

THE
CHURCHMAN

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OUR POSITION IN REFERENCE TO BIBLICAL
CRITICISM.¹

WE are challenged by a recent Declaration to review our position in reference to Biblical criticism, and it will be opportune to consider the subject under two aspects. The first is our general position, as Christians, towards such criticism; the second is our position at the present time in reference to the actual state of current criticism.

Now, with respect to the first, the true position of the Christian must always be one of readiness to listen to any light which critical processes can throw upon the Holy Scriptures, and to welcome any well-considered results which they may offer. The position of the believer must always be that described by our Lord : *He that doeth the truth—and, in the same way, he that speaketh the truth—cometh to the light, that his deeds—or that his words—may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.* If the Bible be the truth of God, the more light that may be thrown upon it, the more will its Divine origin and inspiration become manifest. This should be the fundamental attitude of the Christian, and especially of the Christian minister, towards all applications of criticism—which, after all, are but the application of reason—to the Holy Scriptures. We should remember always that striking saying of the Apostle Peter, that we should *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear.* The word *fear* has been thought to mean also reverence, but it certainly implies a sense of the grave issues which are involved in any answer to inquiries respecting the grounds of our Christian faith. It is not, perhaps, sufficiently remembered, by those who raise critical questions and urge critical difficulties, that these also should be raised in that spirit of meekness and fear which St. Peter

¹ A paper read to the Midland Lay and Clerical Alliance on May 30 last.
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requires, and that to cast doubts over books and narratives which have for centuries been bound up with the Christian faith is not a thing to be lightly taken in hand, or to be suggested to the world at large in loosely-worded Declarations.

But, still, wherever questions are raised in the interest of truth, the Christian minister must have an open mind towards them, subject to one important qualification. That qualification is that the burden of proof always lies upon those who are questioning a long-established and settled tradition, still more a long-established and settled faith. To have an open mind ought not to involve the treating such questions as if there were no presumption on either side. There is an immense presumption—a presumption amounting to a settled prescription—in favour of traditions and beliefs which have held their ground for nineteen centuries—nay, in the case of the Jewish books, for some twenty-five centuries. Those beliefs respecting the Jewish Scriptures have passed through the ordeal of the conflict respecting their meaning and their character which was waged between our Lord and His Apostles on the one side, and the Jewish authorities on the other, at the foundation of the Christian Church. The main argument of the Apostles in their contention with the Jewish authorities of their day was based upon the interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures; and if those Scriptures had not been what they purported to be, their weak points must have been brought to light in that controversy; not to say that it seems incredible that the Apostles should have been allowed by the Spirit of God, by whom they were specially inspired, to build their main argument on foundations which were to be shown by a later criticism to be radically unsound. It is striking to notice the attitude of the Jews themselves towards the critical position represented by the school of Wellhausen. The contentions of that school appear to me to be incompatible with the Christian faith, but they are beyond question absolutely destructive of the Jewish faith; and I ventured to say as much to an eminent Jewish scholar, and to ask him why no great effort appeared to have been made by Jews to reply to the Wellhausen school. He made a gesture of something like impatience, and said that there were some things too absurd to be answered, and that he and his friends were content to wait “until this tyranny be overpast.” I am glad to say that Jewish scholars, both at home and abroad, have somewhat abandoned that attitude. Powerful arguments against the Wellhausen position have lately been published by Dr. Hoffmann, Principal of the Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin; while the objections of the Higher Critics to the consistency of the Laws of the Pentateuch have been answered in a striking volume by Mr. Harold Wiener,

a barrister of Lincoln's Inn, entitled "Studies in Biblical Laws." But that general Jewish attitude, if marked too much, in some respects, by the characteristic tenacity of the race, has its justification, and is in some respects an example to ourselves. The Wellhausen theory implies nothing less than that the Jews have been mistaken as to the whole course of their history, from the time of Ezra downwards; and that is a proposition very much equivalent to a contention, which we might imagine put forward by some Higher Critic of English history, that we are entirely mistaken as to the course of English history previous to the Norman Conquest. Considering, what is now demonstrated, that not merely writing, but long documentary records, such as a code of law, existed in the time of Abraham, it is scarcely credible that Ezra and his contemporaries and successors should either have been under any such illusion themselves, or should have been able to impose it on their people; and, at all events, an enormous burden of proof rests on those who would defend such a supposition.

Again, the consideration just mentioned seems to have been too much overlooked, that a similar burden of proof has to be encountered by any theories which would involve a belief that the Apostles, under the special inspiration of what we believe them to have been the recipients, were entirely mistaken in the view they took of the ancient history of their race, and in the arguments they built upon prophecy. This consideration seems entirely lost sight of by those who adopt what have of late been the dominant views respecting the Old Testament in so-called critical circles. A journal has, for instance, of late been started, called the *Interpreter*, devoted to the dissemination of such critical views as I am referring to, and the first article in the first number was a discussion by Professor Driver of "The Permanent Religious Value of the Old Testament." That value Professor Driver discerns in seven points: first, "the surprisingly lofty and elevated conceptions of God which prevail in it"; secondly, "the clearness and emphasis with which it proclaims the duty of man both towards God and towards his fellow-men"; thirdly, that "the paramount importance, not only of what may be termed the more private or personal virtues, but also of the great domestic and civil virtues . . . is throughout insisted on"; fourthly, "the Old Testament is of permanent value in setting before us examples of characters, determined and moulded by the influence of their religion, which we may in different ways adopt as our models"; fifthly, "the Old Testament is of unsurpassed value for devotional use and suggestiveness"; sixthly, "the Old Testament possesses a peculiar value of its own on account of

the great ideals of human life and society which it holds up before its readers"; and seventhly, "the great stress laid in the Old Testament upon a pure and spiritual religion." That, in substance, is all. Now, is it not an astonishing thing, a thing sufficient to condemn the whole school of thought represented by such an article, that, among these points of permanent value in the Old Testament, there is no mention of that which constituted almost its cardinal value for the Apostles, namely, its prophetic character, its predictions of the Messiah, and the fact that our Lord's fulfilment of those predictions supplied the main argument on which the Apostles relied in their preaching? Could there, to a Christian eye, be a more extraordinary omission than the fact that the Scriptures pointed forward, from beginning to end, to Christ, and that, taken in conjunction with the fulfilment in the New Testament, we have thus an irrefragable proof that from Abraham—nay, from Adam—to Christ God has been speaking to men and controlling their history, since He gave promises from the first which have been faithfully fulfilled? In his last paragraph, indeed, Dr. Driver does say that the Old Testament Scriptures "exhibit the earlier stages of a great redemptive process, the consummation of which is recorded in the New Testament." But that general statement expresses something very far short of the definite, continuous, specific prophetic process on which the Apostles relied in their addresses to the Jews and the Gentiles. That single article, by a leading representative of the modern critical school, is enough to prove the incompatibility of such views with principles hitherto held to be inseparable from the Christian faith. Do not let me be supposed for a moment to say that, if the critical views which Professor Driver represents were reasonably established, they are not to be accepted. But do not let us shut our eyes, as too many competent authorities do, to the fact that, if we accept them, we shall have, as this example shows, to abandon the authority of the Apostles, to admit that they were mistaken in their most vital arguments, at the first great crisis of the Christian Church; and when this is admitted and realized, it cannot well be doubted that their authority in other respects would soon be grievously shaken. Wellhausen resigned the theological Chair which he held. His representatives in this country, who still hold such Chairs, are doubtless not inferior to him in honesty, but I fear they are inferior to him in clear-sightedness. In short, while listening patiently and, as St. Peter says, meekly, to all the arguments which criticism can produce, let us not listen to them as though the whole Jewish and Christian tradition had no presumption in its favour, but, on the contrary, with

a distinct recognition of that presumption, and a sense that any arguments which are adduced in opposition to it have a very heavy burden of presumption against them. The *onus probandi* lies upon such arguments, and an immense *onus* it is.

But now let us turn for a while to the position of the critical argument at the present moment. We are told on all hands, and it is assumed in the recent Declaration, that there are certain "assured results" of modern criticism, and that "many of the clergy have already, with advantage to Christian faith, and with a general assent on the part of their rulers, welcomed important results of a patient, reverent, and progressive criticism of the Old Testament." To put this into plain words, it means, probably, that what is commonly called the critical view of the Old Testament, which places the Law after the Prophets, and at the time of the Exile, is considered by many persons to afford a view of the Old Testament more in conformity with modern ideas, particularly in respect to the evolution of religion, and that it has received the countenance, and at least the toleration, of theological Professors, and even of Bishops. I am sorry to say that is the case. How, indeed, persons can receive with satisfaction and comfort a view of the Old Testament which, as I have said, is inconsistent with the teaching of every Apostle, not to say of our Lord, passes my comprehension.

But let us first ask whether these results are really assured. Now, I would first adduce one slight but crucial example of the nature of these "assured results." In Gen. x. 22 occur the words, "the sons of Shem, Elam," etc., and in Dr. Driver's edition of the Book of Genesis, in the Westminster Commentaries, there is the following note on these words: "Racially the Elamites were entirely distinct from the Semites, their language, for instance, being agglutinative and belonging to a different family; their geographical proximity to Assyria is in all probability the reason why they are here included among the 'sons' of Shem. It is true, inscriptions recently discovered seem to have shown that in very early times Elam was peopled by Semites, who were dependent upon Babylonia and governed by Babylonian *patesi's*, and that the non-Semitic Elamites spoken of above only acquired mastery over it at a period approaching 2300 B.C., but the fact is not one which the writer of the verse is very likely to have known." It would surely be difficult to find a more perverse piece of criticism. In any other department of literary criticism, if a statement were found in a book which was true before a given date, but not true after it, we should at once recognise that the statement dates the book, or, at all events, the portion of the book in

which it occurs. So that on the principles on which we should deal with "any other book" we have here positive evidence that the verse in question belongs to a document or a tradition older than 2300 B.C. Why does not Dr. Driver draw this natural conclusion? Obviously because he is possessed by the theory, which is one of the "assured results" of which he speaks, that the verse belongs to the portions of the chapter assigned to the source P, which he considers belongs to the age of Ezekiel and the Exile, or nearly 2,000 years after the date when Elam was peopled by Semites. Of course, if that is the date of the authorship, there is some improbability, not only in the writer knowing so ancient a fact, but still more in his making a statement which was, at least, inconsistent with the circumstances of his day. But ordinary readers will, we think, be more likely to conclude that Dr. Driver's theory is here encountered by a significant fact which is inconsistent with it. In an address in defence of the Higher Criticism recently delivered in London (*cf. Guardian*, June 7), Dr. Driver alleges that "the archaeological and other facts adduced" by Professor Sayce and others "had no bearing on the Higher Criticism and left it entirely untouched." Here is one instance, at least, in which an archaeological fact has a direct bearing on a critical theory, and gravely affects it. The case illustrates another point in Dr. Driver's recent address. He distinguishes between the Higher Criticism and Historical Criticism, and complains of Dr. Reich for confusing the two. "The historical character," he says, "of the Pentateuchal narratives . . . or of the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection is a question, not of the Higher Criticism, but of Historical." But this verse affords a conspicuous illustration of the manner in which the Higher Criticism affects Historical Criticism. If it were really established by the Higher Criticism that the Pentateuchal narratives were composed, at least in their present form, hundreds, or even thousands, of years after the events, the evidence on which Historical Criticism proceeds would be vitally affected. The consequence is, though Dr. Driver seems reluctant to recognise it, that archaeological evidence, which proves the existence of documents contemporary with the Pentateuchal narratives, such as the Code of Hammurabi, materially affects the probabilities on which Historical Criticism works. If, as is probable from the verse in question, the Book of Genesis quotes documents, or at least reports traditions, which are at least as old as 2300 B.C., there is a reasonable probability that the narratives in that book may be based on equally contemporaneous documents.

For a similar reason the validity of the literary or higher criticism of the Book of Genesis is of the greatest consequence to the interpretation of the earlier chapters of the book. If,

as Dr. Driver's school supposes, they were of late composition, it is not unnatural to treat them as purified editions, so to speak, of Babylonian myths. But if there is ground for thinking it possible or probable that they are reproduced from very ancient documents, that presumption disappears. In truth, the mere fact of the existence of a resemblance in some important features between the Babylonian myths and the narratives of Genesis does not in itself raise the slightest presumption that the Babylonian myths are the older. It is at least as possible that the narratives in Genesis are the ancient and inspired documents, and that the Babylonian myths represent corrupted forms of them; and to many persons the latter supposition will seem much the more probable.

But it is an unfortunate time for Dr. Driver to say, as he did in his recent paper, that "it was a *suppressio veri* to say that the critics were divided amongst themselves; upon all important points they were agreed." Last year, in an important series of Handbooks of Classical Antiquity, edited by Dr. Iwan von Müller, Professor of Classical Philology in Munich, appeared the first half of a "Sketch of the Geography and History of the Ancient East," by Dr. Fritz Hommel, the eminent Professor of the Semitic Languages in the University of Munich, and the author of the articles on Assyria and Babylonia in Dr. Hastings' "Dictionary of the Bible." Appearing in such a series, it appears with even more than Professor Hommel's authority, as it cannot but be regarded as being, in the view of the editor, a trustworthy account of the subject it treats. Now, in this work the conclusions of the school of Old Testament criticism to which, in the main, Dr. Driver belongs are treated as radically unsound. Thus, on p. 172, Dr. Hommel says, after referring to the traditional view, that "a very different picture is given by the representations of the so-called Old Testament science, as it has been conducted for many decades past, or of the modern criticism of the Pentateuch which since 1878 has been developed on the basis of the works of Julius Wellhausen. This criticism started at the outset from false presuppositions, and in consequence could not but arrive at false results. One of these false presuppositions is that analysis of the sources of Genesis which has long become a fanatically defended dogma." Again, on p. 174, he speaks of the Wellhausen view as one "which turns the whole Israelitish tradition topsy-turvy, and makes the greater part of the Pentateuch to consist of pseudographs." On p. 183 he says: "From all this a sober observer, especially if, in addition to the Old Testament, he also knows the ancient East, cannot but conceive the greatest possible mistrust of the so-called assured

results hitherto reached by the criticism of the Pentateuch (the so-called Wellhausen school)."

In the face of such statements by a scholarly archæologist of Dr. Hommel's eminence, the sober observer of whom he speaks—in this country no less than abroad—will be justified in declining to believe that any such assured results as Dr. Driver speaks of have been reached, in opposition to the substantial truth of ancient tradition and belief on the subject. There is, in fact, too much reason to believe that—since the time of Wellhausen, at all events, and perhaps much earlier—the criticism of the Pentateuch has, in the expressive French phrase, made *fausse route*, gone on an entirely mistaken tack. At all events, in the face of such confusions and contradictions as have been here illustrated, it would seem that the promoters of the recent Declaration are singularly unfortunate in suggesting that the results of Old Testament criticism, up to the present time, encourage us to look for satisfactory results from an application of similar methods to the New Testament.

On the latter subject, it would seem enough for the present to say that, by consent of the leading scholars both here and in Germany, the belief of the Church as to the dates and authorship of the books of the New Testament has been substantially vindicated; and if so, we have, at all events, the testimony of contemporaries, to the facts narrated in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. That simple fact, apart from the question of the inspiration of the writers, might alone suffice to reassure believers. It is difficult, for instance, to see how modern criticism can invalidate the testimony of a writer who has been proved to possess the careful historical capacity of an educated physician like St. Luke. Nothing, it may be safely said, has yet been established which invalidates the historical truth, in all essential points, of either the Old or the New Testament; and we may safely rest in the old faith while critics like Dr. Driver and Dr. Hommel are settling their differences.

HENRY WACE.

THE POET-PARSON OF MORWENSTOW.

IN a remote valley on the North Cornish coast, half-way between Bude and Clovelly, stands the ancient parish church of Morwenstow. It is interesting alike in its history, its architecture, and its situation. It nestles under the huge hill which ends in Hennacliff, the grandest rock in Cornwall, and—with the exception of Beachy Head—the highest perpendicular cliff in England. There are few