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Ultimate Problems of Biblical Science.

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THE subject on which, as students of biblical literature, we are all engaged in common is Spiritual Evolution. Our field is the invisible creation. Behind the process which issues in the physical universe, with physical man as its highest known development, has ever been that coincident process which issues in the world of thought and feeling; on its subjective side consciousness, on its objective, literature. As the geologist studies the petrified remains of extinct physical life, constructing a vastly broadened science of biology on the basis of palæontology, so the student of a broader psychology learns past phases of the human consciousness by its surviving literature. Man's interpretation of himself, of his surroundings, past and present, and his aspirations and outreachings toward the source and end of both — these formations of the spirit at various stages in the history of the race are, as it were, petrified in the literature of the past. In the ideas of a bygone age we have something besides the bare record of events to extend the range of our vision. These reproduce for us more or less imperfectly a world which left no impress of itself on photographic plate or phonographic cylinder. They show us the spiritual man at various stages of his development into the likeness of his Creator. We seek to know man as he will be when the Power that informs the material creation with its spiritual content and impels its course has fully accomplished its design. For practical and scientific purposes alike there can be no higher goal of science than the man that is to be, at the culmination of the spiritual creation; for he is the revealer, the Logos of God. We would know him in his relation to the Creative Power, a "power that makes for righteousness," says one of the greatest of literary critics. "We know not what we shall be," says a greater than he, "but now are we the children of God, and when He is manifested we know that we shall be like Him,

for we shall see Him as He is." But all foresight depends on knowledge of the past ; therefore we have no alternative but to study ancient thought ; only we shall study it as a segment in a continuous process, committed, as we are, to evolution by the very genius of the literature we deal with, before the word had any meaning to the student of outward nature.

But there are vital differences which distinguish our study from that of the palæontologist, aside from those of subject-matter. For one thing, the process of physical evolution, to the study of which the biologist gives himself, holds out no prospect of further and higher development. However fascinating the interest attaching to the question by what stages of change physical man came to be what he is in the physical world, the process has clearly reached its conclusion. However angelic we may become in disposition, our remotest descendants will wear no wings nor ride on centaurs. With the spiritual creation it is different. Here all is change. Our very discontent means moral incompleteness. The process of sociological development, millenniums old as it is, has scarcely begun. No limit can be foreseen to intellectual and moral progress for humanity, individually and as a social order. Even the ideals we can conceive tend almost as much to depress us by their remoteness from present attainment as they inspire and exalt us by their sublimity. Thus, contrary to popular opinion, physical science is but indirectly serviceable, whereas the study of spiritual biology is directly practical, because it concerns itself with the actual, present progress of evolution.

Again, the material of the palæontologist is preserved to him by accident. Where some quicksand engulfed the mammoth, where frost preserved, or happy accident petrified and brought again to view the fossil denizen of the past, he finds the data for his new Book of Genesis. We students of literature also have our vast losses to regret ; but not at the hands of indiscriminating nature. The products of human thought and feeling which have perished, have perished largely because they deserved that fate. The literature which has come down represents, on the whole, a survival of the fittest, and this is preëminently true in the case of religious literatures, which have undergone the slow, sifting process of canonization. What was found in actual experience of synagogue and church, as read from week to week in public assembly, to furnish real spiritual nourishment, that, on the whole, became canonical. Beyond all other literatures the canonical, beyond all canonical literatures the biblical,

represents a process of selection. In one sense we may call it "natural," since it was but partly conscious and reasoned ; in another it was more like the artificial selection of the naturalist, since adaptation to the needs of the religious consciousness was the touchstone of fitness. In still another sense we can only do justice to the history of the formation of the canon by calling it a process of divine selection. For we cannot but recognize that there is no one Author of this group of survivals from the religious consciousness of the past which we call the Bible, save that Being who, having already revealed himself in the completer evolution of the physical world, has been, and is now, revealing himself in an advancing spiritual creation.

The study of biblical literature from the historical or evolutionary standpoint reveals itself thus as a kind of spiritual palæontology. Seen in this light, not disconnected from our present religious consciousness, but in vital continuity with it, more of its real value and significance appears. Surely the deepest thing in man is his religion. If we wish to express the idea that some pursuit or ambition has absorbed a man's entire vitality and become the formative principle of his being, we say, "He has made a religion of it," "It is his religion." The history of religious thought, therefore, disregarding or eliminating all that is mere cant, tradition, convention, unreality,—the history of *living* religious thought is the history of human life at its very core and centre, the science of sciences, more practical and at the same time more profound than any other. If there is anything that supremely characterizes the biblical science of our day, it is, it seems to me, this new significance which historical method, imbued with the doctrine of evolution, has lent it. We treat biblical thought as a segment of the spiritual evolutionary process. The source of that wisdom which we seek is a living Creator that "worketh even until now."

To the genuine biologist there is no one stage of the process from protoplasm to physical manhood, which inherently is better deserving of attention than any other. Each is a segment of the great curve he is calculating, capable of divulging the whole solution. As he lifts his eyes from his task he exclaims :

Flower in the crannied wall,
 I pluck you out of the crannies,
 Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
 Little flower,—but *if* I could understand
 What you are, root and all, and all in all,
 I should know what God and man is.

So with the student of spiritual evolution. There are stages of tremendous acceleration in the growth, there are others in which it may appear stationary, or even retrograde, but none can be properly studied in dissociation from the rest. The curve of spiritual life might conceivably be a closed curve ; practically all we know of it suggests rather the hyperbola. Whatever its form, whether continuously progressive, or ultimately stationary or decadent, it must be studied *sub specie æternitatis*. Whether we are engaged upon the first emergence of the religious and moral consciousness of Israel in ancient war-song, ballad-lore, myth, and folk-tale, on the Yahwistic reformation under the successors of Elijah, on the moral awakening of Amos and Isaiah, the priestly and nomistic schools of the post-exilic age, the full flowering of Hebrew religious thought in the Baptist, Jesus and the apostolic age, or those later times which Jesus himself teaches us to regard as times of still greater illumination through the Spirit of Truth ; every period must be studied as part of a continuous whole, unintelligible, or positively misleading, when dissociated from that which went before and that which follows after. The whole, and only the whole, is the Logos of God. And the same principle of continuity, which forbids us to draw hard and fast lines between this period and that of Hebrew development, interposing here and there "centuries of silence" in the self-revelation of God, reminds us also that he hath not left himself without a witness in any age or among any people. That principle which forbids us to renew the ever fruitless attempt to draw sharp lines between this biblical book and that, forbids us equally to discriminate this literature and that, as wholly inspired or wholly uninspired, according to the mere hall-marks of canonicity.

There has ceased to be to-day even a pricking of the ears as I utter this disparagement of artificial boundaries to the revelation of God in literature, because in proportion as we have ceased to depend on convention or dogma in support of the uniqueness of the Hebrew and Christian canon as a whole, in equal or even greater degree has the needlessness of such support become manifest. It is not only that the historical interpreter finds significance in every stage of the religious consciousness, sometimes the very greatest significance in those stages which are crudest and most immature. That is already a commonplace. It is that in proportion as we learn in each author to distinguish mere forms of conception and expression, necessarily distinctive of the particular age and environment, from the inmost kernel of truth, which constitutes his essential didactic purpose, and which alone gave his message its permanent vitality, we learn to think

more humbly of modern wisdom in comparison with the wisdom of the past. The sophomore begins his reading of Plato with the feeling that in that remote past philosophic thought was in its infancy. He has a sense of condescension toward pre-Copernican forms of thought, as if the men who contemplated the universe from such a mistaken standpoint must be incapacitated for really enlightened thinking on ulterior questions. As he goes on he learns better. He begins to see that the highest questions can be approached, and have been approached, in the very childhood of the world, by truly great minds, from a base-line of very limited physical science. As he begins to realize how crude the physical science of to-day is likely to appear two thousand years hence, he is blessed with the heaven-born suspicion that, as compared with the measurements made upon the basis of that limited parallax, the base-line of known fact to-day is only infinitesimally larger than it was in Plato's day. Lastly, when he learns for how many ages even in Plato's day men of a logical power by no means inferior to his own had already turned the telescope of the mind upon these ultimate questions of man and his source and destiny, the nature and meaning of the universe, he is likely to reach an attitude of mind more nearly the reverse of that with which he began. He will be disposed to regard the current thought of his own age, all eaten up with vanity over a few pitiful discoveries in geology, chemistry, astro-physics and astronomy, as crude and immature, and that of Plato, Aristotle, and Lucretius as incomparably greater.

Something similar results when we cease to put a foolish emphasis upon the mere forms of conception and expression to which biblical teachers and writers were confined by the necessities of their age and environment. It really argues nothing but childishness and sophomore conceit to think the unique greatness of Moses and the prophets will be endangered unless they can be shown not to have contradicted some of our little store of modern fact and discovery. It is like correcting the spelling of Chaucer to wish to make Moses and the prophets conform to modern science. They would have granted us our poor little points of superiority, and welcome. And then they would have returned to the great eternal principles with which they dealt, as a Herschel might avail himself of the extra seconds of arc modern telescopic apparatus would enable him to measure in parallax in calculating the distance of a fixed star.

But since I am speaking of a change only partially accomplished, let me take an instance in point. The testimony of the first century is unanimous in representing it as the belief not only of the apostles,

but of Jesus, that the generation then present would see the consummation of all things, the final judgment and the end of the world. No candid interpreter, especially if he be at all familiar with current apocalyptic literature, can deny that the eschatology of the Synoptists, Paul, the John of Revelation, all the New Testament writers save the anonymous writer of the fourth gospel and three related epistles, is in all its formal conceptions simply the stereotyped Jewish eschatology of the time. It runs the regular gamut of the woes of Messiah, the triumph of Antichrist, and the revelation of the Son of Man. The final *dénouement* is fixed with certainty within the lifetime of that generation. This we find to be more and more generally admitted to have been the conviction of all those who report to us the teaching of Jesus. They even report it as a vital element — perhaps to them the most vital element — of his teaching. Yet we see a disposition in unexpected quarters to grasp at mere straws of evidence for the sake of avoiding the conclusion that Jesus shared the catastrophic eschatology of his time. Some even who have come to admit, perhaps reluctantly, that his reported language implies an acceptance of current demonology, particularly in the matter of demonic possession, with no difference but that involved in his loftier, purer conception of God, appear to think his unique authority will be compromised, unless in some way or other he can be shown to have thought like a modern on the subject of the day of judgment and manifestation of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven.

I cannot but think the author of the fourth gospel shows a deeper, truer, because so much freer, loyalty to the teaching of Jesus than these interpreters; for had he deemed it a *sine qua non* of discipleship to accept the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus on this subject, or on that of demonic possession, I cannot imagine his having become or remained a Christian. On these points he frankly takes leave to differ. Had the chiliastic mode of thought of the apocalyptic writer with whom tradition has so strangely identified him been the only type tolerated in the church of his time, men of his way of thinking would have been forced into the ranks of Gnosticism. The fourth gospel is of far greater value to us as an illustration of the latitude and freedom from the bondage of transmitted form available where the true spirit of Christ yet reigns, than it could possibly be as a mere adjunct to historical tradition.

It is indeed characteristic of Jesus to emancipate himself from the conventional modes of Jewish religious thought, like a Samson bursting the new cords of hemp, the instant they are seen to lay fetters

upon the deeper, diviner principles which are part of his intuition of God and moral right. We know that Jesus *would* not have hesitated to discard any of the ideas of catastrophic eschatology he had been brought up in, *if* they were seen to conflict with the real purpose of his Father. He would not have spared them any more than he hesitated to throw down the barriers of particularism or Sabbatarianism, when the supplication and faith of some Syrophœnician, or some lost sheep of the house of Israel, appealed to him as indicative of the Father's will. The question whether he actually *did* discard them is another matter ; a question for the historical critic and exegete. It depends on whether the apocalyptic eschatology in which Jesus had been brought up would necessarily appear to him inconsistent with that developmental mode of the divine working which he undeniably does appeal to in nature. The matter of practical importance is to establish and, like the fourth evangelist, ourselves live up to the principle that freedom from all restraint of tradition and convention, where opposed to his direct apprehension of God's will, is characteristic of Jesus. This recognized, our freedom is guaranteed. Departure from Jesus' special opinions is seen to be compatible with absolute loyalty to him as a teacher. But as historical interpreters we should recognize that wise conservatism was also characteristic of him. Iconoclasm is the last thing we should attribute to him. We are rather surprised to see how long he clings to the old faiths and forms of his childhood, even after it would seem to us they must have begun to seem "a creed outworn." This latter seems to me to determine the question of fact, even at the cost of our being compelled to differ from Jesus' opinion, — let me rather say, from that traditional opinion of his time which his growth in wisdom and knowledge had not yet given him occasion to discard. Why, indeed, should we adduce his example for talking an obsolete apocalyptic eschatology any more than for talking Aramaic?

So far as I can trace the facts, there does not appear to be one scintilla of evidence that the catastrophic eschatology of current Judaism was felt by Jesus to be in any way incongruous with his message as a whole. On the contrary, it seems to me to indicate that, if anything, he laid heavier stress than before on just this element of apocalyptic thought, — that the great judgment and consummation of all things was surely and immediately at hand. The very comparisons cited as evidence of the contrary are confirmatory of this view, when understood in their context and didactic purpose. We need take in illustration no more than the one instance supremely relied upon by those who think he took an exclusively developmental

view. Jesus compared the coming of the kingdom to the growth of a field of grain. Quietly and without observation, while even those supremely interested in the event are asleep or busy with their daily tasks, it puts forth of its own working (*αὐτομάτη*) "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." This parable, forsooth, is supposed to show that Jesus did not share the catastrophic view characteristic of the age. And yet the whole point and bearing of the parable and its kindred is precisely against those who sleep and rise night and day, eat and drink, marry and are given in marriage, just as they did in the days of Noah and Lot, because they see nothing startling, and who therefore infer that there is no sudden crisis impending. For what is it that the framer of the parable utters in the very next breath? "But when the crop is ripe, instantly he sendeth forth the sickle, because the harvest is come!" The lesson is in the contrast between a present time of the long-suffering of God and that of the angelic announcement that "there shall be time no longer." Just for the sake of those who are blind to the signs of the times, — signs which portend divine wrath upon a wicked and adulterous generation, accepting neither the Baptist Elijah, sent as Jonah was sent to the Ninevites, nor the Son of Man with a "wisdom" of God more winning than that which drew the heathen Queen of the South to Solomon, — just for the sake of those who presumptuously demand a sign from heaven in the face of impending doom, Jesus draws this contrast. It is drawn in the parable of the growing crop, the net full of fishes, the sower, the leaven. Like every herald of the Day of Yahweh, Jesus knows two modes of the divine working. He knows a present time of gracious opportunity granted by the long-suffering of God, an opportunity seized by the humble and repentant, to their salvation, neglected by the self-righteous and Mammon-blinded to their destruction; and he knows also a time of sudden catastrophe that cannot be averted, and will not be deferred beyond the lifetime of that same generation whose wickedness culminates in the murder of God's Son. Then the Day of the Son of Man will come "like the lightning that shineth from the east even unto the west." From the moment that he takes up the cry of the Baptist, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, to that when, predicting his rejection and death at the hands of that bloody generation, he assures the Twelve that his vindication shall come before the last of them shall have tasted death, I cannot find a trace of anything in Jesus' mind in conflict with the catastrophic eschatology from which he took his departure, and which it is acknowledged his disciples,

without exception, understood him to have both shared and emphasized.

What then? Was Jesus so dependent on the temporary and conventional form then assumed by the doctrine of divine retribution that we can picture him like Jonah, completely cast down and humiliated because the catastrophe did not come within the given time? Was he inferior to a later evangelist, one who speaks to us seemingly from a time when that disciple had already fallen on sleep, of whom it had been understood in the church that Jesus had predicted his survival till the consummation? The fourth gospel interprets the judgment as an eternal, self-executing gravitation of good and evil to their respective poles, and the manifestation of Christ as "not unto the world," but a coming of Christ and the Father to make their abode with those that love him. Was Jesus so inferior to the fourth evangelist that, confronted by the event, he would have been unable to spiritualize his own prophecies of his second coming?

Be it that with Paul and the whole company of the earliest witnesses, I am wholly wrong in the supposition that Jesus predicted the day of his second coming as for that generation and "suddenly as a thief in the night"; be it that he was not really in sympathy with this characteristic feature of the Baptist's preaching and the religious conviction of his time, but only failed to make clear to his disciples their mistaken ideas on this point; in my main contention I cannot be wrong, which is this: that the authority of Jesus as the supreme Teacher of humanity does not in the slightest degree depend upon his having transcended the point of view of the great prophets which went before him on questions concerning the time and mode of the divine retribution. He who disclaimed knowledge of the times and seasons, who grew in wisdom as in grace, who read God's will in the signs of the times, who wondered and learned, and expanded his view of his mission beyond his first thought, such a Christ would not have been ashamed to learn from the event and to apply to the prophecies a different interpretation in a later generation from that he had proclaimed to his own. Such a Christ is not limited by the ages, but maintains an eternal leadership, whatever the advance of thought.

This illustration, drawn from the eschatological teaching of Jesus, of the comparative insignificance of the particular temporary and local forms wherewith the great teachers of the past have clothed their thought, may seem to constitute a somewhat too extensive digression, but I think it germane and perhaps even indispensable. We have need to emancipate ourselves from the hindrances imposed by our

own pride of knowledge before we can appreciate real greatness of soul in the very lofty sphere of thought which we are investigating. It is simply a hindrance to the student of Plato to be perpetually conscious of the two thousand years of progress in physical science that separates Plato's mode of thought from his own. He must manage to bridge the chasm by forgetting his knowledge and thinking himself back to the standpoint of Plato's contemporaries. It is what we are at last beginning to do, thank God, in biblical exegesis; and if one is still hampered in the process by dogmatic presuppositions which, in the case of Jesus at least, will still interpose in defence of a supposedly indispensable inerrancy, that, too, is destined soon to disappear. Therefore, if I put in this plea against it, it is only in passing. I would deprecate this still exaggerated unwillingness to recognize in Jesus a true man of his time. It is with almost a sense of needlessness that I plead for granting him the right to speak his sublime truths, his eternal principles of God and humanity, in their native garment of what we are pleased, in our great wisdom of twentieth-century enlightenment, to call "error."

I have digressed in order to make clear a truth complementary to that already expressed in the comparison of biblical study to spiritual palæontology. It is so easy to overrate the difference made by a few centuries of additional knowledge and discovery, so hard to realize the maturity of thought of two thousand years ago and upwards on the fundamental ideas of morality and religion, that the very word palæontology is utterly out of place. Disencumber the teaching of the New Testament of that which its own authors, if they lived to-day, would admit to belong not to the substance, but only to the form, and New Testament thought represents not the past, but the present; not an incomplete stage in spiritual evolution, but the completest and most perfect within our observation. We must admit the principle of evolution; we gladly avail ourselves of it in the spiritual creation; but we must beware of assuming that because intellectual progress along certain lines has been comparatively rapid during the last twenty-five centuries, the moral and religious consciousness has outgrown the stage of eighteen hundred years ago. It might not be scientific to say: "The moral and religious consciousness of man reached its limit in Jesus of Nazareth. His conception of man in his relation to God and his fellow-man, under the forms of sonship and brotherhood, represents absolute religion." It might be better, with the fourth evangelist, to give full swing to the principle of spiritual progress, and say, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Only, while

geology and astro-physics combine to unroll before us the inconceivable æons which mark the stages of physical evolution, let us not make the mistake of imagining the greater spiritual creation going on about us to be the product of a few centuries. In the real principles of his teaching Jesus belongs to our own time. Christian thought is modern thought. Religious literature in general must be classed as either preliminary or as subsidiary to that which reveals his consciousness of God and man. There are foothills nearer and more remote, on this side and on that ; but it bespeaks a loss of perspective, an exaggeration of that which owes its seeming greatness to mere proximity, to talk of subsequent religious or philosophical systems as if they evinced a spiritual consciousness comparable with this great fact of the spiritual creation. To imagine that the literature in which Jesus' consciousness of man's relation to God is embodied may lose its authority and uniqueness, may suffer eclipse under the brightness of some modern luminary, unless we continue to deck it out with the attributes of a mechanical inerrancy and up-to-dateness, is to prove one's self in the sophomoric stage of appreciation.

Fellow-students of biblical literature, I have tried for a few moments to view our common subject-matter from the truly modern standpoint, the standpoint of a theistic, Christian evolution, which sees in the religious consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth the climax of the spiritual creation of God, and therefore treats all biblical literature, all literature, all history, all science, as subsidiary to the knowledge of him. We deliberately take this position, not as enthusiasts or bigots but as scientists, because we are persuaded, with a certain apostle, that the "God who," at the beginning of his physical creation, "caused the light to shine out of the darkness, hath shined forth," now at the beginning of his spiritual creation, "in our hearts, to give the light of" a more splendid science, "the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ." Whether the manhood here revealed is the ultimate and absolute, or whether it be possible to conceive an ideal of manhood transcending the life that is hid with Christ in God, is a question which we may leave without misgivings of faith to the systematic theologians. As students of biblical literature it is for us to utilize the revelation of God as the spiritual Creator recorded in the past, and to view it as evidence of his purpose for the future. The point of view will seem narrow only to those who are not in touch with the true spirit of evolution.

If, then, I have defined with reasonable correctness the point of view of the modern biblical scholar, it should not be impossible to

sketch in outline his general plan of campaign. His ultimate design is to understand the moral and religious consciousness of Jesus in its true historical perspective, as an organic vital part of that which went before, was contemporary with it, and followed after it. No man can do Jesus of Nazareth the simplest historical justice, who does not admit that he would have refused the *role* of Messiah, if he had not felt in some way qualified to carry it to a successful issue. The number of unbiassed scholars who maintain that the alternative was never presented to him is in our day fortunately on the brink of disappearance. Equally insignificant is the number of scholars who think the *role* as he conceived it involved a merely commonplace, secular or particularistic redemption. I have tried elsewhere to show that in the story of the baptism and *bath-gol*, followed by that of the temptation, we have Jesus' own embodiment of his fundamental religious experience, exhibiting as fully as the enforced language of symbolism permits, what divine sonship meant to him, and why, and in what sense, it required him to take up and carry through to God's own end the office of Messiah. Considering, then, what Jesus must have understood by Messiahship, and how unlikely he is to have taken the responsibility without absolute conviction of qualification in some way to carry it through, it belongs to us to see if his ideal cannot be expressed in terms of modern thought; whether in fact the highest modern conception of the development of life, evolution in the psychological and sociological sphere is not a mere restatement of what he presented in terms which, if less learned and simpler, are not less true nor less poetic than the modern. We speak of "the divine far-off event toward which the whole creation moves." Is it not possible to do for these modern terms and such as these, what Jesus did for the highest of his day, the terms Messiah-hood and Kingdom of God, — infuse them with his own consciousness of the filial relation to God?

Our problem is twofold: (1) We must determine, mainly through the study of Old Testament literature, What was the ideal aimed at? What had come to be involved in the ideas of Redemption, the Kingdom of God and related conceptions, in the mind of Jesus' contemporaries, and in his own? (2) We must determine, mainly through the study of New Testament literature, wherein he conceived his sufficiency to lie, how participation in that *summum bonum* was conceived as attainable by all his followers, and why the conviction of success instead of being eradicated by the vicissitudes of his career of martyrdom was not only triumphant in himself, but through

nearly two millenniums of Christian history has become the assured and joyful possession of multiplying generations of the world's most enlightened and noblest. Jesus felt that he had achieved the ultimate in the design of God for man. Why did he think so? And how can others have set to their seal in the writings surviving that this is true?

These seem to me the ultimate problems of our science, considered as a study of spiritual biology in the field of biblical literature. Sub-division is a matter of detail, and belongs rather in the province of my predecessor, who reviewed for us the present stage of progress in archæology, criticism and interpretation. Vast has been the gain in our understanding of the spiritual development which led up to John the Baptist and Jesus, since we began to reconstruct the history of Israel on the basis of a rational analysis and criticism of the historical books as sources. The twenty centuries of degeneration, followed by ten centuries of backsliding and "four centuries of silence," which used to constitute pre-Christian religious history, has begun to assume a divine form and order, to link itself in with the progress of the race, and on to the revelation of the Redeemer. In the New Testament also we begin to trace likewise an element of history, and an element of revelation; a Petrine element of simple, artless narrative, emanating doubtless in the first instance from him of whom Paul relates only three years after his own conversion that he went up to Jerusalem on purpose to hear his story (*ἰστορήσαι Πέτρον*), and whom the earliest post-apostolic age depicts in his missionary career still telling in his Galilean tongue the tales which Mark interprets. It is the task of the historical critic in the New Testament to gently disentangle this primitive thread, extricating it from all the web of pious legend, exaggeration, misunderstanding, which devout imagination has woven about it, that we may know the plain, bald facts, just the events as they occurred, in their own inherent significance, as well as the successive interpretations which narrators have put upon them. This is one part of our task in understanding what Jesus was, really and spiritually; a task the delicacy of which can only be appreciated by the thorough student of the Synoptic Problem.

But there enters into the stream of Christian literature another element besides the simple story of Jesus' life and teaching. If Paul thought his knowledge of Christ after the Spirit so much more important that he could preach his gospel three years before going up to Jerusalem "to hear Peter's story," we shall do well to realize how little would be gained by mere history, though it included the restora-

tion of the whole sequence of events from the baptism of John to the death of the last of the apostles, just as they occurred and in the most critical form. This would give us but the dry bones of Christianity. It was not *out of* these, but *upon* these, that the living reality grew up. Even to Peter the Christ was not revealed by flesh and blood, but by the Father. Much more to Paul, the second founder of our faith. The Spirit of the New Testament is the Christ which it knows "not after the flesh." Besides the mere skeleton of outward event and utterance, restorable with greater or less success from the complex stream of Synoptic tradition, there is that which gave life and significance to this whole career, Jesus' consciousness of his filial relation to God, which Paul aimed above all to interpret.

The beginning of the gospel according to the Petrine-Markan tradition is the statement of Jesus' reception of this consciousness. It is that which gave him his sufficiency. The rest of the story is simply to tell how he lived up to this divine calling, and made it prevail.

And when we turn to that other element of the New Testament, the Christological epistles of Paul, the Apocalypse, the Johannine writings, what is it with which they have to do, but the interpretation to us of this consciousness of divine sonship which made Jesus what he was and is; because the writers realize that to know him, both in the fellowship of his sufferings and the power of his resurrection, is eternal life.

Marvellously delicate is the task of historical criticism as it traces the various threads of Synoptic tradition, seeking to restore the mere outward nexus of events, but immeasurably more delicate still is the task of tracing this more spiritual tradition in all its varied forms. The Pauline conception is one thing, that of Hebrews another, that of the Johannine writer another, each including that of his predecessor, each endeavoring to convey the full content of what it meant to Jesus for himself and for his fellow-men to be called the Beloved, the Son of God.

Shall we solve the problem? Not in one generation nor in two, but progressively as we engage in it we shall be penetrating more and more deeply into the supreme mystery of the spiritual evolution that is moving on around us, "the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal, but now is made manifest through the scriptures of the prophets and the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ," the mystery of a Spiritual Creator, "who chose us in the Beloved before the foundation of the world and foreordained us unto an adoption as sons."