

ARTICLE VII.

CRITICAL NOTES.

THE THEOLOGICAL POSITION OF THE BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

SOME complimentary remarks touching the BIBLIOTHECA SACRA made by Dr. Driver in the *Expositor* for June, and by Dr. Hastings in the *Expository Times* for August, afford a desired occasion for a more explicit statement, or rather re-statement, of the theological position occupied by the BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

The BIBLIOTHECA SACRA was founded in 1844, at Andover, Mass., by Professors Bela B. Edwards and Edwards A. Park, professors at Andover, with the special coöperation of Professor Moses Stuart, also of Andover, and Professor Edward Robinson, of Union Theological Seminary, New York. These men were then the natural representatives of the moderate New School Calvinism of the time, as well as of the liberalizing tendencies in the interpretation of Scripture which endeavored to keep within "reasonable bounds." While none of them held an iron-clad theory of verbal inspiration, they all held with great tenacity to what may be called the moderately conservative view of the Bible, standing over against the destructive and radical criticism which was becoming more and more dominant in Germany and among the Unitarians in America.

From the beginning the BIBLIOTHECA SACRA was conducted with a view not merely to express the opinions of the editors, but to give a fair representation to a pretty wide range of divergent opinions, as held by sincere and able men. The editors have always disclaimed responsibility for contributed articles.

Experience confirms the editors in their belief that truth is best advanced by free inquiry; that, however much the cause of truth may suffer temporarily by this means, its permanent establishment is not possible except in the arena of open discussion; for it is evident that the statement of contending theories is best made by their several advocates, and it is only when a theory is clearly and fully stated that either its excellencies or its defects are made adequately to appear.

Still, there is a limit to all things, and especially to the profitableness of statement and re-statement and discussion of conflicting theories; while there are many views of truth which are so shadowy, so dependent upon uncertain data, and so clearly beyond the range of present proba-

bility, that it is not profitable to surrender a large amount of space to their presentation. Hence the necessity of some editorial supervision. "All things are lawful, but all things edify not."

In view of the past history of the BIBLIOTHECA SACRA, it should not have been "unexpected" to the editor of the *Expository Times* that the BIBLIOTHECA SACRA has published Dr. Morton's article on "The Cosmogony of Genesis, and its Reconcilers" (April and July, 1897); for, in the first place, President Morton is a scholar of the very highest attainments, whose sympathies are well within the range of the main evangelical activities of the world. It is inevitable that the views of such a man should be reckoned with. It is best that the evangelical world should read his views in his own statement of them. Other presentations have been sufficiently abundant in the pages of the BIBLIOTHECA SACRA to make the discussion on the whole fairly complete. The reading public can be trusted not to take the address of the closing advocate for the charge of the judge.

As to the case in hand, it is important to bear in mind that all language, and consequently all Scripture, has to be interpreted. The Bible is what the Bible means. There is always and necessarily a margin of doubt respecting the meaning of language, which necessitates a certain amount of lawful range of interpretation. Even the simple phrase "This is my body" divides the church to this day over the extent of the figurative meaning involved in the words. The famous controversy of Luther and Zwingli upon that question led to no settlement of it. The world is still divided into the party of Luther and the party of Zwingli.

But these uncertainties of language have not left the truth altogether in a state of flux. The variety of ways in which the truth is expressed in the Bible leads to a pretty well-defined body of doctrines forming the practical basis of the evangelical activities of the world. The statements both of the extreme advocates of verbal inspiration and of the destructive critics, who, like the cuttlefish, have power to eject around every passage of Scripture the opaque products of their own obscuring doubts, are to be received with caution. The judges always warn the jury against setting up an impracticable standard of proof, and against giving undue weight to "possible," "contingent," "imaginary" doubts. They charge them to be content with that proof which is "beyond reasonable doubt." This phrase "beyond reasonable doubt," though somewhat vague, does not, however, open the way to unbridled license in the interpretation of facts. The experiences of all men give them a personal standard of judgment which is in the main trustworthy. Practical uniformity in the interpretation of the Bible is obtained by this constant appeal to the Scriptures themselves in all their breadth.

If we challenge the higher critics at any point, it is because not of the breadth, but of the narrowness, of their views. It is on the ground that they have limited themselves too much to mere literary criticism;

that they have neglected the broader lines of historical evidence lying outside the range of their vision; that they unduly ignore the indorsement of the Old Testament by the writers of the New; that they fail to appreciate the deep ethical problems underlying practical life in the varying stages of the world's development.

To those who have had a considerable amount of experience in observing the weaknesses of the advocates of special theories both in science and in literature, it is evident that the Christian public is in no small danger, at the present time, of being led into serious error by the overconfident assertions of special advocates whose "personal equation" is to a large extent an unknown factor. One of the results of the extreme specialization of modern study is the multiplication of opinions uttered with most pronounced dogmatism by men whose attainments are really very narrow, and whose judgments rest on imaginary data. If this habit of overconfident expression is often referred to as the German habit, it is because in that country their whole system of education and of professional promotion to theological chairs has been calculated, in peculiar degree, to foster the tendency.

Some years ago two well-educated persons, born and brought up in the same college town on streets closely adjoining each other, pupils in the same public schools and college classes, went to Germany to pursue further study. It so happened that each in turn applied to the same German professor for admission to his classes. When the second one gave his residence as the same as that of the first, the overwise German professor declared that it was "impossible," it could not be, it was "against all probability," for he did not "speak the same dialect" as the other. The readiness with which this emphatic conclusion was drawn from imaginary data may seem to be an extreme case; but it can be matched by innumerable instances in which most dogmatic assertions have been made on questions of biblical criticism where examination of the facts shows no basis whatever for the conclusion.

Scholars in mature life who have lived through the controversies of the last fifty years over the date of the books of the New Testament have good reason for hesitation in the reception of the dogmatic and derisive language constantly employed by the newer school descriptive of their more conservative brethren. The event has proved that the whole mass of German criticism of the New Testament emanating from the school of Baur is an inflated bubble of the thinnest kind. These critics were, one and all, false prophets. In absence of the means of contradiction, they continued to repeat, that, if we could only get hold of a lost copy of Tatian's Diatessaron, or of the so-called Gospel of Peter, we should find documents more original than the four Gospels. But we have now found Tatian's Diatessaron and a portion of the Gospel of Peter, and both prove to be compilations from all four of the Gospels. The younger generation of students can scarcely comprehend what a collapse this is, and what

ignominy thereby is really brought upon what has been the predominant school of New Testament critics for the last fifty years. Harnack's surrender, in which he grudgingly admits that the traditional dates assigned to the New Testament books are approximately correct, is a defeat which would have been heralded by headlines covering a whole page of an American newspaper, had anything analogous to it occurred in political or national affairs.

While therefore welcoming everything from the prophets who are persuaded that they have a new message for the world, we must warn them that their prophecies are subject to examination, and that due effort will be made to determine the "personal equation" of each reformer, and to assign to his deliverance merely such weight as there is in the facts and reasoning underlying them. The greatest danger at the present time is in a lack of diligence on the part of the clergy and educated laymen in attending to both sides of the discussion which is going on concerning the Old Testament. The cause of truth is in danger of being lost by default. Let God be true, though every man be proven a liar. But let us not fall into the trap of accepting things as true because they are confidently stated and vociferously reiterated by special advocates.

"THE HISTORICAL ATTITUDE."

It is becoming very common in theological circles to interpret the historical portions of the Bible according to what men think they would have done in like case, and to hold certain parts to be mythical because the course recorded of the actor does not seem natural to the reader. This is called "taking the historical attitude." The student searches the records, and endeavors, sincerely enough, perhaps, to put himself in the place of the one whose words and deeds are recorded, then estimates the narrative by his opinion of what is probable or reasonable, and often to say "It is unreasonable" is supposed to be an end of controversy. Some who would not, on the plea of the Christian Consciousness, reject the doctrinal teachings of the Bible, are inclined to urge the historical spirit and attitude as a sufficient reason for putting such interpretations on the narrative parts of the Word as practically deny their inspiration. It goes without saying that we should not judge the moral character of a man's deed without putting ourselves, so far as possible, in his place. It is not fair to judge Noah's drunkenness or Abraham's polygamy in the light of this advanced age; but, to judge of the correctness of the narrative by our opinion of what the actors would naturally do in such circumstances is a course that would hardly be tolerated outside biblical criticism.

A recent commentary on the book of Judges is a notable example of this method of treatment. A professor in a theological seminary which is usually considered orthodox, lately acknowledged that to him the

opening chapters of Genesis are but equivalent to a sermon preached by some earnest man from the text "God is great." The account of creation is but a fanciful sketch used by the speaker to illustrate his theme. On such a theory, the Professor could understand how those chapters were written. He could imagine himself doing it, and therefore his theory must be the correct one. On this basis, the mark given Cain was but a tribal mark. It does not matter that the Scripture says, "And the Lord appointed a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should smite him" (R. V.). We can understand how Cain would have the tribal mark; and the fact that everything extraordinary is taken out of the story, and there is little need of mentioning God at all, need not trouble us. Many will think that such interpretation brings a faint glimmer of human light, at the expense of the light of God. We become involved in a serious logical fallacy. It may be true that certain causes will produce a certain effect, but it by no means follows that they are the only causes that will do so. That needs to be proved. A cyclone might possibly tear down a city wall; but so might an earthquake, an inundation, the explosion of a mine, or the hand of God with no other aid. The custom of having tribal marks might account for the brand of Cain, but that does not prove that the one recorded in Gen. iv. was not the direct imprint of the hand of God. The hypothesis of a sermon on the text "God is great" might explain, we will suppose for argument's sake, the opening chapters of Genesis. They might also have been written by revelation of God; and since there is no evidence for the former theory, except that it appears more reasonable to some minds, others may safely rest on the biblical word, and wait for proof of its falsity.

Never was there greater need of remembering our limitations. The extent of human knowledge to-day is in danger of making us forget how little we know. The simplest things always lie in part beyond our vision. Human knowledge cannot explain how a man bends his finger; how the mind, which is not matter, connects with the nerves and muscles, which are not mind, and causes the finger to bend. Much less can we explain all the varying connection of free-will and motive in the mind of man, as a result of which the finger does or does not move. Socrates' precept, "Know thyself," is excellent as a mark to be aimed at, but Jeremiah wrote with the accuracy of inspiration, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can know it?" and the psalmist, as he sought after righteousness, was compelled to cry out, "Who can discern his errors? cleanse thou me from hidden faults." How then can we tell with certainty what would have been reasonable and natural thousands of years in the past? How little we know of the circumstances! With all our supposed knowledge we have but the scantiest outlines of the setting in which those events should be placed, and we are groping among the ruins of the East for any word that can give us more information.

Again, to form an accurate opinion of what would be the natural course for a certain man, we need to know fully the personality of the actor. Two good men will often in the same circumstances act quite differently. It was equally natural for Luther to insist on the literal interpretation of *hoc est corpus meum*, and for Zwingli, just across the table, to plead for a larger liberty. All the previous life of the actor and his inherited tendencies must be considered; and, even were these fully known, his free-will brings a totally unknown quantity into the problem. "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" Whitefield differed from Wesley, and Edwards was different from both. What would be natural to Finney might be very unnatural to Nettleton. What would be natural to the Professor quoted above might be very unnatural to the writer of the first of Genesis. Moreover, what is natural to one man at a particular time is often unnatural at another time. Mr. Gladstone began his public life a Tory, and ended it a Liberal; he belonged to the established church, and worked against that church in Ireland. Future historians will be driven to distraction in the application of the historical attitude to his career. This method of treatment easily passes from the scientific to what is unscientific in the extreme, and puts a greater strain on the credulity of the reader than does the biblical narrative.

Moreover, this course rules out the supernatural. Once God begins to act, man cannot foretell what he will do, nor can he, thousands of years later, say what, under the circumstances, must have been natural for men whom God was directing. Balaam, left to himself, would probably have cursed Israel; but Balaam, in the hand of God, blesses Israel instead. Even Balaam's ass breaks over the natural course when she meets the angel. Israel, alone, would have treated Jericho in one manner, who can say what? Israel, by order of Jehovah, acts in a manner which none could have predicted. "Canst thou, by searching, find out God?" The true student of history examines the attainable facts, but must often confess that his knowledge of those facts, and still more his knowledge of their causes and reasons, fails. Who can fully explain all the varying motives on which Napoleon acted, though the fairly complete record of his rise and fall is before us? Much more must the student of biblical history be humble. It should constantly be borne in mind, that, in the interpretation of the Word, we deal with certain very imperfectly known quantities, viz., the earthly circumstances, the disposition and will of man, and the infinite plan and will of God. It is beyond question proper to gain each available detail of the historical setting of any event, but we may easily draw too rigid conclusions as to the particular form and color the event must have taken, and our conclusions are especially to be questioned when in opposition to the plain statements of the Book.

A theological teacher wrote not long since, "Teach your people that faith has nothing to do with assent to a historical or scientific statement,

. . . and warn them to put honor on their reason, which is the noblest endowment God has given to man." A truer scholarship would hold that faith in the faithfulness of a book whose veracity is so well established as that of the Bible has everything to do with assent to its historical statements, until better proof has been brought against them than that they are inconceivable to us. The eternity of God's existence is inconceivable to us; but the Bible affirms it, and it is probably true. We need not look far to find our reason sadly failing. How many times when we have been most confident have we found our judgment to be but a broken reed! How few conditions of the most important problems of life seem really to lie within our vision! Until trained minds can see eye to eye on questions of Tariff, Currency, Home Rule, etc., we shall be justified in following the command "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding." Kidd has well said: "A form of belief from which the ultra-rational element has been eliminated, is, it would appear, no longer capable of exercising the functions of a religion." We may use our reason, but trust God alone to guide it, and accept many a statement of the Bible when human reason would have suggested something quite different. One can but think that the trouble with many theologians, not in Germany and England alone, but in our own land as well, is precisely this putting honor on reason, leading to intellectual pride, and to forgetfulness of the fact that a necessary qualification for biblical study is such humble acknowledgment of human limitations as will cause the student to wait on the leading of the Holy Spirit.

A. E. THOMSON.

MEDINA, O.

"THE EARLY RELIGION OF THE HEBREWS."

THE thesis of Rev. A. E. Whatham in the present number of the BIBLIOTHECA SACRA, is, that the early religion of the Hebrews was "little, if any, removed from the religion of those people by whom the Hebrews were surrounded." The exact date of this environment is not indicated. The discussion of the point covers a period of some centuries, antedating Abraham, and extending far beyond Moses. No one has ever claimed that Abraham's immediate ancestors and neighbors were pure monotheists. Abraham appears in the record as a reformer, and as moved in his migration by a purely *religious* impulse. He was a separatist. This, the author calls in question, and quotes Davidson as higher authority than Genesis! It is admitted that the record has an unmistakable monotheistic stamp, but then we are told that the pictures in Genesis are an "artificial elaboration," dating from the prophetic period. What Abraham's religious conceptions were, no one can tell, because the subsequent chronicler paints the assumed father of the race as he thinks he should have been! This is naïve. The simplicity is amazing. The only trouble is, that, with such an estimate of the sources of information, it is in-

conceivable that the author did not go much farther, and resolve the entire record into a myth. It is a purely arbitrary criticism which preserves an Abraham, and then denies him to be what he is represented to be; or which concedes Abraham and Moses to have been real persons, and then resolves Jacob and his twelve sons into personifications.

But the author is caught in the same net with the traditionalists,—who simply read the record as it stands, and do not regard Davidson and Wellhausen as higher authorities. The author grants that Abraham was a “*pure* henotheist,” while his neighbors were only “*partial*” henotheists; and that Moses gave to henotheism an exclusive and abiding form and authority. The Decalogue, universally admitted, in the form of the Ten Words, to be of Mosaic origin, admits of no other conclusion. . It is intensely and emphatically a law-code of spiritual and ethical monotheism, as it stands; and the author’s assumption that Moses was only a pronounced henotheist can be made out only by dissecting and mutilating the Decalogue itself. This many critics do; but it only shows to what dire straits criticism is forced. The whole record, in every fiber of it, must be torn to pieces, to make the author’s position good. And what does he gain? Nothing. He gets rid of monotheism as the religion of Abraham and Moses, only to make them the prophets of a peculiar henotheism, which they shared with none others, and which drove the nation at last into absolute monotheism. The “*partial*” henotheism of cognate peoples, speaking the same tongue, did not issue in such a result. Their polytheism and idolatry became more pronounced and cruel. And yet we are to believe that all grew from one and the same root! The author must write another article to show to whom Abraham and Moses were indebted for a henotheism which developed into monotheism. That crucial question he does not so much as touch, and in this peculiarity of the primitive Hebrew henotheism lies the evidence of some form of Divine revelation. It might as well be called monotheism, for monotheism it was in its outcome; and grapes do not grow upon bramble-bushes. The author’s handling of the sources is purely arbitrary, discrediting them from core to circumference; and his admissions are such that his logic is as amazing as his criticism is subversive. If his article is a fair sample of the way in which the modern school of critics remove the perplexities of the Old Testament, the new guides will never lead us out of the woods. The record as it stands is fairly intelligible and consistent; the revised version of it, with all its ingenuity, is unintelligible, because it lacks both historical clearness and logical unity.

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