

GEORGE Q. CANNON,
BRIGHAM YOUNG,
EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS.

TUESDAY, September 17, 1879.

WHAT IS INSPIRATION?

THE September-October number of the North-American Review contains a discussion of the above question by six noted preachers and lecturers. They discuss very learnedly upon the subject, but do not give very satisfactory or direct answers to the question. They seem to have settled upon the notion that remarks in relation to the Bible will elucidate the whole matter, as though that book contained all the inspiration with which the human family has ever been favored. True, some of them accord a partial inspiration to a few of the heathen sages of antiquity, but this is denied by others, and the Bible is made the main object of the inquiry. We offer a few words to illustrate, in brief, the "Mormon" view of this important question:

Inspiration, in its general sense, is the in-breathing, or action upon the soul, of the spirit of light and truth. It is measurably enjoyed by all mankind of every creed and every race. The spirit of life is also the spirit of light. It is "in all things, and through all things, and round about all things, and is the law by which all things are governed." It is to the spirit of man what natural light is to the eye, the medium through which any principle or truth is discerned, as natural light is the medium through which we see the physical objects of creation. Without light, nothing, either natural or spiritual, can possibly be perceived. "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." This is "the breath of life" which God "breathed into" man in the beginning, by which he became a living, sentient, perceptive and progressive soul. It is also the "true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." But there are different capacities of physical sight, so there are of mental and spiritual vision. The spirit of light is always the same, but the receivers thereof are various.

This spirit comes from God and will lead to God. But it exerts no compulsory force. It illuminates, not compels. It suggests that which is good, but will "not always strive with man." Those who yield to its promptings are led in the way of truth and strength.

Those who habitually resist it become influenced by the spirit of darkness, which is of that wicked one, and become prone to iniquity. This natural inspiration is the light by which grand and lofty thoughts are reflected. Sometimes several individuals far apart geographically, but similarly constituted mentally, bring forth identical ideas. Each claims originality and perhaps charges the others with plagiarism. But the real author is the Father of Lights, from whom the intelligence flows which manifests the principles of every invention, device or arrangement which is for the benefit and progress of humanity. The uses to which the intelligence is put, depend greatly upon the persons who receive it. The light is good, but bad men may pervert the information it imparts to the worst of purposes.

All men are accountable, because of that light, and in proportion to the reception and the opportunities therefor. The greatest condemnation is for those who obtain the greatest light. Everlasting, unswerving justice will determine this. The heathen, the Pagan, the Moslem, the Christian, the Jew, the infidel, all have a portion of this natural inspiration, and the sages and oracles, philosophers and poets, reformers and philanthropists of ancient times, among all nations, who have impressed the ages with the stamp of their genius and godlike influence, have all been inspired by the spirit of light and truth, and have brought forth principles and precepts adapted to the period and people among whom they lived. The same spirit in the people bore record of the truth upon their inward nature, and by that light will they be judged according to their works.

In addition to this natural inspiration, which is general, there has been at various times a special inspiration which God bestowed upon certain persons for special purposes. This is called in the scriptures at the Old and New Testaments the Holy Ghost. It is a great endowment of the same light, by which things pertaining to higher spheres can be perceived and understood. By this the Hebrew prophets wrote and spoke. By it the Apostles knew that Jesus was the Christ while the world comprehended it not. By it the word of the Lord has been declared to man from age to age. Without it, no man can possibly understand the things of God. It manifests the Father and the Son. It illuminates the past and unfolds the future. It is the highest light that man can enjoy.

But while it is a more powerful manifestation of divine enlightenment, it does not dominate the persons or faculties of its recipients. They are as free agents as others. It quickens their spiritual and intellectual faculties, but does not reduce them to mere human machines. It is the very antipodes of the "possession" by which people have been controlled in different ages, and by which they were convulsed, distorted, and impelled irrespective of their will. "The spirit of the prophets was subject unto the prophets," so far that they need not if they wished not yield to its influence. They were not "mediums," like modern spiritists, mere animated automata. Their ideas were divine, their language human. The sacred Holy Ghost inspired Isaiah and Ezekiel, Peter

and Paul. Yet the style of their writings is peculiar to each, and Peter was seen to be a man of natural and unlearned, while [Paul's] language had the polish of the schools.

Revelation may be given by angels, by the voice of God, by divine wisdom and dreams and by the manifestations of the Holy Ghost in the soul. But though the last named is different to the former it is needed for the comprehension of either and all. If an angel were to speak the word of God or a vision of heavenly things were opened to human view, without the inspiration of the Holy Ghost the significance of neither the word nor the sight could be properly comprehended. Those who have the Holy Spirit in the same manner and degree as Isaiah, can understand every truth revealed through him; so with the writings and sayings of other prophets and divinely inspired teachers.

The higher inspiration is not confined to any particular age. It is as attainable now as at any former period. It is always the same. There are laws and conditions pertaining to its reception which must be observed by all who wish to obtain it. Faith, repentance and baptism precede its bestowment upon development in the human being. It is conferred by the laying on of the hands of persons appointed to administer it. Then it is "enjoyed," unequally because it must be sought after, invoked, obeyed and delighted in. As different recipients vary in their efforts, so they vary in their enjoyment of its benediction.

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Our limited space forbids further present enlargement on this subject. The light of God is universally diffused like that of the sun. But men may close their eyes to the latter, and shut the windows of their souls against the former. It exists all the same. But as natural light is sometimes latent, so spiritual light is often dormant to us. But when the conditions are right, it shines forth in the midst of the darkness, and guides always aright. And those who will be led by the glimmerings of the light of nature, and lay hold upon the truth can, by obedience to the ordinances, come up into the heavenly vision of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, and be made partakers of the higher inspiration, the best boon of Almighty God to mortal man amid the gloom and darkness of this fallen world.

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