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The Evolution of New Testament Criticism and the  
Consequent Outlook for To-Day

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

OF

MELANCTHON WILLIAMS JACOBUS

HOSMER PROFESSOR OF NEW TESTAMENT EXEGESIS

OCTOBER 5, 1892

Hartford Seminary Press

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# THE EVOLUTION OF NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM, AND THE CONSEQUENT OUTLOOK FOR TO-DAY.

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I cannot stand here this evening without confessing to peculiar feelings, even for such an occasion as this. My election to the chair of New Testament Exegesis and Literature in this Seminary places me in the following of remarkable men — men who were noted for their scholarship and for their influence over the world in which they moved — men who by their aptness to teach were felt in the class-room, by their ability to write were known in literary life, and by their power to accomplish were honored by the Church. Now, did my work stand before me to-night untried, this would nevertheless mean very much to me. But a year's attempted efforts make me realize its meaning in a very peculiar way, for I have actually seen how hard it is, and will always be, to walk worthily in the way that has been thus marked out for me. Were I not therefore persuaded that no man's work results in anything unless in itself it be a struggle, and were I not sure that to the struggle of a professor's work, as well as to that of a minister's, there is a divine call, with its promise of sustaining and enabling grace, I would stop even now and turn aside from the course that here awaits me. But in spite of a year's humbling experience, I am persuaded and I am sure, and so I have nothing else to do but trustingly to enter in upon it, — which in God's name and with God's help I do. And so, in obedience to the traditions which gather around the professor's chair, in an institution such as this, I present to you a theme which holds a prominent place in my thinking about the department over which I am called to preside.

One of Germany's noted theologians, for more than a generation professor at one of her noted universities, has said concerning the present biblical criticism: "We have had too many experiences in this respect, have seen too many hypotheses come and go [to be worried at the criticism that is abroad to-day]. Who knows what grave-diggers already stand at the door? We older ones had experience in Baur's criticism of the New Testament, and some of us took an active part in opposing it. Where is that criticism now? How startling was Strauss in his day. But who is there now that has not abandoned the theory that the life of Jesus consists in myths? How many in Germany, even in scientific circles, compromised themselves by their attitude toward Renan's life of Christ? But who now speaks seriously of the French romance?" I have referred to Dr. Luthardt's words as an apology for what must seem, as I make it, a very commonplace remark, and that is, that there is progress in history in spite of the revolutions which seem to mark its way. There is constant movement and advance, although action and reaction seem to be so largely at work. All history is so. For all history is one. One God is behind it. One man is within it. It is the one life that embraces all living. So, whether we take up the history of races or religions, of churches or creeds, of systems of doctrine or organizations of work, we find in each a development, although by alternations. We may expect to find it, then, in the history of New Testament criticism. Advance, progress, development, in spite of action and reaction underneath it all. And if we so find it, our finding will have a very valuable lesson for us to-day. I am perfectly aware, however, commonplace as this statement is, that it goes for nothing unless there be at hand the historic proof that it is true,—which brings us to what I propose as our theme for this evening,—*The evolution of New Testament criticism and the consequent outlook for to-day.*

New Testament criticism is mostly made to begin with the Reformation age. I venture to say that so to begin it is wrong. It is to be admitted, of course, that the great work of criticism has been done since the Reformation time. But criticism was before the Reformation began, before the Renaissance, before the days of Augustine and Jerome, before the golden age of the

Alexandrian School. However faulty it may have been in its method and process of work, however lacking in its spirit, criticism of some sort and kind was practised from the beginning of Bible study in the Christian Church. To make that evident to ourselves we have simply to remember the necessities that rested upon the early Church. When the apostolic age was over and the early fathers found themselves alone in the world, their first work was necessarily the apologetic of bringing out the real harmony of the past with their Gospel, — which meant the study of the Old Testament scripture. And, as Christianity worked itself out into the world, their next work became necessarily the apologetic of holding forth the real power of their Gospel for mankind around them, which meant the study of the New Testament scripture, and further, as out of the Church there developed those who had followed their own opinions rather than the Word of God, there came necessarily on both sides,—outside the Church on the part of the attacking heresies, and inside the Church on the part of the defending faith,—a fresh study of Old and New Testaments alike. Outside the Church the Bible was studied by heretical fathers, to reconcile it with their systems. Inside the Church it was studied by orthodox fathers to make its true interpretation plain. Now, granted the mental poverty and fault of this early biblical study, it was critical nevertheless just in so far forth as it had to do with the documents involved. If there was touched in this study the origin or authorship or structure or character of the Bible books, then there was criticism, whatever its merit or demerit may have been. If in this study a book was accepted as Scripture or rejected as non-Scripture, then there was criticism, whatever the reasons for the accepting or the rejecting may have been; and if we are going to study the development of criticism, we cannot afford to ignore the attitude which these early critics assumed toward the documents before them, and the method which they pursued in their investigation.

It is a matter of interest, then, to recall the fact that the critical work of the first two centuries was based on internal grounds, that is, on evidence contained within the documents themselves. And this was not simply with reference to the Old Testament, concerning whose Mosaic and Prophetic origin

there was then no suggestion of doubt, but with reference to the New Testament, whose separate books, those not yet gathered together into the official canon of the Church, were acknowledged the historical documents we hold them to be today. And this statement gains significance when we remind ourselves that this was true not only of the fathers who studied the New Testament inside the Church, but also of the heretics who studied it outside the Church. They never denied the historic origin of the New Testament books. They threw some of them aside, but it was because they did not accept their teaching. The Ebionites discarded Paul's writings, not because they denied there was a Paul, or that he wrote, but because they could not accept his theology. The Marcionites rejected all the apostles' writings except some of Paul's; because only Paul and only this part of Paul agreed with their views. Basilides and his followers rejected the Pastoral Epistles and Hebrews, not because they did not find them genuine, but because they found in them their own ideas condemned. And it was this same position that the later heresies assumed towards the New Testament books. The heresy of Praxeas and Theodotus regarding the Trinity admitted the New Testament scriptures as historic documents entire, and accepted them as the common ground of controversy. With them it was simply a question of interpretation. The spiritualistic heresy of Montanus defended itself from the accepted New Testament books. The whole attitude of post-apostolic criticism, even the opposing and attacking criticism outside the Church, was one of acceptance of the historic fact of the New Testament books. That fact was, in that age, such a fact was so evident, so clear, so unquestioned that there was no other attitude to take. However faulty, their criticism may have been, its faults were confined to the methods which they pursued in their internal critical work.

But as the Church grew away from apostolic times, its own attitude and that of its opponents toward the Bible documents changed, and the apostolic books began to be acknowledged or questioned on the basis of the relative presence or absence of external testimony from the earlier Church in their behalf. It needs no special argument to show that this was a perfectly natural change; we might almost say its coming was inevitable,

for distance from the sources made independent testimony important. The fact that the documents were a century old made it necessary to have external evidence concerning them. The Church was no longer in the self-conscious atmosphere of the after-apostolic age, when apostolic facts were so real as not to call for proving. It was entering now upon its actual life in the world, where it stood before men on the evidence of its historic origins, so that as its foes attacked it, or its friends defended it, the appeal was to antiquity against or for. It was, therefore, what we might expect that the systems of error which had departed from the faith should now attempt to deal with the unacceptable books of the Canon on added historic grounds. So we see the Manichæan gnostics freely altering the New Testament text to suit their views, because they held its books to have been of much later origin than Christ and the apostles, and to have been greatly corrupted since their composition. And it was also what we might expect that within the Church certain books began to be disputed and questioned because of the relative lack of historic witness in their behalf. So we see Origen, while questioning the Paulinity of Hebrews because of its internal character, putting down Second Peter as historically disputed in the Church, and Second and Third John as not admitted of all to be genuine; while we find Eusebius referring the final decision of the internally disputed Apocalypse to the testimony of the ancients. So Jerome, in spite, apparently, of personal doubts as to the authorship of some of the books, accepted them all as canonical on the authority of ancient writers. And Augustine, in his essay on Christian Doctrine, held that in judging of the canonical scriptures we are to follow the authority of as many Catholic Churches as possible, preferring those books which were accepted by all the Churches to those which some did not receive. In fact, the New Testament books now became classified according to whether they were acknowledged or questioned; and that acknowledging or questioning was determined according to the relative presence or absence of testimony by the early Church in their behalf. Thus, by the end of the fourth century the attitude of criticism toward the New Testament documents had completely changed. Books now were accepted or rejected, not on the internal basis of their teaching, but on the external basis of the ancient testimony

regarding them; so that, however narrow its horizon may have been, and however little it may have entered into the spirit of true critical work, the criticism of this period opened the way for the critical results of modern times, by bringing into consideration for the canonicity of New Testament books the historic evidence of their apostolic origin. And these results of modern criticism would have been forthcoming long before our day had not this fourth century narrowness of horizon and littleness of scholarly spirit increased, and by its increase brought down upon the Church the darkness and death of the Middle Ages. Under its pall, naturally and necessarily, the appeal to antiquity became a purely formal and fossilized affair; so that the canon was accepted simply because the Church said it was to be accepted, and the Church said so simply because it made no effort to find out whether there was anything else to be said. And the Scriptures themselves came to be interpreted not by a present study of them, but by a quoting of the study that had been done before. And so, whatever science there had been in the Church's critical work died out, and the Church's knowledge of her own historic origin disappeared, and the Church's faith changed to superstition, and the Church's life became corrupt, and the world grew sick of everything that was called by her name.

It was a dark picture, but we understand to-day how its darkness was, in the ordering of Providence, the best background for the light that was to come through the Renaissance and the Reformation. Necessarily at first that light was but a glimmer. The day doesn't dawn with a meridian sun. But this dawning glimmer fell upon everything of the Church and touched, in its falling, the Church's criticism. Its results were not surprising. It simply brought about another reaction. The argument from authority began to be questioned, then opposed, then given up, and the reformers placed themselves squarely upon the argument from the internal character of the books themselves. As Luther found the Gospel in them, he accepted them; as he did not, he laid them aside, at least upon a lower level of acceptance. As Calvin found in them evidence of true doctrine, he accepted them; as he failed to find it, he brought them into question. Beza accepted the whole canonical list, because he found in it all the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

Now, modern scholars are very fond of saying that, subjective as this attitude of the Reformation criticism was, it had behind it the beginning of that scientific spirit of real historic inquiry which has characterized the Church's criticism in these modern days. We have no quarrel with this assertion. We are perfectly willing to acknowledge the presence of this spirit in Reformation times, but our review of patristic criticism has shown us that its beginnings were far back of this, at the very point in the Church's history where they first became necessary, at the point of the Alexandrian School, when the Church had lived long enough to make historic study of her New Testament books a scholarly need. The ignorance of the Middle Ages broke in upon these beginnings and stopped their growth, destroyed them, in fact, and swept them away. But the learning of the Renaissance brought them into life again, and now, under the new vitality of the Reformation, they had before them the possibility of becoming a true and serviceable criticism for the Church.

It becomes an interesting question, then, with which we are immediately confronted, How was it that, instead of realizing that possibility, they sank away again out of sight, and in their place grew up the new scholasticism of Church usage that determined the canon according to custom and relegated criticism again to the universe of unknown things? That question is answered by remembering that purely subjective criticism can never give a standing-ground to the Church. Its tendency is inevitably toward the destruction of the Bible by shivering it into the thousand pieces of individual opinion. We see this in the handling of the canon by the early heretics, in spite of the historic realities of the apostolic age, in the light of which they yet stood. We see it also in the free handling of the Bible books in which Luther and his followers indulged. But the Reformation Church needed Bible standing-ground, if it needed anything at all. As a natural consequence, therefore, it came to abandon this subjective attitude toward the Scripture. But, ignorant yet of the true position it was to hold, or, at least, careless of the hints it might have gathered from the past, at all events neglectful of its work, it allowed itself to drift into the opposite extreme of the attitude of external usage, so that, before the Reformation century was over, the New

Testament came to be formally accepted, as a whole, without note or comment, and with the old lines of acknowledged and disputed books completely cast aside, and was thus withdrawn from the whole field of historical inquiry as entirely as it had been in the Roman Catholic Church by the restrictive rulings of the Council of Trent.

Now, it is hardly necessary to say that, in such condition of affairs as this, there was need not merely of reaction but of reconstruction in Biblical criticism, — for the Reformation was making a mockery of itself. In that great movement thinking Christianity had cut loose from the Church of Rome; had thrown herself out into the world, with one mission, to preach the Bible, with one aim, to study the Word of God, to understand it, to make it known to men. Her sacred business was to get at the Bible facts and tell them, to discover the Bible truths and unlock them. And now, here it was with its Bible wrapped up in a napkin and buried in the earth, forgetful of the calling to which God had consecrated it, scornful of the birth-right He had given it, a slothful, if not a wicked servant. But God punishes churches as well as men. He punished the Reformation Church. For this new scholasticism having reduced religion to an absurdity, a new apologetic was called for and it was offered, but it was offered by rationalism. It was a shrewd move on the part of the old foe of the Church, and it was successful. The offer was accepted, and the eighteenth century opened with reason established as the champion of the Bible. She proclaimed herself the restorer of the Scriptures to their rightful place of power in the world, and in that act made herself the mistress of the Word of God, and trampled it under her feet. She began, proving the Bible true by showing it to be in harmony with herself. She ended, proving the Bible false by showing it was beyond herself, for everything in the Bible was subjected to the test of herself, and so she became authority in place of the historic Spirit of God.

But all this while, since the eighteenth century began, there had been coming into the study of the Church a scientific criticism. It had been the need of Protestantism from the beginning; but so far there had only been hintings at it. The reformers had breathed somewhat of its spirit, even at the low level at which they stood. But these breathings had been

smothered at the lower level of the following scholasticism. Now, however, under the influence of rationalism, in its reaction from this scholasticism, scientific criticism began to take to itself shape and form.

But I want to stop just here and make clear what scientific criticism is, and I cannot do that better than to point back to the Alexandrian School and call your attention to the position which Origen, Dionysius, and the scholars of that famous period assumed. For it will be noticed that their merit lay, not in holding external evidence to the exclusion of internal evidence, but in addition to it. They opened the way for modern criticism in adding external evidence to the internal evidence already used. Origen questioned the immediate Pauline authorship of Hebrews, because of its internal character, but he strengthened his doubt by the weakness of the historic evidence in the Church to such an authorship. Dionysius, on the other hand, while he doubted on internal grounds that the Apocalypse was from the apostle John, admitted the historic proof of its canonicity. Both kinds of evidence, internal and external, were taken into account. It was simply what would have been done in the earliest age of the Church, if there had been any idea that a formal appeal to historic facts was necessary; and it was done now because it was the first time the need of it had appeared. It is in this combination of the internal and external that the essence of scientific criticism consists. Scientific criticism is, on the one hand, the study of the books themselves in their language and style and thought, in their personal and historical and geographical references. And, on the other hand, it is the study of all the historic testimony of every kind, in any way concerning them, in and out of the Church, back to the earliest times. But the combination of these results is made on the principle that the exegetic opinion must always stand subordinate to the historic fact. Exegesis, however it may throw light upon uncertain history and place it in its true position, must always be wrong where it contradicts history's plain and proven facts. So men have been led to call our discipline "historic criticism." It was this sort of criticism that the Church of the Reformation had needed from the beginning. Perhaps it was too much to expect it of that Church. Perhaps the material for it, in the men themselves and in their critical resources, was

insufficient to make it possible at first. But scholarship had been growing toward that, in the Church and out of it, and now under the influence of rationalism it came to its reality.

But now I want to make another thing clear, namely, this fact, that if this is what true scientific criticism is, — the combination between internal and external evidence, — then there lies in that element of combination the key to all the history of biblical criticism since the eighteenth century began. There is a puzzle in that history. For to every honest student of it, it has been a wonder how, if criticism during this time has been so scientific, it should have produced such false results. That is the mystery about the skeptical criticism of the Continent, — so scientific apparently, and yet so against the historic Bible in its results. But in this element of the combination of the internal and external in true scientific criticism lies the explanation. For this so-called scientific criticism has produced these false results because it has laid a false emphasis on the one side or the other of this combination. In other words, it has not been truly scientific. Let us make this clear. As rationalism developed in the past century, this scientific criticism began to show itself. But scientific as it was in its combination of the internal attention to lexicography and grammar, to diction and thought, with the external reference to historic testimony, it was false in its emphasis on the internal at the expense of the external side. Reason was the test. Historic fact was of little account. The subjective judgment settled what was and what was not Scripture, let the objective record be what it might be. That was the attitude of rationalism, and that was the attitude of rationalism's criticism, and so continued to be more and more as rationalism plunged downward into the atheism that preceded the advent of Kant. And although Kant destroyed this Tower of Babel which rationalism had reared for itself, and, by showing its impotence in things divine, humbled the pride of reason into the dust, yet the scientific criticism which showed itself under his followers continued to be false in its over-pressure of the internal side. For to Kant's system there was no external side. History, according to Kant, was merely a dream; for it was made up of facts, and facts were simply the symbols with which the poetic ideas of the mind clothed themselves so that they could be known. Historic evidence

was therefore worthless. Subjective evidence was after all the only thing. So scientific criticism proceeded along its false way. To be sure, it was touched with the glimmering light which came with what might be called the effort at a historical solution of the synoptic problem, begun by Eichhorn, and continued with such brilliancy by Schleiermacher; still its false position was not abandoned. Subjectivity continued to be the test. For, different as Schleiermacher's system was from Kant's, it was like it in the fact that it made little or nothing of historic fact and much, if not everything, of internal impression. It was a system of pure feeling, and subjectivity is simply a necessary consequence of that. On along its untrue way, then, scientific criticism went into the blank darkness of the night which Fichte let down upon the world of thought; through that and up again, if you will, into the great sunless fog of Hegelianism, till it threw itself into the mythicism of Strauss. There, in its finality, it was indeed what it had always been, false; false in its overpressure of the internal opinion against the external fact; false in its authoritating of the subjective idea over the objective record.

But there a reaction set in, a great reaction, whose effect is felt to-day. Let us get the situation plainly before us. Scholarship had been growing since the Reformation time. With its growth had come increasingly into use the methods of scientific criticism, by which the problems of the Bible books are supposed to be considered in the light of all the evidence that can be brought to bear upon them. Yet in reality this criticism had been unscientific and false; because, while the evidence it brought to bear upon the Scriptures was external as well as internal, it was the latter to which it gave the testing place. The cause of this unbalance lay in the philosophies by which the criticism had been introduced into the theological field and under which it had continued to work. These philosophies were all rationalistic, consequently all subjective, and their rationalism had grown until it had reached its climax in the atheism which came with Fichte at the end. Hegel's pantheism was now in the field. Under its light, or its shadow, as you please, Strauss had thrown out his mythical theory of the Gospels. It was subjective in its criticism like all that had gone before; because myth meant simply that there is no such

thing as written history. Men live and move and act, to be sure; but the record we receive of what they do and say and are is merely the mind's poetic dramatizing of it, its taking out from under the facts their spiritual meaning and giving us that in narrative form. With Strauss, therefore, gospel criticism was simply a matter of subjective exegesis. The history which the Gospels gave was to be found out, not by collating the facts presented in their narrative, but by de-spiritualizing them, and so getting at the shadowy substance that might be found remaining.

Now, at this very point, as a matter of exegesis and on the basis still of a subjective method, the reaction began. There came the critic of Tübingen and said: "This is not the proper interpretation of Scripture; there is something more than myth behind what it gives us; there is there an actuality of history, however distorted it may be, and we shall not rightly understand the Scripture until we have grasped the history." In other words the criticism of rationalism had spun itself out, had come to its last possibility of subjectivity, so that the only next step that could be taken was in the other, the objective direction. Now we are doing the Tübingen School no injustice when we say that in that step lay its chance to make, then and there, the criticism of the New Testament truly scientific, to correct the false exegesis of rationalism with a better philosophy, which would give historic fact its proper place in interpretation, which would balance the internal and the external sides. But the "better philosophy" was not at hand. The chance was not taken. The change that took place was not correction and balance, but reaction and an unbalance on the other side. At this point of history, Baur took his stand and then made his history rule and control and despotize his exegesis. He adopted a theory of the history of the early Church, namely, that it was a history of faction and of fight between Paulinism and Petrinism, started in apostolic times and continued down with bitterness into the succeeding age, until, in the latter part of the second century the breach was healed and the opposing parties came together in a united Church. To that theory he made all his exegesis worship and bow down. Relentlessly through the New Testament books he went. Those that showed signs of that early fight he admitted into the canon as

genuine products of the apostolic age. Those which showed no such signs he cast unhesitatingly out. They were written not when they professed to be, nor by those by whom they claimed to be. At best they were the products of the second century, when, in the hope of uniting these factions, the story of the Church's beginnings was rewritten in a mediating form. They were forgeries. They were apocryphal frauds. No matter what their exegesis, to the Moloch of this historical theory they had to be offered up, — and they were; and biblical criticism, scientific, falsely so called, entered upon what might almost be called a revolutionized career. The old reign of subjectivity was over, but another reign of objectivity had begun. The false emphasis and pressure of the internal side were carried over and placed upon the external side. The unbalance of a literary exegesis was given up for the unbalance of a theoretical history.

That career is over now. Tübingenism, like rationalism before it, ran itself out. It is dead now, and to-day, even in the land where it lived in such glory, there is none so poor as to do it reverence. Like rationalism, it was met on its own ground and beaten. Its historical position was taken up, and piece by piece pulled asunder and proven false. Ritschl broke the way, and since his revolt all criticism has been following in his lead.

We have brought ourselves down to to-day, and the question presses itself upon us, Now that criticism has given up the false position of Tübingenism, what is it going to do in the way of another position to take its place? For these last dozen years New Testament criticism has been in a state of flux. What is called "the new critical school" is in reality a transitional school. It has given up Tübingen's historical position; but it still holds to Tübingen's negative methods of work, and consequently still reaches many of Tübingen's negative results. Now the question is, Where is it going finally to land? What is going to be the position which it will ultimately agree upon as the basis of its critical work? Some such position Biblical criticism must have. What will it be? There is, therefore, again before Biblical criticism to-day just the same grand chance and opportunity there was before it fifty years ago, when rationalism's position had been given up and

Tübingen came upon the ground, namely, the chance and opportunity of correcting the falseness in the old criticism, and establishing once and for all time a truly scientific criticism, a criticism that shall maintain a rightful balance between the internal and the external sides, between literary exegesis and historical fact. Yes, there's a greater chance, for, in spite of all the negative results that Tübingenism has produced, the truth has made immeasurable gains during these fifty years. The old position of rationalism can never be taken again, the position, namely, that there is no such thing as history, that the Gospels are legends, and that Christ is a myth. Tübingen destroyed that by its fight for history, false though the history was for which it fought. And the old position of Tübingen can never be taken again, namely, that the history of the early Church was such as to make impossible the writing of the New Testament in the apostolic age. Ritschl and his modern critical school have destroyed that, so that criticism stands advantaged to-day far beyond criticism half a century ago. There has been gained for it what adds immensely to its possibility of coming to a true scientific position, where a true exegesis shall be united to a true history of fact. Now, is that position going to be taken? That is the question.

We come thus to what may rightly claim to be the interesting part of our discussion,—the signs of the times. We do not wish to pose as a prophet; that is always a venturesome undertaking and amounts generally to little or nothing in the end. If there is to be any prophesying, we wish it to be done by the facts which we shall give. These facts are the signs. Men may read them for themselves.

Some ten years ago a Tübingen professor, by the name of Völter, startled the critical world by cutting loose from the old Tübingen idea of the Apocalypse of John and saying that, instead of its being one integral composition, it was made up of many different ones. In support of his claim he produced a scheme of the book's make-up, which scheme he modified, a few years later, into what may be briefly given as follows: (1) There was, first of all, what could be called an original Apocalypse from the pen of the Apostle John, written about the year 65, or perhaps 66. (2) Into this original Apocalypse was interpolated

another, from the same apostolic author, but written some three years later, 68 or 69. Both Apocalypses were without any trace of chiliasm, in the stricter sense of the word, and made no mention of a second Resurrection nor of a new Jerusalem. (3) In Trajan's time, however, this double Apocalypse was worked over by a Jewish Christian, who believed in chiliasm, and looked for a second Resurrection and for a new Jerusalem, but did not look upon Christ as the slain Lamb, — at least did not apply that name to him. (4) In Hadrian's time there was another recension by another Jewish Christian, who held, as his predecessor had done, to chiliasm and a second Resurrection and a new Jerusalem, but who, unlike him, represented Christ as the Lamb of God. (5) A last redaction occurred about 140 A. D., in the time of Antoninus, and was characterized by a hostility to Paulinism. In this final form we have it in the New Testament. This, to be sure, is a bold position, one that takes a good deal of ingenuity to follow, and a great deal more to defend. But this is the position Völter took.

The same year that he produced this modified scheme of the Apocalypse, in 1885, Vischer, a student at Giessen, under Harnack's instruction, caught the ear of his honored professor, and in fact of the critical world, by producing a paper on the composition of this same book of Revelation, in which he held not merely that it was a derived book, but that its original was not of Christian, but of Jewish origin; and that it had come to its present Christian form by its redactor's inserting in it new material, which changed its meaning. The eleventh and twelfth chapters, which are the center-point of Vischer's argument, give a picture that he holds is unintelligible on the basis of a Christian origin, but easily explains itself when we assume it came from a Jewish pen. The eleventh chapter, as you remember, represents the Holy City as given over to heathen, despoiling it for the space of three and one-half years. But the Temple, its altar, and its worshipers are specially reserved and saved from that fate. Great wonders finally came down from Heaven in judgment upon the heathen and produce repentance on the part of those who were left alive in the city. This, Vischer holds, is thoroughly Jewish. To be sure, verse eight represents Jerusalem as the spiritual Sodom and Egypt, where the Lord was crucified; but Vischer holds that this verse has been inter-

polated to turn the chapter to Christian use. The twelfth chapter, on the other hand, represents the great mystery of Heaven, — the woman with her child and the Dragon fighting against it. The child is caught up into Heaven, and the Dragon is thrown into war with Michael and his hosts. He is overpowered by them and is cast out upon the earth, and in his rage wars again against the woman and the remnant of her seed, but prevails not. Now this, Vischer holds, is the prophecy of a Messiah, but a Messiah who is to come in the future, at the end of the days; not one who has already come, and is simply to re-appear. It is therefore the prophecy of a Jewish Messiah, not of a Christian one. To be sure, verse eleven speaks of the blood of the Lamb, but this Vischer says again is the redactor's interpolation, to put it into a Christian form. And then, outside of these two chapters, numerous passages are cited, which, to Vischer's mind, show unmistakable evidence of having come from one who was a Jew and wrote for the Jewish people, and not from one who wrote, as the apostle John must have done, as a Christian and for the Christian Church. It is indeed a critical marvel, and Vischer admits it so himself, how a Christian writer, wishing to produce a Christian prophecy of the future, should have contented himself with dressing up a prophecy written from a Jewish point of view. A more unlikely literary process could hardly be imagined. But we are simply presenting the position which our critic holds.

This treatment of the Apocalypse was, of course, agreed in by Harnack, Vischer's instructor, and was followed, one year later, 1886, by a similar treatment of the same book by Weizäcker, professor at Tübingen, in which treatment the three series of seven signs, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven vials are held to be the original nucleus of the composition, around which all the rest of the book was afterwards gathered. And the next year, 1887, there was added yet another similar treatment of the same book from the pen of Professor Pfeiderer, of Berlin, who held, as Völter had done, that the book was made up of several different Apocalypses pieced together, and not, as Vischer had done, that it was one original Apocalypse worked over into its present shape.

All these productions, we see, were centred upon the Book of the Revelation. But, one year after Pfeiderer's book appeared,

1888, there was produced a like attack upon Paul's Epistle to Galatians. It came from the pen of Steck, professor at the University of Bern, and held that this Epistle was a composite writing, having as its documentary basis the previously written Epistles to the Corinthians, and the Epistle to the Romans; none of these four Epistles being of Pauline origin, but all being the work of a certain Christian school, and produced in the first half of the second century. In support of his claim he said that it was evident that the speech against Peter in the second chapter, and the argument for justification by faith in the third chapter, and the allegory of the bond-woman and the free in the fourth chapter, were all derived from Romans; there being borrowings here and there, perhaps, from the Corinthians, while the last two chapters of the Epistle, the fifth and sixth, were derived from these Corinthian Epistles, with borrowings here and there from Romans—a reckless position, of course, for any scholarly exegete to take, but nevertheless the position taken.

Now I call attention to the fact that these two attacks were significant from the fact that, from the beginning of Tübingenism, these two books, the Apocalypse and the Epistle to the Galatians, had been admitted as genuinely the product of the apostolic age, being, in fact, the two pillars on which, it was held, the entire historic New Testament building was reared. Thus the two chief points in the historic literature of the New Testament have been attacked, and both of them on this documentary basis. That would be remarkable enough, but it is not all.

In 1890, two years after Steck's attack on Galatians, there was published an attack on the Epistle to the Romans, which was even more decidedly documentary in its form, and so approached much more nearly to the treatment of the Apocalypse at the hands of Völter and Vischer. In fact, it came from Völter himself, and, in brief, held that the Epistle, instead of being one letter from the one apostle, was made up of seven different letters,—a real apostolic core-letter, found scattered about in various passages throughout the Epistle, and six other letters by as many different unknown authors, some of them Gentile Christians, and some of them Jewish, found in the various remaining parts of the Epistle.

Again, one year later, 1891, there appeared from the pen of

Professor Spitta, of the University of Strassburg, a discussion of the Book of Acts, that, in its theory of the sources of the book, went beyond all previous theories, and said that before its writer lay two documents, both of which covered the whole history from the founding of the Church at Jerusalem to Paul's arrival at Rome. From these two documents the writer of Acts had derived practically all his material, simply playing the part of a redactor and piecing the two accounts together and making them read, as well as he could, like one narrative.

And now, in the last year or so, has appeared the very able and deservedly renowned presentation of the Teachings of Jesus by Professor Wendt, of the University of Heidelberg, in which presentation, naturally, the origin and composition of the Gospels are discussed, and in which discussion not only the well-known theory as to the documentary origin of the Synoptics is presented, but in addition, the theory of an original document for the Gospel of John, which document was of the apostle's own authorship and was added to, from various other sources, and edited after his death by scholars of his school, its redacted and edited form being that which appears in the New Testament.\*

Now all this, remarkable as it is, might not after all be considered significant enough to constitute "the signs of the times," were it not for one or two things that are to be considered in connection with them. 1. The first is: That these views, above given, do not represent mere local points of criticism; but rather general principles which might be critically applicable everywhere throughout the New Testament, *e. g.*, Völter does not hold simply that, among the New Testament books, the Apocalypse and Romans happen to be of documentary origin. It is with him rather a general literary idea which he is liable to apply to all canonical and early Christian literature. He has applied it already to the Barnabas Epistle, and his attack on Romans is only a part of a similar treatment proposed by him for all the four chief epistles of Paul. In fact, in the same work with Romans, Galatians is treated and relegated, like Romans, to a redactor's hands, being in his view, just as in Steck's, a clumsy compilation from Romans and the two Corinthian Epistles.† And so Steck does not hold

\* See in addition to these, Hitzmann's treatment of the relation of Colossians and Ephesians.

† See his article on the composition of Philippians. (Theol. Tijdschr., 1892, II.)

that of these four epistles of Paul, Galatians is the only one that is a compilation. This is a literary principle, which, in his view, runs through them all. Galatians is derived from the two Corinthians and Romans; while the two Corinthians are in turn derived from Romans, and the whole four are preceded by the Book of Acts and the Synoptic Gospels, to which they are all more or less indebted. So again Spitta's treatment of Acts is simply a single application of a general idea which he holds. It has already been applied by him in a similar treatment of the Apocalypse, and he plans to follow it up with another similar treatment of the Synoptic Gospels. These are not sporadic critical attacks. They indicate rather a general critical disease, which has the possibility of becoming epidemic.

2. Further, this is not something entirely new, sprung up in our modern days,—a critical fad. As far back as Eichhorn and Schleiermacher, in the days of rationalism, this documentary theory was suggested as applicable to the Synoptic Gospels. Even at the beginning of Tübingenism the same theory was advanced by Weisse as possible of application to Paul's epistles. And, though it found no following then, being overshadowed by Baur's own theory of tendency-origin, yet, a generation later, when Tübingen was giving up the ghost, this same theory, as applied to the chief Pauline epistles, was revived by the Holland critics and has been continued by them, and by the French critics also, along parallel lines with the Germans whom we have mentioned above. In other words, this is a general coming into shape and form of previous hints and suggestions which has the possibility of becoming permanent.

3. But there is yet another fact to be considered, namely, that a parallel to this criticism lies in the Pentateuchal criticism of the Old Testament to-day. To be sure, from the time of Astruc, in the previous century, the idea of documentary sources for the Pentateuch had been more or less urged by Continental criticism. But then nothing more was meant than that there were documents among the sources from which Moses himself, or at least a contemporary of his, had compiled these opening books of the Bible. Not until Tübingen's time was the suggestion made that this documentary composition of the Pentateuch might be later than Moses's time. But, just as it had been with the hints at that time made about New Testament

documentary criticism this suggestion obtained no following. In fact, Old Testament work was neglected, in Tübingen's attention to the New Testament, until a generation had gone past and Tübingen was departing this life, when Pentateuchal criticism revived and revived along the lines of this suggestion, namely, that the composite parts of the Pentateuch were of later date than Moses's time, that, in fact, (which is now the modern claim regarding them,) they represented a development of Israel's religion, being landmarks along the way, the documents containing the simpler religious and ethical ideas coming first, those containing the more complex and developed ones coming later. Now this idea of development is the very idea that, to a certain degree at least, lies behind the different documents that are supposed to make up our New Testament books. They are said to represent the development of Christianity, to show the growth of its religious ideas, to make it evident and plain that theology in the apostles' times was a much simpler affair than the New Testament would have us believe. These documentary ideas, therefore, which we have here in New Testament criticism, are not, after all, isolated ideas. They have their counterpart in Old Testament criticism. They are part of a general critical movement which has come into real activity in these latter days, and is claiming the possibility of sweeping all other criticisms before it, and forcing them off the field.

4. And, if there is a disposition to make light of this claim, we call attention to this idea of development which goes along with these documents and, as our final consideration, submit that this simply shows that there stands connected with all this documentary criticism, in Old Testament and New Testament alike, the philosophy of Evolution, and that philosophy is to be reckoned with to-day. Tübingenism was based upon Hegelianism and fell, because its philosophy was not only unpopular, but was untrue. This modern criticism finds its strong support in Evolution, and Evolution is popular and, in its theistic and Christian form, is most likely to prove true. In view, therefore, of these considerations, I think it is no exaggeration to say that these instances of documentary criticism which we have before us in the New Testament are significant enough to constitute "signs of the times."

But if so, then what do they portend? Which brings us back to our question, What position is criticism going now to take as the basis of its critical work? Do these signs show that criticism now is going to embrace its chance and opportunity of becoming truly scientific? Do they give us reason to believe that now it is going to establish a right and proper combination of internal and external evidence, and so unite a true exegesis, on the one side, to a true history of fact, on the other? If the facts say anything, they say very plainly "No." Criticism is missing its chance. The combination will not be made, for in this documentary criticism which it is carrying on there is being placed an over-emphasis on the side of internal evidence. The process is showing itself to be purely subjective. If the partitions made of these New Testament books are examined, they will be found to be based on absolutely arbitrary internal principles. If the redactors who are brought upon the field in the various recensions of these books are investigated, they will be seen to be simply the creations of subjectivity. Völter's and Vischer's and Weizäcker's and Pfeiderer's dissections of the Apocalypse are internal pieces of work at the expense of the external evidence to the early integrity of the book. Steck's partition of Galatians is a purely internal study, which has already collapsed beneath the scientific faults which have been proved against it. So Völter's breaking up of Romans into its seven letters is a subjective process, which, if it were not seriously meant, might almost be considered a companion to the satire on this sort of criticism which the professor-elect to the chair of Systematic Theology in this institution has already published. And so with Spitta's Book of Acts and Wendt's Fourth Gospel. They are an over-pressure of the internal side, on principles which I believe to be in error.

As Tübingenism, then, over-emphasized and over-pressed the objective element in its criticism and made that false objectivity ride all its exegesis, so this documentary criticism is over-emphasizing and over-pressing the subjective element and making that false subjectivity ride all its history. It is deciding authorship by lexicon and grammar, and canonicity by literary style. It is saying that different words mean different authors, and similar words mean forgeries. It is holding that documents are to be dated by their diction and that, because the

Gospels and the Acts are histories, they must have been written before the Epistles. It maintains that no writer can write save in one way at one time. It magnifies differences therefore and intensifies peculiarities; it refines and over-refines, splits and double splits, till it forgets that there is about its narrow view-point a historic horizon that cannot be ignored, if the light of truth is to flood the sacred page.

What then is the outlook for to-day? 1. First of all, summing up the facts which we have presented, the prospect is that we are about to enter upon a phase of New Testament criticism similar, in its outlines at least, to the criticism at present working in the Old Testament. The transitional period is coming to its end. A new period is opening. The confused efforts of the Ritschl-Baur school are crystallizing into the definite movement of this school of Völter, Vischer, and Steck. Hegelianism is yielding the way to Evolution, and documentary analysis, as we have grown familiar with it in Pentateuchal criticism, is being applied largely, if not entirely, to the New Testament books. It will doubtless lead to an attempt to reconstruct New Testament history, as it has led in the Old Testament to an attempt to reconstruct the history of Israel. But that will be a difficult task to carry through, for Tübingen has already fought that battle of reconstructed New Testament history, and has been defeated, and, in that defeat of Tübingen, the facts of New Testament history have been so clearly and so decisively established that not only will Tübingen's battle never be fought again, but no new battle on that field will be likely to have much success. Its present phase, however, is literary rather than historical, a study of the documents themselves rather than of the history which lies behind them. 2. Second, summing up the history of New Testament criticism from the beginning of rationalism's abuse of it, this new phase of New Testament criticism will end, just as all other phases of unscientific criticism have ended, in its own discomfiture and defeat. I shall not, of course, be misunderstood. I believe, just as every Biblical student believes, in higher criticism. It is simply a branch of exegetical science, to be used just as any of its other branches are used. I recognize and welcome the results which its use has brought to the gain of the truth of Jesus Christ, just as I recognize and regret the results

which its abuse has sent in the other direction. But in the end that truth must always gain, whatever struggle and conflict, whatever apparent disaster and defeat may come upon it. It always has done so. It gained by the rationalistic criticism of the eighteenth century, utterly unscientific as that criticism was; for when it was found that there must be something more in the substantiating of the Bible documents than the mere usage of the Church, right though that usage might be, that there was a surer ground on which the Bible was to be held, the deeper drifts of reason and the broader sweeps of the indestructible facts of mind and soul, then rationalism helped to that discovery, though she recklessly leaped beyond it all and went to her own destruction. In that discovery there was a gain for the truth. Again, when it was found that there must be yet something more in the substantiating of the Bible documents than the mere truths of reason, that there was a still surer ground, the broad, strong, certain ground of history, then to that discovery Tübingen helped, though she hung herself with the false history which she held. In that discovery again there was a gain for the truth. Now, apparently, it is being found that, in addition to the proofs of reason and of history, there is to be gained yet surer ground still, ground yet more certain and more sound—that there is to be secured the literary proofs from the documents themselves. Good! Then this documentary criticism will help to its discovery, though just in so far forth as it is unscientific in its principles and methods of work, it must go to its own destruction, while it leaves the same grand, everlasting truth of Jesus Christ, the one and only gainer in the end.

I stand therefore this evening and say: Important as this new phase of criticism undoubtedly is, deep searching as its work will of necessity be, I see nothing in the future to fear. From what it has shown of itself, in the attempts it has already made, I believe it to be unscientific, and therefore destined to destroy itself, while the truth remains firmer in its historic integrity than before. But I do not believe that this result is going to be reached without coöperation on the Church's part, and in that coöperation there are two courses which the Church can pursue. She can stand by and let this new criticism have its own way, occupying the field, controlling the literature, holding the

scholarship, until it has worn itself out with its own vagaries and dies. Then she can come in and, repairing the damage, say: "See what a victory I have gained." Or she can come into the struggle at the start, contesting the field, placing literature against literature and confronting scholarship with scholarship, until this criticism is compelled to yield its unscholarly position and give up its unscientific fight. Then, when truth has gained the battle, she can be grateful to God that she was allowed to be an instrument to that end.

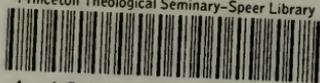
This latter would be the better way, would be the shorter and the quicker way. But to undertake and accomplish it, the Church needs now and to-day to go to her colleges and her seminaries and train her men into a scientific thoroughness of lexicon and grammar, of philology and literary style, of exegesis and Biblical theology, that they may show the falseness of unscientific critics, and, by being scientific themselves, support the truth they hold. The Church can afford to lose no time. She can afford to spare no means. She can afford to do but one thing and that is, with the consciousness of her great responsibility, to make known to the world the Word of God, with the conviction that the Master who has sent her into the world will give her His Spirit to enable her to know that Word, to take that Word, and in the light of all that has been gained for its historic truth in the past, and in the blaze of all that can be brought to bear upon its historic truth to-day, establish that Word in her own convictions, and then preach it to the souls of men.

God giving us the wisdom and the grace, we will try to do this here, not merely that we may supply the Church with scholarship; but much more, that into the Church's pulpits may go those whose faith in the Word is strong, because they know that Word to be true, and who keep strong their peoples' faith in that Word because they preach them its truth.



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