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ART. I.—THE HIGHER CRITICISM.¹

“These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority, let no man despise thee!”—Titus ii. 15.

THE Church of England has a story stretching now over centuries. She boasts a long roll of distinguished sons, faithful to her teaching. These, if they have had the good fortune to be alumni of this University, are always proud to recall among their titles to honour their ancient connection with Oxford. The divine, the lawyer, the man of letters, the statesman, however high they may rise in their several callings, never forget that first and foremost they were Oxford men.

What Oxford has done in the last fifty years for the Church we love so well is in the memory of us all. Even those who in some points perhaps disagree with the teaching which bears her honoured name give witness to the noble revival of Church life, so largely owing to the Oxford school. As a member of another University famous, too, in the annals of our country, I can venture to record an ungrudging admiration, and to express an unstinting praise, of Oxford and its work.

But such a storied past as yours carries with it deep and vast responsibilities; far and wide is the influence which teaching issuing from this famed centre exercises. *Words* spoken here, *books* written here—the *words* are repeated, the *books* are read again and again, in lonely villages, in busy towns, not only in England, but in the Greater Britain beyond the seas. The very “silences” of Oxford, or any topic which *touches* men’s hearts, have their weight, and exercise an influence far and wide.

The great army of ordained clergy of our Church, the smaller but still great army of Nonconformist teachers of Christianity, receive always with respect, often with enthusiasm, any

¹ This paper is the “Pride” sermon, preached before the University of Oxford on Sunday, November 26, 1893.

teaching which bears, or seems to bear, the hall mark of Oxford. In countless instances the views and opinions of these men, many of whom have scant leisure to study for themselves, are moulded and shaped by the teaching which emanates from this great centre.

Many questions of absorbing interest of late have occupied men's minds and hearts, such as grave and pressing political disputes, the relations between capital and labour, the ever-present problem of increasing poverty; but it will, I think be readily conceded that no question is of deeper importance than one which has comparatively lately come to the front among us, and which touches the trustworthiness of our Bible.

Men in the busy world on first thoughts may smile at such an assertion. What, would you claim a *foremost* place among the burning questions of the day for a subject which at first sight appears mainly to concern a few scholars?

But the points involved in this scholars' subject affect—at least, so think some of us—our hopes of eternal life, for they seem to touch, ay, even to threaten, the very foundation stories of our faith.

Now, the peculiar *theme* laid down as the subject of the sermon I have been invited to preach before you gives me the opportunity, or rather lays upon me the obligation, of dwelling upon some of the possible results of pride, and frees me from the charge of presumption in dwelling upon such a subject as "intellectual pride," and its too probable consequences, before such an audience.

Let me begin by boldly telling you what is in the minds, if not on the lips, of very many of our most thoughtful brother Englishmen. In the last years a few scholars of distinguished ability among us have joined hands with a famous foreign school of divinity. The results of their joint studies have alarmed and disturbed many earnest and devout souls. These scholars—some of us think on insufficient grounds—have attacked the traditional belief of centuries, ay, of all the Christian centuries, in our Old Testament. Their theories, which in not a few cases they put out as *certainties*, appear to many of us as utterly subversive of the very foundation of our loved religion.

Let me plainly in a few words sketch out what we understand to be the heads of the teaching pressed on us by the leaders of the so-called Higher Criticism. We are now asked to disbelieve generally the traditional teaching we possess respecting a large portion of the Old Testament, to set aside as *worthless* the teaching of the Jewish people respecting their own (prized) Scriptures, teaching which has endured not for 2,000 years only, but for an indefinite period before even that distant date.

We are asked to discredit the solemn teachings of the Church in the matter of the Old Testament Scriptures in all the Christian ages, to put aside as false and wrong the opinions of the great Catholic doctors in all times and in all lands, from the days of Justin and Irenæus to the days of Pusey and Liddon.

"Incende quod adorâsti" would seem to be the motto adopted by the new destructive school.

At the risk of appearing to exaggerate, I will briefly set before you some of the startling results of the Higher Criticism, as they *appear* to the majority of the people who have devoted any attention to the contest now going on respecting the criticism of the Old Testament.

Up to a very recent date—in the question of the Old Testament—the Church in its teaching followed generally the tradition of the Jewish Synagogue—a tradition certainly held by the Jews *before* the Christian era. This most venerable Hebrew tradition taught that the Pentateuch in its present form was substantially the work of Moses.

Among Christians we may affirm that no shadow of doubt existed respecting the historical existence of Abraham and the patriarchs. The story of the deliverance from Egypt, the desert wanderings of Israel, the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness by divinely instructed builders, the separation of the tribe of Levi by Divine command, the Aaronic priesthood, the institution of the Passover—all these things related in the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua were received as *historical* facts; and the canonical Epistle to the Hebrews has been ever received as the undoubted inspired commentary on much of this ancient honoured story.

Not a few of the Psalms, too, so loved of men, by Church and synagogue alike, were looked upon as undoubtedly the work of David, of Solomon, and of inspired men of their school who lived in the early days of the Hebrew monarchy.

Now a teaching of considerable authority has gone forth which with no uncertain voice proclaims—to use the words of an aged and learned prelate of our Church—that "in the grand and elevating narratives shrined in the Pentateuch, received as Holy Scripture by the Christian Church for nearly two thousand years, by the Jewish Synagogue for a longer period still—narratives by which the hearts of millions have been made to feel the nearness and the awful holiness of God—that in these sacred narratives *there is not one word of historic truth*; that they are but *fictitious* narratives—narratives which *pretend* to be contemporary with Moses, and to give an account of the ordaining of the institutions above referred to

by the Divine command of God—are, in fact, simply the invention of an age many hundred years (seven or eight hundred) later than Moses, and have their origin, not in any Divine revelation, but, forsooth, in the *political* needs of the heads of the Jewish community in an age shortly before, during, or after the Babylonish captivity.”

Then, as regards the Psalms: Neither David, nor Solomon, nor the men of their school, who lived in the early days of the monarchy—*none even* of the fourteen generations who lived between David and the carrying away into Babylon—had any real hand in the composition of the Psalter. One solitary Psalm alone, the xviii., writes a very distinguished scholar of this school, is the only possible pre-Exile Psalm!

To speak of the treatment of the *prophetic* books at the hands of the Higher Criticism would be impossible in the narrow limits of a single sermon. I cannot, however, refrain from dwelling very briefly upon our Lord's testimony to the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, which make up the Old Testament volume. This testimony, whatever be the value we set upon it, can never be left out when we discuss the questions necessarily involved by the demands of the new criticism.

That Jesus Christ, as represented in the Gospels, estimated the Old Testament Scriptures very differently to the new teachers no one would attempt to deny. In the Gospel narrative, I believe the Lord cited or referred to passages in the Old Testament Scriptures more than four hundred times! His knowledge of them was evidently of the most exact and comprehensive nature; to Him Abraham and Moses were real historical personages; the incidents related in the Pentateuch and Joshua belonged to history, and not to fiction. He regarded these writings pre-eminently as Holy Scripture; of Moses He speaks as having given the Law, as having written of Himself.

Now, could Jesus Christ have been mistaken in His estimate of these Old Testament writings? May we assume that “the limitation of our Lord's humanity, and the degree of what is technically called His *kenosis*, was of such a nature that His knowledge in regard to the authorship and composition of the books of the Old Testament was no greater than that of the masters of Israel of His own time?”

To this grave question, one still among us, who from his great learning, his acknowledged scholarship, his well-nigh unrivalled reputation as a profound theologian, has the fullest right to be heard on this point, thus argues: “Can we,” he asks, “feel hesitation or difficulty in maintaining distinctly and firmly this most certain truth, that the Lord Jesus Christ did verily in His human nature not only know all that has been

known or can be known as to those Holy Scriptures which He came to set forth and to fulfil, but, further, that owing to the union of the two natures, and to the inflowing of Divine gifts and powers into His sinless humanity, every question relating to the Scriptures must be considered as finally and for ever settled by Him whensoever it can be shown, by the nature of His utterance, that the question must have been really before Him."

But even for the sake of argument—but only for the sake of argument—granting that the testimony of the Lord before His crucifixion to these Scriptures may be set aside, and the doctrine of the *kenosis* so far accepted as to understand a limitation of historical knowledge during the period of His humiliation, what must we say to the plain statement of St. Luke's report of our Lord's words spoken *after* His resurrection? Surely no voice of Christian teacher can be found to suggest any idea of *kenosis then*? For in His teaching during the forty days after His resurrection, when He arrived at the term and limit of His earthly existence, He in no wise modified or lessened His authoritative references to the Old Testament Scriptures, again studiously referring to the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms as the Scriptures bearing witness to Himself. Surely, then, any limitations that some might conceive as voluntarily accepted during the period of His humiliation were not only withdrawn, but were impossible to conceive in the case of the *glorified Lord*. Twice in the last chapter of St. Luke, which treats of the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, we find a plain statement from His blessed lips, setting, as it were, an authoritative seal upon the teaching respecting the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms, which He had given them during the days of His humiliation.

And these definite statements of our Lord—*this seal* upon His former repeated teaching respecting the Old Testament—never let us forget, was put forth by Him, when robed in the glorious resurrection body—put forth in one of those momentous interviews with His followers, at the very period when He told them "how all power was given to Him in heaven and in earth."

To what conclusions will all this lead us? It is impossible to me, and to many who think with me, to reconcile the thought of ascribing ignorance to our Lord *after* that He had risen from the dead, with the Catholic view of His adorable person. Will not these conclusions, *if adopted*, necessarily lead to new and modified conceptions of Him, whom the Catholic Church loves as Redeemer and adores as very God of very God?

But are not these teachers of the new criticism—these "wanderers from the Old Testament psalter"—perhaps un-

consciously, cutting themselves off from the old Catholic tradition? I speak with all humility, with the voice of the most tender-loving remonstrance. Let them look round. They stand alone; they have no ancestors to whom they dare refer. By the light of their own intelligence they are determining the gravest questions of criticism. They are telling us *which* of the sacred writings possess any historical truth; they are settling *the age* in which each was written—nay, more, they are unfolding for us *the very motives of each writer* in the statements which he makes—motives sometimes comparatively innocent, sometimes purely corrupt. “Motive purely corrupt.” I pause a moment. The writer I quote was not alone in this estimate. Is this too strong language? One of the last letters I received from a scholar and divine deservedly held in high honour by this University, whose sympathies were ever broad and generous—too broad some would say—I allude to Dr. Plumptre, the late learned Dean of Wells—contained the following words. He was speaking of that gifted German scholar, widely known as the foremost of the teachers of the Higher Criticism, and whose conclusions largely form the basis of the teaching adopted in England:

“If we accept *his* conclusions,” wrote Dean Plumptre, “the Old Testament in its narrative and its laws is simply the most false and fraudulent history in the literature of the world.” (This letter was published in the *Guardian*.)

The leaders of the Higher Criticism in England have somewhat taken by surprise those among us who love the old paths made for us by the great teachers of the Catholic Church. As long as the novel speculations were confined to foreign schools, comparatively little attention was excited in England; we were accustomed to a succession of strange and daring theories emanating from Tübingen and other foreign centres—theories arousing but a partial and languid interest among us, and after a time mostly refuted and forgotten.

It is, however, the adoption by some honoured names in our great English Universities of these novel speculations which has disturbed and unsettled so many near and dear to us. Surely—argue not a few outside these honoured walls—surely if *Oxford* gives these startling novelties countenance, and as it appears, at least, on the surface, raises no *audible* voice of protest, giving, as it would seem, a *silent* acquiescence, if not a direct approval, there must be something in them! Perhaps, after all, the Higher Criticism is right, and the Jewish Synagogue and the Catholic Church has been from the beginning wrong, and for all these centuries have taught error

for truth—an error endorsed by our Divine Master Himself even in His resurrection life!

May not we who love the old paths, and would walk therein—may not we, in all gentleness and sad humility, bid our brothers and sisters *outside* these loved walls—men and women who watch with deep anxiety, and the *voices* and the *silences* of Oxford—may we not bid these wait? for the last word on these momentous topics has not as yet been spoken.

Some well known among us have already put out strong protests—strong in English common-sense—strong, too, in scholarship. Fearlessly they claim to refute the telling and specious arguments; arguments based on the language of the several books; arguments based on the so-called anachronisms; arguments based on the alleged absence of all evidence of the existence of a Mosaic law and institutions between the Exodus and the later days of the Hebrew monarchy.

These men, and others like them, are not terrified by the bold and sweeping criticism of their brilliant adversaries; they acknowledge the skill and the boldness of the attack, but they know Him in whom they trust, and are sure of victory at last.¹

Yes, we are sure of victory in the end. But in the meantime it is the *outside* world, who have scant leisure for study, for whom they fear. It is the shipwreck of these countless souls they dread. This dread of the effect of the strange, novel theories of this new, cheerless teaching is shared by many an earnest worker, thinker, scholar in divine things.

Since I wrote these words, only a few days ago, a sad and singular confirmation of them has appeared. This very month a third aged and honoured prelate of our Church has sounded the same note of alarm in his public triennial charge to his assembled clergy. Let me quote his words. They are few but solemn. "It is my deliberate opinion"—he is speaking of the whole system of Higher Criticism—"that it is calculated to *shake the faith of millions*, and to strike a heavy blow at the two great foundation-truths of Christianity."

Now, the comparatively recent and novel attack necessitates on the part of the defenders new lines of research and study. I dare predict that a real advantage will in the long run accrue

¹ The scholars and writers of the schools whose conclusions we depreciate are by no means so confident of *their* eventual triumph. One whom many a disciple, even of the higher criticism, would shrink to follow in his cheerless conclusions, positively predicts a possible, nay, a probable ultimate defeat. Some may term Renan's remarkable words almost a prophecy: "It is not impossible that, wearied with the frequent bankruptcies of Liberalism, the world may yet become Jewish and Christian."—"Hist. du Peuple Israel," tom. i., p. 7.

to the Church from studies specially undertaken to meet this strange and novel attack.

The net result of the threshing out the various questions raised some time ago by the Higher Criticism of the *New Testament* has been to place the several books of the New Testament canon upon a surer basis in the estimation of all serious critics than they occupied at any previous period. We are immeasurably the richer for this prolonged but now almost closed contest.

I should scarcely like to close this brief but studiedly gentle protest against the new views without just indicating (it would be impossible, of course, to do more) some of the lines of refutation already suggested by the advocates of the old traditional school in the case of *one* or *two* of the more weighty arguments urged by the "new teachers."

One of the most weighty of these is the argument of *language*. The Hebrew of the Pentateuch, says the Higher Criticism, is not the Hebrew of the age of Moses, but of a much later age. "The uniformity of the language of the Old Testament is partly explained by the fact that the ancient mode of writing *only* the consonants did not provide for the variation of those variations in vowel sounds which usually marks the history of languages; and when at a later period a system of vowel points was adopted, a uniformity in this respect would be the result." But Professor Robertson, whose words I have quoted, goes on to say "that it must not be supposed that there is no difference between early and late productions. The Books of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah betray their late date by the presence of the so-called Chaldee portions." Again the Pentateuch has a more limited vocabulary and certain archaic spellings; there are many words, too, says the Bishop of Bath and Wells, in the Pentateuch which occur nowhere else. There is little to fear on the side of the opponents of the new school from a searching and scholarly inquiry here.

One more example I would quote here. It is alleged there is an absence of all evidence of the Mosaic institutions between the time of the Exodus and the later times of the Jewish monarchy, especially of institutions of such singular importance as the *setting up of the tabernacle*, the *separation of the tribe of Levi*, and the *substitution of the Aaronic priesthood*.

Now, this assertion—I quote here from the Bishop of Bath and Wells—is at first sight a weighty one, but is scarcely borne out by the facts of the case.

The tabernacle is mentioned over eighty times in the Pentateuch; in each of the historical books which follow the Pentateuch—Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings,

1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles—it is mentioned once or more, in all about eighteen times. How is this (asks the Bishop) compatible with the non-existence of the tabernacle till after the time when these historical books were written?

A similar argument is followed out with great success with regard to repeated allusions to these leading characteristic institutions of the Mosaic Law occurring again and again in the historical books above mentioned, containing the history of the people between the age of the Pentateuch and the later times of the Jewish monarchy.

On the same points I would refer to the lately-published work of Professor Leathes, who has conclusively shown from accumulated internal evidence that all the prophets, those of Israel as well as those of Judah, the *earliest* as well as the *later* ones, were intimately acquainted with the Pentateuch.

“I would put it,” strikingly says the same venerable Prelate, “to every honest mind, that if the Pentateuch and its great institutions were all late inventions seven or eight hundred years after Moses, why were the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles kept, as we see they were—why was there an unbroken series of highpriests from Aaron to Abiathar and Zadok, as we see there was, and onwards down to the destruction of Jerusalem?”

“Why was there a body of priests and Levites always evidently existing? Why, through the most unsettled times, was there one tabernacle with the ark of the covenant, the table of shewbread, the ephod?”

And yet we are told that all these things were absolutely unhistorical inventions!¹

These are only examples. But, as said before, in England we are only on the threshold of the controversy. Years may probably elapse before the advocates of the old belief have said their last words.

Of so novel a nature, and covering so broad an area, are the thoughts of the Higher Criticism, that to refute them exhaustively will not be the work of two or three years—scarcely even of a generation. Advisedly, too, I use the words “of so *novel* a nature,” for I believe I am accurate in stating that the arguments of the Higher Criticism—forged in the schools of Germany, forged with hammer and anvil, lying

¹ Since the above words were spoken in the Oxford University pulpit the weighty work of that most distinguished archæologist, Professor Sayce, has been published (“The Higher Criticism and the Monuments”), simply shattering not a few of the more important conclusions of the leaders of the “new” school. The concluding words of the learned author are remarkable: “*The evidence of oriental archæology is distinctly unfavourable to the pretensions of the Higher Criticism.*”

for two centuries unnoticed in the workshop of the poor excommunicated Jew, Spinoza, and since adopted by a few great English scholars—*never occurred* to either friend or foe of revealed religion *before Spinoza* dreamed his strange destructive dream, and his German disciples and English scholars took up and brought to light his cheerless theories. I ought, perhaps—when I say these arguments never occurred to friend or foe of revealed religion before Spinoza—to accept some half-forgotten suggestions of Aben-Ezra, and some vague uncertain theories put out by the early heretics, especially in the Clementine homilies.

In conclusion, I would add, if I have said one harsh word, or given utterance to one unkind thought, in all humility I ask the pardon of anyone who may feel wounded or hurt, either by the word or the thought. Those distinguished scholars who have adopted and are teaching theories so deeply at variance with all that I, and those who think with me, hold dear and prize, are, I fear, teaching what, alas! they *think* is truth. We may shrink from their views, but we may and should honour the men, for they know not what they do! In a few short years we and they shall be far away from the applause or the condemnation of *men*—we shall be awaiting the summons to a bar of judgment very different to that bar of public opinion where we are both preparing now to plead our cause.

Let us both remember how in that day, *love*, in the great word's highest sense, and only *love*, will cover the multitude of sins, and will win for us the smile of Him who sits on the great white throne.

In this sweet holy spirit of divinest love and divinest forbearance, let us wage what we both deem our holy war; avoiding all thought of bitterness—all words of violence and anger. Remembering both the awful pressing danger of human pride entering in and poisoning all our works and days. On the side I call mine, we have to contend with the pride of tradition—the pride that we are the party who are holding fast and close—perhaps too close, too blindly, to the story of a noble and illustrious ancestry, an ancestry of well-nigh three thousand years!

On their side, they must fight—no light or easy task!—the pride of human scholarship, often erring, often exaggerating; a pride ready to trample ruthlessly beneath the feet the faith, the hope, the joy, the trust of millions of brothers and sisters—weak brothers and sisters, perhaps, in their scholar-eyes, but still men and women for whom Christ died!

Let us both remember in the hour of our mutual pride in our work and teaching, how, perhaps, the holy awful Judge is

looking on that work and teaching with very different eyes to ours; or, in the words of Gregory, quoted by our English Hooker: "Sordet in conspectu judicis, quod fulget in conspectu operantis."
H. D. M. SPENCE, D.D.



ART. II.—THE LEGEND OF ST. URSULA AND THE
ELEVEN THOUSAND VIRGINS.

OUR readers have been able to trace in the history of the Veronica Handkerchief the successive stages through which the mythical legends of the Mediæval Church have passed from their first rude inception to their perfect, though perhaps not final, development. Through a series of changes of persons and places and names, we have seen the gradual formation of a very interesting and romantic personality, and out of a mythical Berenice have witnessed the creation of a still more mythical Veronica. As we get farther on into mediæval mythology we find the ingenuity and adaptiveness of the legendary authors becomes less visible and is replaced by a boldness of invention which is almost startling. A conspicuous instance of this change presents itself in the Legend of St. Ursula and her eleven thousand virgins, whose very doubtful relics are familiar to all who are acquainted with the churches of Cologne, in whose walls this very miscellaneous collection is so carefully preserved. In this case a mythical saint has been created, who is acknowledged by the learned of the Roman Church never to have had a corporal existence, and a Pope has been extemporized for the occasion who has no recognised place in the Petrine chain, while a British-Armorian romance has been interwoven with a legend of German martyrology to complete the triumph of mediæval credulity. But the introduction into the scene of the imaginary Pope Cyriacus, who, according to the fashion of the age, was sainted, brought a new element of a legal character into this series of impossibilities. For to complete the story, and enable the imaginary pope to accompany the eleven thousand virgins on their expedition, it was necessary that he should resign the Papacy and surrender his authority to a successor. This renunciation, religiously believed in for several centuries, was alleged as an important precedent in the controversy which was raised on the election of Pope Boniface VIII., whether a pope had the power to resign his authority and hand it down to another. A remarkable treatise on this subject was composed by the famous canonist, Ægidius de Columna, in which he refers to this instance of the pseudo-Cyriacus, which forms one of the corner-stones of the Ursuline legend. The imaginary