

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

*DR. SANDAY'S CRITICISM OF RECENT
RESEARCH.*

A GOOD many years ago (I think in this Magazine) I expressed the opinion, forced on one who lived far from Oxford, that Dr. Sanday was to some degree giving up to a single University what was meant for mankind. This reproach—if that can be called reproach which was merely the recognition of a zealous and strict devotion to the immediate duty—can no longer be uttered in view of the books with which the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity has enriched us all in recent years. One perceives that these are the result of the long period of probation and preparation to which Dr. Sanday's work has been submitted. The marked characteristic of his writing is its maturity and fulness of thought rather than its ingenuity. His books derive their value, not from bold and brilliant views, which seem to carry both the writer and the reader away with them and almost to overmaster the judgment, but from the impression they convey of a reserve of power that lies still unused behind the written word, of a methodical toning down of expression to the standard that is inevitable and convincing. He never strikes one as speaking too strongly, but always as having pondered over the expression of each opinion till it is the last and completest word that has to be said from that point of view. There is no modern writer who more strongly impresses me with the sense of the moral element which is a necessary part of high intellectual power. It is a truth which one has often to impress on students at college, that mere cleverness is a poor and even a dangerous part of a scholar's equipment, adequate by itself only for the winning of entrance scholarships and class prizes but having no staying power in the race of life.

One feels in Dr. Sanday's work that it is founded and built up on the intense desire to reach the truth, and that this intense desire has directed the method, and concentrated the faculties in the path of knowledge.

The book is made up of a series of lectures and reviews which have no connexion with one another except in two very important respects, they all ¹ belong to one stage and one period in the evolution of the Author's views, and they to a large extent spring from a single purpose, viz., to sum up and estimate some leading tendencies and results in the present stage of scholarship. That the various surveys which are taken of separate parts of the whole field were worked up to suit different occasions gives a superficial appearance of disjointedness; but the appearance is really only superficial, and might by slight changes have been in great measure eliminated, if there were anything to gain by eliminating it.

The opening chapter on the Symbolism of the Bible is a very simple expression of much careful thought: many problems have been pondered over for a long time before it was written, yet they hardly appear above the calm surface. On p. 14, as we see gladly, Dr. Sanday recognizes that "from the very first sacrifice was expressive of ideas." The use of the plural shows that he would not admit the explanation of the origin of the rite of sacrifice from a single idea, as some scholars would maintain. Sacrifice is the expression of the human mind in its relation to God, and is as various as the human mind. The thought of primitive man was simple, but it can never be reduced to one idea alone. The man who can explain the origin of sacrifice from one idea is perilously near the discovery

¹ Except I think the review of Dr. Moberly's *Atonement and Personality*, which (if I am not making a mistake) I remember to have seen some years ago.

of the key to all mythology, and he who has found that key is hopelessly lost. You can with sufficient ingenuity always explain—verbally—anything out of anything; and thus you can draw out—on paper—a process of development whereby all mythology and all sacrifice evolve themselves from a single origin; but this process has nothing firmer to rest upon than the paper on which it is written. Dr. Sanday's words might easily be taken as indicating the view that there are only two really primitive ideas in sacrifice, the gift and the sacrificial communion; but I think that this would be a misconception, and that, when he speaks of "two ideas that we can trace furthest," he does not intend to restrict the number to two, but merely expresses his conviction as to the reality and certainty of at least these two.

On the other hand I confess that I cannot entirely sympathize with the point of view expressed in the paragraph at the foot of p. 9: "We are not surprised to find that in the early books of the Bible, where dealings take place between God and man, the Godhead is represented under human form. Man was himself the noblest being with which he was acquainted; and therefore, in conceiving of a being still nobler, he necessarily started from his own self-consciousness; he began by magnifying his own qualities, and only by degrees did he learn, not only to magnify, but to discriminate between them."

This is, in a way, perfectly proper and sensible. It is what every one says—perhaps what every one must say—and yet I do not feel that it is vital or illuminative: it seems to leave out the true principle. I should not venture to attempt to define the true principle: the task is above my power. But I cannot recognize it in this statement, which is apt to suggest that the conceptions of the Divine nature current among the Hebrews began by being anthro-

pomorphic. This does not convince me. I should rather approach the problem from the point of view that the early Hebrew conceptions were undeveloped, vague, and capable of future growth in more than one direction. They might have degenerated into anthropomorphism, as the Greek conception did. They were equally capable of development in another direction; and they did in fact, under the impulse of a succession of prophets and thinkers, develop in a [nobler [and truer way. But how to describe the unformed germ of early Hebrew thought I know not: most of what Dr. Sanday says on this hard subject seems to be excellent, illuminative and suggestive; but not all.

Difficulties of various kinds impede the attempt to express oneself clearly on this subject. You cannot speak precisely about what is essentially vague. It is difficult to project oneself into the mind of primitive man, or to picture to oneself what was in his mind. It is also hard for us, who are accustomed to aim at clearness and precision and definite outlines, to sympathize with or understand the oriental expression which rather shrinks from these qualities and prefers the vague, the suggestive, and the indirect. The difference between the European and the Asiatic mind is, to a large degree, a mere matter of education lasting through] generations and centuries, but perhaps it is to a certain extent due to difference of nature and sympathy and endowment.

I much prefer Dr. Sanday's other term "indirect description" to the term "symbolism" by which he more frequently designates the Hebrew and oriental style of expression.

The term "symbolism" which Dr. Sanday prefers as the least objectionable is open to the objection that the person who speaks symbolically is conscious of the difference

between the symbol and the real thing, and consciously employs the one to stand in place of the other. That is the case with the symbolic actions of the prophets, described in the first section of this opening chapter of the book which we are reviewing, as when Agabus took Paul's girdle and bound himself with it in token that Paul would be bound if he went to Jerusalem: the symbolism here was conscious and intended, and Agabus explained its meaning.

But, as the Author himself says on p. 11, the earlier Hebrews often did not regard the "symbol" as different from the thing symbolized: the "symbol" was the thing symbolized. How are we to understand or to describe a stage of thought when ideas are so vague and so unformed that they thus pass into one another without any consciousness of the transition? Take the genealogical fiction, which plays so important a part in the early history of many peoples, not merely of the Jews. It was not a fiction in primitive thought: it expressed a truth in the simplest and most direct manner in which the natural mind could express it, though to us the manner seems indirect. The Rev. Dr. White of Marsovan gives an admirable example that came within his own experience, where a wandering dervish used this mode of expression. "He told me that he was a Shukhbazari; and then, to enlighten my ignorance, explained that Arabs, Circassians and Shukhbazaris are 'own brothers, children of one father and one mother.' He used a Scripture form of expression to make me understand that the three peoples possessed the same traits of character." The dervish was merely eager to emphasize the close resemblance in character between the three peoples. He could think and speak only in concrete terms: he could not generalize or deal in abstractions. Yet out of his language in the process and hardening of thought there

might rise naturally and easily a genealogical fiction: the common father and mother acquire names, and the three peoples become three sons.

Nor is it merely real similarity of character that may give origin to this genealogical expression of history. Geographical contiguity may cause it, or the speaker may express by it little more than a common diversity from himself. He looks out over the world, and distinguishes from himself several peoples of the north-west as being children of one father different from his father. So in Genesis x. 4 we have "the sons of Javan: Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim."

The "genealogical fiction," then, has to be understood correctly, and it becomes valuable history. Only the unsympathetic and unintelligent historical criticism of forty or fifty years ago, the period of Grote and Cornewall Lewis, and the *Tübingen*, would be content to regard it simply as legend, and leave it out of the sphere of history. But, in order to understand aright any genealogical myth, we must put ourselves at the point of view of the person or people who originated that particular expression. It tells us something about the peoples whom it correlates to one another: it tells us more about the person or people who originated it: it tells us most of all about the standard and range of knowledge, the limits of geographical outlook, and so on, in the period when it took the form in which we have it.

But here lies the problem that is proposed to the modern student of ancient history. He must entirely dissociate himself from the accepted method of investigating the ancient documents—what is called the "critical" method. He must forget the modern division of the world into the "educated" and the "savage" races. He must separate the primitive man alike from the "educated" and the

“savages” of modern time; for men in the early stage were neither one nor the other, but contained the possibility of both.

In the second half of this most interesting chapter, Dr. Sanday proceeds to apply to the Gospels the inferences which he has drawn from the use of “symbolism” in the Old Testament. The discussion of the Temptation of Jesus occupies the largest space in this part, and is of peculiar interest to the present reviewer. The Temptation is in Dr. Sanday's view entirely a parable (if I am not wholly misunderstanding him). His idea of the Temptation is expressed in the picture by W. Dyce—“a monotonous landscape and a Figure seated upon a stone, with the hands clasped, and an expression of intense thought on the beautiful but by no means effeminate features.” Not that he regards this as the only correct representation of the Temptation. As he says, “it would be a mistake if we were to insist too much upon this contrast [i.e., the contrast between the subjective modern view, and that of Tissot with a conventional fiend, or of mediaeval painters with every detail sharp and definite], as though the modern presentation were right and true, and the ancient or mediaeval wrong and untrue. Each is really right in its place: they mean fundamentally the same thing, and it is only the symbolical expression that is different.”

With Dr. Sanday's view I find myself on the whole in thorough sympathy. That the story of the Temptation is largely of the nature of parable seems established by the Gospels themselves. I venture, as being the briefest way in which I can express my criticism of the present study, to quote part, and to abbreviate part, from what I once wrote on the subject, *The Education of Christ*, p. 31 f., “The authority obviously is the account given by Himself to His disciples; and we are told that ‘with-

out a parable spake He not to them.' How far the details partake of the nature of parable, intended to make transcendental truth intelligible to the simple fishermen, we cannot precisely tell, and no man ought to dogmatize. But no one can doubt as to the essential truth that lies under the narrative." Jesus counted the cost before He began His career: He thought of other possibilities, brilliant and tempting; and He rejected them as temptations. It is involved in the Temptation, when He described it to His disciples, that He was already conscious of the superhuman powers and opportunities that were His, if He chose to use them for personal ends. If you accept the story as anything beyond pure fiction, you must accept the superhuman consciousness of Him who was tempted by means such as are here brought to bear on Jesus. As a whole the temptations are meaningless and absurd, if applied to an ordinary man. It is mere trifling to say to an ordinary man who is hungry, "command that these stones become loaves."

If I understand Dr. Sanday rightly, there is nothing in this statement that would disagree with his views. The only word of question that I would make with regard to his expression of them, is whether in the desire to give clearness to his lecture (such was the original form of the first chapter), he has not made it in some parts too clear and sharp and definite in outline, too strongly modern in tone: though the quotation which I have extracted from his book attests his recognition of the fact that every age must and may look at the Temptation with different eyes, and all equally rightly.

Some may probably be afraid that Dr. Sanday's use of symbolism may, from his premises, be quite logically carried very far, much further than he carries it or they would like. But in an admirable concluding page he sums up the true attitude of mind and the right temper in which all historical

study ought to be carried on. With certain obvious modifications, what he says here is applicable to every department of ancient history. A certain sympathy for peoples and times and ideas remote from our own, an intense desire to comprehend them, a determined effort to throw off the fetters of nineteenth century views and to rise to a freer outlook, a contempt for narrow reasoning and hard logicity (which in these historical problems is often thoroughly illogical in the higher sense of the term logic), all these are needed in the reconstruction of ancient history and the interpretation of ancient literature. But hear how delicately and finely Dr. Sanday describes this attitude of mind : it " consists mainly in three things :

" 1. In a spirit of *reverence* for old ideas, which may perhaps be transcended, but which discharged a very important function in their day ;

" 2. In a spirit of *patience* which, because those ideas may be transcended, does not at once discard and renounce them, but seeks to extract their full significance ;

" 3. In an *open mind* for the real extent of this significance. We have our treasure, perhaps, in earthen vessels, but the vessels are themselves very deserving of study. I would say rather that, for the purpose before us, we should not think of them exactly as earthen, but as made of some finer and more transparent material which permits us to see through to the light within."

A survey of recent research would be an impertinent and valueless production if it were simply a cataloguing of faults and a statement of dissent. One is familiar with the criticism written by the able young man, whose rare and condescending recognition of merit is as a grain of wheat in a bushel of chaff, whose principal aim seems to be to show how much better he could have done the work, if he had cared to undertake it, than the author, and who has evi-

dently never made any serious attempt to understand the book which he criticizes, but merely touched it on the outside and gone off at a tangent. Criticism of this kind is *unerquicklich wie der Nebelwind*.

Totally different is the character of Dr. Sanday's work. He appreciates thoroughly the high principle that it is the function of true criticism to find excellences, not defects. He tells us what he finds that is good in each of the authors whom he criticizes; he expresses his dissent only where necessary to bring out the state of modern opinion; and he expresses it in very gentle and gracious terms. The sharpest statement of disapproval which I observe is that on p. 171; and yet how much it is qualified by preceding sentences of genuine hearty praise. I quote the whole passage. "I have a sincere respect, and even admiration, for perhaps five-sixths of his work,¹ including particularly—I should like to say in passing—his reviews of the literature of Patristics, in which he has been at once just and generous to some of my friends here in Oxford. I repeat that the pamphlet from which I started is not only good but in many ways very good. One may go on for wide stretches in his books and find only occasion to admire. And yet every now and then one is pulled up sharp by passages like those of which I have been speaking, which, I confess, move me to indignation, so narrow are they, and so hard, so deficient in sympathy and in intelligence for the difference between one age and another."

A quality in Dr. Sanday which strikes me as peculiarly admirable—perhaps because I lack it too much—is his power of learning from writers who are so antipathetic to him. If a commentator is devoid of sympathy for the

¹ In the case of reviews, I have often observed that the author is as a rule not so much gratified by the five-sixths of approval (however laudatory) as he is annoyed by the one-sixth of disapproval. It is the same if the proportions are eleven-twelfths and one-twelfth.

ancient author about whom he is writing, or lacks insight into the more delicate and subtle aspects of the text which he is discussing, I can hardly force myself to read him ; he has nothing for me ; and I neither learn from him (except that he sometimes makes me understand through antagonism passages which I might otherwise have failed to comprehend) nor criticize him. But we have just seen how Dr. Sanday can respect and admire five-sixths of an author whose remaining sixth part moves him to indignation. Now let us see how he expresses himself about another writer, who "has directness and ability, and never minces matters ; as I have said, he belongs to no school, and repeats the formulæ of no school. But he writes in the style of a Prussian official. He has all the arrogance of a certain kind of common sense. His mind is mathematical, with something of the stiffness of mathematics—a mind of the type which is supposed to ask of everything : What does it prove ? It is a mind that applies the standards to which it is accustomed with very little play of historical imagination. If it cannot at once see the connexion of cause and effect, it assumes that there is no connexion. It makes no allowance for deficiencies of knowledge, for scantiness of sources and scantiness of detail contained in the sources, for the very imperfect reconstruction of the background that alone is possible to us. If there is upon the surface some appearance of incoherence or inconsequence, it is at once inferred that there is real incoherence and inconsequence. And the narrative is straightway rejected as history ; though a little reflection would show that life is full of these seeming inconsistencies, and would be fuller still if our knowledge of the events going on around us did not supply us with the links of connexion which make them intelligible. Wrede argues as though we could exhaust the motives of the actors in events that happened nearly nineteen hundred years

ago, whereas nothing is more certain than that we cannot in the least come near exhausting them."

On one somewhat important matter I find myself, to my great regret, distinctly in opposition to my friend the Author (to whose counsel and help and never-failing encouragement I owe so much). He seems to me to estimate too highly the possibilities of discovery which purely literary criticism offers: while I seem to him to undervalue them. This is a question that requires more space than can here be given to it near the end of an article; but my impression is that the great and epoch-making steps in advance come from non-literary, external, objective discovery, and that the literary critics adopt these with admirable and praiseworthy facility as soon as the facts are established, and quickly forget that they themselves (or their predecessors) used to think otherwise, and would still be thinking otherwise, if new facts had not been supplied to them. Nothing gives me such interest, and so illustrates human nature, as to observe how principles of literary criticism of the Old Testament, which were accepted as self-evident when I was studying the subject under Robertson Smith's guidance about 1878, are now scorned and set aside as quite absurd and outworn by the modern literary critics. But it was not literary criticism that made the advance: it was hard external facts that turned the literary critics from their old path, and they have utterly forgotten how the change came about.

Moreover, it sometimes seems to my humble judgment that Dr. Sanday is unconsciously guided by the prepossession that there must be a certain residuum of truth in some clever treatise which he has been reading; and he finds this residuum by dividing the writer's total estimated result by 10 or by 100.

He finds the English scholars on the whole to be nearer

the truth, the Germans to be more educative and suggestive. I agree with him to a certain extent. I owe to the Germans almost all the stimulus of my early years, and I owe to several of them also almost all the encouragement which I received at the beginning when I needed it most, and for which I can never be sufficiently grateful to them. But now I find the English most useful, because they often give me facts without views, while the majority of the German writers start from a definite and fixed prejudice. They assume—many of them—the whole of the book in the opening paragraph; and often it seems as if one could draw out the whole reasoning in inexorable logic after reading the opening assumptions.

I must find room for another saying, which seems profoundly true and far too generally neglected. "The fact is that the Judaism of the time of Christ had a wider and more open horizon than that of a hundred years later. The result of the terrific and almost superhuman efforts that the Jews made to throw off the Roman yoke was a long reaction that has lasted almost to our own time. When the great effort failed, Judaism withdrew into its shell; it contracted its outlook and turned in upon itself. It gave up the hope of divine intervention that had at one time seemed so near, and was content to brood upon its past." Several times, in a quite different line, I have had to protest against the prejudice that the later Jewish customs and thought can be regarded as the norm according to which we must judge about Jewish practice and views in the first century before and after Christ. Dr. Sanday here states the true historical principle in a direct and uncompromising fashion; and the whole passage from which I have quoted a few words is as well worth study as anything in the whole space of these carefully thought-out lectures.

In the style one is often also struck by an apparently unconscious tendency to use military metaphors, to think like a soldier, and to count and marshal his thoughts as methodically as a general estimates and orders his force. Exactly five-sixths of Jülicher's work is good and even admirable. "The histories of Elijah and Elisha are much nearer—indeed quite near—to the events."

Other examples of similar character are :—

"Weinel's book is up to a good average, and Steinmann's perhaps somewhat above it" (p. 44).

"I welcome much of his criticism both on the right hand and on the left" (p. 44).

"With us dashing and desultory raids are apt to take the place of what is in Germany the steady disciplined advance of a regularly mobilized army" (p. 42).

"Whatever advance is made, is made all along the line" (p. 41).

Taken in conjunction with what is said in the opening paragraph of the present article, these extracts seem to be indicative of the methodical character of the Author's mind and the orderly progress of his studies. The development of a scholar is always an interesting study not only to other scholars, but probably to the world at large ; and this quality seems to lie at the basis of the Author's intellectual power. In this connexion I need make no apology for another observation, even though it may perhaps seem to some people to savour of a too personal scrutiny.

In this book which now lies before us I am struck with one difference, and, as I venture to think, improvement in the style from his earlier writings—I am not referring to English composition but to scientific exposition of opinion. Dr. Sanday uses the simple first person singular more frequently than he did in an earlier period of his work. This usage is not necessarily egotistic ; in scientific work

it is rarely egotistic; it is the briefest and most direct way of calling attention to the subjectivity, and therefore necessarily the uncertainty, of a statement: it is a danger flag, not a claim of ownership. When a view seems to be proved and trustworthy, one states it in the impersonal language of science; when it is advisable to call attention to the subjective element in a view, and to warn the reader that it is as yet only opinion (as one believes, true opinion), but not thoroughly reasoned and assured knowledge,¹ one uses the personal form.

W. M. RAMSAY.

¹ In Platonic language, it is ἀληθῆς δόξα, not ἐπιστήμη.