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ministers may easily, without knowing it, teach contrary to the mind of their Church and the mind of God both in reference to absolution and other things; and, therefore, the Church's duty to the minister, as well as the minister's duty to the Church, requires for the sanity and effectiveness of his ministry a profound and spiritual knowledge of the Scriptures. Scriptural ministers are as needful to the exercise of the authority of Scriptural Churches as the Word of God is necessary to the validity of that authority. In reference to absolution, therefore, the matter stands thus: Whether the authority for the absolution be deemed the individual priest or the collective Church, it is indispensable in both cases alike that the authority behind both should be God Himself. And as it is only by the searching of the Scriptures that we can know whether an absolution has God behind it or not, the searching of the Scriptures is a paramount obligation for both absolvers and absolved.

*(To be continued.)*



## **Higher Criticism in its Relation to Orthodox Belief.**

BY THE REV. ALEXANDER HENDERSON,

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THE questions which have been brought forward in recent years in connection with the scientific treatment of religious problems are such as frequently occasion perplexity to many who are most earnest in their desire to "square" accurate knowledge with loyalty to the fundamentals of the faith, the reason of such perplexity no doubt being that critical methods are very commonly believed to stand for vagueness and indefiniteness in the statement of Christian truth. And yet there is, perhaps, no more interesting and hopeful phase of present-day thought than that which can be traced to an intelligent appreciation of the light which has been thrown on the Scriptures of both Testaments by modern historical research—namely, the recognition of the fact that new discoveries in

relation to Biblical literature are no longer to be regarded as necessarily inconsistent with a belief and practice at once Christian and orthodox. Formerly, when difficulties arose in regard to such questions as that of Inspiration, there often appeared to be no alternative but a total acceptance or a total rejection of the old idea of revelation. On the one hand, there was a superstitious reverence for the letter of Scripture, and an unquestioning adherence to traditional views, simply because they were traditional; on the other, a practical atheism, or, at best, deism, which was mainly the consequence of what were regarded as hopeless inconsistencies and contradictions in the Sacred Records. The entire question of a revelation from God to man was made to depend on the manner in which the Bible appeared to stand the test of historical accuracy and literary consistency.<sup>1</sup>

Nowadays the attitude of men's minds is changed. The authenticity of much that was so long regarded as the principal, if not the only, medium of revelation has been questioned, and the Scriptures shown to be a collection of works, often composite in their origin, and frequently lacking in unity of purpose. The main results of historical criticism are generally accepted as practically ascertained fact; and although the tendency of much of it has been necessarily of a destructive character, yet, instead of being characterized by a weakening of religious belief, as might at first sight have been expected, the period which has been marked by an apparent sapping of old foundations has, in reality, produced a theism of a more robust quality than has been evident since the Reformation. It may, indeed, be said that the hostility and indifference to revealed truth, which were so common a feature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, have all but passed away, and have given place to a general desire to understand the bases of religious belief, so that now, after continual shiftings from one extreme to the other, according as they have been influenced by new thoughts and new

<sup>1</sup> See an article on "The Old Testament before Modern Criticism," by Canon Foakes-Jackson, in the *Interpreter* for October, 1908.

discoveries, men are beginning to settle down to a steadier outlook, to be able to rise above the prejudices and influences of early education and associations, to take a moderate view of things, and to give them their true value. What was formerly the privilege of the learned is now, in great degree, shared by the many, and there are few persons of ordinary intelligence and education who have not read or heard something of the questions which have occupied the minds of those who, by long and patient study, are peculiarly fitted to analyze and gauge the varied intellectual phenomena of different ages and races, the combinations of thought which they have presented, and the effects they have wrought one on another. It is only by continued application and painstaking research that the mutual influence of Semite, Greek, and Latin can be discovered and made intelligible to ordinary minds; but no one can have read, even cursorily, certain well-known works of the last few decades without appreciating their value, and being impressed by the immensity of the task undertaken, as well as by the keen critical insight and marvellous impartiality of judgment which, for the most part, have been displayed.

It would seem scarcely necessary to observe how futile it is to pretend that the questions raised by what is known as the Higher Criticism are such as can be lightly brushed aside or conveniently shelved. Criticism is a fact of which account must be taken, and however opposed to preconceived devout sentiment some of its methods in the past may have appeared, nothing can be gained, while much may be lost, by ignoring what is on all hands admitted to be a legitimate subject of inquiry; and whatever the ultimate results may prove to be, so long as they have been arrived at by fair and scientific means, they will have to be accepted as just deductions of historical and literary investigation. Surely now it is time when it should be no longer true for any to say that "There is a general consensus among conservative theologians that when Christian history and doctrine are concerned, the ordinary canons of evidence lose their applicability; that the eyes must be accus-

tomed to a non-natural light, and look at the literature and the history of the early Church as if it were something that stood quite by itself, and out of relation to all else going on in the world.”<sup>1</sup> Never has it been more true that if the Bible is to retain its influence over the minds of intelligent men, no attempt must be made to fence it off from candid examination, for it must be shown to be—what in fact it is—not a book which puzzles men’s minds by involving them in endless difficulties when considered in relation to physical science and historic truth, but the record of a revelation given, not wholesale and ready-made, but “in multifarious parts and divers modes,” according as men have been able to keep pace with the gradually but ever-unfolding truth.

It has been sometimes asserted that the Bible ought to be treated, criticized, and examined “as any other book”; but even on the most “advanced” hypothesis it must be admitted that this is hardly possible, since it stands apart from all other books, and so cannot receive precisely the same treatment; and not only this, but as the various constituents of the Bible differ widely in character and purpose, they cannot be viewed from precisely the same standpoint—as, *e.g.*, prophecy differs from history—so, obviously, the high flights of the prophetic imagination cannot be submitted to the cold analysis of the historian. And particularly must a distinction of treatment be observed in regard to the New Testament, for although as *literature* it may be subject to ordinary literary tests, as *doctrine and ethics* it is on a different plane from any other collection of writings in the world; and inasmuch as it claims to be the revelation of a Divine Personality, it is impossible to place it on the same level as writings and visions which make no higher claim than to an interior light thrown on the human understanding.

It is further necessary to bear in mind that inspiration varies in degree as well as in scope and method, and that the demand for a special consideration of the New Testament is based on

<sup>1</sup> Professor Percy Gardner, “A Historic View of the New Testament,” Lecture I., p. 1.

the fact of its belonging to a superior order of revelation to that of any writing found in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> To the rationalist critic all the books of both Testaments stand on a common level as purely human documents ; consequently, judging by the same criteria, it will be an easy matter for him to detect in them inaccuracies and inconsistencies which appear to destroy in great part their historical, if not their ethical, value ; but, as a recent writer has well said : " To seek behind the inaccuracies of a record its essential spirit and truth there is requisite, not only a dissecting and accurate mind, but a sympathetic and perceptive temper ; and a presentation which is not evidently strong may be inherently convincing." <sup>2</sup> So, no matter how high the standard of rationalist criticism may be intellectually, it will most certainly fail to do justice to a subject which it cannot approach in a sympathetic spirit, simply for the reason that it belongs to a sphere beyond the range of its experience. However true it may be that it is impossible to exclude subjective prepossessions, it would seem that the Christian records are more likely to receive their due at the hands of critics who, by their experience and appreciation of the Christian spirit, hold a key to their interpretation, than of those whose attitude towards them is necessarily more or less one of hostility.

But such prepossessions are not found in the Christian critic alone, for they are even more apparent in the non-Christian, inasmuch as the latter is evidently predisposed to the rejection of the miraculous element wherever it exists ; and it should be remembered that the question of miracles being one which properly belongs to philosophy, it is no part of the province of literary criticism to determine it, and, consequently, that those who, in the name of Higher Criticism, set themselves to discredit the miraculous, are really guilty of confusion of thought in that they do not distinguish between two different sciences.

<sup>1</sup> This is no modern view, but one which was held by many of the Fathers—*e.g.*, St. Augustine : " Sicut veteri Testamento si esse ex Deo bono et summo negetur, ita et novo fit injuria si veteri æquetur " (" De Gestis Pelag.," V., quoted by Bishop Gore in " Lux Mundi," Preface, p. xxi).

<sup>2</sup> " The Venture of Rational Faith," by Margaret Benson.

While, however, it seems reasonable to ask for some special line of treatment in the criticism of the New Testament, such a demand is not made with a view to shirking the conclusions which are the legitimate result of impartial investigation. On the contrary, those who have the interests of Christianity most deeply at heart will desire that the exact truth in regard to the documents should be made known; for Christianity is not to be served by the suppression of facts, but rather by courting investigation, so that the records may appear in their true light, and disencumbered of any "umbra" of unreality which the devotional sentiment of ages may have cast over them.

Of course, it must be expected that an admission of the claims of modern criticism will entail a certain revision of traditional views, and those who are willing to pursue the subject to its logical consequences must be prepared for difficulties and to unlearn much that they have hitherto regarded as essential to the idea of inspiration. And it is, perhaps, a certain uneasiness as to final results that has induced men of conservative temper to regard with suspicion a science which they fear may ultimately lead them beyond the limits of concession which, in their own minds, they have set for themselves. That there are grounds for some such fears it would be misleading to deny, for the tendency of modern critical research has been, in a certain sense, destructive. But then, destruction is frequently necessary as a basis of reconstruction, and where old foundations are found to be unstable it is well that they should be destroyed and make room for new ones, rather than that we should dwell in false security. Viewed in their true light, however, the results of Higher Criticism will be found to be in the highest degree constructive.

When one recalls the paltry and even childish expedients which were very commonly resorted to a generation or two ago in the endeavour to bolster up the then current views of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, the wonder is, not that men of critical and logical mind were alienated from the Church, but that Christianity itself should have survived the treatment

it received at the hands of many of its most zealous apologists. When, some fifty years ago, we reflect that it was deemed essential to the maintenance of Christian truth to declare the literal, verbal infallibility of the Bible,<sup>1</sup> and practically to renounce all claim fully to understand it, all hope to solve its difficulties, it is with a sense of relief that one thinks of the position which has been won for us in these days, when it is possible, while holding fast to the great dogmas of the Faith, to welcome every real advance in critical science, to accept all that it can teach us in regard to the authenticity of the Sacred Books, and to view with equanimity controversies in which the authorship even of a Gospel is involved.

It is to this fact perhaps as much as to any other that the revival of religious belief is to be attributed. Men, instead of feeling themselves fettered by narrow and irrational views on the question of inspiration, are now able to accept the great truth of a revelation without being committed to the contradictions and inconsistencies which former views carried with them. The very history of the doctrine of inspiration, and the changes it has from time to time undergone, prove how theologians have striven to rid themselves of the intellectual difficulties which the old theories involved; and it is some comfort to remember that at no time has any definite statement as to the precise method and form, or even as to the nature and extent of inspiration, been made by the authority of the Church Universal. One reasonable conclusion from this significant fact may be deduced—namely, that on questions such as the authenticity and historical value of particular portions of Holy Scripture—which, after all, appertain to scholarship rather than to faith—a certain liberty of opinion is permissible, provided the general position is maintained that the Scriptures are, in a

<sup>1</sup> "The Bible is none other than the voice of Him that sitteth upon the throne. Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more, some part of it less, but all alike the utterance of Him who sitteth upon the throne, faultless, unerring, supreme" (Dean Burgon, "Inspiration and Interpretation," p. 89. Lectures delivered at Oxford, 1861).

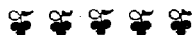


special sense, the medium of revelation, and are held to be Divinely inspired.

But here a difficulty arises, and one which there is no desire to underestimate. No definite theory of inspiration having been promulgated by the Church, what will be the position if, in the course of critical investigation, certain portions of the New Testament, which afford the only canonical evidence of some of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, should be discovered to be interpolations, or in other respects to form no part of the original writings? That there are many portions of Scripture which actually have been, and many that may yet be, proved to be of later origin than the originals, and are consequently of doubtful authenticity, is matter of common knowledge.<sup>1</sup> But the idea of "canonicity" does not imply that all of the books of the Bible are necessarily the work of the men whose names they bear, or that questions of authorship and date affect their authority as portions of the Written Word. What *is* implied is that those writings have been received by the Church as forming essential parts of the body of truth which it was God's will should be transmitted to the world. It cannot be too strongly insisted that Holy Scripture is not in itself the revelation of God, but rather that it is the record of spiritual experience. It was given originally, not as objective data on which Christian truth is founded, but as subjective evidence in support of it. The revelation itself was given in the person of Jesus Christ, and it was He Himself who gave it to the Church, which He founded and ordained to be His witness. The Scriptures of the Old Testament had prepared the way for that revelation, those of the New being the record of the truths revealed, but which were already known to the Church before they were committed to writing. The New Testament Scriptures are, therefore, the result of the effect

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, those portions almost universally admitted to be "deuterocanonical," such as the last twelve verses of St. Mark, the stories of the troubling of the water (St. John v. 4); of the woman taken in adultery (St. John viii. 1, 11); of the Angel of the Agony (St. Luke xxii. 43, 44); the statement regarding the three heavenly witnesses (1 John v. 7); the second epistle of St. Peter; the Apocalypse, etc.

produced in men's minds by the revelation, and their evidential value lies in this, that they are the expression of the mind of the Church, and of the truths she had learned, not from books, but from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who is Himself her Source of Light and Life, at whose promptings and by whose inspiration the books themselves were written. It is because men have so long been accustomed to regard Christian faith as the outcome of the New Testament, and not the New Testament as the evidence of Christian faith already existing, that they tremble for the Truth when doubts are cast on the literary authenticity of passages of grave significance in their relation to the dogmatic statements of the Creeds. When literary criticism has had its say—even to the uttermost—it will still be found that the fundamentals of the Catholic faith are left untouched, and that, though the old notions of Biblical “infallibility” will have been discarded, the Bible itself will remain as an imperishable monument of the highest grade of human experience—the record of how God, working in and with the spirit of man, has led him from crude beginnings up to the loftiest conceptions of the Divine Being and of his relation thereto, until the fulness of the time was come when revelation in its final and most complete form became possible through the personal manifestation of the Eternal Word.



## The Bible and the Printer.

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THE printing of a Bible is a triumph of the printer's art. Probably no other book is such a strain upon the compositor for painstaking accuracy. There are certain rules with regard to the arrangement of the letters and the stops which must be kept with the most rigid obedience, otherwise the book