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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

On Pseudonymity.

I.—GENERAL MORAL ISSUES.

AMONG the difficulties which are felt by many people with regard to modern critical views of Scripture are those which are connected with fundamental moral issues. It is worth everybody's while to face the facts in this matter more definitely than is generally done. It is worth the critic's while; for if he is really in a cloudland of scholastic paradoxes, he will never convince those who insist upon the application of plain moral standards without dialectic and subtle distinctions. And it is also worth the while of those to whom we have just referred; for if the critic's distinctions are reasonable, he ought not to be accused of moral shiftiness. But in the mass of detailed discussion of critical theories these great underlying principles are apt to be overlooked.

One question connected with them—and one of the chief questions—is suggested by the title of this paper. We will endeavour to examine the critical contention later. But first it seems advisable to state the difficulty in its plainest—perhaps even its crudest—form. If a modern writer were to bring forward something of his own under the pretence that it was a newly-discovered work by some famous author of the past, he would be a literary mountebank. Or put the case a little differently, to eliminate the question of personal profit. Imagine an ardent advocate of some political, moral, or social theory pretending to issue a treatise by a philosopher of world-wide fame in support of that theory. The aim would be different; the motive, conceivably, might be a sincere desire to find acceptance for what the forger might honestly believe to be for the world's benefit; but the modern world's verdict on the method would be universal and emphatic. Or consider a well-known illustration of modern times. Suppose the forger detected by the late Dr. Ginsburg had been really actuated by

a lofty desire to propagate religious truth, would that have justified him ?

What ordinary people want to know is this—how does such an action differ from the critical theory of the origin (let us say) of Deuteronomy or 2 Peter ? The critic has his answer, and we will consider it presently. These two books are perhaps the leading examples of alleged pseudonymous origin in the Old and New Testaments respectively. The question of Deuteronomy has been amply and widely discussed ; and there is not room for everything in a paper of this character. But the case of 2 Peter will provide a great many useful illustrations, even if the treatment of it is not complete.

1. The present instalment of the paper aims at dealing almost exclusively with the general moral issues already suggested, and so it will be best first to notice *the plea which is urged by the critical school.*

It is said that people looked at things in an altogether different way in those days ; that it is not fair for us to impose the standards of our time on a remote age like that in which the sacred writers lived ; and that what we should consider a literary fraud would not then have been so regarded by anyone, for it merely represented a general and well-understood practice. Modern commentaries seem to take it as almost beyond dispute that 2 Peter, for example, is not the genuine work of that Apostle. See, for instance, "The Expositor's Greek Testament," and a new "Introduction to the Books of the New Testament" by Archdeacon Allen and the Rev. L. W. Grensted. And the only way in which the moral difficulty can be answered is by some such explanation as the above. So the Rev. L. W. Grensted writes, in the latter volume : "It cannot be too often repeated that we have no right to regard our present ideas of literary honesty as necessarily acknowledged by all honest writers of every age. And there is no reason why the Early Church should not have accepted the standard of its own period."¹

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 258.

No statement could be clearer ; and it is typical. Even Dr. Plummer, who argues for the authenticity of the Epistle in Bishop Ellicott's Commentary, bases his conclusions entirely on other grounds, and frankly accepts the critical position on this particular matter. But it is commonly alleged by conservative students that the critical school share one great human weakness. We all know that a position can be so often stated that it comes to be taken for granted. Reiteration is practically accepted as argument. And it is alleged that this is a besetting sin of the critics. So it is not mere obstinate perverseness and bigotry to ask, not only whether the critical explanation is legitimate on moral grounds, but even whether their contention as to the early standard of literary honesty is actually correct. Was pseudonymity not merely widely practised, but universally reckoned honourable ?

The latter point must be taken first. Personally, I have not been able to discover any clear evidence of the above confident statements in the writings named. In order to make the matter plainer, I wrote to the Rev. L. W. Grensted to ask whether there is direct evidence of such an attitude of mind as they suppose. He has kindly given me permission to quote from his very candid and clear reply. He says : "On the supposition that I am right, and that it would not have been regarded as dishonest to compose a book in the name of some great hero of the past, direct evidence of this attitude is not, I think, to be expected. Nobody thinks nowadays of saying that it is not dishonest to insert in a book quotations from some poet, just because everyone agrees on the point." But where does the comparison come in ? Are not such quotations practically always marked in some way ? So far from anything answering to this, it is implied that 2 Peter takes special pains to *avoid* any such clue ! And is there not in any case a strange lack of proportion in the supposed parallel ? As to the larger question, is it enough to say, Assume the fact, and direct evidence is not to be expected ? If we can be sure of the fact on other grounds, this is well enough ; but one is inclined to

ask whether it is not another critical failing to assume rash theories, and then make everything fall in with them. It might be unfair to say that this is an instance of such a failing; but if it is not, fuller reasons should be given than seem to appear. At any rate, such an argument as Mr. Grensted's practically admits the absence of very direct evidence.

He goes on to say, however, that "of rather less direct evidence there is surely abundance." Here he gives illustrations from the Old Testament which the conservative student in part does not admit, and in part regards as inapplicable. After this comes a notable example in apocryphal literature—the Book of Enoch, which may under certain conditions suggest that pseudonymity was boldly practised, and even was possibly winked at. But his attempts to show that it had in this case a *Christian* sanction assume too much. The distinction is important, as will appear later.

The weight of such considerations, moreover, is considerably diminished by such a statement as "The Expositor's Greek Testament"¹ quotes from Jülicher—"the boundless credulity of ecclesiastical circles to which so many of the New Testament Apocrypha have owed their lasting influence." The terminology seems strange; but if there was this "boundless credulity" in those long-past ages, how can we be sure that such writings were known to be pseudonymous? And if not, how was their pseudonymity condoned by current opinion? Is not such a thought worth considering, even in such a case as the Book of Enoch?

Even more strongly in the same direction is a very definite statement which I find from Dr. Plummer's pen; and let it be remembered that he, while arguing for the authenticity of the Epistle, holds this particular point to be immaterial, so that his testimony should be all the more above suspicion. He says: "The amount of apocryphal literature which began to appear at a very early date, and flooded the Church in the second and third centuries, made all Churches very suspicious about

¹ Vol. v., p. 99.

unknown writings ; and several of these apocryphal books bore the name of St. Peter. Every year that the arrival of the Epistle at any particular Church was delayed would make its acceptance by that Church less probable." This Epistle, he holds, like the fourth Gospel, met with a certain amount of suspicion through appearing after others ; and he thinks it a strong point that it was so generally accepted in the fourth century "*after* such full doubt and debate."¹

If this be the case, can it be correct to speak as if the sole standard of genuineness was orthodoxy?² That seems to involve, as a corollary, that the Early Church did not care at all who wrote a book as long as it taught sound doctrine. Why, then, was there such "doubt and debate" about 2 Peter? It certainly contains no heresy. And it would be difficult to prove that there was any other ground for such care, except the one that seems so obvious to the conservative student. Is it a fact, as Dr. Plummer roundly asserts, that Churches became "very suspicious" about unknown writings bearing well-known names? If so, is it also likely that they viewed pseudonyms with complacent acquiescence?

But I have found one alleged piece of direct evidence, and I will give the reference for so apparently rare a curiosity. In "The Expositor's Greek Testament" the Rev. R. H. Strachan, in his Introduction to 2 Peter, instances a case related by Tertullian.² The writer of the Acts of Paul and Thecla "was compelled to give up his office 'on the ground that he imputed to Paul an invention of his own' (quasi titulo Pauli de suo cumulans). He defended himself by saying that he wrote out of regard for Paul, and that therefore he had not an evil conscience. The plea was evidently accepted, and he was convicted, not of literary fraud as such, but because he dared to advocate the heretical view that women had a right to preach and to baptize."

I have quoted fully in order to be fair. But I have a feeling

¹ In Bishop Ellicott's Commentary, vol. viii., p. 438.

² See "Expos. G. T.," vol. v., p. 99.

that the "evidently" is somewhat in the critical manner! Is it quite certain that the illustration is not double-edged? On the face of it one might naturally assume that a charge, framed in the terms quoted above, involved some condemnation for using the Apostle's name. Mr. Grensted thinks that the emphasis is on "de suo," and (if I understand him) that this refers to the heresy rather than the forgery. Who is to decide this point? And, moreover, even if the judges thought the heresy the worse of the two offences, that is no proof that they thought the fraud of no consequence. The sentence might be, in effect: "You plead you meant no harm; but anyhow you are a heretic."

Mr. Grensted thinks, moreover, that the existence and long use of so many writings under false names is inexplicable if the practice was regarded as wrong. But, as already suggested, can it be proved that these were known to be forged and nevertheless honoured? Were forgeries only rejected for heresy, as he says? Did not the prevalent suspicion on the ground of so large a number of existing forgeries cause even some canonical writings to be treated with hesitancy—as Dr. Plummer urges? And, above all, is there any example of an undoubtedly pseudonymous writing being ultimately accepted as canonical? If 2 Peter is such a case, it would appear to be unique.

2. This brings us to our second point. Even if it should be proved that the theory of varying standards of literary honesty is correct, *there still remains a more serious moral question*. It would be presumptuous, perhaps, to assert positively that there is no evidence, direct or indirect, for the prevalence of a low standard. I do assert that it is difficult to discover such undoubted evidence in the writings of those who uphold the view, in the cases I have mentioned. But it is, of course, possible that the *ordinary* standard of literary honesty was not as high as it is now. If that be granted, at any rate for the sake of argument, two difficulties at once confront us.

(i.) If that be the case, is there any reason to suppose that Christians were not able to rise above such a standard? Certainly the New Testament gives no ground for such a supposi-

tion. No virtue is more strongly urged in it than truthfulness. Truth is something absolute and eternal; and the New Testament inculcates the very highest ideals with reference to it. The embodiment of quotations, and practices of that order, are not to be compared with the wholesale claiming of Apostolic authority and Apostolic experiences, backed up by an ingenious set of devices to "carry off" the assumed position. Though critics assert that good men did all this with clear consciences, we may be permitted to doubt, in the absence of more evidence than they appear to give, whether any man who was ruled by the Spirit of Truth could do so, even if not "inspired" in the stricter sense. Heretics may often have done it: that is a different matter—though doubtless many heretics are honest men. But the author of 2 Peter was not a heretic, and we may credit him with New Testament standards of ethics as well as of doctrine. We may challenge the confident statement quoted earlier, that "there is no reason" why an imperfect standard should not have been accepted by the Early Church, if it was the common standard.

(ii.) An even more serious consideration arises. The Word of God is not for one generation, but for all. We have just considered the case of Christians in whom dwelt the Spirit of God in the ordinary sense, as He dwells in us. Bring in the factor of inspiration for the purpose of revelation, and an infinitely graver question at once appears. What are we to say when we consider "the Author behind the authors"?

I know well that these matters have little weight nowadays. The Bible is dissected like any other book—nay, as no other book would be treated! Turn to any "up-to-date" commentary, and how many references will you find to any kind of inspiration whatever? But the plain man wants to know (and long may he want to know!) what is a worthy view of a Book which claims to be the Word of God. It will be granted, no doubt, that if the literary standard of those days was what is stated, ours is a higher one. And I think it is not open to doubt what the standard approved by God Himself must

be. Is it, or is it not, credible that He would have inspired what even we should treat as a literary fraud in our day, and that He should do so with a view to causing it, in His Divine providence, to find a place in the Scriptures of eternal Truth?

Dr. Plummer has an interesting answer to this difficulty. As has been said, he is not moved by these considerations in arguing for the authenticity of 2 Peter, and he goes so far as to say it is not reverent to assume "that the Almighty *cannot* exalt an Epistle put forth under a pretended name to the dignity of being His Word." He reminds us that God "spoke to His chosen people by the lips of impure Balaam," and quotes the case of Hosea as a warning against pronouncing hastily beforehand what means He could employ.¹

Arguments of this kind are worthy of all respect. It is a fact that there are many workings of God's providence recorded in Scripture and in history which men would not expect. And we may, indeed, be most irreverent when trying to be reverent! But would any such examples be quite so startling as the one under consideration? The choice of a Jehu as instrument of judgment in a rough age, or the overruling of even the sins of a Henry VIII. to advance the cause of truth, teach lessons we dare not ignore. But neither is so startling as the selection, for a channel of revelation, of a man who adopted the name of an Apostle in order to secure acceptance for his revelation. And as to the two examples named by Dr. Plummer, I should like to ask, with all respect, Is either of them parallel? The case of a man unwillingly forced to bless in terms of Divine prophecy—a man not chosen to go, but forbidden to go, and then only compelled to effect the purposes of God—is scarcely like that of one selected out of many others as a channel of inspiration. And as to Hosea, the interpretation assumed is not called for. If we say that the prophet, reviewing sad matrimonial experiences, regarded all things as overruled, or as working together after all, to the revelation through him of

¹ Bishop Ellicott's Commentary, vol. viii., p. 437.

God's great love to His backsliding people, the apparent harshness is instantly, and quite reasonably, removed.

But there is something else to be said. The question is not entirely what is possible or conceivable. Some of the contentions of the critical school are, in the opinion of many, plainly inconceivable, it is true. Of others, some conservative students could not speak so confidently. Such opinions may still be considered most improbable, while at the same time it may be admitted that if, when all secrets are known, they should be found correct, they could be reconciled with Divine truth and eternal right. Or put it another way: in the case of Balaam (though not strictly parallel) a Divine revelation settles the matter. If a Divine revelation were similarly to declare the critical contention about pseudonyms in general, or 2 Peter in particular, to be sound, it would be a different thing. But if I am asked to believe what seems antecedently improbable *on the mere authority of a theory which is itself open to attack*, I decline to do so. With every desire to give all due weight to the reverent contentions of Dr. Plummer already quoted, there remains the question, On what grounds am I asked to accept this startling thing? Feeling that it would be the most startling of all examples of the working of God's providence if, *e.g.*, Deuteronomy or 2 Peter were proved to be what we, at any rate, should be justified in calling a literary fraud in our day, why am I asked to believe it at all? What is the alternative? The answer must be left to a second paper.

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