

opinions and the prejudices of the higher and higher middle classes rather than of the wage-earners."

Now, is this true? Sorrowfully we must confess that it is, and mainly for the very reason the Bishop alleges. We have worked, and are largely working still, "from above rather than from below." This is to reverse the order which has invariably been associated with blessing and success in Christian evangelization through the centuries. Dr. Gore rightly urges that the chief test of the vitality of a Church is its power among the poor, and that it is just here that our Church has failed. We may not, and many will not, be able to follow the Bishop in every suggestion of his proposed "way of return," for one of them, at least, is too far removed from the simplicity and power of New Testament Christianity to be effective. But we are grateful for the fearless statement of our failure and for the clear indication of the secret of it. Dr. Gore has given every Churchman food for earnest and prolonged thought, and we must return to the consideration of some of the suggested remedies. Meanwhile "from below," and not "from above," is the Apostolic method of work, and the surest guarantee of blessing.



The Higher Criticism of the New Testament.¹

By THE REV. F. W. M. WOODWARD, M.A.

THE age in which we live has often been termed a critical age. We are not, indeed, to suppose that the critical faculty lay dormant, and the canons of criticism remained unknown till the middle of the nineteenth century. What is implied is that the methods of criticism have been applied with greater strictness, and that the discovery of fresh material has stimulated inquiry to a degree unknown before. Critical investigation, it should be remembered, is not in itself necessarily hostile to Christianity, and indeed has often proved a valuable

¹ Abbreviated from a paper read at the York Evangelical Union, June, 1906.

ally, throwing fresh light on dark places, and enabling us "both to keep our faith, and yet to see the reality of things." We must distinguish between criticism and criticism, between critics and critics, between the use and abuse of the instrument employed.

Now, part and parcel of this critical movement is the so-called higher criticism. In itself the term is vague and is used in various senses. Strictly and properly it is contrasted with textual criticism and historical criticism. As, however, the work of the textual critic is often in popular language ascribed to higher criticism, and indeed his work may be and is in some cases influenced thereby, and as, on the other hand, higher criticism is frequently taken to include historical criticism, the phrase "higher criticism" becomes practically synonymous with "modern criticism." It is my intention in this paper to use the term in its broader meaning, and, following in part the example set on a recent occasion by Professor Sanday :

1. To speak of the present trend of criticism—textual, literary, and speculative.

2. Then to point out certain important presuppositions affecting both the methods and results of inquiry.

3. In the last place to warn against certain dangers to which the critical process may expose us in approaching the New Testament.

I. The trend of modern criticism—textual, literary, and speculative.

1. Of textual criticism there is no need to speak at length. Such a Greek text as that which underlies the English Revised Version, or that contained in Westcott and Hort's edition, based on the great Greek Uncial MSS., takes us back at least to the end of the third century A.D. By the aid of versions such as the old Latin and the old Syriac, where these are extant, we can go back to the second century A.D. In some cases these versions may even give us a better reading than the great Greek MSS. However that may be, from these versions, the Greek Uncial MSS., and patristic quotations from the second

century onwards, we can draw converging lines in tracing the formation of the text very nearly to the autographs of the New Testament writers. We are practically certain that we know what was originally written. The history of the text of the New Testament is a sufficient answer to give to a school of criticism that shows signs of coming into vogue, relying largely on conjectural emendation. Such conjectures resting on little or no external evidence, disregarding the cumulative witness of the best textual tradition, and inferred from the supposed silence, perhaps, of a single patristic writer, are purely subjective, and really reflect presuppositions about the formulation of doctrine or the history of Christian institutions, either mistaken or without adequate foundation.

2. *Literary criticism.* Turning to literary criticism, we ask how far have the books of the New Testament stood the inquiry into their date and authorship and literary sources? They have come out of the furnace practically unharmed. The course of inquiry has been a reaction and a return to the Christian tradition that they are what they were believed to be—documents of the apostolic age. Writing in 1896, Professor Harnack thought that questions of literary criticism would diminish in importance, as it was come to be generally understood that the early Christian traditions were in the main right. The oldest literature of the Church, in its main points and most of its details, he considered to be veracious and trustworthy. On the whole, writes Dr. Sanday, Professor Harnack's forecast has held good. Since 1896, controversy has raged most fiercely round the Fourth Gospel; but, on the other hand, since that date there has been published a strong work defending its genuineness by Dr. Drummond, of Manchester College, Oxford. As a Unitarian, Dr. Drummond cannot be accused of bias in its favour.

It is something gained to know that the trend of criticism is towards the same result as was reached by the Church at the end of the second century. After all, the earlier Church was not so simple and credulous in accepting spurious documents

as was once thought possible. It did not suffer from "rabies pseudepigraphica." It is something gained to know that the "tendency" writing and the exaggerated scepticism of the times of Strauss and Baur may be relegated to the limbo of lost causes and impossible beliefs.

3. Speculative criticism. It is when we pass to the speculative phase of modern criticism that we are brought face to face with the disturbing forces that have caused so much anxiety and given rise to so much restlessness and unsettlement. As we have seen, the tendency of criticism sets towards a moderate position in literary questions affecting the age and authorship of the New Testament writings. Similarly in the examination of their subject-matter and its historical credibility, we feel that we are in an atmosphere of truth and reality. On such considerations as these the more conservative criticism lays stress, and we ought to insist on their significance. As Dr. Sanday has pointed out, there has been a very real reaction even in historical criticism. "The note of a higher sincerity runs through the teaching of our time. The broad basis, so to speak, of early Christian history is being more securely laid; extravagances are being pruned away, and erratic experiments dropped." Such a statement about the direction taken by investigation justifies us in demurring to any attempted reconstruction of the history of the Christian Society, or the Life of our Lord without the doctrine of His true Deity. "It is true," says Dr. Sanday, "that the latest critical writers abroad cut themselves adrift from the universal verdict of the Church and from traditional Christianity. In certain quarters, whilst a genuine sense of admiration, if nothing more, is felt for the Person of our Lord, yet His miraculous Birth and His miraculous Resurrection are rejected, and the orthodox doctrine of His Person is denied." The general position is summed up as being like that which we associate with the better Unitarianism.

At the same time it is well to recollect what is conceded. Whilst the real authority of St. Paul and St. John is impugned

and an attempt is made to build up a history on the basis of the first three Gospels, omitting the narratives of the Nativity and the Resurrection, yet the common matter of these Gospels remains. It is something that this has passed through the fire intact. Now in this common matter is found the belief that Jesus of Nazareth believed Himself to be the Messiah, and in a peculiar sense the Son of God. This is the irreducible minimum from which we can go forward, for, granted so much, we shall find that there is no key that will ever fit the lock of the problem, except the old belief that Jesus Christ really was and is what He claimed to be and was believed to be. It is but ingenious perversity to pick out, as Professor Schmiedel does, five passages about the life of Jesus, and four about the miracles, and to regard these nine negations as the foundation pillars of a truly scientific life of Jesus. Such passages merely show what Jesus Christ was not and would not do; they do not enable us to understand what He was and is, what He did and does still. They serve not to explain the history but to explain away His true Deity, and to involve in impenetrable darkness the origin of the theology of St. Paul and St. John, and the life and spiritual power of the Apostolic Church.

II. Presuppositions affecting both the methods and results of critical investigation.

The instance just quoted shows us that the battle has to be fought not merely on the ground of the available evidence, but in the region of critical presuppositions. No one, not even the modern "trained historical critic," approaches the evidence with a colourless mind, and the presuppositions involved may decide the inferences before any real examination of the evidence has been made. What, then, are the tacitly assumed principles against which we should be on our guard?

1. The first postulate is the validity of the argument from silence. In estimating the force of external testimony to a book or the character of a narrative, too much stress is often laid upon the silence of early writers, or the fact that narratives possessing the ring of genuine metal are omitted, where we

should expect to find them mentioned. To take an example, we should not have expected to find such parables as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son mentioned by St. Luke only ; yet such is the fact. As Dr. Sanday has pointed out in his work on the Fourth Gospel, the critic does not always ask himself what is silent. What extent of material does the argument cover? Often the extant evidence is so scanty that no inference can be drawn from it. In illustration, Dr. Sanday quotes the work of Dr. Drummond on the character and authorship of the Fourth Gospel. Dr. Drummond is dealing with the common assumption that, because Justin Martyr quotes less freely from the Fourth Gospel than from the other three, therefore he must have ascribed to it a lower degree of authority. He says, "But why, then, it may be asked, has Justin not quoted the Fourth Gospel at least as often as the other three? I cannot tell, any more than I can tell why he has never named the supposed authors of his memoirs, or has mentioned only one of the parables, or made no reference to the Apostle Paul, or nowhere quoted the Apocalypse, though he believed it to be an apostolic and prophetic work. His silence may be due to pure accident, or the book may have seemed less adapted to his apologetic purposes ; but considering how many things there are about which he is silent, we cannot admit that the *argumentum e silentio* possesses in this case any validity. . . . It is not correct to say that a writer knows nothing of certain things simply because he had not occasion to refer to them in his only extant writing ; or even because he does not mention them when his subject would seem naturally to lead him to do so."

If we reflect how imposing an edifice may be raised out of the most flimsy critical materials, or recall the compressed nature of such a narrative as the first twelve chapters of the book of the Acts, or remember the confession in the Fourth Gospel of the many other signs that Jesus did, we must be very chary of saying, "This is not a genuine Dominical saying," or, "That is the reflection of later ecclesiastical practice." As Professor Sanday well says of Dr. Drummond's remarks, "This is one of

the most important and the most far-reaching of all the corrections of current practice."

2. The second principle is the elimination of miracles. No implied canon of criticism really cuts so deeply into the New Testament writings. Owing to the conception of law we derive from physical science, the tendency is to assume the impossibility of the miraculous, or, when the abstract possibility is admitted, to urge that it is practically incapable of proof, and a useless burden on belief. There are two lines of apology that we may take :

(i.) Even supposing the miraculous element were an accretion, the testimony of the writers is not thereby completely invalidated. Mr. Conybeare, a neutral witness in such a matter, in his "Monuments of Early Christianity" (p. 5), has truly said: "The real miracle would be if we should find a homely narrative emanating from Galilee in the first century to have originally contained no such elements. . . . In appraising the historical value of an early Christian document, we ought to condemn it, not in case it contain miraculous elements, but in case the sentiments and teachings put into the mouths of the actors and the actions attributed to them be foreign to their age and country, so far as of these we have any reliable knowledge. Here are the true touchstones of truth and genuineness." Thus far Mr. Conybeare. I need hardly remind you how well the New Testament writings stand these tests. The local colour and the character of the teaching exactly suit the period and the circumstances in the first century to which the Christian tradition assigns them.

(ii.) But we ought to take a much bolder line in defence of the miraculous element. It is in no sense a mere accretion that can be disentangled without loss from a supposed non-miraculous original. The miracles are the Gospel in action. Examine the Gospels, and in the first cycle of evangelic teaching represented by St. Mark, what do we find? Miracle is at its height, and the miracles are exercises of power that do not admit of any naturalistic interpretation. The original writers and witnesses undoubtedly believed that miracles happened, and when we turn

to St. Paul's Epistles and the Acts, it is clear that he and others believed that they had miraculous powers, and lived in an age of miracle. The powers that they possessed were not original but derived, and point back to the Supreme Manifestation of miracle, the Incarnate Lord. There is evidence that in the apostolic age there was not an imagination ready to ascribe miracle, as a matter of course, to any great teacher; for it is expressly written of St. John the Baptist that he wrought no miracle, nor are miracles ascribed to our Lord prior to His public ministry. There is no need to question the testimony of the writers as a whole, unless we assume that the known order of Nature is a complete and final revelation of God's will, or deny the possibility of direct Divine action not to violate but to vindicate Nature's true order. The miracles are congruous with our Lord's Personality. "If the Incarnation was a fact, and Jesus Christ was what He claimed to be, His miracles, so far from being improbable, will appear the most natural thing in the world."

3. The discussion of the miraculous element in the New Testament leads to a third presupposition that lies behind many reconstructions of the New Testament. It is to approach the New Testament with the idea that primitive Christianity has been lost, or was represented by the sect of the Ebionites. On the assumption of the truth of an inadequate Christology, the attempt is made to explain Christianity without the Christ of the Gospels, of the Creeds, of history, and of experience. There is offered to us a merely human Christ, who came into the world as other men come, who was an admirable philanthropist and preacher, but nevertheless was the fallible child of His age, who was crucified and was dead and was buried, but never rose again in any intelligible sense of the words, and never appeared to His disciples, except in so far as subjective visions can be called appearances. It is on the basis of this Christology that the attempt is made to explain and re-orientate the Christian faith and the history of the Church. The attempt is foredoomed to fail. We cannot have Christianity without

Christ, nor Christ without Christianity. Great effects spring from great causes, and great causes produce great effects. If Christ had not been what He was believed to be, there would have been no day of Pentecost, nor any such conviction, energy, and power as we find in the narratives of the Acts and the Epistles. It is simple hallucination to suppose that a mere man, however praiseworthy and noble, could have produced such a spiritual earthquake.

This general position we may support by two lines of more special argument :

(i.) It is against the available evidence. Trace back the first three Gospels to the common matter, and you find there the same truly human but more than human Christ. The first three Gospels, to which the appeal is made, themselves witness that Jesus of Nazareth believed Himself to be, and was believed by His disciples to be, the Christ, the Son of God. There is no ground for the supposition that a naturalistic Christ was deified. We are worshippers not of a deified man, but of an Incarnate God. Whether we turn to the synoptic Gospels or to the fourth Gospel, or to the epistles of St. John and St. Paul, and of the writer to the Hebrews, the same unmistakable figure is enshrined in them all.

(ii.) And a second argument is that the rival hypothesis of a naturalistic Christ is inadequate. It explains neither the genesis nor the success of the supposed legend. For if the portrait is not drawn from life, it must be due to one or two causes : (a) Invention, or (b) the unconscious creative influence of myth. (a) To take the former, exaggerated importance is ascribed by some writers to St. Paul. He is regarded almost as the founder of Christianity, and the creator of Catholic Christology, whilst St. John is regarded as the chief of His disciples. There is, however, nothing in St. Paul's epistles to bear out the suggestion. He is far from being an innovator. He lays stress on the foundation already laid. He appeals to common preaching (1 Cor. xv. 11), and from the Epistle to the Galatians we certainly learn that, whatsoever points were in

debate between him and the Judaizing party, the doctrine of the Person of Christ was not in question. It is the union between St. Paul and the leading Apostles at Jerusalem, corroborated as it is by the common belief of the Apostolic Church, which assures us that Christianity was founded upon a Christ truly Divine. There is no reason to suppose that St. John is a disciple of St. Paul, and his Gospel, for which the value of eye-witness is claimed, really springs from the common belief of the Apostolic Church. (*b*) Nor, again, can this common belief be explained by the growth of a mythology. It is true that round the persons of great men, romance has entwined itself with singular rapidity. Nevertheless their characters are not affected thereby, and the very growth of legend witnesses to the greatness of their personality. The character of Jesus of Nazareth stands out distinctly, but whence do the evangelists, or the Early Church as a whole, get the photographic negative from which to strike off portraits of Christ, so unworldly and yet so human, so spiritual and yet so practical, so heavenly and yet so unlike the conventional Jewish piety of the time? Surely the easiest and the simplest hypothesis is that we have a portrait sketched by living witnesses soon after the events recorded.

Take which line of argument we will, the words of John Stuart Mill hold good, "It is of no use to say that Christ as exhibited in the Gospels is not historical. Who among their disciples or among their proselytes was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee, certainly not St. Paul."

As we study these presuppositions, evidential, scientific, or theological, we find that, whilst they seem to claim that the New Testament is to be examined and treated like any other book, they tacitly substitute another premiss; that nothing different from the contents of any other book will come out of it as the result of investigation.

III. The chief dangers of critical study.

From this brief examination it ought to be clear where the

chief dangers are to be apprehended. We have nothing to fear from free and full inquiry, we need have no dread of new discoveries. Rather do we welcome them. The danger lies elsewhere, and is twofold. We may lose our sense of proportion, and we may live in an unwholesome atmosphere.

1. It is possible on the one hand to become so absorbed in the observation of seeming fissures and sutures in the narrative, so occupied with the examination of supposed minute discrepancies, so engrossed in weighing the probabilities of possible reconstruction, that the majesty of the central Figure in the New Testament is lost to our view. The purpose of the New Testament is before all things and above all things, to bring before us a picture of God in Christ Jesus, as the God of redeeming grace, and to exhibit the relations He has established in Christ Jesus by His Holy Spirit, between Himself on the one side and the individual believer and the Christian society on the other. To behold this picture is far more important than to turn aside and discuss the material on which it has been drawn, the mode by which it has been produced, or the character of the frame in which it has been set. Because a supreme revelation has been given in Christ Jesus, it is incumbent upon us to consider, first of all, the greatness of His Person and work. For this purpose, it seems, Divine Providence caused and guided the formation of the New Testament. It is, therefore, more to us than a true historical record. It is more than a book of edification. It is in vital and organic union with the revelation given in Christ Jesus, for thereby that revelation has been perpetuated and made universal. Thereby the living and reigning Christ speaks and works by His Spirit here and now. For this reason it is to us an inspired book, and speaks with the authority and power of the voice of God Himself.

2. Again, there is the danger of dwelling in an unhealthy atmosphere. The New Testament is, as Christian instinct has felt, an inspired book. It must be used and studied in the spirit in which it was written. Now in critical study there is a very real danger of allowing the Gospel to be sublimated into intel-

lectualism. We may become so absorbed in intellectual problems, or mental difficulties, that we may overlook the primary appeal to the heart, the conscience, and the will. The New Testament is not to be reduced to the level of an antiquarian puzzle for the historian. We may not volatilize it into a philosophy for metaphysicians. We cannot resolve it into a treatise on ethics for the moralist. We cannot even transform it into a text-book of doctrine for theologians. It implies these things, but it contains far more, and is far more. It offers us a present religion, not a mere reminiscence of the past. It guarantees a new power for holiness of life. It is a gospel of grace for sinners. Above all, it is the revelation of a living Lord. These are the powers wherewith it has been endowed by the Spirit of God. These are the promises that the same Holy Spirit can thereby make our sure possession. These no criticism can give, and these, thank God, no criticism can ever destroy. There is much that may perplex, much that may provoke, much that may sadden in current criticism and prevalent modes of thought. We rise from the study of some modern criticism very much with the feelings that Canon Ainger expressed on reading a volume of modern sermons :

“ With eager knife that oft has sliced
At Gentile gloss or Jewish fable,
Before the crowd you lay the Christ
Upon the lecture table.

“ From bondage to the old beliefs
You say our rescue must begin ;
But I want rescue from my griefs,
And saving from my sin.

“ The strong, the easy, and the glad
Hang, blandly listening on thy word ;
But I am sick and I am sad,
And I need *Thee*, O Lord.”

This is the spirit in which we should approach the New Testament, and, if we so approach it, we shall never be disappointed. Deep down in the heart of man there is a thirst for God, yea, even for the living God, and across the ages, from the heaven of heavens, there still sounds in the New Testament a

voice really human and truly divine, with the same loving accent as of old, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly," and again, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."



Hasisatra and Noah.

A "CRITICAL" ASSERTION CRITICISED.

BY THE REV. W. ST. CLAIR TISDALL, D.D.

"There has . . . been discovered [in the Cuneiform tablets] an account of the Deluge very similar to the one we have in Genesis. . . . What is the inference from all this? Surely this—that these legends were derived from a Babylonian or Accadian source."

"That the early Hebrews derived the story [of the Deluge] from Babylonia . . . may be considered a practical certainty."

THESE are two passages taken from two different books recently published which profess to state the "proved results" of Higher Critical investigations. Their authors are themselves Higher Critics, and they agree in asserting in the most clear and decisive manner, as will be seen, that the Biblical account of the Flood is borrowed directly from the Babylonian. The ground on which the assertion is professedly based is the alleged *great similarity* between the Hebrew narrative in Genesis and the Babylonian story known to us from the Deluge episode in the eleventh book of the "Epic of Gilgamêsh," and also in part from Bêrôssos. Our object in this article is to test this conclusion of the Higher Critics. We approach the subject from a purely critical and literary point of view, entirely setting aside all theological questions.

To enable our readers to estimate for themselves the degree of resemblance which exists between the Babylonian account and the Hebrew, it is necessary to quote the former, as related