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Robert Baker Girdlestone and 'God's own Book'*

For this study of Girdlestone we are indebted to Dr Andrew Atherstone, curate of Christ Church, Abingdon, and a former student at Wycliffe Hall, of which Girdlestone was the first Principal.

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Attitudes to the Bible underwent revolutionary change in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly influenced by the rise of biblical criticism and the widespread popularity of its revisionist conclusions. Earlier assumptions about the inspiration of scripture, its age, authorship and accuracy, were called into question. There were, however, a number of conservative scholars, from various theological perspectives, who vigorously defended the traditional approaches to the Bible. These included, for instance, J.W. Burgon, C.J. Ellicott, Edward Garbett, Stanley Leathes, J.J. Lias, H.P. Liddon, E.B. Pusey, Henry Wace and C.H. Waller. This paper seeks to examine the attitude to the Bible of one such conservative scholar, R.B. Girdlestone. In particular, it considers the way in which his approach to scripture determined his views on church partisanship, Roman Catholicism and ritualism, biblical study and the conclusions of the 'Higher Critics'.

Girdlestone on the Bible

Robert Baker Girdlestone, born in 1836, was son of the Revd. Charles Girdlestone, a prominent preacher and Bible commentator.[1] After education at Charterhouse and Christ Church, Oxford, he served curacies at Worthing under P.B. Power, the well-known tract writer, and at Wordsley in Staffordshire. In 1866 he became Head of the

* I am grateful to Martin Wellings for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1 On Charles Girdlestone (1797-1881), see *Dictionary of National Biography*; D.M. Lewis (ed.), *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860* (2 vols., Oxford, 1995); R.B. Girdlestone, *Genealogical Notes on the Girdlestone Family* (London, 1904).

Translations Department of the British and Foreign Bible Society, a position which brought him into contact with missionaries and Bible translators across the world. Between 1877 and 1889 Girdlestone laboured as the first Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, followed by fourteen years as minister of St. John's, Downshire Hill, Hampstead. He retired to Wimbledon in 1903 and died in 1923, aged 86.[2]

In addition to his main work as a pastor and preacher, administrator and educator, Girdlestone published numerous books and articles on the Bible and biblical themes. He wrote about the theology of the Old and New Testaments,[3] Bible chronology,[4] Bible philology,[5] the topography and customs of the Holy Land (after his travels there in 1860),[6] how to read the Bible[7] and the history of the English Bible.[8] He was President of the Prophecy Investigation Society (founded in 1843), and wrote on the interpretation of prophecy and apocalyptic.[9] He provided practical hints for missionaries involved in Bible translation, and for the team of scholars who worked between 1870 and 1885 at revising the Authorised Version.[10] While at the Bible Society he edited their 'Paragraph Bible', published in 1877, which aimed to make scripture more easily understood by departing from

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2 For biographical sketches of Girdlestone, see *Christian*, 22 Sept 1892, 17-8; *Times*, 9 Apr 1923, 9; *Record*, 12 Apr 1923, 226, 235.

3 Girdlestone, *Old Testament Theology and Modern Ideas* (London, 1909); *The Mission of Christ and the Title Deeds of Christianity* (London, 1914).

4 Girdlestone, *Outlines of Bible Chronology Illustrated from External Sources* (London, 1910).

5 Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament: Their Bearing on Christian Faith and Practice* (London, 1871); 'Notes Critical and Expository: Greek and Hebrew Synonyms', *Christian Advocate and Review* [*CAR*] 7ns (Feb 1873), 123-7.

6 Girdlestone, 'A Passover Supper in the Holy City', CAR 3 (Apr 1863), 155-9; 'A Visit to the Samaritans', CAR 3 (June 1863), 249-54; 'Modern Damascus', *CAR* 3 (Oct 1863), 447-50; 'Hebron and its Neighbourhood', *CAR* 4 (Mar 1864), 113-5; 'A Week Beyond Jordan', *CAR* 4 (Sept 1864), 391-4; 'Scenery in the Holy Land', *CAR* 2ns (Aug-Sept 1868), 592-8, 685-90.

7 Girdlestone, 'Four Rules for Reading the Bible', *CAR* 3 (Nov 1863), 526-7; *The Systematic Study of the Bible* (London, 1873), originally published in *CAR* 6ns (Oct 1872), 744-58; *How to Study the English Bible* (London, 1887).

8 Girdlestone, *Our English Bible: How We Got It. A Tercentenary Memorial of the Authorised Version* (London, 1911).

9 Girdlestone, *The Grammar of Prophecy: An Attempt to Discover the Method Underlying the Prophetic Scriptures* (London, 1901); *The Divine Programme: Suggestions for its Study* (London, 1915).

10 Girdlestone, 'The Revision of the English Bible', *CAR* 4ns (Apr 1870), 240-58; 'Papers on the English Bible', *CAR* 8ns (Jan-June 1874), 16-24, 108-19, 173-83, 289-94, 354-60, 430-5; *Suggestions for Translators, Editors, & Revisers of the Bible* (London, 1877); 'The Revised Version of the Old Testament', *Churchman* 12 (July-Sept 1885), 241-50, 321-35, 409-26, *Churchman* 13 (Oct 1885), 16-31; *Our English Bible*, 75-85; *The Student's Deuteronomy: A Corrected Translation with Notes and with References in Full to the Preceding and Later Books* (London, 1899).

the traditional policy of printing each verse on a new line.[11] Girdlestone took an active part in the proceedings of the Christian Evidence Society, and engaged in apologetic defences of the Christian faith at the London 'Hall of Science' in front of the atheists of Charles Bradlaugh's National Secular Society.[12] He was also a Vice-President of the Victoria Institute, founded in 1865 to explore questions of philosophy and science, and to reconcile any apparent discrepancies between them and 'the great truths revealed in Holy Scripture.'[13]

The various epithets used by Girdlestone to describe the Bible show his high regard for the book. For instance, he termed it 'the infallible record of Divine Truth',[14] 'the handiwork of the Eternal Spirit of God',[15] 'a Divine Library',[16] 'the text-book of Truth',[17] 'God-breathed throughout',[18] 'stamped with authority from heaven',[19] 'the inspired records of God's truth',[20] 'God's Word written',[21] 'the Title-deeds of the Christian Church',[22] 'an authoritative revelation from God',[23] 'true and Heaven-sent'.[24] Girdlestone emphasised the need, because the Bible was of 'absolute and unique authority',[25] for people to submit to it and correct their 'fickle and fallible thoughts and teachings by means of its unchanging utterances'.[26] His main aim at Wycliffe Hall was for students to become 'mighty in the Scriptures',[27] and he

11 Girdlestone, 'Papers on the English Bible IV', *CAR* 8ns (Apr 1874), 292-4.
12 Girdlestone, *The Metaphorical Language Applied to God in the Old Testament* (London, 1873); 'Biblical Quotations', *Westminster Bible Conference, Mundesley: Verbatim Report of Sermons and Lectures* (1911), 147. See also Girdlestone, *The Anatomy of Scepticism: An Examination into the Causes of the Progress which Scepticism is Making in England* (London, 1863), originally published in *CAR* 2 (Mar-Dec 1862), 97-101, 212-8, 261-8, 311-7, 362-9, 447-54, 504-10, 558-64.
13 Girdlestone, 'On Scientific Research and Biblical Study', *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* [*JTVI*] 29 (1897), 25-35; 'Indications of a Scheme in the Universe', *JTVI* 43 (1911), 159-66.
14 Girdlestone, 'Notes on Japan', *CAR* 7ns (Aug 1873), 600.
15 Girdlestone, 'Papers on the English Bible VI', *CAR* 8ns (June 1874), 430.
16 Girdlestone, *The Building Up of the Old Testament* (London, 1912), 108.
17 Girdlestone, *Doctor Doctorum: The Teacher and the Book. With Some Remarks on Old Testament Criticism* (London, 1892), 123.
18 Girdlestone, *Building Up*, 304.
19 Girdlestone, *Dies Irae: The Judgment of the Great Day, Viewed in the Light of Scripture and Conscience* (London, 1869), 187.
20 Girdlestone, *Suggestions*, 5.
21 Girdlestone, 'The Faith of the English Church' in *English Church Teaching on Faith, Life and Order* (London, 1897), 31.
22 Girdlestone, *Mission*, 201.
23 Girdlestone, *Anatomy*, 5.
24 Girdlestone, *Doctor Doctorum*, 132.
25 Girdlestone, *Systematic Study*, 5.

expressed his desire

> 'that the Bible may be better translated, better edited, better printed, better circulated, better read, better understood, and better acted upon hereafter than ever it has been in times past. It is God's own Book, standing unique, as His Monument of Truth, amidst a fleeting and changing age.'[28]

He termed it 'a bond of union between divided Churches, an educator of the conscience for old and young, a guide in life, a solace in the hour of death, a stimulus to enlightened labour here, and a means of preparing the children of men for immortality.'[29] Girdlestone celebrated that the gospel spread when Bibles were read across the world,[30] and praised the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews for their work in distributing Bibles amongst Jewish communities, which had 'turned the hearts of many from the Talmud to the truth.'[31] He proclaimed: 'The Bible has proved to be the one Book needful. It was so in the days of Origen in the third century. It is so now in England. It is so in China. It is so in the South Sea islands. It is so in Korea, and in all other countries. Thank God for this Book.'[32] How, then, did this high view of scripture determine Girdlestone's response to the much-debated questions of his day concerning church parties, Roman Catholicism and ritualism, and biblical criticism?

The Bible and Partisanship

Throughout the nineteenth century, 'partisan' was frequently used in ecclesiastical polemic as a term of disparagement to indicate that an individual or institution was narrow-minded or ghettoised, following human leaders instead of Christ himself and holding prejudiced opinions instead of the authentic doctrines of the church. Both 'High' and 'Low' Churchmen argued that although they held definite views they did not belong to any 'church party', while self-styled 'Broad' Churchmen claimed to stand for comprehensiveness. When commenting on Paul's warning to the Galatian church about those who teach 'another gospel', Girdlestone cautioned: 'Every Christian

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26 Girdlestone, *Synonyms*, 10.
27 Girdlestone, *Statement with regard to the Proposed Theological Institution at Oxford* (1877), Lambeth Palace Library, Tait Papers 232, fol.328.
28 Girdlestone, 'Papers on the English Bible VI', 435.
29 *Ibid.*, 435.
30 Girdlestone, 'The Church in Spain', *CAR* 3ns (Dec 1869), 916-25; 'The Bible in Rome', *CAR* 6ns (May 1872), 356-68; 'Notes on Japan', 597-602.
31 Girdlestone, 'The Jews and their Bible', *CAR* 6 (Feb 1866), 98.
32 Girdlestone, 'Goads and Nails', *Westminster Bible Conference, Mundesley* (1911), 360.

believer has to be as wide as Christ in sympathy, and as narrow as Christ in loyalty. . . .Perhaps the latter is hardest in the present age, for every one is terrified at the idea of being called narrow-minded.'[33] It was precisely this charge of partisanship which was levelled at Wycliffe Hall and its sister institution, Ridley Hall in Cambridge, when they were first founded in the late 1870s.[34] The Trustees and Council members of the Halls were required to subscribe to a Protestant interpretation of the Thirty-Nine Articles on the atonement, justification, the sacraments, priesthood and the Bible. This test was seen by some as 'an endeavour to thrust party interpretations' upon the Articles and 'to establish a narrower platform for the new Halls than that which the National Church has set forth.'[35] As a result J.B. Lightfoot and B.F. Westcott, the Lady Margaret and Regius Professors of Divinity at Cambridge, who had initially welcomed the scheme, gave their support instead to an alternative Clergy Training School at Cambridge (opened in 1881), later renamed 'Westcott House'.[36] Nevertheless Girdlestone insisted he was not 'a party man' and had 'neither the tastes nor the gifts needed for a representative man and a controversialist.'[37] Charles Girdlestone explained to Archbishop Tait of Canterbury that his son was qualified to be Principal of Wycliffe Hall 'not merely by his biblical erudition, but by tact, temper, & freedom from all partizan spirit'.[38]

The *Christian Advocate and Review*, a journal which Girdlestone helped to edit in the 1860s,[39] described itself as 'evangelical, but not narrow; orthodox, but not bitter; loyal to the National Church, but not indulging in tirades against Dissent; Protestant, but Catholic; liberal, but not latitudinarian; conservative, but open to salutary reform.'[40] Girdlestone was happy to acknowledge that evangelicalism did not exhaust the number of true believers: 'Christianity is greater than Churchmanship. To believe in Christ and to walk in His steps is the sum and substance of true religion.'[41] Scepticism, he argued, would only be banished from England if 'those who serve the Lord

33 Girdlestone, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: A Devotional Commentary* (London, 1912), 27.

34 A.C. Atherstone, 'The Founding of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford' (forthcoming); F.W.B. Bullock, *The History of Ridley Hall, Cambridge* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1941-53).

35 *Guardian*, 27 June 1877, 880-1.

36 *Guardian*, 4 July 1877, 921. See B.K. Cunningham, *The History of Westcott House* (Cambridge, 1932).

37 *Guardian*, 4 July 1877, 921.

38 C. Girdlestone to A.C. Tait, 6 Aug 1877, Lambeth Palace Library, Tait Papers 232, fol.329.

39 He was editor of the journal's books reviews 1865-67: 'To Our Readers', *CAR* 4 (Dec 1864), 529; *CAR* 6 (Dec 1866), 705-6.

40 'To Our Readers', 530.

Jesus draw more closely together; the High Churchman with the Low Churchman, – the Churchman with the Nonconformist, – one body of Nonconformists with another.'[42] Indeed, to the Church Congress of 1882 he proclaimed: 'no party in the Church possesses a monopoly of truth or virtue . . .Protestants may learn from papists, Churchmen from Dissenters, Christians even from non-Christians.'[43] Elsewhere he taught:

> 'every attempt to unite Christian communities in joint action where they can co-operate without compromising their convictions ought to be cherished, for it exhibits the unity of the Spirit. It must be right for us to unite in social and philanthropic schemes, in Bible circulation, and in the evangelisation of the masses, even though we cannot build up our churches on the same lines.'[44]

True unity between Christians, however, Girdlestone insisted, was to be found exclusively by following the Christ of scripture and living in conformity to his Word. Convinced that 'Scripture is larger than any church',[45] he maintained that the shibboleths of denominations or ecclesiastical parties should be open to challenge by biblical truth: 'no Church, no party, no person is infallible. We need frequently to set our clock by the sun, and to readjust our teaching to plain verdict of the inspired records.'[46] His well-known *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (1871) was written in the belief that Christians would find less to argue about if the Bible were more accurately translated,[47] and he suggested that those who engaged earnestly in Bible study would be prevented

> 'from being narrow and one-sided in theology. Divine truth will be constantly presenting itself to them in fresh and varied aspects. They will thus learn to be "as broad as Christ", and they will find points of contact with Christians of various denominations and schools of thought, whom they had previously suspected or despised.'[48]

Girdlestone told the Mundesley Bible Conference of 1911, an annual event on the Norfolk coast organised by G. Campbell Morgan of Westminster Chapel, that 'the more we are bound by the Bible the more we shall be bound one to another.'[49] Elsewhere he argued:

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41 Girdlestone, *The Churchman's Guide on Present-Day Questions, Specially Intended for Young People* (London, 1905), 5.
42 Girdlestone, *Anatomy*, 108.
43 Girdlestone, 'Unity of Belief in Relation to Diversities of Thought', *Report of the Church Congress, Derby, 1882*, 39.
44 Girdlestone, *The Pathway of Victory* (London, 1891), 58.
45 Girdlestone, *How to Study*, 78.
46 Girdlestone, 'Faith', 26.
47 Girdlestone, *Synonyms*, viii. Cf. *Christian Observer* (July 1872), 560.
48 Girdlestone, *Systematic Study*, 15.

> 'the more thoroughly the Old and New Testaments are studied together in a teachable spirit, the nearer will High Churchmen and Low Churchmen approach each other both in theory and practice, and whilst approaching one another they will also be conformed to the mind of Christ.'[50]

While attempting to avoid partisan polemic, Girdlestone was not afraid to challenge those both inside and outside the church who he thought were propagating unscriptural ideas, seeing it as his duty 'to expose false teaching'.[51] For instance, he pleaded for a strict observance of the Lord's Day, warning that 'Much of the outcry which is raised in favour of Sunday excursions, Sunday bands, Sunday opening of museums, and such like, is the fruit of disguised atheism.'[52] In *Dies Irae* (1869) he argued against ideas of conditional immortality or annihilationism, which became increasingly popular in the late nineteenth century through the teaching of H.H. Dobney, Edward White, G.G. Stokes and others,[53] but which Girdlestone thought against 'the plain testimony of Scripture'.[54] When Congregationalist minister R.J. Campbell published his notorious *New Theology* (1907), a monistic work which rejected traditional doctrines such as the Incarnation, the Trinity and the Atonement,[55] Girdlestone attacked him as 'facile', 'cock-sure', and 'flippant' – a preacher with a 'swelled head' who was 'anxious to be thought original'.[56] Against Campbell, he exclaimed:

> 'Christ is the Truth, and His kingdom is a kingdom of Truth. We cannot extricate ourselves from the facts of Christianity: they are foundation-stones. To preach another Gospel would be to build on the sand; it may be philosophical, scientific, or socialistic, but it cannot become to the human mind and heart what Christ is to a true believer. . . . The mind of man will always philosophize. The twentieth century cannot adopt the exact language of the first. But Christ remains the same, and the Gospels stand secure. We are still to check modern philosophic speculation by ancient historic fact.'[57]

The majority of Girdlestone's writings, however, were directed against what he saw as the attacks on biblical truth by the Church of

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49 Girdlestone, 'Biblical Quotations', 119.
50 Girdlestone, 'The Sacrificial System of the Jews IX', *Christian Observer and Advocate* [*COA*] (Dec 1875), 938.
51 Girdlestone, *Systematic Study*, 16.
52 Girdlestone, 'Thoughts on the Sabbath Question I', *CAR* 6 (May 1866), 284.
53 D.G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of the Nineteenth-century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford, 1974), 180-211.
54 Girdlestone, *Conditional Immortality Tested by Scripture* (London, 1883), 20.
55 K.W. Clements, *Lovers of Discord: Twentieth Century Theological Controversies in England* (London, 1988), 19-48.
56 Girdlestone, 'Gnosticism: Ancient and Modern', *Churchman* 21 (May 1907), 264-5, 270.
57 *Ibid.*, 267-8, 272.

Rome, the ritualists, and the Higher Critics. Although Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, was not to be a 'party' institution, it was to avoid 'all tendencies to Rationalism on the one hand, and to Romanism on the other'.[58] To these themes we now turn.

The Bible, the Church of Rome and Ritualism

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the controversy over ritualism in the Church of England reached fever pitch. The widespread adoption by the ritualist successors of the Oxford Movement of doctrines and ceremonies previously considered Roman Catholic was thought by many to be a betrayal of the Protestant heritage of the Anglican Church. Rival societies battled for ecclesiastical supremacy, with the Church Association fighting firmly against the English Church Union's attempts to reintroduce the 'six points' (eucharistic vestments, wafer bread, altar lights, the mixed chalice, incense and the eastward position) into every parish in England. Under the notorious Public Worship Regulation Act (1874), Parliament's attempt to 'put down ritualism', several clergymen were prosecuted and imprisoned, accused of being allies of the Church of Rome.[59]

Girdlestone described Roman Catholicism (and Islam) as a 'serious departure from the truth of Christ', 'a blight on vital Christianity' and 'practically antichristian'.[60] He insisted that certainty was to be found 'not indeed in the dogmas of Rome, but in the Bible',[61] and that nothing could overcome the 'spiritual thraldom' propagated by the Church of Rome 'except that grand weapon, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.'[62] He rebuked the Roman Church for attempting to silence the Bible:

> 'it cannot be denied that the most persistent and bitter attacks on Bible reading come from within the professing Church, from that community whose head claims to be the successor of St. Peter, but whose teaching is notoriously out of harmony with the plain teaching of the book. If we take

58 Girdlestone, *Statement with regard to the Proposed Theological Institution at Oxford* (1877), Lambeth Palace Library, Tait Papers 232, fols.327-8.

59 W.N. Yates, *Anglican Ritualism in Victorian Britain, 1830-1910* (Oxford, 1999); B. Palmer, *Reverend Rebels: Five Victorian Clerics and Their Fight Against Authority* (London, 1993); J. Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Attempt to Legislate for Belief* (Oxford, 1978); P.P.G. Kitchenham, *The Attempt to Control Ritualism in the Church of England through the use of Legislation and the Courts, 1869 to 1887, with special reference to the Society of the Holy Cross* (Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 1997); J.C. Whisenant, *Anti-Ritualism and the Division of the Evangelical Party in the Nineteenth-Century Church of England* (Ph.D. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1998).

60 Girdlestone, *Grammar*, 153-4.

61 Girdlestone, *Systematic Study*, 5.

62 Girdlestone, 'Church in Spain', 925.

the trouble to analyze carefully the reasons which led the heads of the Jewish Church to crucify Christ, we shall have no difficulty in recognising the motives which lead the heads of the Roman Church to reduce the reading of the New Testament to a *minimum*.'[63]

When in 1870 Bible Society colporters were enabled to distribute Bibles in Rome after King Victor Emmanuel II captured the city from under papal control, Girdlestone celebrated that 'the light of the Gospel is now shining in the Eternal City as it has not done for long centuries'.[64]

The Church of England, Girdlestone argued, had been 'cleft asunder' from the Church of Rome at the Reformation 'simply and solely by the force of Scripture'.[65] Therefore with ritualism rapidly spreading through the Anglican Church, he warned that 'if we build up the erroneous system which our Reformers, by God's grace, destroyed, our glory as a Church and as a Nation will depart from us.'[66] He was a Vice-President of the National Protestant Church Union, founded in 1893 to promote the principles of the Reformation as set forth in the Prayer Book and the Thirty-Nine Articles, and combined with H.C.G. Moule (Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge) and T.W. Drury (Principal of the Church Missionary College, Islington) to produce a book explaining these principles and their biblical basis.[67] Girdlestone spoke of his 'repugnance' for 'Romanism',[68] and wrote against auricular confession,[69] the invocation of saints,[70] and the doctrines of sacrifice or Christ's real presence at the Lord's Supper.[71] Any Anglican who taught Roman Catholic doctrines or tried 'to imitate a mass-priest', he rebuked as 'unworthy of the name of Churchman, and . . . disloyal to his profession.'[72] He pleaded:

'Are we prepared to stand to our convictions, to suffer, to be willing to die,

63 Girdlestone, 'The Bible: Its Contents, and How to Use It' in *Foundation Truths of the Gospel: Essays Contributed to* The Christian (London, 1901), 182.

64 Girdlestone, 'Bible in Rome', 368.

65 Girdlestone, *The Passover, the Communion and the Mass* (London, 1902), 6; first published as 'The Lord's Supper' in *Four Foundation Truths: A Message to Churchmen of Today* (London, 1895), 49-73.

66 Girdlestone, *Churchman's Guide*, 96.

67 *English Church Teaching*. See also Girdlestone, *Hard Words in the Prayer Book* (London, 1908); *Churchman's Guide*.

68 Girdlestone, 'Unity', 42.

69 Girdlestone, 'The Sacrificial System of the Jews III', *COA* (June 1875), 457-8.

70 Girdlestone, 'Notes Critical and Expository: Notes on Texts Connected with Prayer', *CAR* 7ns (May 1873), 378-82.

71 Girdlestone, 'Notes Critical and Expository: The Offerings Made by Our High Priest', *CAR* 7ns (Mar 1873), 212-7; 'The Sacrificial System of the Jews', *COA* (Apr-Dec 1875), 296-310, 382-92, 454-63, 539-48, 614-20, 697-707, 771-80, 865-76, 926-38; *Passover*.

> if need be, for these great truths? Do we feel that God is being dishonoured by the movement in favour of the Romish Mass amongst us? . . .By all means be patient and tolerant, but remember that patience has its limits, which are fixed by the voice of the word of truth; and if we find that people who are perhaps less educated than ourselves are becoming materialized, and their services becoming perfunctory through false teaching, then it is time for us to wake up and stand forth, and claim that the service of God shall be conducted in accordance with the mind of Christ.'[73]

Girdlestone longed for Anglicans to become 'Churchmen of the old stamp, and firm adherents to the truths emphasized at the Reformation, without becoming uncharitable or narrow-minded.'[74]

The Bible and Scholarship

Another development in the nineteenth century was the rise of biblical criticism as an academic discipline, which sought to discover the original historical context of different portions of scripture and thus their original meaning. A phalanx of scholars worked to determine the age, authorship and provenance of the Bible's books and the sources behind them. This led to numerous revisionist conclusions of theological significance, and was frequently termed 'Higher Criticism' in distinction from the Textual 'Lower' Criticism which aimed solely to uncover the original texts themselves.[75]

As will be seen, Girdlestone was prominent in opposing the theories about the Bible taught by the 'Higher Critics'. He was, however, no anti-intellectual. Rather he sought actively to promote scholarly enquiry and was determined 'to look the facts steadily in the face',[76] believing that 'sound theology ought to be based on accurate Biblical criticism'.[77] Indeed he suggested that many disputes over biblical texts had arisen 'not from *too much* study of the Bible, but from *too lit-*

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72 Girdlestone, 'Faith', 37, 43.

73 Girdlestone, *Passover*, 30-1.

74 Girdlestone, *Churchman's Guide*, 5.

75 N.M. de S. Cameron, *Biblical Higher Criticism and the Defense of Infallibilism in 19th Century Britain* (Lewiston NY, 1987); W.D. Glover, *Evangelicals Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1954); H.D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1860-1960* (London, 1963); M.A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible* (Leicester, 2nd edition, 1991), 11-90; J. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (London, 1984); M. Wellings, *Aspects of Late Nineteenth Century Anglican Evangelicalism: The Response to Ritualism, Darwinism and Theological Liberalism* (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1989), 212-304.

76 Girdlestone, *Deuterographs: Duplicate Passages in the Old Testament, Their Bearing on the Text and Compilation of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Oxford, 1894), vii.

tle'.[78] Put more aggressively, he aimed to 'carry on the war with the critic's own weapons',[79] arguing that the remedy for 'false criticism' was 'true criticism'.[80] Having been educated in the free-thinking Oxford of the 1850s, it was said Girdlestone was unlikely 'to be fettered by the mere traditions of doctrine, and the definitions of artificial theology, or to maintain a proposition simply because it has been maintained by the Church of the past.'[81] Indeed he encouraged Bible students to 'Dare to be undecided' rather than 'jump into a set of fixed theological opinions as if they were so many ready-made clothes.'[82] He was a regular contributor to the *Christian Advocate and Review*, a journal which affirmed the authority of scripture but also aimed

> 'to encourage a healthy spirit of Biblical investigation, which is the true *prevention* as well as *cure* of hostile criticism . . . to give a fair hearing to objections, and not merely to shelve them; to acknowledge that there are difficulties in belief (while there are greater in unbelief), and to interpret Scripture honestly, humbly, and reverently.'[83]

Girdlestone suggested that biblical criticism should be accepted 'gladly and fearlessly . . . firmly convinced that investigation will tend in the long run, if conducted in a fair spirit, to strengthen our position.'[84] Although aware that study sometimes threatened 'to undermine the deepest convictions of our soul',[85] he warned that it was dangerous to discourage inquiry:

> 'Doubt looks in at the window when inquiry is denied at the door. . . .Our duty, and therefore our policy, is not to silence inquiry, but to give it free admission, and to endeavour to have it carried on in a right spirit, – namely, humility towards a holy and all-powerful God, and deference to the practical convictions of holy, wise, and experienced men.'[86]

Girdlestone aimed in his study to be 'rational but reverential',[87] to 'combine sound learning with humble piety'.[88] He advised that a

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77 Girdlestone, *Synonyms*, vi.
78 Girdlestone, *Systematic Study*, 6.
79 Girdlestone, *The Foundations of the Bible: Studies in Old Testament Criticism* (London, 1891), x.
80 Girdlestone, *Hebrew Criticism: Its Bearing on the Integrity of Scripture* (London, 1903), 6.
81 *CAR* 3ns (June 1869), 455.
82 Girdlestone, *Systematic Study*, 14. Cf. Girdlestone, *Wycliffe Hall, Oxford: Its Nature and Object* (Oxford, 1878), 3.
83 'The Christian Advocate', *CAR* 3 (Dec 1863), 531-2.
84 Girdlestone, 'Professor Robertson Smith on the Pentateuch', *Churchman* 5 (Oct 1881), 50.
85 *Ibid.*, 48.
86 Girdlestone, *Anatomy*, 84-5. Cf. B. Jowett, 'On the Interpretation of Scripture' in *Essays and Reviews* (London, 1860), 373.

Christian critic should approach the Bible 'with a bias in its favour'.[89] Benjamin Jowett had notoriously argued in *Essays and Reviews* (1860) that the Bible should be read 'like any other book',[90] but Girdlestone believed it was 'professedly no ordinary book'.[91] He insisted that translators of scripture should 'tremble' at their 'sacred and stirring task',[92] and should not undertake it 'without clean hands and a pure heart and a spirit of dependence on the enlightening grace of God.'[93] The scholars chosen to revise the Authorised Version in the 1870s should be 'learned men in the fear of God, and with respect for His Word'.[94]

While acknowledging that well-researched conclusions should be made public, he warned that to publish mere speculations or private doubts 'to an unlearned and unthinking world' was 'the height of cruelty and immorality'.[95] For Christians beset by doubts, the best remedy was 'to read the Gospels and pray over them'[96] and to engage in active pastoral ministry: 'A visit to the cottage of a poor man, or to the bedside of a dying Christian, will often dissipate the lowering clouds with which speculation and criticism have overshadowed the spirit'.[97] Furthermore Girdlestone held that scepticism, such as that of Nathaniel in John's Gospel, was best overcome 'by a personal and spiritual acquaintance with Jesus.'[98] He stated: 'To understand the Bible with the head is no use unless we go on to apply it to the heart.'[99] At the Devotional Meeting of the Church Congress in 1890, Girdlestone explained that overly critical study of scripture was an enemy to the spirit of reverence: 'we should read our Scriptures intelligently while we read them devotionally, but we should read them

87 Girdlestone, *Foundations*, 193. Cf. Girdlestone, *Building Up*, vii.
88 Girdlestone, *Anatomy*, 3.
89 Girdlestone, *The Age and Trustworthiness of the Old Testament Scriptures* (London, 1889), 4.
90 Jowett, 'Interpretation', 377, 404. See P.B. Hinchliff, *Benjamin Jowett and the Christian Religion* (Oxford, 1987), 69-84; I. Ellis, *Seven Against Christ: A Study of 'Essays and Reviews'* (Leiden, Netherlands, 1980); J.L. Altholz, *Anatomy of a Controversy: The Debate over* Essays and Reviews *1860-1864* (Aldershot, 1994).
91 Girdlestone, 'Professor Robertson Smith', 51. Cf. Girdlestone, 'Four Rules', 526.
92 Girdlestone, *Suggestions*, 5-6.
93 Girdlestone, 'The Revised Version of the Old Testament I', *Churchman* 12 (July 1885), 241.
94 Girdlestone, 'The Revision of the English Bible', *CAR* 4ns (Apr 1870), 258.
95 Girdlestone, 'Professor Robertson Smith', 48.
96 Girdlestone, 'Canons of Historical Criticism: Their Application to the Four Gospels', *Churchman* 20 (Jan 1906), 26.
97 Girdlestone, 'Professor Robertson Smith', 48.
98 Girdlestone, 'Papers on the Gospels IV: The Causes of the Rejection of Jesus by the Jews', *CAR* 3 (Sept 1863), 386.
99 Girdlestone, 'Four Rules', 526.

with a childlike heart, longing that God's word may enter into our souls.'[100] Elsewhere he advised:

> 'It is not enough to be masters of textual criticism, to know what learned writers have advanced on difficult passages, to attain an ultra-refinement of taste and sagacity in translation, – our object is higher than this. It is to know the ways of God, to commune with Him in His Word, to enter into the fulness of His truth, to be enobled by a conception of His character, to be upborne by His promises, and to minister to others those lessons of Divine wisdom and love which we have thus learned.'[101]

Likewise Girdlestone maintained that his students at Wycliffe Hall needed Bible knowledge that was not provided by the usual lectures at Oxford University:

> 'It is not enough that they should be able to talk learnedly about the authenticity of Daniel, the date of Job, the deutero-Isaiah, the Elohist controversy, or the Synoptic Gospels. They must read God's Word from another point of view, if it is to be the means whereby they may convince men of sin, show them the way of pardon, and lead them in the path of righteousness.'[102]

The Bible and Higher Criticism

Girdlestone prayed that God would 'raise up a band of sound and faithful and able students who shall consecrate all their intellectual powers to the defence of His Word.'[103] He was happy to admit that the approach of conservative biblical scholars in the past had not been free from fault:

> 'We have been afraid of allowing textual corruption, late editorial work, the use of ordinary materials, and human ways of putting things. We have confused inspiration with omniscience, and have forgotten that the treasure of Sacred Truth is committed to earthen vessels. We have minimized inconsistencies and have refused to face difficulties. We have imported modern science into ancient books, and have sought to shut up those questions about age and authorship which God in His providence has left open.'[104]

Nevertheless Girdlestone arrived at traditional conclusions on most critical questions, being content to 'stand in the old paths'[105] and confident that 'many modern speculations which pass under the name of modern criticism will pass away, being proved and found want-

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100 Girdlestone, 'Reverence', *Report of the Church Congress, Hull, 1890*, 543.
101 Girdlestone, *Systematic Study*, 14.
102 Girdlestone, *Wycliffe Hall*, 1.
103 Girdlestone, *Doctor Doctorum*, 186.
104 Girdlestone, *Foundations*, 196.
105 Girdlestone, *Hebrew Criticism*, 80.

ing.'[106] His most important publications on the Old Testament were *The Foundations of the Bible* (1891), *Deuterographs* (1894), *Old Testament Theology and Modern Ideas* (1909) and *The Building Up of the Old Testament* (1912), for which he gained a reputation as 'a stoutly-armoured champion on the side of orthodoxy'[107] and an assailant upon 'the very citadel of advanced criticism'.[108]

Girdlestone rejected the Documentary Theory for the origins of the Pentateuch propounded by Julius Wellhausen, K.H. Graf and others, mocking it as an attempt 'to juggle with letters of the alphabet'.[109] Their hypothesis, he claimed, was 'pure imagination' and 'vanishes like smoke' when seriously examined: 'even the glamour of German and professorial names will not make reasonable men accept it.'[110] Instead he argued that the last four books of the Pentateuch were of Mosaic authorship,[111] and that Genesis was of even earlier composition, though Moses may have been its 'inspired Redactor'.[112] He dated the Flood to about 2429 B.C. and the creation of Adam to about 4083 B.C.,[113] and rejected Darwin's Evolutionary Theory as 'speculation' which 'betrays a brilliant imagination' but lacked proof.[114] After examining the parallels between Samuel-Kings and Chronicles, Girdlestone concluded that their authors were 'chroniclers rather than inventors', who had not 'indulged in flights of the imagination while professedly composing history. . . .To attribute to them anything which savours of fraudulent invention, whether of law, history, or prophecy, is equally unfair and uncritical.'[115] He maintained that the Bible's history narratives were confirmed by archaeological discoveries in the Middle East,[116] and rebuked those whose anti-scriptural bias led them 'to overthrow a Biblical statement if it

106 Girdlestone, *Foundations*, 194.
107 *Literary Opinion* (Mar 1891), 81.
108 *Expository Times* 6 (Feb 1895), 212.
109 Girdlestone, *Building Up*, 108. See E.W. Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford, 1998), 1-92.
110 Girdlestone, 'Period of Joshua' in R.V. French (ed.), *Lex Mosaica, or the Law of Moses and the Higher Criticism* (London, 1894), 107, 120.
111 Girdlestone, 'The Book of Deuteronomy', *CAR* 3 (Jan 1863), 1-7; 'Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers' in H. Wace (ed.), *Criticism Criticised: Addresses on Old Testament Criticism at a Conference held by the Bible League at Oxford, February, 1902* (London, 1902), 60-71; 'Professor Robertson Smith', 48-62; *Student's Deuteronomy*, xii-xvi.
112 'The Mosaic Origin of the Pentateuch', *JTVI* 50 (1918), 55; Girdlestone, 'Some Linguistic Peculiarities in Genesis', *Churchman* 12ns (Aug 1898), 561-70.
113 Girdlestone, *Outlines*, 57, 60.
114 Girdlestone, 'On Scientific Research', 28.
115 Girdlestone, *Deuterographs*, xxvii-xxviii. Cf. Girdlestone, 'Isaiah and Micah', *Churchman* 5ns (July 1891), 505-12; 'The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Jewish Histories', *Churchman* 6ns (Dec 1891), 113-20.

seems to run counter to a cuneiform inscription'.[117] In the few instances where archaeologists had discovered apparent discrepancies, the Bible's version of events should be given precedence: 'Are we always to whittle down our Bible to make it consistent with a clay tablet? . . .Were the Assyrian scribes and copyists infallible?'[118] Girdlestone also defended the literary integrity of Isaiah, Daniel and Zechariah.[119] When it came to the New Testament he upheld the historical accuracy of the Gospels,[120] and dismissed the possibility of the existence of 'Q' (a common source for Matthew and Luke) as posited by Adolf Harnack, B.H. Streeter and others.[121]

While encouraging biblical research, Girdlestone warned that the speculations of the Higher Critics had been 'pressed into the service of unbelief',[122] and that 'under the guise of historical criticism, there lurks the cloven foot of unbelief in God.'[123] The 'torrent of destructive criticism' launched against the Old Testament during the nineteenth century, he maintained, was not chiefly due to new linguistic or archaeological discoveries, but rather to an 'unwillingness to let God act'.[124] He exclaimed:

> 'A criticism which debars God from raising the dead, from answering prayer, from enabling the prophets to predict, and from intervening in the affairs of nations and individuals, has no right to the title of Higher Criticism. It is simply sailing under false colours'.[125]

He argued for the bodily resurrection of Christ[126] and for the historicity of Bible miracles:[127] 'Christianity without the supernatural would be no Christianity. You cannot cut out the supernatural from

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116 Girdlestone, 'The Higher Criticism and the Monuments', *Churchman* 8ns (Aug 1894), 564-9; 'A Bird's-Eye View of Discoveries Illustrating and Confirming the Old Testament' in *Can We Trust the Bible? Chapters on Biblical Criticism* (London, 1908), 99-126. See B.Z. MacHaffie, '"Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies": Archaeology and the Popularization of Old Testament Criticism in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Church History* 50 (Sept 1981), 316-28.

117 Girdlestone, *Doctor Doctorum*, 177.

118 Girdlestone, 'Higher Criticism', 569.

119 Girdlestone, 'How Many Isaiahs Are There?', *Churchman* 2ns (July 1888), 514-25; Girdlestone, *Age and Trustworthiness*, 61.

120 Girdlestone, 'Canons', 20-31; *The New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (London, 1909).

121 Girdlestone, 'Biblical Quotations', 180.

122 Girdlestone, *Hebrew Criticism*, 31.

123 Girdlestone, *Anatomy*, 27.

124 Girdlestone, *Foundations*, iv-v.

125 Girdlestone, *Hebrew Criticism*, 46.

126 Girdlestone, 'Papers on the Gospels II: The Resurrection of the Saviour', *CAR* 3 (May 1863), 198-208; 'The Resurrection of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ', *JTVI* 37 (1905), 222-7.

the New Testament with a pair of scissors.'[128]

Higher Critics were called by Girdlestone 'the disintegrators',[129] and he renamed their 'critical hypothesis' as 'the destructive and uncritical hypothesis'.[130] Attempts to destroy confidence in the integrity of Bible books were 'only preliminary to the shattering of our belief in the history which they contain, in the prophecies which they hand down, and in the Divine interventions which they record.'[131] Elsewhere he wrote:

> 'The effect of modern criticism on the average mind is to destroy the sacred authority of the Old Testament, to reduce its history to doubtful tradition, to bring down its prophecies to the level of forecasts, and to lower the authority of Christ's utterances. . . .Mission-work at home and abroad would be paralysed if the new criticism were allowed to have free course amongst us. The first of all questions the inquiring soul in any land asks about a Bible statement is this: "Is it true?" If we doubt, hesitate, trim in the matter – if our own hearts are doubtful – our words are vain.'[132]

It was no comfort to suggest that the Bible record, even if inaccurate, was written by holy and pious men:

> 'An honest man cannot sustain his soul on pious frauds. When he strikes out of his New Testament all references to the pious frauds of the Old, and all the theology which hangs upon them, he will find but little left with which to battle against evil and to face the day of death and that which is beyond.'[133]

Likewise Girdlestone stated that to be content simply with the knowledge that God was on our side, even if the Bible was of little historical value, was 'worse than folly . . . if the narrative of the facts is untrustworthy, theology becomes mythology, and Christian Truth has lost that backbone of history which has hitherto been the secret of its vigour.'[134]

The Bible and Christ's Verdict

Like other conservative scholars of his generation, Girdlestone often used the '*Christus Comprobator*' argument, that the traditional conclusions concerning the age and authorship of the Old Testament were

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127 Girdlestone, 'The Miracles of the Saviour', *CAR* 3 (Mar 1863), 101-8; 'The Scriptural Idea of Miracles', *JTVI* 39 (1907), 61-75.
128 Girdlestone, 'Canons', 30-1.
129 Girdlestone, 'Period of Joshua', 107.
130 Girdlestone, *Student's Deuteronomy*, xiii.
131 Girdlestone, *Hebrew Criticism*, 79.
132 Girdlestone, *Doctor Doctorum*, 184-5.
133 Girdlestone, *Foundations*, x.
134 Girdlestone, 'Professor Robertson Smith', 50.

true because these were the views of Christ himself.[135] He observed that Christ did not appeal to the Old Testament 'simply as the best the Jews knew, or as a pious compound based on old myths, containing the gold of good advice amidst the dross of human tradition; but rather as monumental books authorised by God Himself'.[136] It was wrong to study the Old Testament without reference to Christ's proclamations: 'Criticism without Christ is shifting sand. . . .We must view the Old Testament from His point of view rather than from the German critical point of view. Germans may err, and have erred. Christ has not erred, and cannot err.'[137] Elsewhere Girdlestone proclaimed:

> 'Whether He is expounding the Law or preaching the Gospel, whether He is appealing to Moses or to the Prophets, whether He is referring to past facts in Jewish history, or to the future destiny of the good and evil, – all has the seal of infallibility stamped upon it by the omniscient Son of God. There is no room for error, for mis-statement, for national prejudice: His Word is *truth*.'[138]

These assumptions were challenged by the publication in 1889 of *Lux Mundi*, an attempt by a group of young Anglo-Catholics to reconsider their theology in relation to modern scientific and historical discoveries. Most controversial was the essay by the book's editor, Charles Gore (Principal of Pusey House, Oxford), in which he proposed a form of kenoticism whereby Christ emptied himself of his divine omniscience at the Incarnation, a theme developed further in Gore's 1891 Bampton Lectures.[139] Girdlestone responded with a series of articles in the *Record* newspaper, published together as *Doctor Doctorum: The Teacher and the Book* (1892), in which he argued that although Christ's glory was temporarily veiled, his knowledge was never limited. Nor did Jesus accommodate himself to Jewish beliefs, although he may have used contemporary idioms and methods of arguing. Girdlestone insisted that Christ was 'an infallible Teacher',[140] and regularly affirmed that the Bible is true because God is true, as illustrated by the following examples:

> 'Do not lightly give up any single book; do not have anything to do with

135 See Cameron, *Biblical Higher Criticism*, 157-78; McDonald, *Theories*, 137-60.
136 Girdlestone, *Doctor Doctorum*, 128.
137 *Ibid.*, 184.
138 Girdlestone, 'Was Our Saviour's Knowledge Limited When He Was Upon Earth?', *CAR* 3ns (Jan 1869), 29.
139 C. Gore, 'The Holy Spirit and Inspiration' in Gore (ed.), *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (London, 1889), 313-62. See J.A. Carpenter, *Gore: A Study in Liberal Catholic Thought* (London, 1960), 146-82.
140 Girdlestone, *Doctor Doctorum*, 100-1.

those who would undermine the Scriptures. They are true; they will stand the test of true and fair criticism. Commentators may make mistakes as to their interpretation, and critics may make mistakes as to their age and authorship; but God makes no mistakes; and the books belong to Him.'[141]

'The Old Testament was Christ's Bible. It testified to Him, and He to it. Many a time foes have risen up against it and sought to destroy it, but it stands secure, for it is founded on the Rock of Truth.'[142]

'God is true, His Word is true, Jesus is true.'[143]

'If any books bear the mark of fidelity, these do. If any are on the side of truth and righteousness, of God and Spirit, these are. They have always had enemies, but no weapon fashioned against them has prospered.'[144]

'These venerable books have been dragged before the court of modern criticism, but they need not be ashamed; they can stand the full glare of linguistic and literary daylight. They share the fate of the Christian confessors of old time; and they share their triumph. They testify to Christ, and Christ testifies to them.'[145]

'The Book is a Rock, because God is a Rock. The Book has its enemies, some of whom pose as its friends. But it will never perish, neither can any one pluck it out of our hands, for it is the Father's Book'.[146]

Such an elevated understanding of the Bible determined Girdlestone's reverent approach, as a Christian, a preacher and a scholar, to 'God's own Book'. It was because of this belief in the unique origin, complete trustworthiness and supreme importance of the scriptures that he spent his life in teaching and studying them and encouraged others to do so, and promoted their translation and worldwide distribution. It was this belief that led him to insist that the Bible should dictate right attitudes to church partisanship, Roman Catholicism and ritualism, and motivated him to write extensively against the conclusions of the biblical critics. In this Girdlestone was typical of many conservative biblical scholars of his generation. By the time of his death in 1923, however, these traditional attitudes had been widely abandoned across Britain, in University common rooms and working men's clubs as well as in many cathedral closes and parishes churches. There was a general shift towards a popular semi-critical understanding of the Bible, if not the wholesale 'acceptance

141 Girdlestone, 'The Genuineness and Authenticity of the Sacred Books' in *Six Sermons on the Bible, Addressed Specially to the People* (London, 1892), 98.
142 Girdlestone, 'A Bird's-Eye View', 126.
143 Girdlestone, 'Goads and Nails', 354.
144 Girdlestone, *Foundations*, 198.
145 Girdlestone, *Age and Trustworthiness*, 62.
146 Girdlestone, *Hebrew Criticism*, 80.

of criticism' which is often claimed. Articulate opposition to the conclusions of the Higher Critics had become 'the special preserve of the determinedly and committedly theological conservative',[147] and those who continued with Girdlestone's approach to scripture during the inter-war years formed a rapidly dwindling minority.

Eighty years after Girdlestone's death, he still has valuable lessons to teach today's church. Although some of his specific conclusions might be queried, his general approach to the Bible has much to commend it. A convinced evangelical, glad to affirm the 'infallibility' of scripture, he was yet no obscurantist. He actively engaged in debate concerning modern ideas, worked hard at detailed research, and contributed some serious and respected academic volumes. Far from stopping his ears to radical statements about the age and authorship of the Bible, he faced them head-on. Moreover, Girdlestone was determined to submit all his views to the verdict of scripture, even when this was a painful process or brought him opprobrium, rather than blindly following the cherished teaching of some theological party. He also managed to combine the dual roles of theorist and practitioner. Instead of sitting in a secluded ivory tower, he was actively involved in pastoral work, preaching, evangelism and the training of ministers at Wycliffe Hall. His Bible scholarship was not an end it itself, but was intended to inform and enliven his Christian ministry and build up the wider church. Scripture was not something he simply studied at a distance, but it had a life-changing impact upon him. Believing the Bible to be 'God's own Book', he longed for his own life and the lives of others to be brought more and more under its sway. The contemporary church would do well to learn from Girdlestone's example.

Abstract

Robert Baker Girdlestone (1836-1923), first Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, was a typical conservative biblical scholar of his generation. This paper examines his attitude to the Bible, which he called 'God's own Book'. It considers the ways in which his approach to scripture determined his views on major issues of the day, in particular church partisanship, Roman Catholicism and ritualism, biblical study and 'Higher Criticism'. Girdlestone is shown to have encouraged serious scholarship, aiming to 'combine sound learning with humble piety', although his researches and his belief that Christ's

147 G. Parsons, 'Biblical Criticism in Victorian Britain: From Controversy to Acceptance?' in Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain* (vol.2): *Controversies* (Manchester, 1988), 255.

statements concerning the Old Testament were infallible, led him to traditional conclusions about the age, authorship and accuracy of scripture.