

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

VOL. XXIX.—FEBRUARY, 1895.—No. 2.

REVIEW SECTION.

I.—FALLACIES OF HIGHER CRITICS.

BY PROF. WILLIAM HENRY GREEN, D.D., PRINCETON, N. J.

AN apostle tells us that "the law is good if a man use it lawfully." The maxim is of universal application. Good things are liable to abuse; and the more beneficial they are, the more injurious they may become. The greatness of their power for good is the measure of their capacity of inflicting evil. It is thus with the forces which nature places at man's disposal, and with the implements contrived for human use. They are good, if properly used and rightly directed. They may prove dangerous and destructive, if used improperly. Dynamite, whose enormous energy is indispensable in vast engineering operations, is likewise a tremendous agent in scattering terror and death; and it is as awful in unskilful hands as when employed by designing men bent on destruction. It wrecks edifices and destroys lives with like resistless fury, whether exploded by an accidental spark or by a fuse deliberately applied. Widespread mischief may be unintentionally and even unconsciously wrought by friendly hands, as well as purposely effected with criminal intent by artful and malicious foes.

The Higher Criticism as an instrument for investigating ancient writings is of inestimable value, if it be handled aright. It institutes inquiries respecting:

1. Their author, and the time and circumstances of their production.
2. Their integrity: whether they are in form and contents just what they were as originally written; or if they have been altered in any respect by omissions, interpolations, or changes of any sort to discover the fact and restore them, if possible, to their pristine purity.
3. Their trustworthiness, whether they are reliable and correspond with what is true and right. And
4. Their structure and relations: of what several parts do they consist, and how articulated, and how do they stand related to other antecedent and subsequent productions?

In prosecuting these inquiries every available source of information

is interrogated and light sought from every possible quarter; and the result of such investigations properly conducted is to open the way for a clearer comprehension and a juster appreciation of the works in question by placing the modern reader as nearly as possible in the position of those to whom they first came, and thus affording him a better insight into the minds of the writers. But the benefit of the study depends entirely upon the accuracy with which this preliminary investigation is made. If the reasonings are fallacious and the conclusions false, it must obscure and cloud—it may even utterly pervert the meaning of the author by putting what he has written in wrong connections, and considering it from an erroneous point of view; or it may mutilate and destroy his work by tearing it asunder, corrupting its text, or casting unjust and unfounded suspicions upon its genuineness and authenticity.

Some very astounding conclusions have been announced of late in the name of the Higher Criticism of the Scriptures. And on this basis the Christian world has been challenged to abandon the ground which they have so long and so tenaciously held, to revolutionize their opinions as to the facts of the Bible, and to amend their creed. Before accepting this challenge it is no unfair inquiry whether these conclusions are veritable additions to our knowledge and to be welcomed as helps to the true understanding of the Word of God. Are they signal lights by which we may safely guide our way, or a deceptive *ignis fatuus*, flaming only to lead us to destruction? It is bringing no railing accusation against the Higher Criticism in itself considered to charge mistakes upon those who have practiced it, and to point out the wrong methods which have been pursued. Fallacious reasoning will necessarily lead the critic astray, however good his intentions, however sincere his convictions, and however admirable his personal character. These do not come into the account when the question is as to the tendencies of a system or the grounds upon which it rests. The excellence of the man is not always a sure voucher for the accuracy of his logic. The plain fact is that the revolutionary statements put forth as the ascertained results of Higher Criticism have no other foundation than fallacies of higher critics. Some of these will here be adverted to as the limited space allotted to this article will allow.

The most comprehensive and fundamental of all relates to the proper domain and function of the Higher Criticism as applied to the Scriptures. It deals with literature as such, and occupies itself with purely literary questions. Thus De Wette in defining the scientific character of this department of learning says: * “The Bible is to be considered as a historical phenomenon in a series with other such phenomena and entirely subject to the laws of historical inquiry.” As the physicist, who deals solely with the laws that govern material things, is in danger of imagining that everything is explicable from these laws

* Histor.-krit. Einleitung, § 4.

and of forgetting that there is any higher realm, so he who concerns himself exclusively with the literary side of the Bible is in danger of exalting this to such preponderance as to overlook the fact that it has another aspect, and that as the Word of God it is not only entitled to be treated with peculiar reverence, but to be regarded as the supreme rule of faith and duty. The fallacy consists in treating the Bible as a purely literary product, and its study as a mere branch of literature. Its divine origin and authority may not be in terms denied, but they may be so entirely left out of sight and so wholly without influence, even in the consideration of questions in which it is necessarily involved, as practically to amount to a denial. The Bible has a human side, but it is not a purely human book. And to treat it as such is as though one were to deal with Milton's "Paradise Lost" and Newton's "Principia" as the productions of a child, and to pare them down to the level of what was possible with such an origin.

The critical hypothesis of the gradual formation of the Old Testament canon in successive steps corresponding to the threefold division of the Hebrew Bible, and separated from each other by long periods of time, is based on this purely literary conception of the books. It is assumed that these were not from the outset distinguished from all other books as the product of divine inspiration, nor written with the design of forming part of the rule of faith of God's people, but that in later ages a sacredness and authority came to be attributed to them which they did not possess from the beginning.

The same conception also underlies the changed attitude which it is proposed in critical quarters should be taken in respect to the Bible. Inasmuch as the writers of the Bible were men, and to err is human, it is assumed that the Bible must have its mistakes, such as are to be expected in every human production.

The lines of evidence upon which the Higher Criticism relies for its conclusions are perhaps nowhere more fully or clearly stated than by Dr. Briggs in his "Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch," p. 4. Little exception can be taken to them in the guarded form in which he presents them. But the manner in which they are in fact applied and the conclusions deduced from them indicate a wide discrepancy between the verbal statement and the actual practice. One is reminded of what Jerome says of the figurative style of elevated poetry, that it says one thing and means another, and is as slippery as an eel: the more tightly you grasp it, the more quickly it will slip away. Or of Bunyan's quaint description of the waterman, who looks one way and rows another. A number of the fallacies, of which we are in quest, may be grouped in connection with these rules, of which they are the loose or faulty application. The canons of criticism as laid down by Dr. Briggs will first be stated in his own language, and then the fallacies involved in the use made of them by the critics will be pointed out.

(1) "The writing must be in accordance with its supposed historical position as to time, place, and circumstances."

No fault can be found with this as a general principle. But the fallacy comes in when it is openly or covertly assumed that in determining the historical position of a writing every prediction must be regarded as *post eventum*. Thus it is claimed that the promise to Abraham (Gen. xvii. 6) and to Jacob (xxxv. 11), that kings should descend from them could not have been put in this form until after the time of David, nor Isaac's blessing to Esau (xxvii. 40) until Edom's successful revolt against the dominion of Judah; and every anticipation of the Babylonish exile by Isaiah is held to be proof that the passage containing it belonged to a later age.

So, too, when miracles are discredited, and the presence of supernatural facts in a narrative purporting to be that of an eye-witness is held to conflict with its alleged historical position, and to show that it belongs to a much later period, when legend had magnified what were in reality natural occurrences into the miraculous. Thus the mighty deeds ascribed to the age of Moses are held to evince that they could not have been recorded by a contemporary, and that the history must have been idealized by being seen through the haze of centuries. We are accordingly told that we must distinguish between the ideal and the actual, between the exaggerations of the narrative and what can be supposed to have really taken place.

A further fallacy, of which large use is made, is that of deciding the age of writings by means of an *a priori* scheme of doctrinal development. The critic fixes upon the grade of religious knowledge which can be attributed to a particular period; and if a certain book contains more exalted ideas than his scheme allows, it is held to be not "in accordance with its supposed historical position," and it is forthwith remanded to a later date. Thus, when Dr. Driver (*Lit. of O. T.*, p. 83) argues that Deuteronomy cannot be from Moses, but must belong to the age of Josiah or shortly before it, because "the prophetic teaching of Dt., the point of view from which the laws are presented, the principles by which conduct is estimated, presuppose a relatively advanced stage of theological reflection."

Dr. Briggs's next rule is:

(2) "Differences of style imply differences of experience and age of the same author, or, when sufficiently great, differences of author and of period of composition."

The fallacy here consists in overlooking the fact that differences of style may likewise arise from diversity of the subject, or a diversity in the species of composition. Thus great stress is laid upon the obvious difference of style between Gen. i. and ii., iii., as implying diversity of authorship. In reality, it simply results from the fact that Gen. i. deals with the grandly majestic facts of the Creator in bringing the world into existence and peopling it with the various

orders of living beings, while ii., iii. drops into simple narrative as it relates what befell Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Historical events require a different style from the details of ritual law and genealogies and statistical statements; and yet the diversity of style thus arising is made a ground for the partition of the Pentateuch into documents. Milton's prose writings could, on the same principle, disprove the genuineness of his poetry, and Shakespeare's sonnets be made to discredit his plays.

(3) "Differences of opinion and conception imply differences of author when these are sufficiently great, and also differences of period of composition."

The fallacy here lies in assuming differences of opinion on insufficient grounds, and in creating factitious differences between different parts of the same composition, and thence inferring a diversity of writers. Thus there is a difference of signification between the divine names Jehovah (Lord) and Elohim (God), which leads to a discrimination in their use. Jehovah is his name in the proper sense of the word, that by which he is known as the God of the chosen race, the God of revelation and of grace. Elohim (God) is a more general descriptive term, by which he is chiefly known in his relation to the world at large and to all mankind. It hence follows that the patriarchs worshiped him as Jehovah. Accordingly, whenever throughout Genesis they are said to call upon his name, to build altars and to offer sacrifice, the term Jehovah is invariably used, never Elohim. Also in recording the most striking acts of condescension on the part of God, and his most familiar intercourse with the patriarchs, the term Jehovah is prevailingly used rather than Elohim. Now, on the basis of these facts the inference has been drawn that the Elohim passages in Genesis reflect a different conception of God and a different conception of the patriarchal age from that of the Jehovah passages, and that these are so irreconcilable that they must be attributed to different writers. It is claimed that the author of the Elohim passages had a much more exalted view of God, such as did not permit him to speak of God as coming down to men and associating with them on such free and familiar terms, or imputing to Him acts and feelings kindred to those of men. And he also held the view that altars and sacrifices and the distinction of clean and unclean beasts were unknown to the patriarchs, and were first introduced in the time of Moses. Whereas the absence of these things from the Elohim passages of Genesis is not due to any difference of conception whatever, but simply to the distinction between the two terms which are employed to designate the Most High.

In describing the plagues sent upon Egypt in order to overcome Pharaoh's obstinacy in refusing to let the people go, mention is sometimes made of the rod in Aaron's hand, sometimes of the lifting of Moses's hand or rod, sometimes of the divine agency alone. This has

been construed as three different conceptions entertained by different writers as to the way in which mighty works were wrought, one giving prominence to Moses, another disposed to exalt Aaron, and a third taking no account of the human instrument whatever. But there is no incompatibility in the accounts, and no good reason for parceling them among distinct writers.

(4) "Citations show the dependence of the author upon the author or authors cited."

A distinct reference in one work to another is a clear proof of the prior existence of the latter. But this is evaded by the critics in one or other of three different ways: (1) By denying the reference. Thus the evident and repeated allusions of the oldest of the prophets to the Pentateuchal history and legislation are magisterially set aside. The reference to the overthrow of the cities of the plain by Amos (iv. 11), Isaiah (i. 9, 10), Hosea (xi. 8); to various events in the life of Jacob, Hosea (xii. 3, 4, 12); to the exodus from Egypt and the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, Hosea (xi. 1, xxii. 13, xiii. 5), Amos (ii. 10, iii. 1, ix. 7); to the miraculous passage of the Red Sea, Isaiah (xi. 15, 16); to the pillar of cloud and fire, Isaiah (iv. 5); to the criminality at Baal peor, Hosea (ix. 10), and much more of the same sort is waved aside by the gratuitous assumption that the prophets refer not to the narrative in the Pentateuch, where all this is plainly written, but to some imagined oral tradition instead. And Hosea's explicit mention of the extensive written law (viii. 12) is converted into a hypothetical suggestion of a law that might be given in the future, in spite of the fact that the people are charged with having already grossly disobeyed it and "counted it as a strange thing." (2) By reversing the relation. Ezekiel makes such abundant references to the laws in Leviticus that the coincidences cannot be disputed, and the connection between the two is indubitable; and in order to maintain their hypothesis of the late date of Leviticus, the critics aver that it was patterned after Ezekiel. (3) By disputing the date of the citation. Jeremiah's prediction of the overthrow of Babylon (l., li.) is largely based on Isa. xliii., xiv., as the prediction of the judgment on Moab by Jeremiah (xlviii.) is based on Isa. xv., xvi. But in order to escape the argument of genuineness thus afforded for Isa. xliii., xiv., that of Jer. l., li. is impugned.

(5) "Positive testimony as to the writing in other writings of acknowledged authority is the strongest evidence."

And yet, in the determination of the critics to deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the explicit testimony of Josh. i. 7, 8, and of numerous other passages throughout the book is altogether disregarded, and that of Judg. iii. 4 and of numerous other passages in subsequent books of the Bible is held to be irrelevant. The reader is referred to the very instructive article by Prof. C. M. Mead in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* for April, 1893, "External Evi-

dence as to Seneca's Writings and Paul's," for proof that well-attested books of the Bible are pronounced spurious by critics, who admit without hesitation the genuineness of books ascribed to profane authors which have not a tithe of the same evidence in their favor.

(6) "The argument from silence is often of great value."

The fallacies that arrange themselves under this head are enormous. A large proportion of the difficulties and objections alleged by the critics are drawn from what the sacred writers do not say, and are perfectly gratuitous, whether as inferring ignorance on their part, or justifying the imputation to them of sentiments which they do not express. It is impossible at the close of this article to enumerate or even to classify them.

Other fallacies of frequent occurrence can only be hinted at here without enlarging upon them. One is the fallacy of the circle, assuming the point to be proved. It is thus with the alleged characteristics of the so-called Pentateuchal documents. Certain words are held to characterize JE, and certain other words to characterize P. Every passage containing any of the former class of words is unhesitatingly ascribed to JE, and every passage containing any of the latter class is in like manner assigned to P. And the result is just what might be anticipated: the JE words are all found in the JE sections, and the P words in the P sections, for the simple reason that the critics have put them there. The division was made on this basis.

Euclid tells us that things equal to the same thing are equal to one another. The critics have improved upon this axiom. They act on the assumption that things which are not equal to the same thing are equal to one another. This is the foundation of their so-called parallel passages, of which they make such extensive use in impugning the historicity of the Pentateuch. Two distinct narratives, having certain points in common, are on this account declared to be separate accounts of the same transaction. Their differences are then adduced to prove, not what they do in fact establish, that the two transactions are not in fact identical, but that the two accounts of the same thing, as they are gratuitously assumed to be, are conflicting and irreconcilable, and therefore untrustworthy.

Euclid again teaches us that a whole is equal to the sum of all its parts. But the critics improve on this axiom likewise, and act on the assumption that any one of the parts is equal to the whole or equal to any other part. This is the foundation of the doublets, which Wellhausen and Dillmann have multiplied so profusely. Any transaction involving two or more particulars may by this process be parceled between two or more documents, the portion assigned to each one severally being gratuitously assumed to be a separate account of the whole matter. These separate accounts are then compared, and as of course they do not correspond, being quite distinct, the untrustworthiness of the narrative is inferred.

The last in the list of fallacies which shall here be mentioned is confounding the abstractly possible with the actual. Hence the swarm of conjectural emendations of the text, and of hypothetical reconstructions of history with an entire disregard of historical testimony. It seems to be thought sufficient to devise a plausible theory; any further proof of its reality is apparently reckoned superfluous.

It can hardly be supposed that the Christian world will be ready to reconstruct its creed at the bidding of critical hypotheses so honey-combed with fallacies.

II.—SOCIAL EVOLUTION.

BY WILLIAM W. McLANE, D.D., PH. D., NEW HAVEN, CONN.

“SOCIAL EVOLUTION”* is the title of a recent book, which has been favorably mentioned by many reviewers and which deserves wide circulation. It is one of a class of books which attempt to account for the development of society according to the laws of evolution. It differs from some of these books in the place which it gives to Christianity. Unlike Mr. Spencer, who asserts that Christianity is the consequence of belief in ghosts and ancestral worship, the author of this book asserts that Christianity is the cause of religious and social development. The book is Christian in spirit, scientific in method, and historic in form.

The author accepts the Malthusian theory of population, and claims that men tend to multiply beyond the limit of the food supply. He adopts the Darwinian law of the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest in the sense of the strongest. He asserts that the interests of the individual and the social organism are and must remain antagonistic. He finds, therefore, no rational sanction for human progress. “Throughout the whole period of development hitherto the conditions of progress have necessarily been incompatible with the welfare of a large proportion of the individuals comprising any species. Yet it is evident that to these, if they had been able to think and to have any voice in the matter, their own welfare must have appeared immeasurably more important than the future of the species.” “The conditions of existence in the highest and most advanced civilizations of our time can have no rational sanction for a large proportion of the individuals comprising them.”

There are certain things, however, which modify the seemingly inevitable laws of nature. Two new forces made their advent with man, namely, reason and the capacity of acting in concert with others in society. Man is also endowed with a religious nature; and religion affords a superrational sanction for the subordination of the welfare of the individual to the welfare of society.

**Social Evolution*, by Benjamin Kidd. Macmillan & Co.