

correspondence and intercourse of personal affection. This is the mind—these are the ways of a true shepherd of Christ's flock, of one who heard, recorded, and fulfilled the final charge: "Lovest thou Me? . . . Feed My sheep."

Thus, at the close of the first century, the Apostolic age was ended, under gathering clouds, but also with the gentle lights and tender colours of a holy sunset in the last ministry and unrecorded death of the disciple whom Jesus loved.

There is a natural inclination to identify the Gaius of this Epistle with one whom we knew before: "Gaius, mine host, and of the whole Church," as St. Paul calls him (Rom. xvi. 23). It is so pleasant to meet an old friend after a lapse of years and in unexpected circumstances. In both cases, too, there is the same generous and hospitable character, and a like neighbourhood to schismatic disturbance. In the "Speaker's Commentary" Bishop Alexander dwells on these points, and concludes: "The supposition, then, that the Gaius of this Epistle is the Corinthian Gaius is, at least, not improbable." But the name Gaius (Latin, Caius) was most common. The characteristics were proper to the first Christians, and not rare amongst them; and there is a difference between the Corinthian party spirit and the ambition of Diotrephes. Time and place are against the supposition. Between the Epistle to the Romans (A.D. 58) and the probable date of St. John's Epistles there is an interval of some thirty or thirty-five years. St. John's pastoral connection was in proconsular Asia, and he appears never to have visited the Western Churches. It is most improbable that in advanced old age he should contemplate a journey from Ephesus to Corinth, and speak of it as in the ordinary course of things. It is still more so that he should designate a friend, and presumably a convert of St. Paul, who was a distinguished member of the Church in the previous generation, as one of his own children (*τὰ ἐμὰ τέκνα*), the testimony to whose walk in the truth rejoiced his heart.

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ART. II.—THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE BIBLE.

I VENTURE to think it would be well if it were more clearly realized that the question of the trustworthiness of the Bible is the great practical issue which is brought before us by recent criticism, and that this question may be practically decided without entering into many points of detail, on which critics may remain for a long time divided. It is independent, for instance, and confessedly independent, of much of the current theories respecting the composition of the Pentateuch. It is not indeed true, as is so often alleged, that the dominant theory on that subject is one upon which all competent scholars are agreed. A powerfully written book, recently published by Professor Sayce, entitled "Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fallacies," in which, in view of the most

recent research, he explicitly rejects, and even scorns, that theory, is alone sufficient evidence to the contrary. A most interesting and important investigation, of which the first-fruits have just been published in the *American Journal of Theology*, is now being conducted by Dr. Redpath, the Grinfield Lecturer on the Septuagint in the University of Oxford, into the use in the Septuagint of the Greek words which correspond to Jehovah and Elohim. This investigation tends to show that in the Hebrew manuscripts used by the Septuagint translators there were material differences in the use of those words from that of the existing Hebrew manuscripts, on which the Jehovistic and Elohist theory is based. But if so, the original basis of the distinction between the Jehovistic and Elohist narrators would disappear. Dr. Redpath suggests another explanation of the phenomenon—namely, that when the Jews had come to shrink from using the Divine name Jehovah, an Elohist recension of the Bible was provided, and that these two recensions, the original Jehovistic and the popular and Elohist, are both represented, and perhaps combined, in our present manuscripts. It seems a somewhat startling thing that German and English scholars can have gone on for about a hundred years elaborating theories on the basis of a phenomenon in the present Hebrew text, without taking the trouble, which is now being taken by Dr. Redpath, to ascertain whether that phenomenon is supported by the oldest evidence which, with the exception of the Samaritan Pentateuch, we possess respecting the original Hebrew text. But it is enough to mention these facts in order to show that it is altogether premature to assume that the current critical theories respecting the composition of the Pentateuch are established. But even if they were, and if it were further established, as most of the critics maintain, that the Elohist and Jehovistic documents were written at a late period of Jewish history, and not by contemporaries of the events narrated, there would still, apart from questions of inspiration, be no sufficient ground in that fact for doubting their trustworthiness. Histories are now being written of the early periods in our own history which may be actually more accurate than any contemporary memoirs we possess, because they are composed after a comparison of those memoirs, and after an investigation of original documents. In the same way, Dillmann recognises that the narrators of the Pentateuch, whoever they were, appear to have had access to older documents, and were, consequently, in possession of materials for writing true histories; and if, in addition, they were under the guidance of inspiration in using those early narratives and documents, we have all the ground we could

desire for accepting their authorities. Let it be laid down, therefore, that the modern critical theories respecting the text, even if they were true, do not in any way destroy the ground on which the trustworthiness of the Scriptures, as ordinary historical narratives, rest. The account given by St. Luke of his procedure, under, as we believe, inspired direction, may still apply to every one of the historical writers of the Old Testament. If contemporary documents ever existed recording the events narrated in the historical Scriptures, the writers of those Scriptures may have composed them with the same advantages as any other historians. When, indeed, it was not supposed that writing was known in patriarchal times, it involved a degree of faith at which we may well marvel, to suppose that Moses was enabled by inspiration, hundreds of years after the event, to write such minute accounts of the lives and doings of the patriarchs. But now that we possess a whole code of laws drawn up under the authority of a King who was contemporary with Abraham, there is no difficulty in believing that Moses was in this respect in a position similar to St. Luke.

The question of the trustworthiness of the Bible may thus be taken entirely out of the region of mere literary criticism, and we may inquire whether, on broad historical principles, there are any sufficient grounds for questioning the uniform belief of the Jewish and Christian Churches in the truth of the Scripture narrative. We are justified in putting the question in this form, and throwing the burden of proof on the side of those by whom that belief is questioned. We have the spectacle before us of a nation of extraordinary tenacity, of undoubtedly great antiquity, coming before the world with a set of books, which it declares with unanimity to have been handed down among them from generation to generation, to have been preserved as sacred treasures by their great leaders and teachers, and to contain an account of their history which corresponds with all the extant memorials of their race. Such a nation, coming forward into the world with such documents in its hand, must be regarded in the court of historical inquiry as a witness, not only *primâ facie* credible, but needing overwhelming evidence to refute. It is not the witness of a single man, it is the witness of a succession of men of the highest authority among their own people, the witness of successive generations, the witness of a unanimous consent, of traditions, of customs, of laws and ceremonies. The documents, in accordance with the usual requirement of a court of law, are produced from the proper custody, and those who produce them are characterized by a substantial unanimity in the account they give of them and in their

interpretation of them. What would be the first question which common-sense would put to anyone who came forward to impugn their historical authority? It would surely be to ask him to produce any positive evidence of the inconsistency of the books with known facts. You question, one would say, the trustworthiness of this witness, who has been believed for long ages. Are there any facts you can adduce which contradict his statement? Now, if a critic who questions the trustworthiness of the Bible is asked this question, what must be his answer? It must be that he can produce no facts whatever which are inconsistent with the substantial truth of the Old Testament narratives. On the contrary, the main course of historical investigation has afforded extraordinary corroboration of some of the most perplexing passages of Old Testament history.

A crucial instance is afforded by the fourteenth chapter of Genesis. Thirty years ago, as Professor Sayce reminds us, Professor Nöldeke pronounced that that chapter had been proved to be unhistorical; the political situation supposed by it was incredible and impossible, and the whole story was a fiction, based on the Assyrian conquest of Palestine in later days. It is now known that the circumstances described in that chapter are in entire harmony with the circumstances of the Babylonian history of the time, as they have been revealed by contemporary documents, and even that the names of the Kings mentioned in it have been handed down correctly. The exact preservation of these foreign names of ancient date leads, says Professor Sayce, to two conclusions. On the one hand, the narrative in which they occur cannot have been handed down orally; it must have been copied from a written Babylonian record, and been written from the outset in Hebrew, as we find it to-day. In other words, the Biblical writer had before him a Babylonian chronicle, from which he extracted just as much as related to the subject of his own history. Now, this is a crucial case, and one might almost think that that chapter, which has been such a source of perplexity to mere literary criticism, was providentially inserted in order to furnish in due time evidence in corroboration of the rest of the patriarchal narratives. But this is only an example of what is everywhere the case. There may be some discrepancies in detail, as yet unexplained, between the records of the Hebrew books and the records of the monuments; and it is not to be assumed at once that, in case of such discrepancy, the monuments must be right and the Hebrew records wrong. But although for fifty years the soil of Egypt and of Mesopotamia has been ransacked for ancient records, and incalculable numbers of them have been

unearthed, the general result has been to confirm, and not to invalidate, the truth of the Hebrew narrative.

The position could hardly be better described than in a passage in Dr. Driver's recent commentary on Genesis. He is discussing the question of the historical character, or, in plain words, the trustworthiness, of the narratives of the patriarchs. He says (p. 58): "How far, in the existing narratives, the original historical nucleus has been modified or added to . . . it is, of course, impossible to determine exactly. An objective criterion is seldom obtainable, and subjective impressions of what is probable or not are mostly all that we have to guide us." The methods of the criticism which Dr. Driver represents could not be better summarized. "An objective criterion is seldom obtainable"; in other words, as I have said, no definite objective facts can be produced to invalidate the truthfulness of the Scripture narrative. "Subjective impressions of what is probable or not are mostly all that we have to guide us." Of what value, we may well ask, are subjective impressions of what is probable or not probable in such distant ages? What critic, under the guidance of subjective impressions only, would have thought it probable, five years ago, that we should find an elaborate code of laws, comparable to that of the laws of Moses, actually contemporary with Abraham, and that we should have an English translation of it on our tables? Dr. Driver says, a little later on, that in the time of the patriarchs religion "must have been in a relatively rudimentary stage," but, "at the same time, the patriarchs often expressed themselves in terms suggesting much riper spiritual capacities and experiences, and in some cases, indeed, borrowed evidently from the phraseology of a much later age." St. Paul, on the contrary, recognised in the history of Abraham the cardinal religious principle which it was his mission to assert, and the question really involved in Dr. Driver's "must" is whether God did actually speak to the patriarchs. If He did, if there were an absolute communication between God and man, who shall venture to say that the religious conviction so produced "must have been" merely rudimentary? The subjective impressions of Oxford and German professors, respecting what must have been the limits of the communications between God and man in the time of Abraham, are not worth much. Ask the critic, in a word, for objective criteria to prove the unhistorical character of the narratives in Genesis, ask him for the definite evidence on which he impugns the most venerable witnesses in history, and he frankly confesses he has none, and he falls back on subjective impressions. Those who believe these ancient witnesses have also their subjective impressions. They are

penetrated, in the words of Dr. Lock, the editor of the series in which this commentary appears, by "the extraordinary truthfulness to human nature and to Oriental life" which these narratives display, by "the consistency of this book with the subsequent history and religious thought of later Judaism;" and they have a still stronger subjective impression that, as he mildly puts it, "the fact of inspiration once admitted on the higher level of moral and spiritual tone may well carry its influence over into the details of fact, and turn the balance, when otherwise uncertain, on the side of trustworthiness." One would think it really might. If inspiration has any weight in the balance at all, it really might be expected to turn it in favour of such trustworthiness. Such, however, I submit, is the main point in this great issue. The Scriptures are in possession of the ground; they have been unchallenged witnesses for some two thousand five hundred years. If you are to disparage their trustworthiness, it can only be by some objective criterion, and this you cannot produce. If you appeal to your subjective impressions, we must take the liberty of regarding your conclusions as subjective also, and as destitute of objective validity.

The case is similar with the account of the creation in the first chapter of Genesis. It comes before us with very solemn authority; it is appealed to by our Lord as revealing the true constitution of man. If you are to overthrow its authority, it is for you to prove its inconsistency with science. But that inconsistency cannot be said to be proved when high scientific authorities, such as the late Sir William Dawson and Professor Dana, maintained the harmony of the two. It is certain that there is at least a most marvellous general correspondence between the account in the first chapter of Genesis and the revelations of natural science. That fact alone constitutes a miracle, and creates an immense presumption in favour of the belief that apparent discrepancies in minor matters will be cleared up by subsequent investigation. Above all is the case the same with respect to the general course of Jewish history, as to that succession of the Law and the Prophets, which has been believed without a break by the Jewish and Christian Churches till within fifty years ago. Nothing less than absolute demonstration is required to justify our belief that the whole Jewish nation since the time of Ezra, and every Jewish writer without exception, were under a delusion respecting the real course of their national history. I asked a great Jewish authority in London why the orthodox Jews did not reply to the theories of the critics on this cardinal point, and he replied, with a smile, that there were some things which were too absurd and incredible to be worth refutation. That

was the natural feeling of a Jew who was sensible of the continuity of his national life. The broad fact would seem to be that the only arguments which can be adduced against the substantial trustworthiness of the Jewish Scriptures are the subjective impressions of European critics in the nineteenth century respecting what is probable or not in Oriental antiquity, and in the dealings of God with men in those days. In the true balance of history, such subjective impressions are surely as light as a feather.

I will only add one word respecting the trustworthiness of the New Testament history. It should never be forgotten that in this field the subjective impressions which were dominant in Germany fifty years ago have been absolutely overthrown. It is now recognised by the vast majority of competent authorities that the Gospels are contemporary records, and the Acts of the Apostles, when put to the test of objective criteria by such an historical inquirer as Professor Ramsay, have been proved to be marked by the most surprising accuracy in details. Let us, then, be encouraged to hold with a firmer faith than ever to the plain historical truth of the wonderful and gracious narratives the New Testament Scriptures contain. Let us not be for a moment deterred by subjective impressions of philosophers as to what is probable or not in the most mysterious regions of God's supreme revelation of Himself—in His Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension. In those sacred and mysterious regions we are never safe except in accepting the plain testimony of truthful and inspired witnesses. It may well be that much that they tell us is beyond our comprehension, and there may be difficulties respecting it which will remain unsolved on this side of the grave; but if we can regard them as trustworthy, as faithful and true witnesses, we have a solid foundation on which our faith can rest, and on which the Christian creed and the Christian life can be built. Let it be the first point in our thoughts that that foundation stands firm, that the Scriptures alike of the Old and the New Testament may be unfeignedly believed, and that criticism will be true and valuable in proportion as it starts from that first principle.

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