17

Bible Mysteries.

Arthur T. Pearson
Ex. 33:16-20, Kings 5:1-15
John 3:1-21, Peter II: 3 Chap
304
447
69
173
730
27
II Peter: III: 16.

"In which are some things hard to be understood."
The work bears the mark of the workman. The book shows signs of the author: why should not the Bible, coming forth as it does from a divino hand, partake of the mystery which invests the divine nature!

It is one of the most inconsistent and unreasonable apologies by which men ever cloak their neglect of God's Word, that it contains "things hard to be understood." They stumble at the very threshold of the kingdom of heaven, over that which is no necessary obstacle, even to a child. It will be our object to expose the fallacy of such an objection. The presence of mystery in Bible truth is no bar to faith, and implies no defect in the Scripture: else the text makes a fatal admission.
Observe that this is the confession of St. Peter, as to the epistles of St. Paul, or rather as to certain things in those epistles of which he and Paul, alike treat. A slight difference in the reading of the various manuscripts makes it possible to understand Peter as speaking of the entire writing of his fellow-apostle, or as alluding simply to the difficult truths therein treated; but this is not essential, for in either case it must be still what is hard to be understood to which he alludes. (Some read as others ois translating, literally “in which are many things incomprehensible, which they that are unlearned illiterate (in things of Christ) and unsteadfast (like a tree without roots),” worst or torture &
Things known to be facts we never dispute, however incomprehensible. And it is because Bible truth does not appeal to the eye and ear like the sights and sounds of common life, that we dispute its claim upon our faith. We look into this Holy Word and there it seems as though every thought of man were as in a mirror, reflected. Now is it to be accounted a strange thing, if in such a book we find also unmistakable evidence of a divine mind—thoughts beyond the power of man, either to originate or comprehend.

Some day we shall confront them as facts of our eternal experience, in another life; then we shall believe when heretofore it is too late.
Another reason why the Bible contains things hard to be understood, is because it treats of things which lie outside the sphere of our present experience. We love to walk by sight. We are fond of eye and ear proofs. We are like the Greek who could only say oída I know, as the perfect tense of εἰδώ: I see. We know only what we have seen. We crave mathematical demonstration to settle every fact. Now here are somethings which we cannot make matters of this eye or ear witness, nor prove with a mathematical certainty. Bible mysteries lie outside our region of investigation: they belong to another sphere. Some day we shall confront them as facts of our personal experience, in another life: then we shall believe when perhaps it is too late.
We never dispute a fact that appeals to our eyes or ears, however mysterious. We cannot deny gravitation, strange and inexplicable as is its silent and unseen force: we judge by its effects. But because the influences of the Spirit belong to a different sphere, and cannot appeal to sense, does it follow that they are any less facts? Faith makes all these things, facts, as real as any other!
A paradox is not a contradiction, an inconsistency or an impossibility. The idea of a paradox involves two things: first apparent absurdity and secondly, real fact. It unites seeming inconsistency and actual harmony.

Science abounds in paradoxes. For example, there is the hydrostatic paradox, which familiarly stated is this: a quantity of water however small may be made to balance any weight however great, and the familiar principle which harmonizes this seeming contradiction is that peculiar property of liquids in virtue of which they transmit pressure equally in every direction. When a child sees a hydrostatic bellows, in operation, and a column of water weighing one pound sustaining the
There is the mathematical paradox, which tells us that two lines may approach each other, get actually and never meet, their distance being constantly divided by two. We see the same principle in the repeating decimal fraction which is forever approaching a unit, but never becomes one. It is mathematically demonstrated that a straight line known as the asymptote of the hyperbola may eternally approach the curve of the hyperbola and yet never meet it. What can involve greater apparent absurdity! If anything is plain it is that convergent lines will finally meet if prolonged far enough, and yet mathematics, the very science of certainties, flings its bold contradiction in the teeth of this axiom!
platform with one thousand pounds upon it, it is a perfect mystery. But as he grows to manly years, and becomes a student of natural philosophy, he comes to understand the principle of the paradox. See also Mathematical Paradox.

The Bible is full of paradoxes; yet there is in it not one inconsistency, not one real contradiction. But the Bible promises only to be self-consistent; it does not promise to harmonize with every human theory. If we would understand the Scriptures, we must come to them to see what they teach, not bringing our own preconceptions to measure by them the truth or consistency of the divine Word! This is what the Apostle calls in the text 'arresting them, i.e. putting them on the
rack, or as we commonly say, torturing them into a given testimony. We make contradictions in the Bible by making it teach what we believe. It is possible to warp the word of God to make it fit the crook of almost any dogma; to attach to it such unnatural constructions as make it seem self-contradictory.
Science is full of impossibilities. I alluded to the mathematical paradox, which teaches that two lines may eternally converge and never meet. At first thought it seems impossible yet investigation proves it true. A simple illustration of the same principle may be found in the ages of a father and son. Today, the father is twice as old as his boy. Twenty years pass and the son has relatively gained upon him, the father is now one half older than the son. Another twenty years and he is one third older, another twenty and he is one fourth older, and so that fraction which represents the difference is constantly becoming less, and through eternity will come nearer and nearer to nothing; yet will the ages of both ever be equal?
A man, in controversy with me on religion, once said I want a religious faith which is not so full of impossibilities, give me a religion with mathematical certainties! I soon proved to him by such simple illustrations that even mathematical certainties involve apparent impossibilities. The difficulty lies not in the truth but in our weak narrow finite understanding. We soon come to the limits of our comprehension. Hundreds of things like parallel lines have no point of convergence, simply because our eyes are too weak, our mental vision too limited to follow them to their junction.
The mysteries of the Bible are no more than paradoxes: seeming solecisms. We cannot reconcile their apparent contradictions from the imperfectness of our understanding.

You sail between the Pillars of Hercules and those perpendicular walls of rock appear above the water's edge wholly distinct. Yet they meet away down in the ocean depths. You may let two rays of the sun fall upon a surface, and the nicest and most exact mathematical test can shew no convergence: they appear perfectly parallel! Have you any doubt that they meet in the sun! Trace them back through 95,000,000 miles and they spring from the same orb: but the distance of their source is so great that you
cannot detect the slightest convergence. So of the doctrines of the word of God. In one place is the bold assertion of God's sovereign control; in another equally unequivocal is the declaration of man's free agency. Men say, both statements cannot be true: if God is absolute in control, man cannot be really free. These are parallel lines: they cannot have any point of junction. Harmony? I my brother, it is the infinite distance between you and God that makes these truths appear irreconcilable: trace them back, if you could follow them to their common source, they would be found to meet in the throne of God.
There are mysteries everywhere else, which pass all our comprehension, and which we can only apprehend as facts.

Look at God's works in nature. What revealers of untold wonders are the microscope & telescope. The microscope shows us what a world of life may be contained in a dew drop; the telescope reveals the immensity of that which appears from distance to be but an insignificant speck in the universe. You read Herschel's statement of stars so far off that their light, shooting toward us at the rate of 200,000 miles a second has taken two millions of years to reach us. But to my mind the mystery found in the minutest works of creative skill is if pos-
sible still more appalling.
You look at the green mould which dampness develops upon a piece of bread, and beneath the microscope you discover a dense forest, with trees, and trunks, branches, fruit—perfectly formed.

When Lieut. Perryman was sounding the sea preparatory to laying the Atlantic telegraph, some of the clay brought up from those depths dried on his fingers and sunk into the crevices of the skin. Yet on placing this impalpable powder beneath the microscope it was found to consist of millions of perfect shells, each holding a living animal.
The irreverent boldness with which men treat Biblical mystery, is a sign simply of ignorance, inconsiderateness and folly. What does man know at all! Now narrow the broadest range of his information and comprehension! Take all that eye ever saw, ear ever heard, or ever entered within the compass of human thought! Aggregate it all and in comparison to what is to be known, what is it? as a grain of sand amid the myriad atoms of earth! or a single drop amid the immeasurable sea. I have never read, without being deeply impressed, those significant words of the Apostle: If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know
There is no sign of ignorance more conclusive, than an opinionated estimate of one's attainments in knowledge. On the other hand nothing marks a really broad and varied learning, more unmistakably than the humility which counts our highest knowledge as only the reveal er of our ignorance. The more we know, more we see to be known and the less we feel that we know. Let any man who challenges the Bible to unveil its mysteries before him, go and read that address of God to Job, xxxviii chap.

"I will demand of thee, and answer thou me."

"Whence wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Who appointed its measures and stretched the line upon it?"
"Up on what are its pillars settled, and who laid
the cornerstone thereof? when the morning stars
sang together and all the sons of God shouted
for joy! Or who shut up the sea with doors in
its gushing forth, when it issued from the womb?
When I made darkness its robe and thick dark
ness, its swaddling-band? and brake up for it
my decreed place and set bars and doors and
said: Neither shalt thou come up any farther
and how shall my proud waves be stayed!
"Thus thou commandedst the morning since thy
days; and caused the day-dawn to know his
place. Thus thou enteredst into the springs of
the sea, or hast thou walked in the search of
the depth? Knowest thou the way where light
"dwelleth? Understandest thou the path to its house?

"Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow

"or the hail? Who hath divided a water-course

"for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the

"lightning of thunder? Hast the rain a father;

"and who hath begotten the drops of dew? Out

"of whose womb came the ice and the hoary

"frost of heaven, who hath gendered it? Canst

"thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades or

"loose the bands of Orion? Knowest thou the ordi.

"nances of heaven. Canst thou send lightnings

"that they may go and say unto thee: Here

"we are!"
"Ancient as are these challenges, science has not yet answered them, and probably never will fully explain even these processes, not to say unravel their mysteries. Contrast with such divine majesty questioning the feeble assertions of the rationalist that he cannot receive a Revelation from God which contains anything beyond his comprehension or which claims to be supernatural! What blindness to the fact of human ignorance and impotence! Here are the simplest questions of Nature unanswered after six thousand years! Even the minutest of God's works defy our research. All the concentrated light of science brought to a burning focal point does not remove the dark
ness that invests the dew drop; the hail stone
is yet an essential mystery; while in the snow
flake, revealing under the microscope myriad
crystal forms of most exquisite beauty and variety,
"there is an inexhaustible store of unrevealed
science, hidden there! Light has been shining
lightning has been playing for 6000 years, and
today we have not traced the path to their mys
terious abodes. Lange in Gen. 139

Now all this mystery invests the works of God
in which are many things hard to be under
stood! Is it any marvel if in his word that
unfolds only the thought of God, and makes
no appeal to sense, we should find likewise
things hard to be understood?
It is sometimes said that only weak minds will accept a revelation which contains things hard to be understood. On the contrary, it is sometimes a mark of the highest order of intellect that men reverently recognize some truth as beyond human capacity of comprehension.

Robert Hall says: The most enlightened of men have always been the first to receive and acknowledge the remaining obscurity which hung around them, just as in the night the further the light extends, the wider the surrounding sphere of darkness appears. Hence it has always been observed that the most profound inquiries into nature, have been the most modest and humble!
Locke writes: I own to you freely the weakness of my understanding, that though it be unquestionable that there is omniscience and omnipotence in God, our Maker, and though I cannot have a clearer perception of anything than (of this) that I am free; yet I cannot make freedom in man consistent with omnipotence & omnipiscience in God. And yet I am as fully persuaded of both as of any truth I most firmly assent to; and therefore I have long since given off the consideration of this question, &c. 73: 282.
All our experience is full of mystery. You are yourself a mystery. Perhaps no one doctrine of God's Word has been more persistently fought than that of the Trinity. The idea of three persons in one Godhead - why, says our opponents, the very idea involves contradiction: can three be one? Yet in a sense you represent a trinity, body, mind, soul. Each acts independently. You may paralyze the body, yet the mind thinks, the heart loves. And so we can separate clearly between our intellectual and our emotional activity, and yet so perfectly meshed are these three distinct elements of our being that they form but one man. When you understand the mystery of your own being you may begin to comprehend God's trinity.
Burke Peter admits the fact of mystery in the Bible, and with all these qualifications, there is no doubt and ought to be no dispute that mystery really does exist there. So far are we from desiring to argue away this great fact that we justify in the Scriptures the presence of things hard to be understood.
Were there no mysteries in the Bible, it could not be a divine book! And for this reason, the production always bears the Mark of the producer. What man makes shows human handiwork, it may be intricate but it is never inexplicable. I saw a Swiss bird, in my boyhood, which occupied the ingenuity and skill of the maker, for years. It was very minute, yet so exquisitely formed that it not only imitated the motions of the living bird, but sung distinctly six different melodies in imitation of as many different birds. On the other hand, a bird alights on a bough before my window sings his song and flies to his nest. There is not only exquisite mechanism, sweet melody, gorgeous plumage—all that the Swiss manu
facturer embodied in his machine. But here is life voluntary motion—animal instinct—intelligence. This mechanism needs no winding up and can perpetuate its species. You have no doubt that man made the first. In every heart you see man's handiwork—have you any doubt God made the other and not man? And what convinces you that God created the living bird? Simply this that in the living creature there is so much to which human comprehension never reached—it is full of the inexplicable mysteries of life, and just what is incomprehensible about it is that which proves it the workmanship of God. That mystery is the stamp of a patent right, the unmistakable mark of the inventor.
This thought deserves expansion. If you examine a machine and comprehend its entire mechanism & working, thoroughly understand the principles of its construction and the mode of its operation, this at once puts you upon an intellectual level with the man who invented or framed it. What you are able thoroughly to understand, you could with an inventive turn of mind, devise. If on the other hand you find something into whose construction you vain look, so that while you cannot discover its practical working, you find yourself unable to discover its principle of operation, is it not plain that it is the product of a mind superior to your own in intelligence and all the attributes of genius. In so far therefore as it is a
mystery to you it lifts the maker above you. Of Savage takes up a bow. He understands why it has a given shape, why it is made of a certain wood, why it takes here and curves there, why its arrow is thus headed and feathered and his complete understanding of that weapon shows that it needed no greater class of mind than his own to produce it. But now for the first time he tries a gun. He sees clearly that its bullet speeds to its mark wounding or killing according to the precision of its aim. But that firearm is to him an inexplicable mystery. He attributes its involuntarily to the Great Spirit, showing how natural it is for us to feel, instinctively that what we cannot understand emanates from some high
ev source. So is it with books. That which is entirely within your mental grasp shows that its author was in a sense on a plane with his reader. But if the writer descends into the profound mysteries of science, or soars into the lofty realms of philosophy; if he vanquishes your false arguments by the force of his logic, confounds your ignorance by the universality of his information, amazes you with new and startling discoveries, or leads the way where your capacity makes it impossible for you to follow you recognize the author as a superior man. And so whatever a human mind invents or discovers, a human mind can grasp, and the fact that a man can perfectly comprehend any production proves a human pro
duce! On the other hand God's word everywhere, by its mystery proves its divine workman. It is so in nature. After six thousand years, a blade of grass is inexplicable by any discoveries of science and art. Among all the things we know as facts in the material world, there is not one which we fully comprehend. And it is so in the Divine Word. You read the Koran, and though it has in it not a few absurdities, it contains no mysteries. So of any human author's writings. Find a man who stands on his intellectual level, and even Newton's Principia or Aristotle's Organon, Bacon's Novum Organum or Humboldt's Cosmos presents no mystery. But no man ever comprehended the only Book ever written by inspiration of
God. To comprehend fully all its divine truths we must ourselves also be divine. To claim fully to understand it is either to bring God down to a level with man or to lift man up to a level with God. Even the angels desire to look into these things for angelic intellect though it can doubtless penetrate further into divine mysteries than we cannot reach to the height or depth of God's thought. The very mystery of the Bible proves its authenticity and divinity. Knowing it to claim divine authorship, we should expect it to verify its claim by presenting thoughts and truths inexpressible of human comprehension. And so we find that there are in it paradoxes which no man ever would have dared to state, simply because the
mode of reconciling these apparent contradictions is wholly above human reach. When Kepler was unraveling the mysteries of planetary motion he exclaimed with enthusiasm: O almighty God, I am thinking thy thoughts after thee. But did he himself, great as he was, ever claim to grasp the thought of God. Can any astronomer of history explain the first and simplest mystery of planetary motion: why they move at all?

Ed. Weist once said to Mr. Webster: "You are a man of too much intellect to believe that one is two and that three are one. Sir, answered Mr. Webster, with great emphasis and dignity, the Bible teaches me that there are three persons in the Godhead. I am not vain enough to profess to understand the ma-
Hemelies of Heaven. A nobler reply worthy of as noble an intellect as his. To him who rightly regards the grand question of Bible mysteries, like the miracles by which Jesus asserted his divine mission, they become corroborative proofs of inspiration & the authority of a divine utterance. And vain indeed must he be who presumes to unravel the secret things which belong to the Lord our God, into which the angels with their sublime intellects, and celestial knowledge, still desire to look.
In certain things it is credulity not to investigate but in others we are bound to accept simply the witness of the Word of God: here it is impossible to investigate: irrevocent even to attempt it.

But perhaps it is asked, of what conceivable use can truth be that is not comprehensible by us. I answer partly as I have shewn, to prove a divine source; and I add partly to prove our faith. What we see and hear and fully grasp we can readily believe: this requires no faith. But when God's teaching involves mystery, then we have to become as little children, and be willing to be led, as in the darkness. Our faith makes those things to be facts which cannot be matters of sight.
Binghamton, Sabbath P.M. Oct. 20, 1861

Waterford " " " 27 1867

Detroit (Written) Sabbath Dec. 17 1869