

the brothers, attendants of Christ, constructed.¹

In these simple and unpretending documents, the composition of private persons often of the less educated strata of society, we see how many glimpses are opened up into the Church and the religion of the fourth century—the many contending sects of Christians, the struggle of the pagan revival against the new faith, the growth of ecclesiastical feeling and terminology, the care for the poor, the curing of the sick, hospitality to strangers, and so on.

I append, as an afterthought suggested by an inscription still unpublished, that the rosette on Christian tombstones may have been understood symbolically as a star.

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*DR. EMIL REICH ON THE FAILURE OF THE
HIGHER CRITICISM.*²

THIS book challenges comparison with Torrey's *Divine Origin of the Bible*.

The two apologies for Holy Scripture emanate from persons very differently situated : the one a revivalist preacher, the other a lecturer on history and politics to fashionable audiences in London. Nevertheless their books agree in some curious ways. Both endeavour to deal with a vast subject in a very modest compass : Dr. Reich in some 35,000 words, Dr. Torrey in about half the number. Neither *displays*—I do not say possesses—more than a superficial acquaintance with the subject ; and both agree, alas, in vilifying those who are opposed to them. The sceptics with whom Dr. Torrey argues are, he tells us, to be found in taverns, gambling-hells, and even worse places ; Dr. Reich's

¹ κασιγνήτοι Χριστοῦ θεράποντες ἔρευξαν.

² *The Failure of the "Higher Criticism" of the Bible*, by Emil Reich (Nisbet, 1904).

opponents are not indeed so located by him, but nevertheless they are compared to inquisitors, and said to employ the poison of vile insinuation. And both positively declare that the systems against which they have taken up arms are exploded, and yet both seem more uneasy about them than this belief would warrant.

It is unlikely that Dr. Torrey's book was ever subjected to the unfavourable criticism from which Reich's has suffered, and this is because some of its methods excluded it from attacks of the same sort. The Bible, Dr. Torrey holds, ought to be studied on the knees; if critics find unanswerable difficulties therein, it is because they have forgotten how to pray. Wagers—or something of the sort—were made by Dr. Torrey with “unbelievers” that if they read and prayed for a certain period, all their scepticism would disappear; and, when the terms of the wager were kept, it would appear that Dr. Torrey won. Difficulties that are soluble by devotional exercise are clearly not the difficulties that are soluble by ordinary processes of reasoning; the author therefore is dealing with experiences which even reviewers who have not shared them are likely to respect. Many of them would rejoice to learn that devotion could succeed where commonplace methods of reasoning ail. So far then as Dr. Torrey appeals to the emotions, he is safe from their attacks. It is rather where he offers solutions which might occur to a man sitting in his chair, that he fails to satisfy. Such cases are his suggestion that the Crucifixion may have taken place on the Wednesday, to account for the “three days and three nights”; or that the second verse of Genesis should be rendered “and the earth became waste and desolate” in order to harmonize the Biblical account of creation with modern geology. The almost certain rejection which will be accorded to these suggestions will be due to their belonging to the same plane

as the objections : having nothing “ transcendental ” about them.

Dr. Reich does not adopt quite the same devotional attitude, though he agrees with Dr. Torrey in the employment of arguments which by general consent are excluded from scientific debate. The attestation of the Founder of Christianity to the truth of the Old Testament is employed by both : Dr. Torrey gives it a rather more prominent place than his colleague, and tries to extend the attestation to the New Testament also. Both appeal to the enormous practical value of the Bible ; and this argument also has to be excluded from the lecture-room. Still, though for any scientific purpose the value of Dr. Torrey’s book is exceedingly small, for the missionary preacher, who has to deal with the sceptic of “ the tavern or gambling-room,” he has provided a useful compendium. Of the value of religion for purposes of education and reform there is very little doubt ; and Dr. Torrey’s great and successful experience renders his opinion authoritative on the mode by which such persons should be approached, and the Bible be brought to bear on their sad or desperate case. If there be any analogy between bodily and moral disease, the food to be administered to the diseased disposition would probably differ very considerably from that which would suit the healthy soul.

Dr. Reich’s work does not lay claim to the indulgence which is rightly meted out to works which have a definite moral and religious aim, and the tone which he has adopted is such as to provoke contradiction in impartial readers and alarm and distrust among friends. An Indian gentleman was once asked to lecture on temperance before an English audience, ready to acquiesce and applaud. When he began by observing that in India murder was thought a venial offence as compared with drunkenness, those who had invited him to lecture began to repent of having done so ; for

such exaggerated advocacy could only injure their cause. So there may be many readers of *The Failure of the Higher Criticism* who would gladly be convinced of the historical character of Moses ; but they will be unpleasantly thrilled by the sentence, "it is no exaggeration to say that he who denies the historic existence of Moses, denies the Mediterranean, the Nile, and the Euphrates." For they will be aware that this is not indeed an exaggeration—yet only in the sense that an exaggeration is a proposition quantitatively false, but otherwise true ; whereas this statement appears to have no grain of truth anywhere. It is difficult indeed to credit any one with so crass a form of determinism as that which would profess to deduce Moses (and, we suppose, the ten plagues) from the existence of the two rivers and a sea ; the pretensions of the old astrology were modest in comparison. An assertion of this sort will therefore inspire the opposite of confidence in the most favourably disposed.

Perhaps we should infer from this sentence, as from many others, that it is the author's intention to persuade rather than to convince : for indeed vehement asseveration can perhaps compass the former, but not the latter of these results. None of us are disposed to deny (the existence of) the Nile, etc., because we have either ourselves seen and sailed them, or known trustworthy persons who professed to have done so, and respectable steamship companies which offer to take us to them. And clearly none of these masses of water are artificial, and designed by Moses, as the Suez Canal was by de Lesseps : so that to deny de Lesseps might be made equivalent to denying the Suez Canal. Nor on the other hand can it be said that the existence of Moses is inextricably bound up with that of the nations who lived by those waters ; for with the Mediterranean and Euphrates he had, even according to the Bible, no connexion, and as

early as the first century A.D. (and indeed earlier) persons who had access to lost Egyptian annals searched vainly for some one to identify with the Hebrew leader. Hence we can only treat this sentence as an expression of the author's earnest conviction of the historical truth of the Biblical narrative ; and since in these days it is still uncertain what attitude the churches will eventually adopt towards the new treatment of their sacred books, such vehement attestation on the part of an historical student is by no means an unwelcome contribution to a difficult subject.

For the rest it is undesirable to reiterate the unfavourable criticisms which have already been passed on the book, and which it certainly took no pains to avoid. It will be more interesting to call attention to such of its contents as deserve appreciation or gratitude.

In the opening chapter we are made acquainted with some legends current among the Masai, a negro tribe in German East Africa, whose religion has been studied by Captain Merker, and described in a work as yet little known in England. These negroes were found by him, according to his statement, to be in possession of a series of narratives closely resembling those at the beginning of Genesis, and even some in Exodus. These include the stories of Paradise and the Fall, the first murder, the Ark with the dove and the rainbow, and the delivery of a decalogue on a mountain amid thunder and storm. The names employed bear no resemblance to the Biblical names, but otherwise the similarity is remarkable.

Dr. Reich infers from this fact, not that the Biblical narratives are historically accurate, but that those are in error who trace them to Babylonian sources ; he supposes that the stories must have been current in Arabia in pre-historic times, whence they are found in the possession of nations whose ancestors migrated from Arabia at very

different periods. To most readers it will seem far more likely that the Masai legends (if their existence should be confirmed) will turn out to have originated from the teaching of Christian missionaries removed by no long distance from our own day : of other cases in which savages have been credited with a tradition of the Deluge this has been seen to be the solution. Should the connexion between the narratives be more remote, the prospect of an interesting study in comparative folklore is held out.

A fact to which attention is rightly called is that many men of practical ability have had little or no sympathy with modern Biblical criticism. The public will be disposed to think (against Dr. Reich) that those who have devoted their whole time to the study must be more competent to give an opinion than persons whose main business has lain elsewhere ; but of the fact, whatever its psychological explanation, it is easy to find illustrations. Both the most prominent English statesmen of the nineteenth century—Mr. Gladstone and Lord Beaconsfield—entered the field of controversy as orthodox theologians. From passages in the *Life of Lord George Bentinck* it might even be argued that the latter would have approved of Dr. Reich's identification of anti-Semitism with the Higher Criticism ; an identification hard to be maintained in the face of the *Jewish Quarterly Review*. The private letters of Prince Bismarck give evidence of sympathy with orthodox evangelicalism ; and those of the late Lord Selborne contain an argument in favour of the genuineness of Daniel. A prominent defender of the same cause is (or was till recently) head of the Criminal Investigation Department. The Bible Society can often get some successful and eminent administrator to take the chair at its meetings. If only Dr. Reich could have spared us the contemptuous epithets which he bestows on the specialists, he would have made a point likely to impress many readers.

Some of the remarks on language and languages are likely to meet with acquiescence, though a few are intentionally paradoxical, and it is not quite easy to distinguish jest from earnest. Thus on page 5 little gratitude is said to be due to "Grotefend and other ingenious contrivers" who have enabled us to read cuneiform; but on page 186 the Higher Critics receive their *coup de grace* from a copy of Genesis in cuneiform script, dating from the thirteenth or twelfth century B.C., that will "undoubtedly and in the near future" be unearthed. Such a document would be quite useless for the purpose of discrediting the Higher Critics, and indeed for any other, if no one could read cuneiform: one of these passages must therefore be in jest, and internal evidence is about equally divided in favour of either. On the other hand, the author seems rightly to emphasize the imperfection of modern acquaintance with the languages of the Old Testament, whether the evidence of Spinoza on the subject can be admitted at this time or not. The discovery of any continuous mass of Israelitish literature of almost any two or three centuries before Alexander would provide us with certainty, where we have to be content with ancient or modern hypotheses. If therefore the discovery of ancient literature is to be procured by prophecies of the sort quoted, Dr. Reich should be requested to foretell the discovery of some unknown Israelitish books, rather than of copies of existing works. They might not solve all the problems which criticism faces; but they would certainly solve some.

Some sympathy may also be felt with our author's complaints about the reduction to myth of characters regarded by the world not only as historical but as thoroughly known and understood. The loss to history of a personage so clearly painted as Joseph is certainly deplorable. The question is whether this result is the critic's misfortune or

his fault. The story of Joseph at each stage involves the belief in the prophetic character of dreams—his own, the chief baker's and the chief butler's and Pharaoh's. Is this principle, in Dr. Reich's opinion, so well attested by experience that such a career has none of the characteristics of fable? A word or two on this subject from him would surely have been in place.

Finally, it may be observed that the difference between Dr. Reich and those whom he attacks is much slighter than his language would suggest. His account, e.g., of the Pentateuch is that it was a *Gemeinde-Lesebuch*, "or popular work of edification in the hands of every one: . . . such a popular *Gemeinde-Lesebuch* must necessarily have undergone constant changes in its verbiage (phraseology), style, matter. Too many people handled it; too many copied it; too many different copies were extant in the various households. . . . A popular book of education, going through an untold number of copyists and generations, undergoing the greatest possible changes in form and structure, *if not also in its religious and historical essentials*, cannot now be reconstructed into its original constituent parts" (pp. 67-69). This result seems to give poor comfort to those who desire confirmation of their belief in the infallibility of Scripture. Higher Criticism, according to this, is a failure, not because it attempts to divide the indivisible, but because it would divide the infinitely divisible. Its enumeration of sources is not too large, but far too small. The follower of Wellhausen might perhaps suppose that J, E, P, etc., were authorized and competent persons; Dr. Reich's followers have not even this crumb of consolation.

The evidence, it may be observed, appears to be entirely against the simultaneous existence in ancient times of any great number of copies of the "Law." That our existing Hebrew copies are all derived from one is certain; from

Josephus it would appear that in his time each large community was possessed of a single copy ; *the* copy captured by the Romans at Jerusalem afterwards came into his possession, and he does not suggest that he owned another. A copy was, it is stated, brought by Ezra to Jerusalem ; a copy was discovered in Josiah's time. It is therefore improbable that the case is as bad as Dr. Reich represents : our existing Law is the result of a series of official recensions, several of them made when some national calamity had introduced considerable vagueness into the tradition, and all by persons whose critical methods differed widely from those now held in honour ; the impossibility of unravelling the threads cannot be settled on *a priori* principles, but depends on the actual character of the materials. Even in a *Gemeinde-Lesebuch* this would hold good.

With regard to method also Dr. Reich's seems far nearer that of his opponents than that of the believers in literal inspiration. So he argues from the occurrence of monotheism in prophecy of 850 B.C. that the Exodus, which he puts about 1250 B.C., must have been historical ; apparently (the steps are not easy to follow) because only so acute a national peril could have produced the intelligence requisite for the discovery of monotheism. The reconstruction of history on *a priori* principles is therefore common to Dr. Reich with his opponents, though few of them would venture to calculate back 400 years in this style. But if we turn to the Bible, it says nothing about national dangers abnormally developing the intelligence ; the Abraham who arrives at monotheism by reflexion is a character of Josephus, not of Scripture ; just as the Moses of Scripture is neither a general nor a legislator in our sense, but a passive agent, through whom a supernatural power works and speaks. Supposing therefore that Dr. Reich's historical argumentation could deduce a Moses and an Exodus, both

would necessarily be of a different sort from those of which the Bible speaks. So we might plausibly argue that living by an estuary produces great swimmers ; but this premise would be useless, if the historical fact which we desired to deduce were that some one crossed the Forth by the Forth Bridge Railway.

Parts of this book were originally delivered as lectures, and lectures often lose considerably by being printed. A number of personal matters which play a prominent part in an oration figure nowhere on the printed page. A printed discourse by Spurgeon is a poor reflex of the same as uttered by the great preacher. Hence we can well believe that much of this work was far more effective when heard than as read. In a future edition it may be hoped that the painful passages in which men of justly earned eminence are violently attacked may be omitted.

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