

Biblical Criticism and Practical Problems.

BY THE VERY REV. THE DEAN OF CANTERBURY.

THE Epistle to the Hebrews commences with the statement that

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who being the Brightness of His glory, and the express Image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

There is in the New Testament no more comprehensive statement than this of the sum and substance of the Christian revelation. It states, first of all, that God has spoken to man. That is the beginning and the very foundation of our faith, though its momentous importance is not always sufficiently realized. Any definite communication, any spoken word from the God who is our Creator to His creatures, must needs be to them the most momentous thing in the world. None of the realities with which they are surrounded, however great and urgent, can for a moment be comparable to an utterance directly addressed to them by the God who created all those realities, and on whom they are absolutely dependent. We should, I think, do well to learn a lesson from the Epistle to the Hebrews, in putting this supreme fact in the very forefront of our thoughts, our teaching, and our controversies with opponents. We are not concerned, in the first instance, with mere religious opinions or philosophies, or with ecclesiastical doctrines and practices, but with direct words and messages from God; we have to listen to those words and messages ourselves, and to call upon others to listen and to obey them.

But, in the next place, we are told that those messages are numerous. Neither the Authorized translation nor the Revised conveys an adequate impression of the meaning of the original in this respect. The Greek does not say merely that God

spoke in sundry ways and in divers manners, but that He spoke in many ways and in many manners. It is the word "many" that is repeated in the original, and is emphatic. God has spoken to men again and again. He spoke to the fathers of the Jews by the prophets. In those words the Apostolic writer would at once have been understood, by those Hebrews whom He addressed, to be referring to the books of the Old Testament; and it is important and instructive to realize that this is the description he gives of those books—that they are the record of God's words to the fathers by the prophets. He evidently takes that for granted. No Hebrew doubted for a moment that God had spoken those numerous words, and that they were recorded in his sacred books. In this one verse of the inspired writer we learn what is meant by speaking of the Bible as God's Word. God spake in time past to the fathers, and here, in these books, is what He said. I observed just now that it was a momentous thing to realize that God, the Creator of heaven and earth, had spoken at all: it is still more momentous to know that He has spoken often; and the book which contains the record of those words must be proportionately momentous, and must be the most precious book in the world. That is the next point in our Christian faith—not merely that God has spoken, but that He has spoken many times, and that those words of His are preserved for us in the Bible.

The third point is that in these last days He has spoken unto us by His Son—not by one who was the Son of God in a figurative or adoptive sense, not by a Son of man who was in some sense a Son of God, but by that Son whom He had made Heir of all things, and by whom He made the worlds, the Brightness or Effulgence of His glory, and the express Image of His Person. In the Lord Jesus Christ we are in the presence of that Son of God who made the worlds, who exhibits the very glory of the Father Himself. It is in accordance with our Lord's saying—"He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father." Again, there is surely something overwhelming in the thought that, when we are listening to our Lord's words, and observing our Lord's actions

in the Gospels, we are really brought face to face with God Himself, actually seeing the Father and listening to the Father. The very mind and will and character of God Himself is there revealed to us. Though in human tones and human lineaments, we are beholding the Brightness of the Father's glory and the express Image of His Person. In the truth and love of Christ we behold the truth and love of the Father; and though it is the Son who suffers, it is in accordance with the Father's will, and the Son's sacrifice is prompted by the Father's love.

The next point in this comprehensive statement is the purpose for which that suffering was borne, "when He had by Himself purged our sins." That is the summary description of the Son's work on earth. The message of the Gospel is essentially a redemptive message. Apart from abstract questions respecting the Divine purposes, which are beyond our ken, the broad fact which had to be dealt with was that human nature was in a state of corruption and sin, and alienated from God. It is really idle speculation to be dreaming about what human nature might have become if it had not fallen. As a matter of fact, it did fall at the very commencement of its career. That fall must have been foreseen by Him with whom all things are present, and, consequently, in His purpose and vision the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. If the love of God embraced mankind, a redemption, a purging from sin and its consequences, must have been from all eternity an essential part of the Divine order, as the Scriptures say it was. To offer the sacrifice necessary for that purgation, and so to enable the Spirit to be sent, by whose sanctifying work fallen nature could be regenerated—this was the culminating and cardinal point of our Lord's work on earth.

Finally, when this work was accomplished, when He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. That is the end, the supreme fact, with which we have now to deal, the central fact of human life, and even of the universe—that our Lord Jesus Christ is at the right hand of the Majesty on high, from thenceforth expecting till

His enemies be made His footstool. In that high place He has, ever since His ascension, been carrying forward the work of subduing those enemies, and by a providential government infinitely above our comprehension He is advancing His kingdom and promoting His Father's will. This is the one supreme fact of life, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. That long course of Divine utterances and revelations, from the time when God first spoke to the fathers by the prophets, has been directed to this one grand result—that Christ, having once for all by Himself purged our sins, having provided the one sacrifice and the one only remedy for the sin and evil of the world, has sat down for ever upon the right hand of God as the King, the Judge, the High-Priest, and the Saviour of all.

I have recalled this comprehensive and inspired summary of our faith because it appeared to meet the main difficulties and objections with which we are concerned at the present time in our religious life. It lays down, in the first place, the primary principle which we have to assert, in reference to that criticism of the Bible which occasions so much perplexity, and which, I fear, is in various ways at the root of our troubles. It reminds us that the one central point we have to guard, in respect to that criticism, is the fact that God did speak in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, and that we have in the ancient Jewish Scriptures an inspired record of those Divine words. It is the doubt which is cast upon that plain matter of fact which constitutes the essential mischief of so much of the current criticism. It is certain that we have learnt, and are learning, much as to the mode and extent in which those Divine words have been preserved to us. Thus the old supposition, which was the only one open to our fathers of a generation or two ago, that the whole of the Book of Genesis, for instance, was miraculously dictated to its author, is now seen to be, not only scarcely conceivable, but wholly unnecessary. If, as was then supposed, writing was not practised till the days of Moses, the elaborate details of the Book of Genesis could only have been supplied by miraculous dictation.

But now that we know that writing was practised long before patriarchal times, we recognise that the Book of Genesis is due to what Dr. Liddon calls the "inspiration of selection"—to a precisely similar process, in fact, to that to which we owe the Gospel according to St. Luke. But the essential point—the point questioned by recent critical commentaries on the book—is that the words of God to the patriarchs there recorded are truly recorded: that God did speak to Abraham, and did make a covenant with him; that God did give that promise which the whole history of the world has verified—that in Abraham's seed all nations of the earth should be blessed. No one can for a moment doubt that, when the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews referred to God having spoken to the fathers by the prophets, he had in his mind those utterances of God to Abraham, which to every Hebrew were the very foundation of his faith and of his national life. The record we possess of those words of God in the Book of Genesis have the unbroken tradition of the whole Jewish people as their witness; and in face of the evidence recently afforded of the existence of elaborate compositions like a code of laws in the time of Abraham, I venture to say that the trustworthiness of those records rests on a firmer foundation than ever. It may be that that book and other books are composed of various documents, and are the work of various hands. It may be. The supposition has, at all events, I venture to think, been grossly exaggerated. But that does not in the least prevent the documents from being trustworthy, and the records preserved in them being true. That is what is clearly involved in this opening reference to what God spake to the fathers by the prophets; and a criticism which denies this denies the very foundation on which Apostolic argument rests, and consequently undermines that Apostolic authority on which our Christian faith so largely depends.

Now, I would urge that this consideration affords the key to the position to be held in our pastoral work on the subject of criticism. It is indispensable, if the authority of the Christian faith is to be maintained, that we should be able to treat the

Bible as a trustworthy book, in the plain, broad meaning of its statements. It was never more certain than in the present day that our instruction, to be effective in any way, must be founded upon the Bible. In the controversy now raging respecting national education we might almost say that there is only one point upon which, if not all, yet the vast majority are agreed, and that is, that religious teaching in our schools must be founded on the Bible. The question at issue is only how the Bible is to be taught, whether it is enough for portions of it to be selected by those who control the schools, and read with more or less comment, or none at all ; or whether it is essential that the main truths which the Church has collected out of the Bible, and embodied in creeds and catechisms, should be taught. But unless the Bible, in its plain meaning, its plain historical meaning, is trustworthy, either method is unjustifiable and cannot long be maintained.

There are those, indeed, who seem to be contented to surrender the plain historical truth of the Bible on the ground that the Christian faith rests on the authority of the Church, and can be taught and enforced by that authority alone. I need not dwell on the old reply to this view, by asking on what the authority of the Church rests ; but it is enough to point out that nothing can be more destructive of the authority of the Church than the surrender of the historical truth of the Scriptures. If the prevalent higher critical view of the Old Testament be the right one, then every great authority in the Church, from St. Stephen and St. Paul downwards, has been mistaken in his interpretation of the Scriptures, and in his view of God's dealings with mankind. You cannot quote one single authority in the whole Christian Church who has not assumed the truth of the history of the Jews in accordance with the *prima facie* narratives of the Old Testament. The Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter, the expositions of all the Christian Fathers, the whole hymnody of the Church, the whole theology of the Reformation, and not merely of the Reformation, but of the Council of Trent, falls in one comprehensive

crash. Imagine an infidel lecturer to a popular audience able to say to them : " Your Christian teachers make a great deal of the authority of their Church, but it is now admitted by their most learned men that every Christian Father, old or modern, up to the last fifty years, has been totally in error with respect to so simple a matter as the history of the Jewish people ; these learned men are agreed that you cannot rely on the historical truth of the narratives on which your whole belief in God having spoken to men is based, and that, for instance, the Book of Deuteronomy, which professes to give an elaborate account of God's words through Moses to the children of Israel, is a pious fiction." Supposing an infidel really able to say this, and what have you to fall back upon ? The Bible is gone, the Church is gone, all the teachers of the Christian Church are gone, and nothing remains to you but beliefs, which may be beautiful and elevating, but which have lost their old foundation. If it be thought that I am at all exaggerating the practical, popular effect of such criticism, let me read to you a passage from an authority who, if not impartial, is inclined to allow as much as he can to current critical views. I mean Professor Lotz of Erlangen, in the volume he published last year on the " Old Testament and Science."

"The Old Testament," he says, "is history, and open to criticism as historical, but it is also the history of redemption. It is the history of Divine revelation and guidance, by which the redemptive work of Jesus Christ was prepared, a history which the Saviour treated as a preparation for His coming. But the newer criticism is not content with merely correcting particulars in the narratives of the Old Testament, which is comparatively tolerable, but it declares the whole representation of Old Testament history, as we read it in the Bible, and as Jesus read it, and as He acknowledged its truth, to be false. It further declares the books of the Old Testament, almost without exception, to have arisen through a series of revisions, mutilations, additions, and distortions of the original text ; so that the Scriptures present a character which is the very opposite of trustworthiness. If this were really the case with respect to the origin of the Old Testament, it would be scarcely possible to honour this book any longer as a book of Divine truth."

These are not the words of an English obscurantist, but of a Professor in the University of Erlangen, published there in the

face of his brother professors, a statement which he could not have put forward in such an audience if it were any serious exaggeration of the truth. Gloss the matter over as you may, this is what the dominant criticism comes to, and this is a view of the Scriptures which must render their effective use in pastoral work impossible.

But if, with the school which Professor Lotz represents, and which corresponds in substance to the view of the great critics before Wellhausen, of such men as Ewald and Dillmann, you can treat the narratives of the Bible as being at least as true—to take an example lately put forward by the Bishop of Bristol—as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and can tell people that the books of the Bible, having come to us from a hoary antiquity, may be in some details imperfect and the text occasionally confused, but that such doubtful details in no way affect the substantial truth of the narrative, you may trust the common-sense of the people to discount, so to say, these difficulties, and to read the book with confidence; and as they do so, its inherent truth will more and more impress itself upon them, and its hold on their hearts will be deepened day by day. The case could not well be better put than by Professor Lotz (p. 244):

“We maintain,” he says, “with confidence that it is possible to do justice to the requirements of science and at the same time to maintain firmly that the Old Testament is a book out of which the Church and all Christians can confidently gain that knowledge of the ways of God which it was the object of this part of the Bible to afford. For we see that the redemptive history of the Old Covenant, as received by the consciousness of Christians, is in all essential matters as well attested by the Old Testament under critical treatment as by the old Bible when read with the eyes of ordinary men. Accordingly, a man may read the Old Testament without having any conception or idea of scientific criticism, and yet will find in the old book entire truth—for the ways of God which he devoutly follows in reading were the actual ways in which God led His people.”

That is the essential point; as long as we guard that, we can use the Old Testament effectually in our pastoral work. But if we had to believe and to teach a view of that history which, in Dillmann's words, “turns everything upside down,” we may be sure that the Bible would very soon lose practical authority among our people.

At the same time, we should be wise to introduce our people gradually to those facts, respecting the text of the Scriptures and their transmission, of which a knowledge is indispensable in order to avert the danger of their losing faith in the trustworthiness of the whole book, because some insignificant detail may be inexplicable, or even inaccurately stated. It seems to me that even the number of such inaccuracies is becoming more and more diminished by further research, the details, for instance, even in the genealogical parts of the Book of Genesis being more and more justified. We must, and may, trust our people's good sense to distinguish between cardinal facts and principles on the one side, and accessory details on the other. Above all, we must endeavour to cultivate their imagination. The Jewish writers, like other Oriental writers, were great artists, who produced not mere chronicles, but pictures, works of high art, which are all the more true in substance to reality because sometimes indifferent to pre-Raphaelite minuteness of detail. It needed the prosaic, logical, dull mental habits of a European to see any difficulty in Joshua's imaginative appeal to sun and moon to stand still, as though that could be more than an imaginative way of appealing that "the stars in their courses might fight" against his enemy, as they have so often fought against armies in the actual history of the world. The Englishman has, perhaps, more imagination of this kind than most nations; but I may say, in passing, that the possession of this imaginative power in interpreting the Scriptures is a great characteristic of Luther's power as a preacher and commentator, though he strangely forgot to exercise it when interpreting our Lord's words respecting the Holy Communion. But the broad substance of what I would urge is simply this—that, for the purpose of pastoral work with men and women and children in ordinary parishes, we are on safe ground if we treat the Bible as a book of true history, whose narratives may be trusted and followed without any unnatural interpretation or reconstruction. We cannot, of course, do this unless we are convinced, as I am, that that is the true verdict of sound

criticism. We must be able to tell our people consequently that we trust critical processes when rightly applied, and that we rely on the Scriptures as having stood that test. Then we retain that which is essential—the assurance of the Epistle to the Hebrews that “God at many times and in many manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, and hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.”

But let us pass to consider the bearing of this passage on the question which is now filling us with such extreme anxiety—the question of national education. It is proposed to prohibit in all our national schools that systematic denominational education which has hitherto been the characteristic of Voluntary, and particularly of Church schools, and even to render it possible, if the local authority should think fit, that no definite teaching, and even no Bible teaching, should be allowed. Now, what a passage like this must impress upon us is that the teaching to be thus prohibited or crippled is not the teaching of opinions, but of facts, and of facts which by their very nature are the most momentous of all facts. What would you think of a requirement that a teacher who gives instruction in astronomy may mention the planets and give a general account of their course, but must not mention their relation to the sun, or give an account of the sun’s nature? It would be equally absurd to attempt to teach children the general nature of their duties, and not tell them who imposed those duties, and who would be the Judge of their discharge of them. But further, if it be a fact that God has spoken at many times and in many manners, could there be anything more unreasonable than not to take care, so far as we can, that every child in the kingdom should know that He has thus spoken, and should be thoroughly and systematically taught what His words and commands have been? Nay, more : could there be a higher act of disrespect to God than to fail to inform children of the words He has spoken, and to impress His words upon them as the most important of all the facts of their lives? If Jesus Christ be the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His Person, what could

be more disrespectful, both to Him and to His Father, than to fail in leading to Him, and through Him to His Father, all children who may be entrusted to our care? For us Christians, whatever it may be for politicians, this is not a matter of expediency or of politics, but a paramount duty; and it is difficult to conceive of a more heinous disrespect to the Son of God than not to insist on His words, and His Father's words, being kept in the very forefront of our schools and of our teaching. Let us only bear in mind that this is the issue at stake in the present discussion, and our duty must be plain.

It may be added that the same consideration is decisive as to our duty in respect of missions. We are bound by allegiance to the God and the Saviour whom we serve to make them known to the heathen, as they were originally made known to ourselves. Some people will tell us not to disturb their faith, even though it is erroneous. In answer, it is enough to ask the question, whether there is any other truth whatever which the opponents of missions would refrain from communicating to the heathen. In point of fact, unbelievers in Christianity have no hesitation whatever in communicating to them scientific truths which are absolutely destructive of their religions; whereas the truth which is proclaimed to them by missions is not only the highest truth of all, but is the only truth which can sustain them when the spirit of their old beliefs has been undermined by men of science, men of business, and men of the sword. It is strange that people who are perpetually boasting that their only object is truth, and that in truth alone is to be found the secret of human welfare, should object to Christians proclaiming what they believe to be the greatest and most elevating of all truth. If, in fact, in Christ's own words, He is "the Way, the Truth and the Life," it is something like inhumanity to fail to proclaim Him and to lead others to Him.

But let it be added that everything depends on our holding these great cardinal truths aloft as dominating all others—in our preaching, our teaching, and in our minds and hearts. Half our troubles arise from want of proportion in our thoughts and

our teaching on these subjects. We allow our minds, and the minds of our people, and the mind of the world, to be occupied with a number of minor, if not trivial points, about ceremonies and vestments, and subordinate differences of doctrine, until statesmen seem to think that these are the only things we care for, and consequently conclude that the denominational teaching we profess to value is concerned with such mere verbal matters, and that it is no hardship to discountenance it. The way to meet that danger and misapprehension is to lift these cardinal questions high above all others, into the vision and the apprehension of our people, to make them realize that our thoughts are full, and that theirs ought to be full, of God and of His Word, of Christ and of His sacrifice, and of His eternal and living kingdom ; to realize better ourselves, and to make them realize, that every interest and consideration in the world is secondary in importance to these grand truths ; and that, consequently, whatever course legislation may take, we at all events shall never rest, and will give the nation and Parliament no rest, until young and old have their minds filled with these truths and realities, and live in them in order that they may die in them.



Christianity in the Indian Empire.

By THE REV. T. BOMFORD, M.A.

MANY people seem to wish to affirm that Christian missions are making no progress in the Indian Empire. They refer us to the opinions of "various civilians and military officers, men who, of course, know what is happening in the empire." There is a passage in Lecky's "History of European Morals from the Time of Augustus to that of Charlemagne" which supplies us with an answer to these affirmations. Lecky shows how few pagan writers before Constantine's time ever referred to