

## ARTICLE V.

A REMARKABLE CLAIM ON BEHALF OF THE  
RADICAL CRITICISM.

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THE claim to which reference is here made is none the less remarkable for not being literally recent. As a matter of fact, it is so far from being literally recent that it is even a trifle stale from age. And yet the frequency and emphasis with which it has been reiterated during the past eighteen months or two years invest it with a sort of recency. I shall not pause to cite instances or even to give references. A single typical specimen will suffice to call up many others to the reader's mind. Just such a specimen is furnished to our hand in an editorial that appeared in the *Biblical World* for December, 1906. Under the caption "A Quarter Century of Old Testament Study," this editorial undertakes to set forth "the changes" which "within a generation" have taken place in what it calls "Christian thought" regarding the Old Testament, and indeed, I may say, regarding the Bible as a whole. It begins by recalling the general suspicion and aversion with which the Radical Criticism was viewed by the Christian public generally as recently as twenty-five years ago. It next points to the fact that the changed view of the Bible for which the Radical Criticism stands is being widely accepted to-day. Thereupon, it proceeds to ask,—

"Has this change of view been marked by that decline of religion and that loss of influence of the Bible which twenty-five years ago were honestly feared by many who to-day hold these views?"

and to answer its own question by saying,—

"On the contrary, the change has been in every way to the advantage of religion and the Bible."<sup>1</sup>

As already intimated, the claim here set up is in no sense peculiar to the *Biblical World*. It may be found in the pages of such persuasive writers as Professor John Edgar McFadyen, Dr. Charles Foster Kent, and others, who during the past few years have been making earnest efforts to popularize and to commend to the confidence and acceptance of the Christian public the conclusions of what may without offense be called the Radical Criticism.<sup>2</sup> I cite the claim in the form in which it is put forward by the *Biblical World* simply because as there stated it presents us with a specially clear cut and tangible issue.

What, then, is the nature of this claim the validity of which

<sup>1</sup> *Biblical World*, December, 1906, p. 356.

<sup>2</sup> This term is used with deliberation, and the writer trusts with discrimination also. It is used in the hope that it may lead fair-minded persons to take account of a distinction that is too much lost sight of. I refer to the distinction between the findings of the Higher Criticism proper and the findings of the Radical School of the Higher Criticism. To make the Higher Criticism proper responsible for all the findings put forth in its name by those who—if we are going to use language with any discrimination—must be called the Radical School of higher critics, is a mistake that is none the less unfortunate and serious for being only too common. The unquestioned ability and distinction of the leaders of this school, together with their unfortunate habit of thinking and speaking of themselves in the "*L'état c'est moi*" style, has obscured in the public mind the fact that they are after all, in reality, but what may be called "the extreme left" in the parliament of Criticism. This ought not so to be. And without turning aside to discuss the difference between the different schools of higher critics, the writer feels entirely warranted in fixing attention upon the fact that there are different schools, and upon the further point that the character

we are to seek to test? In a general way it relates to the bearing upon the interests of religion and the Bible of what the writer has already more than once called the Radical Criticism.

But let us notice its precise form. The claim before us, then, is not that the conclusions of the Radical Criticism will not necessitate any substantive changes in our conceptions of the Bible. True, just that claim used to be made, and made with all the confidence and earnestness with which the claim now under consideration is being made. But such a claim need no longer concern us. It is safe to say that it has been hopelessly and finally discredited by advancing knowledge. At any rate those who make the claim now under examination tell us frankly that the conclusions of the Radical Criticism, if accepted, will necessitate a changed conception of the Bible.

Nor is the claim that we are to examine merely that the changed conceptions of the Bible necessitated by the conclusions of the Radical Criticism will not harmfully affect the influence of the Bible. It goes much beyond any such tame, negative assurances. The claim is that the changed conception of their respective conclusions is not determined by the fact that one school does, and another does not, use the methods of the Higher Criticism—for all alike use these methods—but by the manner in which they respectively employ these methods, and by the presuppositions that they respectively bring to their employment of them.

The writer wishes to say further, and to say distinctly, that in the use of the term Radical Criticism he is not insinuating opprobrium under the form of definition. That type of Criticism is properly called radical the conclusions of which are revolutionary, going to the very roots of current conceptions of the Bible and religion. Whether these conclusions are right as well as revolutionary is, of course, a separate question, and one to be decided strictly upon its own merits. But, in the meantime, those who regard the Higher Criticism as a legitimate discipline, and who themselves employ its methods, must in fairness be allowed some way of advertising the public that the revolutionary results put forth in the name of the Higher Criticism are not only not demanded, but, in their judgment, not even warranted by that discipline.

of the Bible necessitated by the Radical criticism "has been in every way to the advantage of religion and the Bible"—to the advantage not of religion only, but to that of the Bible also. The form of the verb used here shows clearly that the *Biblical World* does not regard itself as giving expression to what might be called merely an expert opinion, but as bearing testimony to a tested and verified matter of fact. "The change" of which it speaks is a change which it contemplates as having already been effected in the mind of the "Christian public," and one that has been effected for a sufficient length of time to reveal the kind of fruit that it may be expected to bear. Hence it does not say "the change will be found to be in every way to the advantage of religion and the Bible," but, quite specifically and distinctly, "the change has been in every way to the advantage of religion and the Bible." And thus it transfers the issue raised by the claim from the sphere of opinion to that of fact. It transfers the claim from a mere claim into a bit of testimony as to a matter of observed effects. In other words, the specific claim here set up by the *Biblical World* is, that the facts show that the changed conception of the Bible necessitated by the Radical Criticism, as tested in the sphere of experience and by its actually observed effects, "has been in every way to the advantage of religion and the Bible."

Several considerations invite to a careful examination of this claim:—

For one thing, those who make it are serious and honest men. When, therefore, they invite an investigation of their claim, we may be sure that they desire what they invite. They would not set up such a claim unless they themselves believed it well-grounded. And if in this belief they are laboring under a misconception, it is safe to presume that they will be pleased to be disabused of it.

If, on the other hand, their claim is well founded, then, the sooner all who love the Bible become apprised of the fact, the better will it be for the interest of religion and the Bible. And if additional justification of a somewhat detailed examination of this claim were needed, it would be furnished by the fact that, so far as the writer knows, in the sharply defined form in which it is here put forward, this claim has not up to this time received the careful testing to which its intrinsic importance and the high position of those who make the claim entitle it.

Finally the specific form in which the *Biblical World* has cast its not wholly unfamiliar claim will greatly facilitate our examination of it. As already indicated, it brings the matter to which the claim relates into the sphere of testimony. Our method of testing the validity of its claim is, therefore, decided for us. It will be simply to produce witnesses who shall be recognized as competent to testify as to the effects upon the influence of the Bible that up to the present time have been produced by the changed conception of the Bible necessitated by the findings of the Radical Criticism. Fortunately, such witnesses are not lacking. And the force of their testimony will be enhanced rather than otherwise because some of them very cordially believe that the changed conception of the Bible in question ought to, and in the end will, prove to be "to the advantage of religion and the Bible." One can only wish that he might rationally hope that they may be right. In the meantime, it will be observed that the writer cites them not as prophets but merely as witnesses.

The first witness whom I shall introduce is the late lamented Dr. William R. Harper, President of the University of Chicago, until his death the editor-in-chief of the *Biblical World* and a conspicuous and admirable figure in the ranks of the

radical critics of America. In the year 1904, Dr. Harper put out a little book entitled "Religion and the Higher Life." In this volume, as we are told in the preface, he gathered together the talks, more or less informal, which for several years previous he had been delivering before bodies of students. These addresses, as his preface also informs us, represent Dr. Harper's effort to discharge in a measure a responsibility which he declares weighed upon him more heavily than any other connected with the office which he had been called upon to administer. They all relate to what their author calls "the practical questions of a religious life." Here, then, we have one, himself a radical critic, possessed of a deep sense of his personal responsibility to promote the religious welfare of the students who passed under his hands, speaking to a body of students who lived in an atmosphere impregnated with the ideas of the Radical Criticism. It would look, therefore, as if in this connection, if anywhere, we should be entitled to expect to find conspicuously in evidence the advantages that have accrued to religion and the Bible from the Radical Criticism. But what does Dr. Harper himself say? These are his words:—

"And yet, I have noticed that with each recurring year it has required a greater effort on my part to undertake this kind of service. I have asked myself whether, as a matter of fact, it was growing more difficult to deal with subjects of this kind in a university atmosphere."<sup>1</sup>

The tone of sadness and the consciousness of failure that is in these words is unmistakable. There is no suggestion that Dr. Harper found the task to which he had set himself lightened by the advantages accruing to religion and the Bible from the type of criticism of which he himself was a conspicuous advocate.

My second witness shall be Mrs. Louise Seymour Hough-

<sup>1</sup> Preface, p. viii.

ton. Mrs. Houghton was formerly editor of the *New York Evangelist*. Last year, she published a very readable and instructive book entitled "Hebrew Life and Thought." This book issued from the press of the University of Chicago. In its preface Mrs. Houghton says:—

"The purpose of these papers was not, and is not, to give forth original ideas, but to bring the more or less cultured but unscientific Bible student into a hospitable attitude toward the new light that scholarship has shed upon the sacred page. It has long been my conviction that if scientific scholarship had more generously availed itself of this method of culture, it would not have aroused that alarm and antagonism with which it even yet has to reckon."<sup>1</sup>

I presume that the great body of Bible students would be included among those whom Mrs. Houghton here speaks of as "unscientific." It is clear, however, that in calling them "unscientific" she does not mean to describe them as unintelligent. On the contrary, she speaks of them as persons of more or less culture. Here, then, is a large body of Bible students who, according to the testimony of Mrs. Houghton, have failed to perceive the advantages to religion and the Bible accruing from the Radical Criticism, and that notwithstanding the fact that they are confessedly persons of more or less culture.

But Mrs. Houghton gives even more directly significant testimony than this. After having called attention to the conspicuous, one might even say the dominating, influence exercised by the Bible upon English literature in the past, she adds:—

"Few young people of to-day have a verbal acquaintance with the Old Testament, and it will soon become necessary to edit all our greatest writers, even such novelists as Hardy and Stevenson, with explanations of the Biblical allusions."<sup>2</sup>

And here I must beg attention to the fact that Mrs. Houghton speaks more particularly, doubtless, for the young people

<sup>1</sup> Preface, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

of her own circle—that is to say, please observe, for those who have grown up in the atmosphere of the Radical Criticism. Certainly if she can be relied upon as a well-informed witness. the advantages to religion and the Bible that have accrued from the Radical Criticism are of a most extraordinary and doubtful kind.

Let us hear another witness. This time it is a correspondent of the *Interior*, a Presbyterian paper published in Chicago and known to many. His statement will be found in the issue of September 5, 1904, under the caption "Folks, Places, and Things." He is giving what purports to be the actual experience of a Presbyterian minister. This minister says:—

"One fall there came to us a splendid young fellow from Chicago University to train the boys in football. I liked him and got to know him very confidentially. One day to my surprise he told me that a year before he had intended to enter the ministry, but after taking a year in the divinity school of the University of Chicago he had thrown up the whole idea."

The minister goes on to say:—

"I asked him what had changed his plans.

"'I'll have to be candid with you,' he answered; 'I suppose I was already getting a good deal mixed about some things just in my own private thinking, but it was the lectures of Professor Foster that convinced me that I had no business trying to be a preacher.'

"'What did Dr. Foster teach you?'"

"'Well, he showed that there was nothing miraculous about the Bible; that the religion of the Jews just grew up naturally like other religions; and that Jesus Christ was the Son of God only in the same sense that all of us are; that the miracle stories can't any of them be true; that the death of Jesus didn't do anything for us; that it's our own character that saves us and we don't need the benefit of anybody else's character, and so on—all that goes with that. When I found I believed all this, I didn't seem to have anything to preach, and so I gave it up.'"

I might cite further from the statements of the same witness, but surely it is not necessary. Here, then, we have the claim set up by the *Biblical World* put to a crucial test under the



most favorable conditions, and the reader sees what is the outcome. Please observe I do not now introduce the question "Was the young man right in the conclusion that he reached?" I simply call attention to the plain matter of fact that the outcome of the acceptance of the results of the Radical Criticism in this case was that the Bible and the religion of the Bible were thoroughly discredited in the mind of this young man.

The next witness who shall be permitted to speak as to the claim set up by the *Biblical World* is Dr. Charles Foster Kent, formerly of the University of Chicago and now of Yale. No one can charge Dr. Kent with any disposition to be a swift witness against the Radical Criticism. Last year he put forth a volume entitled "The Origin and Permanent Value of the Old Testament." The opening sentence of the preface of this volume reads as follows:—

"During the past generation the Old Testament has commanded equally with the New the enthusiastic and devoted study of the great body of biblical scholars throughout the world."

The next sentence but one, however, reads as follows:—

"At the same time the tendency of the rank and file of the Christian church within the past decade has undoubtedly been to neglect the older Testament."

A little further along in his preface I find him saying:—

"If, on the other hand, the prevailing apathy and neglect are due to ignorance of the real character and value of the Old Testament, let us lose no time in setting ourselves right."<sup>1</sup>

And on the tenth page of his book, after having criticised the methods of certain scholars of his school in bringing the results of their work to the attention of the public, he suggests that had they shown more wisdom

"many open-minded people might have been saved from the supreme error of writing, consciously or unconsciously, '*Ichabod*' across the pages of their Old Testament."

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, Preface, p. vi.

Far be it from me to intimate that Dr. Kent means to say that the effects indicated ought to have followed as the natural result of the Radical Criticism. On the contrary, one object of his book is to show that the Radical Criticism, properly understood, is wholly "to the advantage of religion and the Bible." I have cited him not for his expert opinion as to what the result of the Radical Criticism ought to be, but as a witness to what, as a matter of fact, those results, up to this time, have actually been. And you will observe that, while he holds to the theory that the results ought to have been very different, he confesses that, as a matter of fact, the actual outcome of this kind of criticism has been that many open-minded people, either consciously or unconsciously, have been led to write "Ichabod" across the pages of their Old Testament.

The next witness whom I shall cite is Dr. Andrew C. Zenos, of McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago. In January of the year 1907, Dr. Zenos wrote for the *Homiletic Review* an article entitled "The Established Results of Old Testament Study." In this article he shows himself to be, I will not say partial to what I have called the Radical Criticism, but certainly not hostile to it. Later in the discussion he says:—

"But from another point of view we may ask the matter of fact question: What effect has the use of the critical method had on men's judgment of the Old Testament as a book of religious inspiration and instruction? It is not to be denied that the well-meant but ill-advised warnings of some on one side, and the rash claims of some unbelievers on the other have persuaded many to look on this sort of study as dangerous to the Christian faith, and the Old Testament has suffered a partial eclipse."

Let the reader note Dr. Zenos's words. He says distinctly, "The Old Testament has suffered a partial eclipse." It is true that Dr. Zenos does not regard this as the direct or legitimate result of the prevalence of the Radical Criticism. On the contrary, he ascribes this result in part to the ill-advised warnings

of some on one side, and in part to the rash claims of some unbelievers on the other side, in the controversy called forth by the Radical Criticism. Further, it is fair to direct attention to the fact that immediately after the statement that "the Old Testament has suffered partial eclipse," Dr. Zenos adds, "But it is emerging from this temporary obscurity fuller than it was ever known to be of spiritual illumination." The reader, however, will easily discriminate between Dr. Zenos's personal opinions and cheerful prognostications on the one hand, and his statements as to the actual outcome of the Radical Criticism up to this time. He says explicitly that "the Old Testament has suffered a partial eclipse." And now I ask, With whom has it "suffered a partial eclipse"? It has certainly suffered no such eclipse in the case of the present writer. The Old Testament never appeared to him more certainly and luminously divine in its origin and teachings. Nor has it suffered eclipse with those who hold to the present writer's conception of the Bible. For them, the Old Testament is to-day what it has always been for them, namely, "the oracles of God," "the scriptures of truth." With whom, then, has the Old Testament suffered the partial eclipse of which Dr. Zenos speaks? I answer, It is with those, and only with those, who have given a too-easy credence to the claims of the Radical Criticism. I do not say, and the reader will please observe that I do not now say, that the Old Testament ought to have suffered even a partial eclipse with those just referred to. It may be that in permitting it to suffer such an eclipse they were doing an injustice alike to the Bible, to the Radical Criticism, and to themselves. But the fact remains, that, Dr. Zenos himself being witness, the Old Testament *has suffered* such an eclipse in the case of those who have lent a too-credulous ear to the teachings of the Radical Criticism.

The next witness who shall testify upon the issue raised by the *Biblical World* is no less a person than Professor Goldwin Smith, and one whose well-earned distinction in the realm of letters, and in other departments of learning, is, I take it, familiar to the readers of this journal. In 1906 Professor Smith put forth a little volume entitled "In Quest of Light." In it he gathers up and puts in permanent form a series of letters from his pen which had appeared from time to time in the *New York Sun*. The first essay in the book opens with the following sentences:—

"One clergyman, it seems, denies the infallibility of the Bible and treats the Church as an association for general improvement. A second finds in the Bible inaccuracy and worse. A third professes to believe only so much of the Bible as commends itself to his judgment."

It closes with the following sentence:—

"The three eminent clergymen, it is to be feared, are sliding down a slippery incline, on which no permanent foothold is to be found."

The essay as a whole really amounts to a well-meant bit of courteously given advice to clergymen, of the stamp indicated in the opening sentence, not to overpress the policy of silence or dissimulation in dealing with the general public. Professor Smith thinks that it would be an unfortunate impression to go abroad, that the clergy are, so to speak, dedicated to falsehood. He reminds them that, while caution and tenderness will always be in order, these are not incompatible with sincerity and frankness. And here the writer pauses to ask: Who are the clergy that have laid themselves open to this kind of counsel from this source? Are they those who hold with Christ and the apostles that Moses gave the law. Are they those who hold with the Apostle Paul that the Old Testament is "the oracles of God"? Hardly, I think. They are rather those who have taken up a hospitable attitude toward what is called "the new

light" that the Radical Criticism is supposed to have shed upon the sacred page. They furnish us a concrete illustration of the new ethics to which the Radical Criticism leads.

But I return to Professor Smith. Here is what he has to say as to the effect of what he inaccurately calls the "higher criticism":—

"It can hardly be denied that between the higher criticism on one side and Darwin's momentous discovery on the other, materialism, in the scientific and philosophic sense, positive or negative, is gaining ground. We are called upon at all events to find a new warrant for spiritual life, for reliance on the dictates of conscience, for any hopes that we may have cherished of existence beyond the grave, for confidence in a divine order of the universe. We can no longer believe that the miscellany of Hebrew writings, many of them of doubtful authorship and date, some of them plainly mythical, are a divine revelation. Nor is anything to be hoped from an attempt to evade the difficulty by suggesting that Deity, in its dealings with man, had to accommodate itself to the Darwinian law of evolution. Of the Gospels, criticism has spared only the character and teachings of Jesus, which, on any hypothesis, have given birth to Christendom. In the authenticity, contemporaneity and harmony of the documents we can confide no more. We can no longer sincerely accept the evidence for the Incarnation, the Immaculate Conception, the miracles, the Resurrection; or deem it such as would certainly have been given in proof of a revelation, which was to be the light of the world. Moreover, the Fall being a myth, as it is now allowed on almost all hands to be, there is no ground for the Incarnation and the Atonement, a disclosure which in itself is fatal to the dogmatic and traditional creed of Christendom. Nor, we must sorrowfully confess, is the collapse of our evidence limited to the case of revelation."<sup>1</sup>

And still, in the light of such testimony as this, the *Biblical World* has the hardihood to declare that the change wrought by the Radical Criticism has been wholly to the advantage of the Bible and religion!

I might introduce a score of other equally competent and unbiassed witnesses as to the effect of the Radical Criticism upon religion and the Bible in the case of those who lend a

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 126.

too-credulous ear to its claim; but I must forbear, and content myself with citing just one other witness on this point. I refer to Dr. Frederick Delitzsch. Many of my readers will recall the sensation that was created by two lectures that he delivered before the Emperor of Germany, and that he subsequently published under the title of "Babel and Bible." Let us hear what are the conclusions in regard to the Bible to which Dr. Delitzsch himself has been led by the Radical Criticism. I quote:—

"And this inconsistency produces an increasingly widening gulf. When, e.g., a theologian of no less authority writes (26th January, 1903), 'You criticise a conception of Revelation that sensible Protestants no longer share; it is that of the antiquated Lutheran Dogmatists. . . . All divine revelation is, of course, affected by the human medium, and must therefore have historically developed'; he describes exactly the standpoint that I myself advocate, only I regard the conception of 'divine revelation' as held by the Church and that of a historical, i.e. human, development, to be irreconcilable contradictions. Either we take one or the other. *Tertium non datur*.

"I hold the view that in the Old Testament we have to deal with a development effected or permitted by God like any other product of this world, but, for the rest, of a purely human and historical character, in which God has not intervened through a 'special, supernatural revelation.'"<sup>1</sup>

And what is the gist of this statement? It is this, Dr. Delitzsch has been forced to the conclusion that for those who, with himself, hold to the results of the Radical Criticism, to apply the term "divine revelation" to the Bible is a gross solecism, or an offensive dishonesty. How any thoughtful man can dispute the correctness of Dr. Delitzsch's contention is beyond the comprehension of the writer. If, then, it be in every way to the advantage of religion and the Bible that the Old Testament should be irretrievably divested of its character as the Word of God, of course the claim of the *Biblical World*

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 186. The edition referred to is that issued by the Open Court Press, Chicago, 1903.

stands vindicated. But to me this seems a contradiction in terms.

In conclusion the writer has only two remarks to make. One is that he has of set purpose avoided dragging into his discussion the question of the correctness or the incorrectness of the findings of the Radical Criticism. This he recognizès as the ultimate question; and one to be settled upon its own proper evidence. The *Biblical World* and those whom it represents believe, of course, that those findings are correct. On the other hand, the writer and those whom he represents regard them as incorrect and unwarranted. And sooner or later the reader will have to line himself up with the one view or the other. But even though he should come to the conclusion that the findings of the Radical Criticism are correct, and therefore entitled to his acceptance, it need not follow that he will hug to his soul the fond delusion that these findings are "in every way to the advantage of religion and the Bible." If they are correct, then no doubt sooner or later we shall all have to accept them, and that even though they should be to the advantage neither of the Bible nor of religion. In the meantime, in the light of the evidence submitted, it is evident that one will not be wiser if he permits the assurance that the changed view of the Bible necessitated by the findings of the Radical Criticism has been "in every way to the advantage of religion and the Bible" to cause him too lightly to accept those findings.

The other remark that seems to be justified by the evidence is, that the claim that we have been considering, proceeding from the source from which it does, represents either a singularly infelicitous use of the familiar terms, or an ignorance of the facts testified to by the unimpeachable witnesses cited above that is as deplorable as it is surprising.