

# The Royal Conflict

A DEBATE ON, "IS THE BIBLE REALLY GOD'S WORD?"

## A FATEFUL MEETING

"Look out that you do not fall in love with her."

"What! with little Margaret?"

The latter speaker was Brandol Beckham, a recent graduate of one of the European universities. He was now returning to his Virginia home, after an absence of three years, and it was on the train as he was nearing home that he met an old friend who had uttered the note of warning.

Margaret, the young woman to whom the friend referred, although not related to Brandol by ties of kinship was yet an inmate of Brandol's home, and they two were members of the same family. The relationship between them was as follows: Mr. Beckham, Brandol's father, had married Margaret's widowed mother, so that Brandol and Margaret were brought together in the same family as step-brother and step-sister. Up to the time this story opens they had never seen each other, their parents having married during Brandol's first year at the university. The parents in their letters to Brandol had always referred to Margaret as his little sister Margaret, and he had continued during his life at the university to think of her as such. Already in their letters Brandol and Margaret had begun to call each other brother and sister, and this custom was kept up after Brandol's return. Ever since the marriage of his father he had felt a growing desire to see Margaret, and now that he was soon to cross the threshold of his new home his curiosity concerning her touched high-water mark.

Happy greetings and congratulations raged like a storm in the Beckham mansion on the night of Brandol's arrival. Neighbors and friends came in with hearty welcomes, and as they entered the parlor they found a young man tall and erect, with black hair and eyes, with countenance pale and clear, and with a physique and bearing that never failed to attract attention.

One young lady had remarked in Margaret's presence, the day after Brandol's return, that she thought it was such a pity that a nice young man like Mr. Brandol Beckham should be an infidel, that she had heard that he had become one at the university.

The remark fell like a lighted match upon Margaret's inflammable heart, and she returned to her home with a shuddering dread of her apostate brother, and with this dread came a touch of pity. But Brandol, unconscious of the thoughts that filled her mind, was delighted with his little sister as he incorrectly called her. Though she lacked several inches of equaling him in height, yet when she was compared with others about her, it was seen that she by no means deserved the diminutive title of "little." Brandol

was so free and cordial with her that she found herself much in his presence, and her dread and restraint gradually diminished.

About two weeks after Brandol's return he attended services at the First Baptist Church, where the Beckham family were members. During the walk homeward from church he found himself in a company of young people, all of whom were of the feminine persuasion.

"I felt sorry for poor old Doctor Books this morning," Brandol said in an earnest tone.

His remark caused an epidemic of exclamations from the young ladies.

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Grilton.

"I was grieved that he made such a spectacle of himself," replied Brandol.

"Mr. Beckham, do tell us what you mean. I thought the sermon was very impressive," she said.

"Miss Grilton," said Brandol in a tone of mingled impatience and compassion, "do you mean to intimate that you believe that story about the Ark?"

"I assuredly do," she replied. "It is in the Bible."

Brandol's only answer at first was a sympathetic smile. "And you think that settles it?" he asked.

"Of course. The Bible is inspired, and therefore it must tell the truth."

"You are sure of that, are you?" he asked.

"Who ever heard of such a question?" spoke up Miss Elna Belvin. "Of course the Bible is inspired."

"How do you know?" asked Brandol.

"The matter needs no proof," she said. "Such a great book must have been inspired."

"Your theory then is that every great book must have been inspired," said Brandol.

"By no means," she replied with an extra touch of vigor in her voice; "but the Bible is the only one great book. There is no other book that can be compared with it."

"I declare I must take my eyes to an optician," remarked Brandol.

Every one turned suddenly toward the speaker. Margaret asked with some anxiety, "What is the matter?"

"I cannot see straight," he replied. "Do you know I cannot see that point that Miss Belvin makes? She says that the Bible must be inspired because it is the greatest book in the world, but I cannot see it that way. I am willing to admit that the Bible surpasses every other volume in literature; but for the life of me I cannot see that it must be inspired."

"Mr. Beckham, you shock me," replied Miss Elna. "I would no more think of doubting the inspiration of the Bible than I would of committing murder. No, indeed; my dear father and mother, in fact all my people before me, have believed in the

Bible. They died trusting in its promises, and I hope to follow in their footsteps."

"Well, I hope you will not follow them very soon," answered Brandol. "But it does seem a little curious, Miss Belvin, that you have on hand a belief which you cannot account for. Surely you do not hold to your theory simply as one of the precious heirlooms of the family?"

At this point they were approached by friends returning from a different church. A volley of remarks were exchanged, after which the party separated. One person there was in that first party whose heart had been shaken by a small whirlwind, though she had scarcely uttered a word. Too much bewildered she had been to speak. It was Margaret. The question, "How do you know the Bible is inspired?" kept ringing in her mind and would not cease. She was a beautiful girl, of nineteen years of age, and three years previously had given her heart to the Savior. The church of which she was a member held her in the highest esteem. She was loved for her sweet Christian character, and in her Sunday school she stood pre-eminent as a Bible student. Her facility in memorizing and explaining the scriptures, as well as her love for the book, had made her one of the most effective teachers in the school. Her knowledge of the scriptures was indeed remarkable, and those who had heard her expounding the Word to her class had often remarked on her maturity of thought and speech. She had a class of small boys, and their devotion to her was as beautiful as it was natural.

The question as to the inspiration of the sacred volume had never disturbed her childlike faith. She had occasionally heard and read criticisms and even sneers at the Bible, but she had always recoiled from them as being the expression of blasphemy. When Brandol had at first asked for proofs of the inspiration of the Bible she expected that several proofs would be immediately forthcoming, but to her dismay no proofs were offered, but in the place of them came the inquiry to her own mind, "How do we know?" For several minutes after they parted from the others she was silent, but suddenly she turned and said: "Oh, brother Brandol, you don't know how your words make me feel."

Her look and manner smote him to the heart. She continued, "Of course the Bible is inspired. It must be, but my mind is in such a whirl that I cannot think of the proofs."

"Don't worry your head about the matter. It is a subject of much mystery," he said, unwilling at the moment to afflict her mind with the doubts that clouded his own. "Maybe, after all, it is inspired, in some sense, though of course no one of us can tell exactly how it was composed."

"Why can we not look in the

Bible and find out?" she asked.

"That would be a unique plan sure enough," said Brandol, with a smile that he tried hard to suppress. "If I wanted to find out about the trustworthiness of a man I hardly think I would go to the man for information. And so I am not sure that the Bible writers are the best ones to testify concerning their own inspiration," he said.

"Why not?" asked Margaret, in surprise. "Do you think the Bible writers would tell an untruth?"

"I cannot speak with positiveness, Margaret, as to what the Bible writers would do."

They had reached their home, and were seated on the top step of their front porch, where they continued their conversation.

"Oh, brother Brandol, what a strange remark to make. I did not know any one thought the Bible was not a good book. You make me feel awful. I never had any idea of Moses, or Samuel, or Paul writing deceitfully—why I cannot conceive of such a thing."

"Not too fast, my fair debater," replied Brandol. "I did not say they were deceitful, nor that the Bible is a false book. The only question with your humble brother is 'May not these good men have been deceived?'"

"What! Deceived as to how they wrote their books? Do you believe that Moses and Paul and others like them did not know how they composed their own writings?"

"Were you aware," said Brandol, looking at her with a faint smile, "that good people, even in this day, become fanatics and are deceived about communications which they claim to have received from God?"

"Of course," she replied, "some foolish people might become deceived about some things, but the Bible was not written by foolish men. It would have been hard to deceive them about anything, and certainly they could not have been deceived about so simple a thing as the manner in which they wrote their books. If they did not know, brother, who does know? They ought to know more about it than anybody else."

"That sounds very pretty, Margaret, but the same kind of argument could be used concerning those absurd books in our day which the writers claimed to have written under divine inspiration—books like the Mormon Bible, or that of the Christian Scientists. I might say that we must believe what these writers say, because if they do not know about their writings, who does know?"

"Brother Brandol, surely you are not comparing the Bible with these books?"

"Yes, but there are books, like the Koran, which have made a profound impression on the race, and Mohammed declared that he got his message from God."

"I thought that Mohammed got his teachings largely from the Old Testament," replied Margaret. "I have read that the Koran is partly modeled on the Old Testament. But the question is, 'Were Moses and Paul and the others deceived

in what they tell us about their writing?' I do not say that we must believe everything that any person might say about his writing, but I do say that we ought to believe what men like Moses and Paul say. How could they have been deceived about such a simple thing? You yourself said they were good men. If so, then why can you not trust them to tell us how they composed their writings? I trust these men to tell me about Christ and Heaven, and I have built my eternal hopes on what they say. Shall I not also trust them in what they say about their writings? I cannot understand how a Christian, who believes what these men say about the gospel of Christ, can be afraid to believe what they say about the manner in which they wrote their own books. One or two of these writers possibly might have been mistaken, but brother how could this have happened to all of them? And you must remember there were nearly forty of them, and they did not live and write together, but they wrote separately, at different times and places, during fifteen hundred years."

"I can see how all of them might have imbibed the same delusion about inspiration," said Brandol. "You see the first writer, back in the beginning started out with the idea of his inspiration, and as each writer would begin his work, he would imagine that he too was inspired, and thus the belief would be handed down."

"Brother, you make the Bible writers out to be a lot of simpletons. The idea of saying that Moses imagined that God gave him what to write in the Bible, when really God had nothing to do with it; and then that men like Samuel and Solomon, Daniel and Isaiah—men like Peter, Paul and John, each imagine that he received a special message from God, like all the others, when in fact he did not! Such a pack of weak men as your theory makes them could not have written a book like the Bible, a book that has lived so long and done so much for the world."

"Don't forget one fact, my charming reasoner," he said, "and that is that I did not claim that these men were deceived about their productions. They do get a little off sometimes in their speculations about the future and also about the past. But they certainly had sense enough to know how they got their facts. Surely, not all of them could have been deceived on that point."

"So you do believe that the Bible is inspired?" asked Margaret with timorous delight.

"Not that I am aware of," he said with a smile. "I believe the writers knew how they got their books, but please remember they nowhere tell us how they wrote these books. They might have told us, and I would believe them if they had told us, but the one melancholy fact is that they maintain a remarkable silence on this subject. Why do they not say something about it?"

"They do, don't they?" asked Margaret.

"Ah, that is just the point. I thought you were letting your 'supposins' get the upper hand

(Continued on page nine)