ta ra ra boom de aye." Where is the book, after all, that is five hundred years old and read by the masses nowadays, for, as we said, a book that is one thousand, or two thousand, or three thousand years old is read by nobody. Horace and Homer may be studied by students of the classics, and school-boys may have Virgil and Xenophon thrashed into them, but whoever thinks of reading them ? They are dead books in dead languages. For you can-put it down for a certainty that the older a book is the smaller is its chance of surviving, or being read by people of diverse nationalities. Another thing. No book ever has had much chance of being circulated widely 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. German works are read by Germans; English works by Englishmen. I know that I never could enjoy "Old Mortality," for I am not a Scot.

What book do you know of, with a few great exceptions, 'such as Dante, Cervantes, Goethe, Dumas, Shakespeare, that has been able to overleap the bounds of nationality; and as to Turkey, India, or Mexico, or Brazil, what man out of a hundred could tell you whether they had any authors, or if they had, the name of one of their works. But the marvelous thing about the Bible is, that it is the only book in the world that has not only over-leaped the barrier of time, but it is the only book in the whole world that has been able to overleap the barrier of nationality. It was written largely in a dead language, for the Hebrew language is not a language that is either spoken or written today; and yet that Book, written in a dead language, written by men who died two thousand or three thousand years ago, is not only living today but it is the most widely-circulated book in the world.

### *The Wonder of its Sale:*

Surely this is another marvelous thing. The Old Book is easily the best seller of the day. 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 was the book called the Bible. Other books compute their circulation by thousands; the Bible by millions. And yet the man on the street never thinks of this book as a book that was written in a dead language over two or three thousand years ago.

### *The Wonder of its Interest:*

Another marvelous 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. A wonderful thing it is to think that there is one book that differs from all others; a book that is read to the little child and read by the old man as he t r e m b l e s on the brink of the other world; Years ago I heard the nurse reading a story to my child, and I said to her, "What is it that you are reading to the little one?" "I am reading the story of Joseph in the Bible," she answered.' And the little child, in excitement, cried, "Please don't stop her, please," as she listened with delighted interest to the reading of a book 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 noblest of modern minds, one of the greatest of modern scientists, our foremost Canadian scholar, the great Sir William Dawson, President 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, in Nazareth, in Galilee. Many of the writers were what we would call illiterate. Not only were they not university men, or scholars or original thinkers; they could not speak their own language properly. There is a strong probability that neither John nor Peter could speak grammatically. You remember Peter was trapped because his dialect betrayed him. He spoke like a Galilean. Did you ever hear a man of Yorkshire or Somersetshire talking? Did you ever hear the brogue of an Irishman from Galway? 'It was like that with Peter and John. (Matt. 27-73. Acts 2-7:4-13.) They were uneducated men. And many of the men who wrote the Bible were men of that character. One was a farm hand. Another was a shepherd. They were men of no literary reputation. And yet from men of that type educationally 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 today, 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.

All its authors were Jews, and the Jews by instinct and tradition, by education and sentiment, were the narrowest of all narrow people. The Jew was not only narrow; he had no interest in other nations. You know what a time it took to get the idea into Peter's head that he ought to have an interest in the salvation of the Gentiles of the outside world. (Acts 10-14. Gal. 2-11-14.) A miracle of special revelation only did it. How do you explain then the fact that these ignorant men, these most unc cosmopolitan 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 all men, and The Book of the world today. It is for only one tongue, and that is, the world's. It is for universal man as man. It is the proud boast of the Church of Rome today that it has but one language, and that a dead language, the Latin. But the Bible Society have a prouder boast. It is their boast that they have printed the Bible in over five hundred living languages; that they are giving the Living Word to every nation under heaven, that they may hear in their own tongue the wonderful works of God. Yes! God has so overruled the history of His world that there has been born a Society which has re-established the miracle of Pentecost. It is truly a miracle. It is a wonder to think that an old Hebrew book, written by a lot of Jews, has in God's mystic 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. It is the English Bible; the best that our literature can give in simple, noble prose, as Frederic Harrison once said in a lecture at Oxford. And yet, wonderful to think of, the German never thinks of it in any other way. To him it is the German Bible.

### ***The Wonder of its Preservation:***

The Another wonderful thing about the Bible is that it is almost the only book in the world that 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” (The name of the Christians has been extinguished). 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 persecution of medievalism. 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. Even Luther was a grown-up man when he said that he had never seen a Bible in his life. No jailer 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 persecution of all has been during the last one hundred and fifty years. The bitterest foes of, the Bible, 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. Baur and Strauss and the Tubingen School took up the cry of the Children of Edom: “Down with it, down with it, even to the ground.” But He that sitteth in His silent heaven laughed, and Jehovah had them in derision. For here it is today, and stronger than ever. It stands, and it 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 Eichborn, Wellhausen and Kuenen, will ever be confederate against it.

Yet in spite of these age-long persecutions the Word of the Lord is having free course and is being glorified. It is being circulated at the rate of about twenty-five million copies a year, in over five hundred languages of the globe. It has an influence it never possessed 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)



### ***The Five Crowning Wonders:***

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

#### ***Its Self-Authenticatingness:***

There is, first of all, what we might call its self-authenticatingness. You need no historical critic or university professor to p r o v e that the Bible is God's own Word. The Holy Ghost alone is the Author and Giver of that 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 and a Divine 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, and 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." (Read 1 Cor. 2-12). You cannot explain this. But it is a fact deep and real.

#### ***Its Inexhaustibility:***

Another wonder of the Bible is its inexhaustibility. 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; each tree contains a thousand seeds; each seed the germ of a thousand trees. 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 creative power, ideas and plans, and schemes, and 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 today 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 in infinity of multitude.

### ***Its Non-improvableness:***

Another wonder is its non-improvableness. You cannot gild gold. You cannot paint rubies. You cannot brighten diamonds. And no artist can touch with final touch this finished Word of God. This proud-pinnacled -century can add nothing to it. It stands as the sun in the sky. If the greatest Bible-lovers of the last century, like Irving, and Gladstone, and Spurgeon, and Parker, had attempted to improve it their work would have been a patch and a disfigurement. It has the glory of God.

### ***Its Authoritativeness:***

Its irresistible authoritativeness. This is another wonder. It breaks upon you as a 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, 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 of man as man. No other speaks with such binding claim, or presumes to command the obedience of mankind. While all the books of the Bible are not equal in grandeur of revelation or of spiritual value, or ethical importance, there is throughout an equality of inspiration and finality of authoritativeness. The strange thing is that men in every age and clime acknowledge it. They know that the book speaks to their inner consciousness with an authority like the authority of God Himself.

### ***Its Perennial Re-Inspiration:***

Another wonder is what might be called its perpetual re-inspiration. Men think of the Bible as a book that was inspired. But the wonder of the Bible is that it is inspired. From the far-distant heights of time it comes sweeping into the hearts of man to-day, and the same breath of God that breathed into it its mystic life makes it live and energize again 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 the wondrous things of Thy law," it is re-inspired, and the Spirit makes it live once more. For 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 one hundred and third Psalm, it is not ancient Hebrew, it is present-day power; and I, a living soul, over-whelmed with gratitude, cry out: "Bless the Lord, O my soul." The other day I took up this dear 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, and one day opening my Bible, at random as men say, my 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 ever 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 that day was God's own Word to me, inspiring because inspired inspired because inspiring.

### ***Its Christ-fullness:***

But the final wonder of the Book is Christ. He is its fulness, its centre, its fascination. It is all about Jesus! Old Testament and New Testament alike tell of Jesus, the great fullness 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, Jesus; Jesus, the arch of the span of history, the key-stone of the arch of prophecy; Jesus, the Revealed, the Redeeming, 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.

### ***The Last Word:***

And as I close, let me say this one word more. O, do not think and do not say, as I have heard men say they think, that we ought to read this Book as we read any other book; we ought to study it and analyze it just as we do any textbook in literature or science. No, no ! When you come to this Book, come to it with awe. Read it with reverence. Regard it with a most sacred attention. "Take thy shoes from off thy feet, for the ground where-on thou standest is holy ground." Never, never compare this Book with other books. Comparison is dangerous. They are of earth. This is from heaven. O, do not think and do not say that this Book only 'contains the word of God! It is the Word of God. Think not of it as a good book, or even the better book, but lift it in heart and mind and faith and love far, far above all, and ever regard it, 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; eternal in duration; inexpressible in value; infinite in scope; divine in authorship; human in penmanship ; regenerative in power; infallible in authority; universal in interest; personal in application; inspired in totality.

(I would like to suggest as a great stimulus and strength to the student of the Word, two books on the Bible by the late Dr. Adolph Saphir, the very learned Hebrew Christian, entitled "Christ and the Scriptures," and the "Divine Unity of Scripture." "Christ and the Scriptures" is a cheap little book, but, for its size is considered by many to be the best ever written on the subject. Saphir's "Divine Unity of Scripture" is really a great and scholarly work, noble in its style and suggestiveness. The man who reads them should never doubt his Bible any more.)