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TRACTS FOR THE TIMES.

No. I.

No. I. **No Revelation Infallible.**

BY

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ALLAN HUME.

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NO REVELATION INFALLIBLE,



It is with great regret that I notice in the *Arya* for February the following paragraph :—

“ TWO BRAHMO GENTLEMEN.—Babu Siris Chandra Basu, B.A., and Lala Ramkishen, members of the Brahmo Samaj, who signed the application forms for membership of the Lahore Arya Samaj, on the day of the last anniversary, have been declared ineligible by the Vice-President, Lala Jewan Das, so long as they would not, in common with other Fellows of the Samaj, *accept the Vedas as infallible Revelation.*”

Respecting and admiring Swami Dayanand, as we all must, as a gentleman of great learning, pure life and noble aims, it cannot but pain all lovers of the Truth, who have emancipated themselves from the fetters of Priestcraft, to learn that a Society over which he, Dayanand, presides, adopts, as a basic tenet, the infallibility of *any* written documents.

Of all the erroneous dogmas that have showered their curses on the hapless race of men, no one has led to more disastrous consequences, and no one more merits the reprobation of all who love truth or their fellow-men, than this pernicious and deceptive theory of the *infallibility* of sacred books, be they Bibles, Korans, Vedas or what not.

This dogma is the evil soil out of which has ever sprung and flourished that monstrous and poisonous

growth of Priestcraft, which has stained and sullied every page of Human History with degradation and misery. with blood and fire.

Were, therefore, the good Swami ten-fold as learned and as pure-minded as he is, were his aims an hundred-fold nobler, higher and more unselfish than they are, it would still be the simple duty of every man, however humble and unlearned, who has at least learnt from history the true bearing and inevitable outcome of this fatal dogma, to withstand him boldly when he attempts to reinforce it with his great authority, and tell him, plainly, that though in *other* matters he may be as a God, in *this*, he is alike a traitor to the cause of humanity and to the highest Truth.

These are strong words, but what words can be too strong, nay what words can be strong enough to condemn an attempt to reimpose upon mankind, that greatest curse of all past ages—the dogma of the infallibility of written documents? That the attempt is made in good faith cannot alter the position; it will absolve the agent from moral responsibility, but it cannot absolve us from the duty of opposing him and exposing the real character of his action. If, haply, having convinced himself that it was an universal panacea, some Swami, good, pure, learned, should, under some fatal delusion, set to work to mix with the waters of every stream and well to

which he was able to obtain access, some substance that the whole past experience of the world had proved to be a deadly poison, could any words be too strong to reprobate his action, any warning, to all who might possibly become his victims, too emphatic? And, though it were but a poor labourer, who saw and understood what was being wrought by this great, learned and otherwise good man, could we blame even him for lifting up his humble voice to warn his fellows?

But there is no known poison of the mineral, vegetable or animal kingdoms which ever has, or ever could work such wholesale destruction on the human race as has this mental poison, to which we owe half the wars, half the sin and misery, and all the religious persecutions, the massacres, burnings, torturings that have, at times, gone far to change this earthly paradise, this fair bright world, into a Hell.

Therefore an insignificant labourer as I am in this great vine yard, and unworthy though I may be, morally considered, to loose the latchets of Swami Dayanand's shoes, I offer no apology for thus raising my humble voice against the pernicious, the deadly dogma, which it would seem that he has introduced as the basis of his teachings.

Let us first clearly understand what this dogma means. Infallibility of the *Vedas* (or ANY other SCRIPTURES) means nothing else but the infallibility

of the PRIEST, whom each layman follows. It is not alone from History, *a posteriori*, that this is established ; we can prove it, *a priori*, from the conditions of the case.

No matter how clearly any SCRIPTURE might be written, it would always contain passages susceptible of *at least* two interpretations, and the priest becomes the arbiter of which of the two should be accepted. But as a matter of fact all sacred scriptures contain much that is the reverse of clearly written ; of most of them, before they become widely acknowledged as infallible, the language has ceased to be generally spoken or understood ; in the processes of repetition and reproduction an infinite number of various readings have crept in ; contradictions and discrepancies have made their appearance in all parts ; doubts have arisen as to what portions are really authentic and what have been added later, so that even assuming that in some remote past any sacred scripture really was an infallible revelation, at any long subsequent period, what is to be held to be the infallible revelation, must depend upon the views held by a particular teacher or priest, or by a school or body or " church " of such.

No man, therefore, understanding the conditions and capable of reasoning from these, can fail to perceive that the dogma of the infallibility of any scripture necessarily leads to spiritual despotism, priestly

rule and priest craft ; and no man who has studied History to any purpose can question the fact that, despite the myriads of learned, pious, pure, and saintly men that all priestly bodies have contained, hierarchical organizations and priestcraft have entailed more misery on mankind than all other sources of suffering put together.

Even, therefore, were it certain that any scripture *was*, at its first appearance, an infallible revelation it would be a wicked thing *now* to preach it as infallible, first, because experience has demonstrated the inevitably fatal results of such preachings ; and, second, because every honest scholar knows the impossibility after the lapse of a couple of thousand years of making at all certain what any scripture originally contained, or what its contents (the whole plane of thought having shifted) really signified.

If then Swami Dayanand is preaching the Vedas as an infallible revelation, he is, however good, pure and high his motives, doing a wicked thing and helping to reforge and reimpose the rusty fetters of a now growingly obsolete priestcraft ; and if he is preaching his remarkable, amplified (and I am bound to say after studying, the originals and literal translations by eminent scholars, European and Native, of several passages, *to my view distorted*) translations as infallible revelation, then he is claiming either equality with the Divine Source whence the Vedas, as he teaches, sprung,

or a fresh plenary inspiration from that source ; and I fearlessly challenge him, either to justify the evil dogma of infallible revelation or to substantiate his own plenary inspiration.

Let it be clearly understood that I do not presume to question his *scholarship* ; he may or may *not* be the greatest living Vedic scholar ; but unless he is *inspired*, his interpretations of the Vedas are only his *opinions* which may be right, or *wrong*, and which *must*, like the opinions of all human beings, include *some* error, and to attempt to affix the seal of infallibility to any mere mortal's opinions is simply, to my notion, blasphemous.

But if he claims plenary inspiration, where is the proof of this ? What mighty works has he wrought ? What evidence has he given that through him the Divine, and the Divine *only*, with no intermixture of astral and earthly voices, is speaking ? There are many others as learned, as earnest, as pure of life as himself who utterly repudiate much of his interpretations ; what more reason is there for us to accept him as inspired rather than these ?

But, to pass on, it is further clearly demonstrable for all who care to study and consider the subject, that no scripture that we have in the world can *possibly* be an infallible revelation.

For there is no Scripture, that is not in many passages obscure, that is not open to numerous diverse,

if not contradictory, interpretations, that is not pervaded by various readings, that does not involve discrepancies and contradictions and in regard to the significations of which the wisest and best men in all ages have not perpetually disagreed.

Now it seems to me self-evident that had a Divine Omnipotent Ruler of the universe ever seen fit to promulgate to this world an *infallible* revelation, He would never have done His work imperfectly; there would have been no obscurity in His words, no room for diverse interpretations; men would no more have been able to introduce various readings, than to alter the earth's orbit; nothing but harmony could have prevailed from the first to the last letter; and, lastly, an infallible revelation of the Divine Truth *must* be so clear that men could not always be differing about it.

Furthermore it may be reasonably argued that no infallible revelation of Divine truth would be of any use to us mortals; for as such a revelation must contain *all* truth, it would be incapable of realization by limited and conditioned human intellects, and it is therefore not only certain that no such revelation ever has been made, but incredible that it ever should be made.

Is there then no truth for us, no inspiration? On the contrary, to every pure, thinking mind, those fragments of the truth that it is able to realize and assimilate surely reach, and, as for inspiration, every pure and good man, speaking from his spiritual nature, is

more or less inspired. But all this is very different from *infallible* revelation and *plenary* inspiration.

If while, still, in "this life of error, ignorance and strife," it is permissible to hazard surmises, I would say that Divine Truth resides only with the **ONE AND ONLY**; that each man who develops and cultivates his spiritual nature obtains, as he rises in the scale of spritual evolution, less and less distant and distorted views of that truth, (or of such portions of it as his earthly nature and limitations admit within his mental grasp); that this has been true in all ages and is so to this day, and that consequently while no sacred scriptures, which are all human products, are *infallible revelations*, all are more or less of revelations of truth, all have been more or less inspired, all contain, even as we read them, much spiritual food of inestimable value, and could we now fully realize what their writers intended would doubtless yield far more of this.

But for each one of us the only *infallible revelation* is that which reaches a man from his own spiritual nature, and which, as he ponders over the scriptures or abstracts his inner consciousness in meditation, suddenly flashes out the light of life upon the dead words of some old text or shadowy form of some wandering thought and wakes these thereafter into living truths and divine revelations—*for him!*

FOR HIM!—but by no means necessarily, or even

probably for all other men of even his own time, let alone of far distant ages.

Admitting that truth is infinite, and that our minds are finite,—that not only is the point of view of each individual *somewhat* different from that of even his neighbour's, but that the standpoint of different nations and different ages are *widely* different, how can any really wise and spiritually-minded man contend that *any* SCRIPTURE, least of all one five thousand years old, can be an *infallible* revelation to mankind generally of the present day?

It may be true, at least it may faithfully reproduce some view of some portion of the truth, but it will be no revelation, least of all an infallible one, to any so placed that they are no longer able to see *that* particular portion of the truth, or to see it from the direction in which it was originally psychographed.

Unquestionably many of the primary and highest (and therefore as it were most distant) truths are so situated that no local differences of position, not even the stupendous sweep of the world of intellect through its orbit during the last five thousand years, can materially affect the view, but with the great mass of secondary truth it is widely different, and what four or five thousand years ago were "saving" truths, (since a saving truth is one that the soul's eye can see) are many of them now no longer such, having sunk below the mental horizon of the age.

The higher each man raises himself spiritually, the more and more he is able to grasp with philosophic gaze the spiritual truths of the Past, and of the Future, but, to preach to the work-a-day world of to-day, either the Gospel of the dead Past or of the unborn Future as an *infallible revelation*; is not only to my mind wicked, as I have already explained, but vanity and foolishness; and even if the Vedas or the books of Genesis ever *were* (which I have shown that they never could have been) *infallible revelations* to the generation in which they were produced, they *could* not *possibly*, from the conditions of the case, be infallible revelations for the men of to-day.

Now all this is an absolute truth to me; I know it as a certainty, but it by no means follows that it is a truth to others, and if therefore you or others dispute it I shall be neither surprised nor vexed, though I shall be ready and anxious to defend the position, which I have now sketchily outlined, against all comers, with a mass of arguments with which I have not at present thought it expedient to trouble you or weary your readers.