

## ART. IV.—CRITICAL METHODS.

IN dealing with the criticism of the Old Testament, to which my remarks to-day will be confined, there are two ways in which the problem may be approached.<sup>1</sup> We may approach it from the standpoint of the convinced Christian, and show how, from its narrow and one-sided view of the subject, it entirely overthrows the conceptions of Scripture which in the mind of the believer are based on a variety of cumulative considerations. Or we may approach it from the standpoint of the scientific inquirer, investigate its methods, and estimate the force of the arguments it brings forward. I have, as a rule, preferred to take the latter course. For the Biblical critic of the day is in the habit of discounting beforehand any considerations the convinced Christian may adduce by saying: "You are not an unbiassed seeker after truth. You approach the matter with your mind made up. It matters not how strong my position may be; my arguments have no weight with you because of the foregone conclusions which you have adopted." And this line of argument has often immense force with the young and unwary, and involves those who are influenced by it in a maze of difficulties from which there is no easy way of escape. And so I have usually preferred to take nothing whatever for granted, to deal with the arguments of modern critics on their own merits, and to inquire, without making any assumptions beforehand, how much weight deserves to be attached to them. I therefore propose on this occasion to discuss the methods of the school of Old Testament Biblical criticism, which is just at present in fashion, and to ask how far they may be expected to lead us to the truth.

I will not enlarge on an argument which is of considerable importance — namely, that the so-called critical methods are altogether too contracted in their scope. As I have already said, the arguments for the inspiration and authority of Holy Scripture are *cumulative* arguments. They are drawn from all sides; they connect themselves with all the characteristics of our complex organization. The Biblical critics of the day, on the contrary, have but three lines of investigation. They approach the subject, not from its moral, psychological, intellectual, or religious side, but they confine themselves to its linguistic, literary, and historical aspect. This argument might well occupy our whole time. I cannot do more at present than point it out.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was read before a meeting of the Bible League at Southport, October 29, 1903.

Of the linguistic problem we need not say much. Wellhausen himself, the modern Biblical critic *par excellence*, has confessed that not much ground exists for a satisfactory linguistic criticism. Once more, I cannot stop to show that he has excellent reasons for steering clear of such criticism, to which it would be extremely inconvenient for him to allude. But it must be obvious that as all the Hebrew writings, of every kind, can be included in one not very large volume, the amount of matter is hardly sufficient to give us much scope for comparative linguistic analysis.

But to make up for the deficiency of linguistic arguments—the only ones, by the way, with which Wellhausen and his followers are really specially qualified to deal—we are informed that the literary and historical criticism with which they favour us is “scientific” in its character. Well, if it is not it ought to be. No criticism which is not scientific deserves to be listened to for a moment. But perhaps before we concede this claim, it may be well to ask what scientific research really is. First of all, it may be necessary to point out that “science” means “knowing,” and “scientific methods,” therefore, are methods of acquiring knowledge. But in these days so-called “scientific methods,” not only in Biblical criticism, but in many other fields of research, unsettle everything, call everything in question, and therefore, so far from increasing our knowledge, they are far more likely to lead to universal ignorance. A “science” which disputes everything is mere nescience. This is the case with recent Old Testament researches. Whether they be scientific or whether they be not, they leave us absolutely uninformed about the steps of the “evolution” from fetichism and animalism through polytheism to an “ethic monotheism,” the fact of which evolution they claim to have established. In general, no doubt, our knowledge is increasing. And if it be increased, it can only have been by employing “scientific methods.” It may be well, then, to ask in what departments of research our knowledge is increasing most rapidly. There can only be one answer to this question—in the field of physical investigation. What methods of research, then, do we employ in physical inquiry, and what methods of research in that department of knowledge have been found unsuccessful? I will answer. Physical science stood absolutely still for centuries, because men persisted in making inquiry rest on *deduction* rather than on *induction*. That is to say, they laid down certain *a priori* principles, on which all reasoning on facts must necessarily depend, instead of endeavouring to gather from the facts themselves the system of laws which governed those facts. But it is obvious that such laws must in the first place be

reached by mere *guesses* or *inferences*. How did such guesses or inferences become established as scientific laws? The way in which they were ultimately established was this: their correctness was assumed, and they were then applied deductively, or, in other words, they were taken as a basis for argument and calculation. If the results they gave corresponded on a large scale with observed facts, they were considered to have been proved; if not, they were set aside and others substituted in their place, or, more often by far, they were modified and corrected to the extent that circumstances required.

That is true scientific research. It takes nothing whatever for granted but the most elementary principles of all reasoning, and it is constantly engaged in testing and correcting the conclusions to which it comes by comparing them with, and applying them to, the facts with which they deal. Now, my complaint of modern Biblical criticism is that its method is precisely the opposite of this, and that therefore it is not only not scientific, it is eminently unscientific. For, in the first place, it proceeds altogether on hypothesis; that is to say, it lays down *a priori* principles instead of arriving at its principles from the observation of facts. This is the reverse of the true scientific method. And next, instead of testing its methods, as physical investigators do—testing them frequently and continually, in every minute detail—by applying them to given cases and known facts, and ascertaining whether they produce correct results, it altogether refuses to take this necessary course. On the contrary, it overwhelms with sarcasm and indignation the inquirer who knows that this is the only satisfactory way of arriving at scientific certainty. Thus it is of the essence of scientific inquiry that its results should be verified and verifiable. The methods of the modern Biblical critic remain to this day unverified. And by the clamour he raises against those who demand that the truth of his methods should be demonstrated by applying them to some given case, he himself makes it clear that they are unverifiable. Therefore they may be very ingenious—they unquestionably are; they may be the result of infinite labour—no one disputes it; they may display a very minute acquaintance with the phenomena—let that be cheerfully conceded; but scientific they are not, in the proper sense of the word. Were the results of physical science conducted on such principles, were they not a good deal more carefully tested, a man who set out for Australia might find himself in California; a man who wished to compound a healing remedy might manufacture instead a deadly poison.

Unfortunately, time will not permit me to enter into a full

demonstration of what I have asserted. Some day, perhaps, I may be permitted to make it more complete, for it is by no means my wish to break off in the middle. But I will give as many instances of my assertion, that the Biblical critic proceeds on assumption, not on scientific methods, as I at present can, asking you to bear in mind that, did time permit, I could furnish you with many more.

First and foremost, then, the modern Biblical critic starts with the assumption that there can be no Divine interference with the ordinary course of human thought, which, it contends, must proceed on the principle of evolution, and this is described as "a slow and *gradual* process," proceeding by "natural laws." Thus, if there be any passage of Scripture claiming to be a prophecy, any account of a miracle, the German critic challenges it at once. If it seem to be a prophecy, it must have been written after the event; if a miracle is described, the passage containing it is of later date. And his English follower, at least, regards it as suspicious, and does his best to explain it away. I may give as one instance out of a thousand Ewald's so-called "proof" that Deut. xxviii. 68 was written after the capture of Jerusalem, because it mentions the return of Israel to Egypt. It is obvious that such an assumption involves the whole question of the possibility of prophecy. Similar assumptions are applied to narratives in which miracles are stated to have occurred, a course which involves the whole question whether the Divine Will can do what you and I can do ourselves—namely, counteract, on due occasion, the action of ordinary natural law. I will give one instance of these assumptions. The German Emperor (with whom, I am afraid, I do not often agree) has done good service to our cause by complaining lately that Professor Delitzsch, in his archæological researches, has gone out of his way to lay down certain philosophical axioms, which first of all are outside the limits of this inquiry, and next, are at least possibly untrue. He was asked, says the Kaiser, to illustrate Israelite history by recent archæological discovery. "This, unfortunately, he has not done." Instead of this he has laid down pretended philosophical canons concerning the impossibility of a supernatural revelation. "That," says the Emperor, "was a grave mistake." His Majesty is quite right. But it is a mistake into which most German critics, whether of the Old or New Testament, have fallen. Instead of confining themselves to an investigation of the facts, they have laid down scientific or *unscientific* canons concerning the impossibility of supernatural interference with natural law—canons which even Huxley has repudiated. This is not science, it is the road to the blindest ignorance. And all this talk about "natural

law"—what does it mean? You must, first of all, define nature. And when you get your so-called "scientific investigator" in the land of definitions—and accurate definition is the first requisite for scientific investigation—he tries to escape from the corner into which you have driven him. Sometimes "nature" with him means what is purely material, sometimes it means, as Spinoza has defined it, "an infinity of other things," if that can be called a definition. But before his demonstration is complete the scientific investigator must explain whether that mighty and incalculable force called Will, which is exerted every moment by every living being, is in action in nature or not, and if so, on what ground he denies the existence of a Supreme Will and the exercise of that Will by Him who possesses it. Nor is this all. He asserts that all progress must be "gradual," and therefore he disputes the possibility of revelations of the Divine Will. But are there no breaks, no cataclysms in the history of the visible universe? Are there no evidences of Divine interferences in the development of species? And are there no sudden impulses in the history of human thought, no unexpected developments in the sphere of human action, no rapid growths even in the history of religion, setting revelation aside for the moment—times, I mean, when great minds have arisen, and changed the whole aspect of things in a few short years? We have only to mention Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Newton, Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon, Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed in order to dispose of the theory of "slow and gradual" evolution of opinion or historic fact. Thus, not only are these hypotheses, on which much modern Biblical criticism is based, mere assumptions, but when they are applied they break down in a moment in their collision with plain and palpable fact.

Then, again, Biblical critics pretend to have some infallible specific for disintegrating a coherent narrative into its component parts, an unerring instinct which enables them, without risk of failure, to detect the various contributors to it by their diversities of style. In vain we ask them to distinguish infallibly on what they call—the word is not mine—"stylistic" indications between the work of Dickens and the work of Wilkie Collins, between the work of Besant and the work of Rice, between the work of Erckmann and the work of Chatrian—all men of their own epoch, and nearly all of their own race and language. In vain do we ask them to discriminate between the various authors—all well known to them—of the King's speech, and to assign to the redactor his part in bringing the whole of it into shape. I saw, since these words were written, an attempt at an answer to this argument in

the *Westminster Gazette*. The writer said that in order to establish it the assumption is made that the writers in the Pentateuch were contemporary, whereas they differed as widely in date as do Chaucer, Shakespeare, Bacon, Milton, and Tennyson. No one, it is added, could doubt about a narrative constructed out of materials so widely different in style and spelling as these. Unfortunately, this argument is absurdly contrary to fact. There is no such wide difference of style as is here supposed. Certain words and phrases are picked out, it is true, and assigned to certain authors. But what difficulties this course leads us into I can personally testify. No Hebrew scholar, I venture to say, would dare to say that the various portions of the Pentateuch display signs of such wide differences as are alleged in the *Westminster Gazette*. If it be asserted that they do, how, I would ask, is it that it has taken us nineteen centuries to find them out? How is it that some critics of repute put the Priestly Code *before* the Elohist and Jehovist, and some several centuries after? How is it that since Astruc, two centuries ago, suggested the use of Jehovah and Elohim as enabling us to discriminate between the writers, it has taken two centuries of hard work to discover these "obvious" distinctions of date, and that even now the various authors have not been fully and finally discriminated? Let us try the scientific test. Set down a number of competent Hebrew scholars who are in ignorance of the results as arrived at by Wellhausen and his disciples, and ask them to note down the various writers by their obvious discrepancies of style and language. I will guarantee you the result. No two of them will discriminate alike. But the challenge, our adversaries go on to say, is altogether unfair, irrelevant, and not *in pari materia*, and a good many people who are rather more anxious to find a flaw in an argument than to seek for truth are in the habit of encouraging them in this answer. Of course, such persons *may* be right. But I repeat, that real scientific progress has never been made except by methods which are capable of being tested by being applied to a given case, and that few important scientific discoveries—in the realm of *physical* science, at least—have been made except by methods which *have* been thus tested, nor would any man of science think of representing results which have not been thus tested as established scientific discoveries. The results obtained, then, *may* be infallible, incontrovertible, incontestable. But the methods by which they have been obtained have no claim whatever to be represented as "scientific." Before they can deserve that title, they must be applied to known facts, and must be shown beyond doubt to bring out the right results. Unless they can be sub-

mitted to such a test they must be set down as guesses, and no more. In other words, the Jehovists and Elohist and Deuteronomists, the Priestly Codists, the staff of post-exilic redactors of whom we have heard so much of late, are simply "such stuff as dreams are made of." They *may* have existed, it is true. If people choose to believe that they existed, we cannot gainsay them. But beyond that we cannot go. I venture to predict that before long that will all disappear, and, "like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wrack behind."

Next, I would remark that to support the conclusions drawn from what I have just shown to be, on scientific principles, mere guesses and no more, recent Biblical criticism conceives itself entitled to remove from the work of nearly every one of the large number of authors by whom the Scriptures were written every single statement—and there are a great number of such statements—which conflicts with the mere guesses to which, as I have proved, they have resorted. It is true that this naked statement of their mode of procedure is usually disguised under ambiguous phrases. The histories as they stand are declared to have been "worked over," or "expanded," or "set in a new framework" by someone devoted to the views of the Deuteronomist or the author or authors of the Priestly Code. But all this, if we insist on its being expressed in plain English, means that these editors boldly interpolated into the histories which they handed down statements contrary to fact, in order to secure the triumph of their opinions. Into the morality of such conduct I will not enter. That is a question, not of science, but of morals. I am quite content to leave it to the judgment of the English people. I am simply examining into the scientific value of the methods I have described. And I insist that if such methods are to be accepted as scientific, they must rest on defined and detailed proof. As no such proof has been given—if it has, let it be brought into court and fully weighed—we are entitled to declare that, in the case we are now considering, instead of rigid logical proof, one assumption has been invented to support another, and that no scientific demonstration whatever of these hypotheses is in existence. I urge, in support of this declaration, a fact which cannot be questioned. The critics have repeatedly been challenged to name the history of any people beside the Jews whose history has been so treated, or to give any single instance where, if such a treatment of historical material has been attempted, it has not ultimately been rejected with contempt by historical investigators. Such methods may be very ingenious conjecture—they may sometimes have a show of plausibility—but scientific historical criticism, in the way

in which it has been understood by competent historians, they certainly are not, as more than one historian of repute has told us. The sole reply to such objections to modern critical methods, made over and over again by men capable of judging, has been the repetition, with lofty infallibility, not unmingled, sometimes, I am sorry to say, with scorn, of the statements which have been called in question. Surely, when Holy Scripture is being discussed, a little more modesty, a little more regard for fairness and consideration for other men's opinion, might not unreasonably have been expected.

The last method of the modern critic to which I have time to refer has been already indicated—I mean his disdain of opponents and his confidence in himself. Let us appraise its scientific value. In other branches of science a modest tone is adopted, and certainly, save on points which have been thoroughly examined and tested, is disclaimed. "Physiology," we have been frankly told in a recent review in the *Times*, "is still in its infancy." And again: "A secret of the history of the solar system is undoubtedly involved in the planetoids which some Newton of the coming centuries may unravel." This is the invariable tone of true scientific research. It submits to every single student every single step of the demonstrations by which it has arrived at its conclusions. It invites criticism, and is ready—nay, anxious—to receive corrections and to modify statements which are inaccurate. And it frankly confesses that there are problems it cannot solve whenever there is not sufficient evidence at hand to solve them. Not so is it with the so-called "scientific" Biblical criticism. Its attitude is the reverse of that of the real scientific inquirer. Not only, as I have shown, does it rest on assertion, but it resents criticism; it refuses to modify, to test, to correct its conclusions, as scientific investigators never fail to do. It announces results before they have been established. It embodies those results in *Introductions*, which are little more than a bare statement of the conclusions at which modern criticism has, rightly or wrongly, arrived. If the student desires scientific *proofs*, he may find them, if he can, scattered over two or three dozen volumes difficult to obtain, and by no means easy to read. Is that the way we teach mathematics, chemistry, electricity? Once more, if the results are challenged, the challenger is not regarded as a brother student—one as anxious as the challenged to ascertain the truth. He is waved aside as a bigoted traditionalist; he is refused admission into the charmed circle of the initiated. "Scholars are agreed," so boys at school and young men at college are informed. If any venture to question their decision they are not "scholars" however much erudition, ability, reasoning power, or common-



sense they may have. I have myself studied very carefully, in years long past, the methods of real scientific research—the works of Sir Isaac Newton and his distinguished followers—and I have no hesitation whatever in saying that their methods, and those of the modern Biblical critic, are as far as the Poles asunder.

Here I must come to a conclusion. I do not love controversy for its own sake. I should not think of entering into it save in defence of what I believe to be fundamental truth. I have been ever anxious to allow the utmost latitude to those who undertake so difficult and important a task as the literary and historical investigation of the Bible history. Like others who have stood on Bible League platforms, I may even have been accused of having made dangerous admissions in their favour. I have ever been opposed to the undue narrowing of the limits of Christian freedom of speech. But there is one first principle which the Christian cannot give up. If he give it up, he ceases, *ipso facto*, to be a Christian in the ordinary sense of the word. It is this: that God has spoken to His people, not merely in the working of their own hearts, not merely in the working of ordinary natural laws—whatever that much-abused word “natural” may be held to mean—among them, but openly, undisguisedly, and by means outside the operation of ordinary natural laws. For that principle I must contend as long as God gives me life. And I repeat that if modern Biblical criticism is to induce us to surrender that truth, it must be conducted by very different methods, and depend upon very different arguments, than those which I have ventured to characterize. To sound criticism, carried out with true scientific humility, rigid logic, and earnest desire for truth, there can be no objection. Such criticism, I am well assured, instead of undermining and overthrowing the Revelation of God given to us in the Old Testament, will eventually dissipate all objections to the fact of an external and authoritative Divine Revelation.

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P.S.—Since this paper was written, the Bishop of Winchester has addressed the Church Congress on the “assured results” of modern criticism. Without expressing an opinion on the details of his paper, I may be allowed to say how glad I am that he has not included among those “assured results” the utterly unproved assertions that Deuteronomy and the Priestly Code are forgeries of the seventh and fifth centuries B.C.