

Finally, the *third* period, which begins with the commencement of the nineteenth century, has for its peculiar and special problem to exhibit the person of Christ, as the perfect union of the divine and the human, with a full recognition of the difference as well as equilibrium of these two elements.

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## ARTICLE IX.

### REMARKS ON CERTAIN ERRONEOUS METHODS AND PRINCIPLES IN BIBLICAL CRITICISM.

By Prof. B. B. Edwards.

A MORE sober and just method of studying the Bible may be among the favorable results which will flow from the the political revolutions which are taking place in various parts of Germany. Some essential and salutary changes in the general habits of thinking and modes of investigation may be expected. We confidently look for this valuable moral product from these political strifes. The grounds for this encouragement are various. In the first place, a profounder and more practical religious feeling may be awakened. This was one result of the wars which followed the first French Revolution. It is said that there are indications in various parts of Germany of more earnest religious emotion. The "present distress," the uncertainties which hang over all earthly things, have led some to look for "a city which hath foundation." A natural consequence of these awakened sensibilities will be a more reverential regard to God's written word, a profounder conviction that it is infallible and eternal truth. In the multifarious and conflicting systems of morals — each containing more or less of important truth — which have rapidly succeeded each other, in the attractive and exciting political theories which are now brought forward, not a few of which, on experiment, will be found insufficient or baseless, there may be a yearning of the heart for the simple truths of the Bible, a desire to place the feet on the rock of ages, a craving for an *objective* guide that cannot mislead. In other words, a revived sense of practical religion implies that serious state of mind without which the Scriptures will not be used aright, and will, therefore, be misinterpreted.

In the second place the Germans will become a more practical people. They now enjoy a much larger degree of civil liberty than at any former time. The responsibility of governing masses of people, of maintaining order, security and the rights of property, will be devolved, to a great extent, on the people themselves or their direct representatives. Now it may be safely asserted that all who undertake to govern men, or in other words to maintain law and public order, will find the Christian religion indispensable, not a vague, shadowy, merely subjective religion, but a positive faith, which has definite articles, and is susceptible of external proof. A republican government of any considerable duration, is inconsistent with the effects of a rationalist interpretation of the Scriptures. A despotism may be sustained in the absence of Divine revelation, or in methods of interpreting such a revelation which really undermine all its authority. But the supreme power cannot be made dependent on the popular will unless that will is enlightened by some trustworthy, objective truth, and is made willing to bow to its teachings. It is yet to be proved whether a desirable republican liberty can be maintained where the Christian Sabbath is not regarded as a Divine institution binding on all men. If it be placed in the category of things which are expedient, if learned theologians are willing to consider it as a remnant of Jewish prejudice, then so far is it doubtful whether a people can be entrusted with the political sovereignty. If the States of Germany are destined to enjoy popular forms of government, then of necessity there must be introduced into the German character a much larger infusion of practical good sense. And if this result shall take place, the imperative necessity of a scriptural education will be felt, an education based on the belief that the Bible is really, the whole of it, an infallible Divine revelation.

The reasonableness of this expectation might be argued, in the third place, from the influence of political and historical studies, and of the pursuits of civil life. The great historians and statesmen of Germany have felt far more profoundly than many theologians, the importance of a fixed standard of religious faith and the insufficiency and worthlessness of that vaunted "higher criticism," which would disintegrate the Scriptures and rob them of their objective importance. We refer to such illustrious statesmen and writers, both among the living and the dead, as John Von Müller, Heeren, Niebuhr, Luden, Leo, Von Savigny and others. "A protestant Christian is nothing to me," says Niebuhr, "who does not hold the historical of Christ's earthly life, in the proper, literal sense, with all its wonders, and holds it as historically certain as any other event belonging to history, and

is as calmly and firmly convinced of it; who has not the most steadfast conviction of all points of the Apostles' Creed in their literal sense; who does not consider every doctrine and every command of the New Testament as an undoubted Divine revelation. A Christianity after the manner of the modern philosophers and pantheists is nothing to me; without a personal God, without immortality, without the individuality of man, without an historical faith, it is nothing to me, although it may be a very clever and acute philosophy. I have often said that I will have nothing to do with a metaphysical God, and that I will have no other than the God of the Bible, who is heart to heart."<sup>1</sup> In the studies of a statesman, who has been seriously engaged in the administration of public affairs, there is an earnestness, a depth, a comprehensiveness, a wisdom most favorable to the reception of evidence such as that by which the Scriptures are supported, and for which we shall look in vain to the closets of many professed theologians.

The same result may be anticipated, in the fourth place, from the new fields for study and effort which will be opened in Germany, and the consequent diminution in the number of those who shall pursue theological studies. The schools of theology in Germany have been greatly overstocked. Every department, district and corner of the theological field has been searched. All conceivable questions, all possible ramifications, all imaginable aspects of the science, it should seem, have been the subjects of earnest study, many of them of separate essays. Of course novelty is sought rather than truth. Startling theories have been brought forward, rather than consistent results, or well-balanced opinions. Notoriety must be secured at every hazard. A name, perhaps daily bread, must be earned at all events. A subject is studied laboriously rather than comprehensively; effect is sought more than utility; ingenious disquisitions are the result, not well adjusted and wholesome thoughts. Hence Germany may be said to be filled with books rather than with wisdom, with theological treatises rather than with theological knowledge. The mind has been in an unnatural state, put upon the stretch for subtleties or wire-drawn distinctions or novel modes of exhibiting an old error. When a patient, truth-loving disposition is wanting, solidity or value can hardly be expected in the products of thinking or of investigation. To this cause is to be attributed not a little of the neology which disfigures and corrupts the sacred literature of Germany. The Strauss'es, the Baur's, and the new Tübingen school, may not be actuated so much by hostility to the gospel as by a prurient love of startling nov-

<sup>1</sup> *Lebensnachrichten über B. G. Niebuhr*, II. 344.

elites, a morbid desire to show how far the "higher criticism" can carry one. The main cause of the mournful attacks on the gospels is not that malignant hatred which characterized some of the English deists, or that impious levity which ruled in the French school. Some of these neologists are men of excellent temper, of the kindest feelings, and of unexceptionable morality. They have been led to seek to undermine the Christian faith, partly at least from wrong mental habits; and these habits have grown out of the peculiar political circumstances of the country. Thousands have pursued theological studies, have written on the most holy mysteries of the Christian faith, who had little moral fitness for this work, who ought to have been earning an honest livelihood in some civil profession. Multitudes, almost without number, have essayed to comment on the Bible, with as little moral qualifications for the work as a common versifier would possess who should undertake a *Paradise Lost*. The purity of heart, the honesty of motive, the reverential fear, the desire to accomplish an important practical good are not there. Such commentators necessarily fail. Instead, therefore, of being awed by their learning, or dazzled by the boldness of their propositions, we need only to examine their arguments with patience, and we shall be convinced how unsubstantial they are. In such a combat David may enter the lists with the proudest Philistine.

This leads us to remark, once more, that the dissolution of the union between the church and the State, which is likely to follow these political changes, will exert an auspicious influence on theological learning. If rulers, resembling in character the counsellors who control the Swiss cantons, or some of the grand dukes of Germany, possess the right of naming theological professors, how is it possible that the fountains of Divine truth shall remain uncorrupted? The church, in its most vital interests, is in the power of a radical and godless reformer, or of a more polished, but not less dangerous skeptic. If the appointing power happens for the moment to be evangelical, then the chairs of theological instruction will be filled with men of the spirit of Hävernick and Tholuck. But if the civil government is in the hands of worldly or infidel politicians, as it is more likely to be, then no pen can adequately describe the evils which will flow from a theological fountain poisoned at its source. On no point is the union of church and State fraught with greater calamities. The theological departments of the German universities have often in this way been filled with men who had not the slightest moral fitness for their station.

Now with mental and national peculiarities such as we have indicated, with an organization of the theological departments in the universities, such as has long existed in the German universities, we might expect that modes of theological investigation, principles of biblical inquiry would be adopted, which would lead to sad results in weakening, if not subverting, all faith in Divine revelation. Before, however, we enumerate some of these erroneous principles, it may be proper, in order to prevent misunderstanding, to allude to the great obligations which all Protestant nations are under to the biblical scholars and theologians of Germany. No person of candor, who has any knowledge of this subject, will deny these obligations or wish to abate from their value. The true Christian scholar will welcome light from every possible source, and will not consider it necessary to maintain his character for orthodoxy by any illiberal and unworthy prejudices.

First, we are indebted to the Germans for an immense accumulation of valuable materials. Germany is a storehouse crowded with spoils from every region of the earth, from every province of inquiry. Her libraries are receptacles of most elaborate speculation and of widely gathered knowledge. On all the subjects which have a near or a remote relation to theology, on almost every topic which is at all kindred to it, the scholars of that country have toiled with incredible patience. In this affluence of materials, one needs especially the power of a wise selection, the ability to sift the wheat from the chaff. Still, secondly, not a little of these theological treasures is admirably simplified and digested. Indeed the scholars of no country are so fond of *methodology* as the German. In respect to clear arrangement, the grammars and lexicons of the Latin, Greek, Hebrew and other languages have been constructed with surpassing ability. The grammars and lexicons of Zumpt, Freund, Kühner, Buttman, Thiersch, Pape, Gesenius and others, are the common property of all in Christendom worthy the name of scholars. So it is in dogmatic theology and in church history. The manuals of Hahn, Hase, Bretschneider, Hagenbach, Gieseler, etc., stand at the head of the list in their respective departments, not only for the value, but for the scientific arrangement of the materials. Then, in the third place, we have the advantage, which is by no means inconsiderable, of possessing truths which have come unharmed from the sharpest conflict, views which are the product of the keenest comparison, gold that has been seven times purified. Every truth which is admitted in Germany, we may be sure, has a firm foundation, because it has come uninjured from the

hardest fight. Many positions, capable of the amplest defence, have been given up; those which remain, though they be few in number, challenge our instant and cordial belief, because they have been put to a fiery trial in every form. If any part of the Scriptures is acknowledged by the German to be authentic, then we may be sure that it is so; if there were a weak place in the evidence, it would have been infallibly detected. And in cases where the authenticity or genuineness of a passage has been given up, on insufficient grounds, there may be no ultimate loss. Truth does not fear the sharpest scrutiny. And it is no mean advantage to the Christian cause, that its opponents have been men of eminent learning, of the keenest powers of criticism, and of practised ability in sifting evidence.

Again, it is not without its advantages, that the truths of religion and morals have been investigated by German theologians, who are so unlike those of England and France, theologians so learned and so marked by idiosyncrasies. We obtain aspects of truth which we might never otherwise reach. A door is opened into treasures on which we might not otherwise gaze. The peculiarities of the German scholar become, in this way, productive of good. In the final result, we possess profounder and more comprehensive conceptions of truth than were otherwise possible, in the same manner that we obtain a more adequate and truthful view of the French Revolution by tracing it on the pages of the German historian, as well as on those of the English and French writers.

These advantages, however, have been attended with serious evils. The peculiar intellectual and religious culture of Germany has given birth to mental habits and modes of investigating truth, which are unsound and pernicious.

I. The first to which we will allude is the erecting of a standard of judgment, often termed "the higher criticism," to which everything is made to bow without appeal. If an assertion or a narrative will not abide this test, they are summarily dismissed as unworthy of attention. If an ancient document cannot stand this arbitrary and fiery ordeal, it receives sentence of condemnation at once. An objection to this highly vaunted standard, is its uncertainty. Who has defined it? What are its necessary bounds and metes? It is a varying quantity. On approaching it, it recedes, so that we cannot grasp its form or colors. With one writer it may mean one thing; with his neighbor, another. A second objection is, that this "higher criticism" has been set up as a standard in a country and in a period where the spirit of skepticism and doubting in regard to all ancient

monuments has been carried to an extraordinary and unwarrantable length. The influence of Wolf and Niebuhr has been injuriously extended to a department of ancient knowledge with which they had little to do. A spirit of suspicion has been breathed over all ancient writings, because some have been found spurious, or because a little flaw has been detected in a trustworthy document. Nothing is incorrupt if anything is corrupt. This skeptical tendency has become a national characteristic of German scholarship, a tendency which as really unfits one to set up a standard of criticism, or to judge fairly of a literary production, as the easy faith or the superstitious credulity of the Roman Catholic. In a school of criticism founded in such circumstances, we cannot place confidence. Candor, fairness, a large and honest view of a subject, and a truly comprehensive judgment, are sadly wanting. Again, this standard of criticism has been erected on a basis almost exclusively *subjective*, on the strength of individual feeling and opinion, without much regard to objective truth or external testimony. The "spiritual philosophy" has prevailed to such an extent in Germany, it has so pervaded all departments of thought, it has so colored and shaped all the aspects and tendencies of the mind, that evidence drawn from history, from human experience, from the tangible and visible universe, and from the honest and every-day feelings of common men, is neglected or is unknown. German culture has been, to a melancholy extent, a *one-sided* culture. It has embraced only a part of man. We cannot expect, therefore, a standard of criticism entirely just and reasonable. True rules of judgment in matters of taste, or in matters pertaining to any department of literature, can be found only in proportion as all mental phenomena and all the facts of human experience are taken into the account.

II. Another erroneous principle in biblical interpretation is, the setting up of one's own feelings, or intellectual and moral judgment, as the final arbiter. Thus a miracle is to be rejected because it is psychologically impossible. A narrative is pronounced to be a myth, because it does not coincide with our observation or experience. The state of mind in which a seer could foretell future events, is inconceivable, and is therefore to be denounced. We cannot imagine how an individual can be under the immediate influence of a malignant spirit and retain his free agency; consequently, we must abandon the doctrine of a personal evil spirit. Thus we set up ourselves as the ultimate standard of appeal. Nothing that will not stand the test which we have assumed, is worthy of belief. At the bar of our judgment all alleged facts, the minutest and the most stupendous events recorded in history are to be tried. By the light of our own conceptions, a uni-

verse of truth is to be accepted or disowned. The sun could not have stood still on Gibeon, if it is at variance with our preconceived notions of what is practicable. There must be an error in the alleged number of the Israelites who marched through the wilderness, as the physical difficulties would be insurmountable. The miraculous conception of Jesus presents embarrassment to the interpreter, which he sees no means of overcoming.

Now one difficulty connected with this standard of judgment arises from the want of an accurate perception of the true province of reason. Alleged facts are summarily rejected because we cannot perceive their consistency with other facts, or because we cannot precisely determine the mode of their existence and operation. They do not really contradict each other, but simply rise above our comprehension. Another difficulty is, that we do not clearly distinguish the reason from other powers or qualities with which it has little to do. The light of this faculty may be compelled to pass through a murky atmosphere. A thousand influences may come in to mislead us. What we imagine to be the decision of an unbiassed intellectual faculty, is compliance with the spirit of the times, or results from a dread of giving offence, or is one method in which our idiosyncrasy is revealed, or it is one of the thousand aspects in which prejudice shows itself. Again, a fruitful source of error lies in our ignorance of what is fit and becoming. We have not the power to transport ourselves into the distant past, and reproduce states of society which no longer exist, or with which we are not familiar. The miracle is incomprehensible because we are unable to understand the state of the society for whose benefit it was performed. A book of the Old Testament (*Canticles*, e. g.) has no divine authority because we cannot see the utility of it. It affords no spiritual nutriment to us, therefore it is psychologically impossible that it was ever intended for the spiritual benefit of any portion of our race. Civil and political usages were tolerated under the Jewish theocracy which would not be borne now. Wars were authorized at which the philanthropy of the present age stands aghast. A perfect Being could not take delight in these scenes of barbarism and bloodshed. The Scriptures which profess to give the Divine sanction to them, could not have proceeded from God. Now in this way, we make our own limited experience, our own culture, our states of mind, modern and occidental habits and feelings, the rule, the fixed standard, with which distant ages, states of society, manners and customs totally different, must be made to square. Obviously erroneous as such a standard must be, inapt and unanalogous as such methods of comparison necessarily are, yet they have constituted the favorite standard, the constant source of



appeal, consciously or unconsciously, to hundreds of learned commentators. The biblical books have been subjected to a system of interpretation which has been applied to no other productions. A bill of rights, a legal document, any ancient parchment or scroll, are explained according to certain well known objective rules, acknowledged and approved by all. Nothing would be considered more preposterous than to expound the Twelve Tables, Magna Charta, or an American Constitution, according to the personal feelings of the reader, or the subjective tendencies and habits of different annotators.

III. Another erroneous method of interpretation may be termed the monotonous or mechanical. It represents the sacred writers as shut up to one stereotyped style, to a diction confined, as it were, by iron clogs and clasps. Moses could not have been, in any sense, the author of various parts of Genesis, because the style and language are not run in the same mould. The book of Deuteronomy is thrust down several centuries, because it has a different complexion from the other portions of the Pentateuch. A Psalm is assigned to the Maccabean period, because it has a few Chaldaisms, or half a dozen phrases which are not found in other compositions that are supposed to be earlier. The two parts of Zechariah have not the same author, for there are striking differences of expressions in the earlier and later chapters. The three Pastoral Epistles are not Paul's, for they contain scores of words that do not appear elsewhere. John, the apostle, did not write the Apocalypse, as the Greek is quite foreign to his Gospel and Epistles. Thus the beautiful form of scriptural truth has been dislocated, marred, patched up, and amalgamated in a way which shows a most lamentable ignorance of the operations of the human mind, and of a thousand phenomena in literary history. A multitude of facts and considerations may be adduced to show the absurdity of the rule in question. Advancing age very often produces important changes in one's style of writing. In general the fancy and imagination become less prominent; the judgment, the reason, common sense, give tone and direction to the style. Copiousness of words gives place to copiousness of ideas. An individual at twenty-five years of age delights in a flowery, or an artificial, or an ambitious style; at forty-five his compositions are remarkable for condensed energy or mathematical precision. At the same time there are instances where the reverse of this is true. The style grows more picturesque and lively with advancing years. The later writings of Burke have much more exuberance than his *Essay on the Sublime*. The sharp trials of life, the bitter sorrows which fall to the lot of most literary men, exert a mellowing influ-

ence on the course of thought and on the diction ; there is more depth, sincerity and power of impression ; words take their shape and coloring from the heart. New occasions, too, sudden emergencies, fresh fields of thought and effort, presuppose changes in the style. Paul addressing the uncultivated Galatians and Paul writing to his beloved Timothy, would be expected to vary his language somewhat. The heart of the same apostle, when he was on the eve of his martyrdom, would overflow with tenderness and solemnity ; new words would naturally be introduced ; a patriarchal solicitude would lead to earnest repetitions. This would account for some of the differences which exist between the book of Deuteronomy and the other four books of the Pentateuch. In the case of the inspired writers, new revelations, more powerful operations of the Spirit, a deeper insight into divine truth, would create a necessity for new words, new phrases and an altered style. These causes would occasion the same changes as might occur in merely human productions where the authors were making rapid progress in knowledge, or adopting new methods of culture. The three Pastoral Epistles have many peculiarities ; but not more than the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians. The first epistle to Timothy is said to contain eighty-one of what are *ἀπαξ λεγόμενα* ; the second, sixty-three ; the epistle to Titus, forty-four ; the epistle to the Philippians, fifty-four ; that to the Galatians, fifty-seven ; the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians together, one hundred and forty-three.

Why then should we create an obstacle to the authenticity or genuineness of the books of the Scripture, where none exist ? Why should we apply a rule there which will apply nowhere else ? Why do we single out a volume from the vast treasures of literature, and try to maintain that its authors shall be confined to one monotonous, unvarying diction, while in all other literary productions we are charmed with the freshness, the ever varying shades of style and diction ? On what grounds must the inspired writers be denied the liberty of adopting new modes of speech, phraseology fitted to new exigencies of thought and outward life, when the utmost liberty is taken by writers of ancient and modern times ? The fact of inspiration in the one case and mere natural power in the other, would not materially vary the result.

IV. It is maintained by some critics, "that faith in Christ can set no limits to critical investigations, otherwise faith would hinder the knowledge of the truth."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the declarations of our Lord

<sup>1</sup> See Vater's Comm. III. 829. De Wette's Einleitung ins. A. T. p. 236

in regard to historical matters, his references to the facts of the Old Testament may be true or they may be erroneous. Criticism must proceed on its independent course in accordance with these declarations, or in opposition to them, as the case may be. But can we judge of the Old Testament separate from the New? Is not historical criticism compelled to find some of its most important materials in the records of the New Testament? Has it not been established with more certainty than any other event recorded in ancient history, that Jesus Christ came into the world, that he perfectly obeyed the law of God, was full of grace and truth, that in his lips was no guile, that he never accommodated himself to the sinful prejudices of his countrymen, and that all the words he ever uttered are worthy of the most implicit belief? Is not criticism then compelled to admit these facts and act upon them? Are not his declarations in regard to the Old Testament to be credited without any misgivings? Would he propound as historical facts what he knew to be mere Jewish fables, or uncertain traditions, out of deference to the common belief of his countrymen, or from his unwillingness to disturb their prejudices? No right-minded man will believe any such thing. Every one capable of estimating evidence, or of discriminating fable from facts, must admit the truth, the historical truth of the Gospels. If he admits this, he must also admit that our Lord would not and could not deceive. But he did deceive, if he affirmed those things as historical verities which never occurred. Our faith in Christ must rest on historical facts. It is not a mere subjective feeling. It has its basis on the personal character of the Redeemer, on his truth, his veracity, his perfect knowledge of all past events, on his unshrinking honesty. Historical criticism, therefore, on the Scriptures cannot act independently of faith in Christ. His testimony in regard to the Old Testament is one of the main elements which must come into the account. His word is unerring and decisive.

V. We advert to one more fact, which may be indicative rather of a wrong state of feeling than of an erroneous method or principle of interpretation. We refer to the tone of confident assurance with which a critical judgment is pronounced, the decisive, if not contemptuous air with which an alleged erroneous theory is discarded. The manner of the neological critics in this particular is strikingly analogous to that of certain modern writers on the prophecies, who lay down their propositions as if they were mathematical axioms, who seem to have no more doubt that they have arrived at the truth on some most difficult and recondite themes, than if they were the subjects of inspiration themselves. It has been commonly supposed

that modesty is an attribute of genius; that deference to the opinions of the great and good of past ages is not inconsistent with the progress of knowledge or with independent investigation. Most men of genius, the great thinkers, the profound inquirers, have written under the conviction that the human mind in its best estate is not infallible, and that an overweening confidence is one of the surest marks of error, or of superficial thought.

As an illustration, we may select the assertions of some of the modern critics in relation to the authorship of the Pentateuch. Leagerke has the courage to say: "The question whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch should no more be raised by those who have in themselves any consciousness at all of the development of the history." De Wette subjoins: "The controversy can now be only in respect to the time of the post-Mosaic authorship."<sup>1</sup> Now we suppose that these critics would consider of no account the nearly unanimous opinion in favor of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch which is held by the scholars of Great Britain and the United States. These scholars would be set down, possibly, as still laboring under the prejudices of education or of traditional belief. But can the numerous body of learned scholars in Germany, Ranke, Hengstenberg, Drechsler, e. g., be classed in the same category? Is it given to the "liberal" critics of Germany to decide a momentous question for all Christendom besides? Are such summary and sweeping judgments indicative of that honesty and candor of mind which can alone lead to satisfactory results? Are they likely to be acquiesced in, especially when the critics themselves are by no means agreed as to the manner in which the Pentateuch should be dislocated, and its various parts re-arranged, and in face, too, of the many corroborating proofs furnished by the Egyptian discoveries in favor of the antiquity and general truth of the Mosaic narratives? In short, assumption and an arrogant tone betray the weakness of the object for which they are enlisted, rather than furnish occasion for doubt and dismay to those who are not inclined to follow in the path which some of the modern critics have marked out.

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<sup>1</sup> De Wette Einl. ins. A. T. p. 226, 6th ed.