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THE HIGHER CRITICISM AND REVERENCE FOR THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

The Holy Bible, commonly called the Holy Scriptures, that collection of ancient writings, dating from the age of Moses to the close of the first century, a period of fourteen hundred years, has been so generally regarded by the Christian Church throughout its history as its Great Rule of Faith, that the result of any criticism brought to bear upon its pages must be of vital importance, directly to the Christian and indirectly to the whole world. I say the result of criticism, because criticism itself is important so far as it affects the opinions of men. All things that come within the scope of the human mind inevitably undergo the searching examination of the intellect demanding truth. The great text book of the Christian religion can hardly be expected to escape the common lot ^{and} to forge the minutest inspection. Momentous issues are involved in that inspection, issues which affect not only the beliefs but the conduct of the human race.

The term "Higher Criticism" has lost by popular usage a great deal of the dignity of its meaning. Its frequent employment in the conversation of men of all classes and degrees of learning and its occurrence in all kinds of discourse and literature have vulgarised the phrase so as to comprehend all arguments views and opinions which are at variance with those of traditional orthodoxy. In point of fact, the term as first used in the latter part of the eighteenth century did not imply a disposition to unorthodoxy, but merely described that method of criticism which differed in its nature from that which went by the name of "Lower Criticism"—the latter embracing all such studies which relate to the letter or text of the sacred writings, the manuscripts, versions, various readings, determination of the

correct text, etc.; the former, the studies, relating to their style, structure, sources and literary characteristics. Both are important and necessary branches of Biblical study.

Dr. Moule, the present Bishop of Durham, has truly said: "The most earnest defender of the Supernatural character of the Scriptures may be, and very often is, as diligent a Higher Critic as the extremest antismaturalist." But there has undoubtedly attached itself to the term a sense of inquiry into the authenticity of the Scriptures, and it is useless to ignore this fact.

Professor Sayce defines the Higher Criticism as "a critical inquiry into the nature, origin, and date of the documents with which we are dealing, as well as into the historical value and credibility of the statements which they contain."

The inquiry into any subject does not necessarily denote a disbelief in its truth or accuracy, in spite of the popular idea that the Higher Criticism is essentially destructive. On the contrary, its methods which are quite scientific and justifiable are applied to the study of the Ancient Scriptures by those whose purpose it is to establish their authority not less than by those who wish to undermine it. To be content to rest in simple and perfect faith in the inerrancy of the Scriptures, steadfastly determining to close the mind against modern thought, surely this is not the way to make intelligent and faithful Christians. If Christianity is true it will eventually triumph over all forces antagonistic to it. To examine the foundations is not to admit a flaw in them; but to refuse to examine where flaws are pointed out might well be construed into a doubt of their impregnability. Critics of all schools of thought, ranging from the most destructive to the most conservative have bent their utmost energies to the most thorough inspection of the books of the Bible, making the most searching

inquiries into such questions as : " when these various books originated; whether they were written by the authors to whom they are popularly assigned; of what material they are composed; whether they are self-consistent, and to what extent they agree or disagree with one another; whether additions have been made to them from time to time; whether they are confirmed or discredited by the monuments and the history of the period in which they are supposed to have originated." (Universal Cycl., V.551) To such an analysis and inspection have these ancient writings been subjected by these men that their opinions must necessarily have influenced a countless and varied band of followers, and the question which naturally arises in many minds is, What effect has the Higher Criticism on the Reverence for the Holy Scriptures?

The derivative meaning of the word "reverence" is "standing in awe or fear of", and applies to the feelings of that class of believers who regard the Bible very much in the light of the old Rabbinical theory, which claimed the Scriptures to be verbally dictated by God and absolutely accurate in every word, letter and vowel-point and therefore regarded it blasphemous to raise a question concerning any part of it. The great Calvinistic Divine, Dr. Charles Hodge, writing in the early seventies of the last century, no doubt well described the faith of many at that time. "Protestants", he says "hold that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God written under the inspiration of God the Holy [^] G_ost and are therefore infallible, and consequently free from all error, whether of doctrine, of fact, or of precept." (Systematic Theology , vol. 1. p. 152) And again (p. 163.) " All the books of Scripture are equally inspired. All alike are infallible in what they teach." Those who hold the opinions of the learned Doctor, as expressed above, and who do not go even so far as to embrace the theory of the Rabbins, must undoubtedly reverence the Scriptures in the most literal sense of that word - they must regard those scriptures with a feeling of awe akin to fear.

Contradistinctive to such believers are some who undoubtedly have been influenced by the opinions of the extremest critics. These latter start out with the assumption that the books of the Bible are in no respect different from other sacred books, that they are no more a revelation from God than are such books as the Avesta, the Zoroastrian Bible, and the Koran, the sacred book of Islam. Their work is decidedly destructive, and they have attempted in every way to discredit the authority and credibility of the Scriptures.

Those who follow the tenets of such critics can in no way be said to reverence the sacred books of the Christian Church. But between these two classes of thinkers, the idolaters or worshippers of the Word, and the iconoclasts whose aim is to destroy it, there lies a large body of believers who neither worship the letter nor miss the spirit of the Bible; who do not stultify their reason and stifle their moral sense when they read this book, nor do they find it possible to treat it as any other book; who do not regard it as infallible, but believe it to be inspired by God and to contain his message to man; who see in it a treasure to be found for the searching, but hold towards it an attitude of respect and trust. Surely it is from this last class that Reverence in its broader and fullest meaning comes: "the deepest respect and affection for something trusted in". As men can respect and love only those whom they trust, so only when the Bible is believed and trusted in can it be held in deep respect and affection, which is Reverence. This class of thinkers hold that man, who is fallible, wrote the Bible; but God, who is infallible inspired man to utter His message; that the proof marks of man's handiwork are seen on every page, but these same pages are illumined and sanctified by His divine influence.

It must be admitted here that there are many free thinkers who have a great respect for the Bible, and who even study it in the most sympathetic spirit. They believe that as a manual of conduct, as a guide to life, it excels all other books; but they do not accept its supernaturalism. They trust it so far

and no farther. At this point they fall short. They may be said to respect but not to reverence the Scriptures. But it is doubtful whether more than a very small minority of thinkers disbelieve the supernaturalism of the Bible, so instinctive is the belief in unseen power in man. Even a man like Theodore Parker, who took such liberties with the orthodox faith of Christianity that he was regarded even by Unitarians as a heretic, speaks thus of the wonderful power of that book:-

"This collection of books has taken such a hold on the world as no other..... It is read of a Sabbath in all the ten thousand pulpits of our land. In all the temples of religion is its voice lifted up week by week. The sun never sets on its gleaming page. It goes equally to the cottage of the plain man and the palace of the king. It is woven into the literature of the scholar, and colours the talk of the street. The bark of the merchant cannot sail the sea without it; no ships of war go to the conflict, but the Bible is there. It enters men's closets; mingles in all their grief and cheerfulness of life. The affianced Maiden prays God in Scripture for strength in her new duties; men are married by Scripture. The Bible attends them in their sickness, when the fever of the world is on them. The aching head finds a softer pillow when the Bible lies underneath. The mariner escaping from shipwreck clutches this first of his treasures and keeps it sacred to God It blesses us when we are born, gives names to half Christendom, rejoices with us, has sympathy for our mourning; tempers our grief to finer issues. It is the better part of our sermons. It lifts man above himself; our best of uttered prayers are in ^{its} storied speech, wherewith our fathers and the patriarchs prayed. The timid man, about awaking from this dream of life, looks through the glass of Scripture and his eye grows bright, he does not fear to stand alone, to tread the way unknown and distant, to take the death angel by the hand and bid~~a~~ farewell to wife and babes and home. Men rest on this their dearest hopes; it tells

them of God and of his blessed Son, of earthly duties and of heavenly rest." (Discourses on Religion.)

The effect of Criticism on the faith of men must depend very largely on the quality of their minds. All minds from their very constitution and development are not affected alike. To make use of that classic quotation from Terence, it might be said: "So many men, so many minds; every man in his own way." As in the ordinary affairs of men, so in the things concerning their faith: the nature of that faith depends very largely upon the character of the mind, as consequently does the effect of Criticism.

Ruskin in his study of the Greek myths of cloud and storm (Queen of the Air) concludes the first lecture of that book by answering the question, what real belief the Greek had in the imaginations of gods? He remarks that the Greek creed was necessarily different in its character as the Christian creed is, according to the class of persons who held it, and he classified the faith of the people under four separate heads:-

(a) "The creed of the common people, which was quite literal, simple, and happy. He illustrates the simplicity of their faith by recalling the artifice of Pisistratus who in Athens obtained the reins of government through the ready belief of the populace that a beautiful woman, armed like Athena, was the goddess herself."

(b) "The creed of the upper classes, which was more refined and spiritual, but quite as honest, and even more forcible in its effect on the life". "The good and unworldly men" he says, "the true Greek heroes, lived by their faith as firmly as St. Louis, or the Cid, or the Chevalier Bayard."

(c) The faith of the poets and artists, which was necessarily less definite, being continually modified by the involuntary action of their own fancies; and by the necessity of presenting, in clear verbal or material form, things of which they had no authoritative knowledge. Their faith was in some respects, like Dante's or Milton's: firm in general conception, but not able to vouch for every detail in the forms they gave it; but