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A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php

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874TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

HELD AT 12, QUEEN ANNE'S GATE, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1,
ON THE 2ND JUNE, 1947.

AIR COMMODORE P. J. WISEMAN, C.B.E., IN THE CHAIR.

The following elections have been made : Rev. J. W. Wenham, M.A., B.D., (on transfer from Member), Life Fellow ; Rev. Roderick J. Wilson, M.A., Member ; C. L. L. Binder, Esq., B.A., Member.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

THE BIBLE AND CRITICISM.

By SIR FREDERIC G. KENYON, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.Litt.,
LL.D., F.B.A.

IN addressing you for the first time as your President at the Annual General Meeting of the Institute, I feel that my first obligation is to refer to the loss that we have suffered in the death of my predecessor, Sir Charles Marston. No one could have been more devoted than he to the principle set out as the third of the objects of the Institute, as stated in its prospectus : " In humble faith in one Eternal God, Who created all things good, to combat the unbelief now prevalent by directing attention to the evidences of the Divine care for man that are supplied by Science, History and Religion ". In him this took the form especially of an ardent championship of the authority of the Bible. He was always on the look-out for evidence which seemed to him to confirm the accuracy of the Bible record ; and he devoted much of his ample fortune to the search for such evidence by archaeological investigations, and the publication of their results both in scientific and in popular form. He took a general interest in archaeology, as was shown in his Presidency of the Shropshire Archaeological Society in the neighbourhood of his home at Wolverhampton ; but Biblical Archaeology held the first place in his heart and mind, and in " Who's Who " he described himself, not only as " Manufacturer, Politician, and Traveller ", but as " Biblical Archaeologist ", and the list of his publications shows where

his main interests lay. Besides a book on "The Christian Faith and Industry" (a subject of very vital importance to-day) they include "The New Knowledge about the Old Testament" (1933); "New Bible Evidence" (1934); "The Bible is True" (1934); and "The Bible Comes Alive" (1937). The last-named was concerned with the results of the excavations at Lachish, which were financed jointly by Sir Henry Wellcome (and after his death by his Trustees), Sir Robert Mond and Sir Charles; and it is with these excavations and with those at Jericho, likewise promoted by him, that his name will be especially connected. He supported these researches liberally: he left the scholars who conducted them free in the planning of the works and the interpretation of their results; he accepted their results, and then whole-heartedly utilised them in impressing on the general public their value as confirming the accuracy of the Bible records. He claimed no expert knowledge as a scholar for himself; but he grasped eagerly at such results of scholarly research as seemed to him to strengthen the cause which he had at heart.

It is in the attitude taken towards the results of investigation, whether archaeological or literary, that differences are apt to show themselves among students of the Bible. Some seem always anxious to accept views which discredit the Bible as a correct record of events, or which throw doubts on the traditional authorship, date, and authenticity of the books of which it is composed. To them the non-traditional view is always to be preferred. Others take an exactly opposite standpoint, upholding both the authenticity and the accuracy of the Bible in the most rigid sense and treating all critics as enemies who must be resisted on all points. Others again try to find a *modus vivendi* between the results of research and criticism on the one hand and the Bible records as they have come down to us on the other. There was no doubt as to where Sir Charles stood. He was definitely on what would in present-day terminology be called the right wing of Biblical scholarship. He accepted without qualification, and indeed sometimes (in my opinion, over-emphasised, whatever seemed to "prove the Bible") and he tended to ignore or under-estimate evidence on which sceptical critics relied for their adverse views. As between what are called "fundamentalists" and those who are often inaccurately described as "higher critics" (a term which properly applies to all who occupy themselves with the interpretation, as opposed to the text, of the Bible, but often

restricted to the most "advanced" or left-wing of such scholars), there is no doubt that Sir Charles was nearer to the fundamentalist wing, because he held that the left-wing critics weakened the authority of the Bible, and consequently lessened its influence on the mind of the present generation. In this attitude I think he represented the views of many members of the Institute, and perhaps of the Institute as a whole.

Now I think I owe it to the members of the Institute to make clear my own position in this respect, just because I approach the question from a somewhat different angle from that of my predecessor. I was, indeed, very reluctant to accept appointment to the office to which you have elected me, and it was only under repeated pressure from your Council that I eventually consented. It is not that I differ in the very least from the fundamental proposition of Sir Charles and those who are like-minded with him, namely the authenticity, trustworthiness, and vital value of the Bible. These I affirm most strongly; I deplore anything that weakens the authority of the Bible; I regret the diminution, only too evident, in the practice of Bible reading; and I recognise that hostile left-wing criticism has largely been the cause of this. But I differ somewhat as to the way in which such criticism should be met; and in order that there shall be no misunderstanding I think it right to take this opportunity of stating my views as to Biblical criticism in general. If they are not acceptable to you, it would be much better that I should not be your President.

The difference is not one of principle, but of emphasis and of manner; and it is due to a mode of interpretation of the Bible which, as I hope to show, has not always been followed by the Church, and which is in no way vital to Christian belief. In the first place I would recall the first object of this Institute, as formulated at its first Annual General Meeting in 1867 and printed in our *Journal of Transactions* to-day. It runs as follows:

"To investigate fully and impartially the most important questions of Philosophy and Science, but more especially those that bear upon the great truths revealed in Holy Scripture: with the view of reconciling any apparent discrepancies between Christianity and Science".

Science, I take it, in this declaration of purpose, includes historical science and literary science, as well as natural science:

and the object of the Institute is thus affirmed to be to show that the results of human intellectual inquiry are not incompatible with the divine revelation contained in the Bible and incorporated in the Christian faith. Now, if two parties are to be reconciled, the first stage is to see how far each can go towards meeting the views of the other without sacrificing its own principles, and whether there are indeed any irreconcilable differences between them. It is not wise to begin by treating the other side as an enemy bent upon one's destruction, or to disallow the validity of its claim to be listened to. In the present case, the first point to be settled is whether the human intellect is to be allowed free play in its examination of the Bible records, as it is in the investigation of natural science or of other ancient records. It is obviously a more hopeful beginning if one does not feel obliged to deny the validity of the other side's basis of operations.

Now, it cannot be denied that there was in the nineteenth century on the one hand a school which argued somewhat in this manner: The Bible is the Word of God; the Word of God cannot be otherwise than wholly true; therefore every statement in the Bible must be accepted as literally, wholly, and permanently true; and if the human intellect, following out its own inquiries, arrives at any different results, those results are unacceptable. Over against these assertions were set the results arrived at by natural science and historical and literary criticism, which only became active in this field in the course of the same century. There can be no doubt that these results were incompatible with the view of the Bible as above set out, and that the natural tendency of the human intellect to accept its own conclusions shook the credit of the absolutist interpretation of the Bible. The question therefore at once arises, Is the absolutist interpretation the only legitimate and Christian interpretation admissible, and must the conclusions of natural science and historical and literary criticism be disallowed as invalid?

The weak point in what I have called the absolutist interpretation is its claim to know exactly in what form God would choose to communicate His will to mankind. He might, no doubt, have revealed it in a form which would be open to no doubt, and which would be applicable to all states and all ages of mankind. To the human mind it is difficult to understand how this would be possible; how the primitive Hebrew or the

aborigines of Australia could have been addressed in the terms of the cosmogony of Copernicus or Newton or Einstein, or the moral teaching of Amos and Isaiah, of St. Paul and St. John : but it is not for us to say that it could not have been so. But it is clear, on the slightest consideration, that in fact He did not choose to do so ; and it is easy to see why we should not expect it. It is clear that the Bible records have not reached us without some corruption in passing through human hands. There are in the first place variations, and not unimportant variations in the form in which they have reached different peoples. The Jew has them in the Massoretic Old Testament ; the Greek Church in the Septuagint Old Testament, and a New Testament which is often not in accordance with the oldest MSS ; the Roman Church in the Vulgate ; the Abyssinian in the Ethiopic version ; we ourselves both in our Authorised and in our Revised Version ; and all of these are dependent upon hundreds of manuscripts, no two of which have an absolutely identical text. Which of these is the authoritative form of the Divine revelation ? Next, in the substance of the revelation we see manifest evidence of variation, of progress, of adaptation to different stages of development. The revelation of Jehovah to Abraham, as the God of himself and his descendants, is not the same as the revelation of Him to the great prophets as the God of all peoples, claiming the allegiance of those who did not yet know Him, nor as the revelation of Him through Jesus Christ as the Redeemer and Saviour of the world, when the Law was supplemented by the Gospel.

The conclusion which we are entitled to draw from these considerations is that we are expected to use our human faculties in the interpretation of the record that has come down to us, and that we may expect to find human frailties in the transmission of the record, and a history of development in the revelation itself. And it is natural that it should be so. In the more important province of conduct, God has not imposed His will upon us. He has left us free agents, and lays upon us the responsibility of ascertaining His will, of interpreting it, and of following it. Why should it be otherwise with the interpretation of the books in which His revelation of Himself is recorded, which have come down to us through the agency of fallible men ? We are in fact told as much by St. Paul : " For God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God

in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this knowledge in earthen vessels" (2 Cor., iv, 6, 7). That is the caution which we have to bear in mind.

If this be so, if we recognise the legitimacy of inquiry and criticism, we are plainly in a better position to deal with those who claim the freest right of criticism, and have a far better chance of bringing them over to our view than if we denied them the right of being heard at all. And it is my assured conviction that, by the acceptance of such liberty of criticism, not only are we able to treat critics as colleagues and not enemies, but that the authority of the Scriptures is strengthened, and we gain a fuller and richer understanding of their meaning.

There is nothing new or revolutionary in this point of view. It has not been held by everybody in comparatively recent times, but it is in accordance with the teaching of many of the ancient Fathers of the Church. There was in early times much difference of opinion as to the books constituting the Canon. The Jews drew up their Canon of the Old Testament about A.D. 100, excluding a number of books (those now constituting our Apocrypha) which had formerly circulated on an equal (or nearly equal) footing with the books which they accepted. The Greek Church continued to accept these, which had always been present in the Septuagint. The Roman Church, departing from the opinion of Jerome, included them in its authorised edition of the Vulgate. The Ethiopic Church includes them and adds to them the Books of Enoch and Jubilees. Our own Church, since the time of Coverdale, has followed Luther and Jerome in accepting the Jewish Canon, relegating the other books to the Apocrypha. The Syriac Church likewise originally omitted the Apocrypha, but subsequently incorporated them. In the New Testament the Syriac Church originally omitted Revelation, 2 Peter, Jude, and 2 and 3 John. All these books were in the time of Eusebius still regarded as of doubtful authenticity. Revelation was also omitted by the Egyptian Church. Hebrews was not regarded as Pauline in the Western Church, though it was in the Eastern.

That the text also was regarded as uncertain and open to discussion is shown very clearly by Origen's Hexapla edition of the Greek Old Testament, in which he tried to reconcile the Hebrew and the Septuagint texts. What is more important, however, is to note that differences of interpretation were also freely admitted. It was as clear to Origen as it is to us to-day

that there were customs represented as tolerated in the earlier books of the Old Testament which could not be reconciled with the morality of later ages. Chief among these were the polygamy of the patriarchs and the indiscriminate slaughter of defeated enemies, including women and children. It was the perception of these difficulties which led Origen both to affirm that Scripture has a different force for different ages and for different readers, and to propound the theory of multiple interpretations which might be applied to it. He maintained that every part of the Bible admitted of a threefold interpretation, literal, moral and allegorical. This doctrine had a most wide-reaching and disastrous effect on the exegesis of the Middle Ages. While the school of Antioch, under Theodore of Mopsuestia and Chrysostom, maintained the literal and common-sense interpretation of the Bible narrative, the principle of allegorical interpretation accepted by the great authority of Augustine flourished widely in the West, and led to extravagancies which often amounted to absurdities. The schoolmen of the Middle Ages added a fourth method of interpretation, which they called anagogic or mystical; and of all four methods the literal was regarded as of least importance. By one or other of the remaining methods any proposition which the writer wished to maintain could be justified. To quote a single instance, the word "water" might signify the simple element; but it might also signify sorrow or wisdom or heresies or prosperity; allegorically it might mean baptism or grace, and anagogically it might stand for eternal happiness.

It is thus plain that throughout the history of the Church a rigid literalism of interpretation has been by no means always prevalent or universally accepted. In this country we owe it to what in nearly every respect has been an unmixed benefit, namely the enthusiastic reception of the Bible which was one of the results of the Reformation. History tells us that when the Great Bible (the work of Tyndale and Coverdale) was placed by royal command in 1539 in every church, the common people flocked in crowds to read it. The Geneva Bible of 1560, in its smaller form and more readable type, brought it into the homes as well as the churches, and rooted it firmly in the hearts and on the lips of all classes. The allegorical interpretations were completely swept away, and the books of the Bible were read exactly for what they said. For the most part this was clean gain: but there was also an element of loss. Among the common

people, and especially among the strong Puritan party, there was no acquaintance with critical methods to replace the liberty of interpretation which had been used and misused in the Middle Ages. They treated every part of the Bible as of equal authority and of universal application. They had even a special preference for the Old Testament, and freely quoted the denunciations of the Midianites or the Amalekites as applicable to their own conflicts with their fellow-countrymen.

Less regrettable than such intolerant excesses as these, but equally uncritical, was the habit that established itself of applying Biblical texts wherever they seemed verbally applicable, and treating them as of universal applicability and authority, without reference to their original context. And this literal, uncritical interpretation and use of the Bible became so incorporated in the general method of approach to the Bible that any questioning of it was regarded as an attack on the Bible itself and a denial of its Divine inspiration and its authority as a guide in life.

It was this spirit which came into violent contact with modern developments in science and in critical scholarship. It is not always remembered how recent these developments have been. It was only in the nineteenth century that they struck heavily on the accepted views which had become traditional. The average Englishmen had been content to read his Bible (and he *did* read it) with unquestioning acceptance, and had indeed little means of comparing it or criticising it. It was therefore a shock when geological discoveries were found to be inconsistent with the literal understanding of the seven days of Creation, and with the chronology of Archbishop Usher which had been imbedded in the margins of our Authorised Version so long that it was almost received as part of the sacred text. Literary criticism also, such as scholars had developed in connection with classical texts, when applied to the books of the Bible, suggested hitherto unknown modifications in accepted views as to the dates and methods of composition of these books. The growth of our knowledge also of the ancient world raised questions which bore upon the history of the Hebrews as recorded in the Old Testament. It therefore became necessary fairly to face the question whether the conclusions arrived at by human intelligence could or could not be accommodated to an interpretation of the Bible record which a Christian could without disloyalty accept.

This is precisely the issue which the Victoria Institute was founded to investigate: not to uphold one particular theory of Bible interpretation, but, in the words which I have quoted already, to seek to reconcile any apparent discrepancies between Christianity and Science. What I have endeavoured so far is to show that the Church throughout its history has not confined itself to any one method of interpretation, but has tried many ways to fathom the depths of the teaching inscribed in the Scriptures. Personally, I believe that this can best be achieved by keeping an open mind with regard to the results of criticism: that it shows a truer faith in God to use to the full those intellectual faculties which He has bestowed upon us, and to believe that they cannot ultimately lead to conclusions irreconcilable with the truths of revelation. It would be dishonouring to God to suppose that the faculties He has given us inevitably lead to false conclusions.

This is not by any means to say that all the assertions made by those who regard themselves as advanced exponents of scientific or literary criticism are to be accepted forthwith as assured truth. I would no more accept the assertions of Baur and the Tübingen school with regard to the dates and character of the New Testament books than I would the most extravagant allegorical exegesis of the Middle Ages. What I would urge is that science must be met by science, criticism by criticism, and that this can be done in sure faith that in the long run the truth will be found to lie on the side of Christian belief. It is not to be denied that this has not always appeared to be so: that plausible arguments have from time to time been produced which, if substantiated, would shake the authority of the Bible; but it is to be remembered that this is a world of trial and probation, and that our true course is to go forward with unshaken faith to investigate and challenge unacceptable conclusions.

Those who feel any doubt as to the validity of such confidence may well draw encouragement from the course of historical and scientific research during the past century. It cannot be denied that in the beginning of what may be called the age of criticism some very formidable assaults were made on the authority of the Bible. It was hard to reconcile modern cosmogonical and geological conclusions with the narrative of Genesis—impossible, indeed, to do so in any form which would

be accepted by the scientist. The Darwinian doctrine of evolution removed creative activity very far away and gravely reduced the action of Divine Providence in the world : and Science was then very sure of itself and of its power to solve all problems. Historical inquiry, with much new evidence derived from the records of the surrounding nations, made many people doubtful of the trustworthiness of the historical books of the Old Testament ; and literary criticism, arguing that there was no evidence of the use of writing before about the eighth century B.C., maintained that no confidence could be felt in the detailed accounts in the books of the Octateuch of events many centuries earlier, and of laws and customs far too elaborate to be attributed to so primitive a people.

To meet such arguments, faith and perseverance in research were needed : and they have been abundantly justified. The cocksureness of Science has suffered rude shocks. Scientists have found many gaps and uncertainties in what seemed the smooth and easy fabric of Evolution. Archaeology has proved that writing was known and freely used long before the age of Moses, and that codes of legislation at least as elaborate as his were current as early or earlier among adjoining nations. Literary discoveries have established the first-century date of the books of the New Testament, and have satisfied scholars in general of the truth of their traditional assignment to their respective authors. In every respect the authority of the Bible, from the most severely scientific point of view, stands higher to-day than it did a century ago. The faith of those who believed in the face of difficulties has been vindicated.

I feel therefore that we who believe in the Bible have everything to gain by meeting hostile criticism on its own ground : by not treating it, indeed, as necessarily hostile but as legitimately raising questions which require investigation. And we shall do well, I am sure, not to overstate our case or to use arguments which will not stand examination. That has, I think, been a rather common error among champions of the Bible. To give a small illustration of what I mean : I remember many years ago dissuading Bishop Winnington Ingram, then head of the Oxford House in Bethnal Green, from using the argument that the story of the destruction of Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea was proved by the fact that no mummy of the Pharaoh Menepthah had been found : first, because there was no certainty that Menepthah was the Pharaoh of the Exodus ; next, because

the book of Exodus does not say that Pharaoh was himself drowned ; thirdly, because his mummy might still turn up ; and, finally, because it would prove nothing whether it did or didn't, since if he were drowned his body would probably be washed ashore. So also, to revert to the discoveries for which our late President was largely responsible, I do not think the Lachish letters contribute anything to the confirmation of the Bible. They are interesting, as a sidelight on the last years of the Kingdom of Judah and as mentioning individuals known to us by name in the Bible record ; but they have to be explained from the books of Kings and Jeremiah more than they serve to explain them. On the other hand, the Jericho excavations, if rightly interpreted by Prof. Garstang, give valuable confirmation to what have been thought questionable details in the book of Joshua ; and the Ras Shamra discoveries, so far from showing, as some people hastily claimed, that the religion of the Hebrews was similar to that of the Canaanites, prove, it seems to me, exactly the contrary. They are extremely valuable as showing what was that religion of Baal which the worshippers of Jehovah were combating throughout the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, but in doing so they prove the immeasurable superiority of the latter creed.

It is not my purpose to-day to review all the results of modern archaeology and criticism, but to claim, as consistent with full loyalty to Christianity and with the principles which the Victoria Institute was founded to assert, a method of interpretation which regards the Bible as a *progressive* revelation of God's education of His people, developing and expanding from primitive legends through the training of the Patriarchs and Judges, on to the grander and more spiritual conceptions of the Prophets, and culminating in the revelation of Jesus Christ through His disciples and Evangelists ; not immune from human frailties in the transmission of the record, but preserved by His Spirit from error in the essence of what the record enshrines, the revelation of the nature and will of God. Not all persons will interpret the record in the same way. The freedom which one claims he must allow to another. One man may believe that the book of Daniel is a contemporary record of actual fact, another that it is a second-century composition of tradition, romance and history disguised as prophecy ; but each may recognise the sincerity of the other and be prepared to consider his arguments with good temper and without contempt.

Liberty of investigation, an open mind, charity towards our opponents, and faith in the victory of truth: these are the principles I claim as the true spirit of the Victoria Institute. With them I believe we may go forward and "greet the unseen with a cheer".

DISCUSSION.

The Chairman (Air Commodore WISEMAN) said: I am sure that you wish me, on your behalf, to voice your thanks to Sir Frederic Kenyon on this the occasion of the delivery of his first Address as President of the Institute. His papers as Vice-President have enriched our Transactions. As you are aware it has been a tradition of the VICTORIA INSTITUTE that the Presidential Address is not normally subjected to discussion as are other papers read before it. The Chairman of the meeting is, however, expected to make some observations.

In the paper to which we have just listened our President has shown himself a true critic in the exact meaning of the word, that is he has acted as a judge, placing the evidence in the scales with absolute impartiality. The careful restraint, the sober judgment are, of course, in accordance with the immense learning which has characterised his work over so long a period, particularly in connection with textual criticism. He has wisely called our attention to the primary purpose for which our Institute was brought into existence. As stated in our Constitution we are not called upon to assume an attitude, but to investigate "fully and impartially" and I trust that we will heed his reminder of this postulate. I am very sure that the only way that we can meet one-sided and merely destructive criticism is by a more balanced and constructive criticism certainly not by mere denunciation, still less by vituperation.

Sir Frederic has referred to the tendency on the part of some to use arguments which will not bear examination, so cannot help our case. He instanced the desire of Bishop Winnington Ingram to use the proposition that because the mummy of Meneptah had not been found it was evidence of the destruction of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Only recently the VICTORIA INSTITUTE received a letter from a venerable Archdeacon asking whether we had any information about a story which had been broadcast to the effect that Noah's

Ark had been discovered in an almost complete condition on a lake near the summit of Mount Ararat. Because the repetition of that story in the form given would have done great disservice to the cause of truth, I informed our correspondent of some of the obvious errors in the story. This is not the place or the time to go into these in detail. We can never serve the cause of truth except by truth. That this type of misjudgment is not confined to one side has been clearly shown by our President when he pointed out that the alacrity with which some scholars claimed the Ras Shamra discoveries as revealing a strong similarity between Hebrew and Canaanite beliefs. As Sir Frederic has stated, they prove "exactly the contrary."

Our President's pre-eminence in the field of Textual Criticism and his distinguished contributions in the field of archæological knowledge lends impressive weight to his pronouncement in this Address: "In every respect the authority of the Bible, from the most severely scientific point of view, stands higher to-day than it did a century ago."