

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I. DR. BRIGGS' HIGHER CRITICISM OF THE HEXATEUCH.¹

THIS is in some respects a notable book. The recent, though possibly passing, notoriety of its author, and the importance of the event which was the more immediate occasion of its publication, would, of themselves, be sufficient to give it some claim to this distinction. We must confess, however, that in calling it a notable book, we had reference to claims grounded in other circumstances, which, if not less adventitious, are certainly of even greater moment and graver significance. We refer to the fact that Dr. Briggs' book is one of the latest, and, in our judgment, one of the ablest, attempts to bring the results of radical criticism before the popular mind, and commend them to popular acceptance. Few, comparatively, seem to be aware of the extent, the vigor, and the persistency of the efforts now being put forth for the attainment of this end. Those, however, who have occasion to notice such matters know the tireless energy and ceaseless activity of the representatives of the neo-criticism. Journals like the "*Biblical World*," series of books like "*The International Theological Library*," dictionaries like that now being put forth under the editorship of Drs. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, series of commentaries like the one soon to be issued from the press of Messrs. T. & T. Clark, are exerting a

¹ *The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch.* By Charles Augustus Briggs, D. D., Edward Robinson Professor of Biblical Theology in the Union Theological Seminary, New York. Pp. xii., 259. New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons. 1893.

IV. THE LIMIT OF THE CHURCH'S POWER TO MAKE DECLARATIONS.

IT is assumed in this discussion that the threefold distinction of church power adopted by Calvin is exhaustive; and that it is either (*diatactic*) law-making, or (*diacritic*) judicial, or (*dogmatic*) doctrinal. Further, we take it for granted that the first, in its subject-matter, is confined to circumstances of time, and place, and of order and decency, and that the second involves only the application of the truth, and the administration of the sacred and holy discipline of the Lord's house, and that both as to their objects extend only to members of the church. It follows that the only kind of power belonging to the church, which in its purview goes beyond church members, and has direct relation to the outside world, is that of prophesying or declaring truth. This includes authority to speak to its own people about their conduct in all the departments of life, and to testify to all men the gospel of the grace of God. But authority to declare the truth and the principles of holy living in every department of life, and authority to declare what is the good and the right in every problem that may arise in every department of life, are not the same thing. It is one thing to teach the principles of moral rectitude which should govern the mind in advancing to a conclusion, and another to make a conclusion for the mind to be adopted as settled by external authority, as a father may do in many or most cases for his non-adult child. To say you should strive to promote morality is not the same as to say you should approve a certain enterprise professedly designed to promote morality, and give it your praise and adherence, whatever you may think of its methods or its real tendency. The doctrine that the church should enjoin upon its members the duties which belong to their secular and political relations does not imply that it has any authority whatever over these relations themselves, whether to establish, change or control them. Grant that the church should declare the Decalogue as

the law of God binding upon the nation and upon all citizens, it does not follow that the church may ally itself with the state in relation to coercive means for the enforcement of the church's decrees. But surely the distinction betwixt speaking about a thing authoritatively, and deciding every problem which that thing suggests, is broad and practical enough, and is observed in all the relations of civilized man. Yet men bent on defending error have sometimes succeeded in obscuring the widest differences between objects of thought.

This suggests that it may not be wholly unnecessary to call attention to the distinction between the church considered as a divine organism, constituted of officers, and the church considered as consisting of Christians in their individual capacity, whether acting severally or in voluntary association. The former is, properly speaking, the subject, the latter the object, of church power.

The question arises, Does it pertain to the church to set her seal of testimony to all which may seem to it to be true, or is it restricted to a specific department of truth as the subject-matter of its deliverances?

This question calls up the antecedent one, What is the work which Christ has committed to his church?

1. Many professing to be Christians apparently feel sure that the church is a society ordained for directly promoting all good, and that it should take charge of all that pertains to human welfare, even of the whole physical department of human life, and make declarations not only about, but deciding which is the best, food and clothing. To a social science lecturer of high literary standing and professed Christian belief, whom the writer heard lately addressing a learned audience, it appeared very reprehensible that ministers did not from the pulpit instruct the people as to the relative nutritive properties of beef and pork, and of bread and Irish potatoes.

2. There is a second class of professors who, unwilling to be extremists, hold that there is a limit to the teaching work of the church, but that this limit is its own discretion, to be exercised in any case where it is requested to speak. They do not think that

the church should declare on every subject pertaining to human happiness, but only on such subjects as it may deem proper to handle. This is really no limit at all. It leaves the question of making a declaration to the discretion of the majority of a church court—to fallible men, subject to human passions and prejudices, liable to respond to the call of public opinion, to be carried off by the tide of partisan fervor, to feel the pressure of political zeal, and to allow their pleasure to blind their wisdom and misdirect their judgment. If at one time the church makes a deliverance on a secular question on which there would seem to be no room for disagreement between the righteous, at another time, under pressing circumstances of a temporal nature, it will be prompted to handle and decide a matter concerning which even right-minded men do not all agree, and which seems false and unwarranted to some of its own members, till, ultimately, whatever interests the outside world in any community will claim successfully a deliverance from the church, grown tyrannical in self-sufficiency; and mere human feeling will decide whether a matter is fit to be handled by the church, dictate the church's testimony, and bend to its own pleasure the mind and will of the majority in the church court.

This expansive tendency of discretionary power was signally illustrated by the Presbytery of New York not many months ago. The defeat of Tammany Hall, in relation to the government of the metropolis, was, whether correctly or mistakenly, attributed to a man who is a member *ex-officio* of that ecclesiastical body. The means used by this gentleman to change the government of the city were, in the estimation of all his fellow-citizens, degrading to the divine office, and in that of many, and perhaps most, of the good people of New York, positively immoral. . Even the secular papers, noted for plainness of speech in their reports, forebore, through shame, to give full accounts of the clerical detective's adventures, experiences, and conduct night after night and week after week in the palaces of impurity. The New York *Sun* says: "They (the reporters) were ashamed to hear even the description of the proceedings and practices of which Parkhurst was the voluntary witness for hours together in the companionship of a pink-

faced young man of his flock. It was not enough for him, though it would have been ample for proof, that there was the readiness to give such exhibitions for his hire, but he remained throughout the revolting performances, drank beer with the loathsome performers, and watched his youthful companion dancing with them in their nakedness." No wonder that the report of the Rev. Dr. Parkhurst's testimony in court abundantly substituted asterisks for information, and says that the evidence he gave was "so unspeakably revolting that the reporters were distressed because their official duty compelled them to listen to it." In his efforts to utilize these detective results as a means of reformation, the only immediate success he achieved was the dismissal of a few constables and of a subordinate officer or two from their place in the police force, and the sentence of one captain to Sing Sing for receiving a basket of fruit from a man whom he had permitted to encumber the sidewalk with his merchandise. How much Dr. Parkhurst has contributed towards ousting Tammany Hall, and even how much better off New York city is under the new *regime*, are questions on which a majority of her citizens, and of Republicans as well as Democrats, are not at all decided in their opinions. It is certain that there never was more complaint of city officials, or more quarreling and vituperation on account of official city positions, or more squabbling for leadership, in any community than there is this day in the metropolitan city of the great western republic. It is also true that Tammany Hall was no more responsible for corruption in the police force than was the Union League or any other prominent Republican organization in the city. The Board of Police Commissioners was bi-partisan, composed of Republicans and Democrats; the Superintendent (Byrnes), who has accumulated vast riches in the service, and the wealthiest Inspector (Williams), were strong Republicans, and it is not improbable that the whole body comprised more Republicans than Democrats. Very many saw in the election of Mayor Strong only the action of the ground-swell of change manifested of late in the ocean of opinion throughout the whole Union.

But Parkhurst and the Lexow Committee had been the sensa-

tion for months, and hence to Parkhurst and the Lexow Committee were ascribed the political revolution in New York City, and to Parkhurst, the victorious, in their excitement, looked for speedy millennial perfection.

The preachers, on the Sabbath before the day of election and previously, gave specific instruction and exhortation as to the candidates before the people, and the party with which they should vote. Thus the churches and their leaders were already moving down the secular grade, and after a month had been providentially given to this great Presbytery, through a postponement of the discussion of the Strong resolution, to consider the question of making itself subsidiary to the detective reformer, such was the power of partisan newspapers, and such the éclat of the late success in downing Tammany, deemed, as it was, to be due to the preacher's excursions into the realms of Venus, that not a member, save one—and he was a Southerner, trained by Thornwell—dared to raise a voice in opposition to a motion giving glory to the preacher who had had the sensational part in the drama just enacted. The fact that this preacher never attends the meetings of Presbytery—except that he attended to vote for Professor Briggs, when charged with impugning the divine authority of the Scriptures—and that he goes beyond Briggs in contempt of the Confession of Faith (which, when the Briggs case was on, he said in his pulpit he had never read, and never intended to read), and in the denial of inspiration, was nowhere in the minds of the great majority of the Presbytery of New York, when called to give glory to the secular reformer. The feeling of political triumph, the attainment of municipal dominance, the joy of victory over a hated organization, made many forget the decorum of a court of Jesus Christ, silenced others who previously had not concealed their agreement with the protest of the man from the South, at least from him, and carried the resolutions which identified the Presbytery and the Reform League to a most triumphant adoption.

Thus it is seen that discretion did not keep the great Presbytery of New York from making a declaration which involves approbation of the principle, let us do evil that good may come; and of which the Nestor of the Press in the United States says in his

editorial columns: "The decision as expressed in the resolutions passed, with the single dissenting voice of Dr. Mullally, is particularly, that in disguising himself and visiting houses of ill-fame the Rev. Dr. Parkhurst proceeded in strict accordance with the spirit and teaching of 'the gospel of Christ as the supreme remedy for every form of evil, and the church of Christ as the agency by which the world is to be regenerated and saved.' It is, that by such methods 'the moral teachings of Christ must be applied to every sphere of life,' and that consequently 'the church should,' by justifying and applauding them, 'bear her testimony for righteousness and purity in all human affairs.' Parkhurst's example, moreover, is especially commended to 'the Christian young men of the city,' as tending to arouse them to 'a realizing sense of their moral and religious duties as citizens,' 'binding them together in efforts for the purification of our civil and social life.' Incidentally, therefore, the course of the minister in taking along with him in his nocturnal prowls a pink-faced young man of the church to witness 'circuses' got up at his provocation and expense, and to carouse and dance with naked harlots, is held up for youthful admiration as 'noble,' 'faithful,' and 'heroic.' The members of the Presbytery 'rejoice' in it, express 'gratitude' to Dr. Parkhurst because of it, and contemplate the proceeding with 'pride.'"

It is very desirable that the public should know exactly the moral standard of the Presbyterian Church, so that everybody may be able to determine whether it suits him, and whether he wishes his children brought up according to it. The religious belief of the New York Presbytery is not definable in this radical variation from the Westminster Confession, and hence whoever likes its moral standard, now so precisely established, is eligible for admittance to the churches, without regard to his doctrinal opinions. The existence of a large number of disreputable houses in town indicates that this Presbyterian moral standard will not fail for lack of support, and many people may be attracted to a church which makes deceit a virtue, and moral uncleanness beautiful and spotless purity, so long as they are practiced in a truly religious spirit. All people who think differently, and who feel

it incumbent on them to live, and to teach their children by precept and example to live, decently, honorably, and in obedience to principle, never compromising with evil under the false pretence that the end justifies the use of vicious means, are, of course, out of place in a church which formally and officially, by its representative Presbytery, holds up for them as their example a minister who went about in disguise, and in company with a young man of his flock, visiting, and inciting, and paying for, exhibitions of naked harlots, "for the purification of our civil and social life"!

The *Charleston News and Courier*, a paper noted for its freedom from all sensationalism and extravagance, while naïvely saying that it does not believe that the Presbytery *meant*, by its endorsement of Dr. Parkhurst's methods, to establish a new standard of ministerial conduct, adds: "But we fear that some of the weaker and more fleshly brethren may follow his lead, not in the same good cause, but for the purpose of seeing the seamy side of a very wicked world; at any rate, the impression which the action of Presbytery has made on one very acute mind" (that of Charles A. Dana) "would seem to suggest such a regrettable possibility."

Plainly, if there is *no* principle, or only that of her own discretion, to limit the church's authority to make declarations, it will be more and more diverted from its office of co-laborer with God in saving souls, more and more assimilated to temporal societies, and more and more distracted by the clamor of contending human opinions, till it shall have become but a co-laborer with one class of citizens in its opposition to another class.

It is very apparent that there is an innate tendency in preachers and church courts to go off on the secular, which is apt to prove the sensational, track. To illustrate again by the metropolitan Presbytery: There is upon its records no resolution of glorification, or praise, or thanks to the member of that body who for over thirty years has preached faithfully the doctrines of grace to more than a thousand, perhaps to two thousand, people twice every Lord's day, and whose preaching is the food and stimulus of a congregation that contributes, probably, more than a fourth of all the money given by all the congregations of the Presby-

tery to carry on the Master's work at home and abroad. Not long ago an eminent lawyer, laboring as one of a faithful committee appointed by the body, succeeded in purging the church of deadly heresy, at great expenditure of thought and time. Others within its jurisdiction, very remarkably successful in spiritual work, are too numerous for individual mention. Yet the only member of the body singled out for signal laudation is a minister whose audiences are not drawn by the preaching of the doctrines of Presbyterianism, but by dissertations on the speculations of humanitarianism, and whose efforts are directed rather to bringing criminals to punishment than to guiding souls to the cross. The Presbytery of New York, in this respect, is not an exception, but a specimen. When special praise is bestowed on a man by a church court, it is almost always for some secular success, real or apparent. The Rev. Dr. Henry Van Dyke, of the Brick Church, said in *The New York Herald*, and repeated the judgment on the floor of Presbytery without provoking the faintest sign of disapprobation, that it is more necessary to the Presbytery to be endorsed by Dr. Parkhurst than it is to Dr. Parkhurst to be endorsed by the Presbytery. In this Dr. Van Dyke manifested the tendency of the human heart, even in the best men, to exalt the secular above the spiritual, and the necessity of a substantive, authoritative limit to church work and to the exercise of ecclesiastical power.

A fourth class says there is such a limit, and it is this—the only secular questions which the church may concretely handle are those that involve morality. This again gives the largest scope to dogmatic church power. In all questions pertaining to man, there is necessarily a moral element, for man is a moral being, and is bound in all things to glorify God. If the church may handle all concrete moral questions, she may handle all social and political questions. This also gives full play to passion and prejudice, and makes the church lord of the conscience, an infallible judge and divider in questions of allegiance, of law, of inheritance, of disputed right, and of methods from the highest to the lowest relation. It makes the church the arbiter of right and wrong, and of the more desirable and the less desirable, where she has

only the light of nature to guide her. It would make the church a society of universal good. It is utterly incompatible with the Bible doctrine of church unity. According to Paul, a man's nationality and secular policy, so long as it does not contravene the revealed law of Christ, are not to be considered at all in the idea of the church. The only question in settling its essence is that of being in Christ Jesus.

These animadversions are deemed suitable to prepare us to receive the Bible principle which limits clearly, and to the spirit of obedience, satisfactorily, the church's power to make declarations.

This principle is contained in many biblical affirmations:

1. Christ is the head of the church, and exercises his headship by his Spirit and his word. The Spirit makes no new revelation, but only makes the word felt and known. If so, the church is the organ of Christ to think and speak and act his dictates, and should say only what he has said. The church as such, should have no will, no opinion, of her own, but should only give its testimony to him, and keep and declare his sayings. \

It follows that *the church should be silent, when its Divine Master is silent*, that the Bible is the divine rule and limit of church power, and that when the church goes beyond it, the church assumes the prerogative of its Divine Head, and makes itself his substitute and plenipotentiary. This is precisely the *proton pseudon* of Rome. It is sent to preach the preaching that he commands, and no more. It is, strictly speaking, his organ rather than even his messenger, and therefore to speak only the things which it may be sure Christ speaks through it.

It may be asked, Has the church, as such, nothing to say to its members in respect to philanthropic, and political, and reformatory questions? Certainly it has. It should deal with its members as individuals, and teach them to obey the law of Christ in the exercise of their will, their judgment, their affections, and the whole employment of their powers, and of their time. It pertains not to the church to say what profession the individual shall choose, but it does pertain to the church to declare that man should work, and prayerfully find and do his appropriate work; to say what is the best system of banking, but it should teach that

the banker should be honest; to point out the best way of applying human law to society, but it should tell its children to act their part as moral integers in the social structure, for the good of man and the glory of God, as responsible creatures. Having no revelation on the subject, it must not say which party's professions in an elective contest are most worthy to be believed, or which party's platform most worthy of support, but it should insist that its members diligently use their own judgment about men and measures, and vote in the way they deem best for the moral and material advantage of the community. The church is precluded from the work of settling constitutional questions, or deciding in a disputed case who *Cæsar* is, but it is bound to teach its children that using the best light they have they must decide conscientiously to whom their allegiance is due, and be obedient to the government which they deem to be in reason and right entitled to their allegiance.

Two Christian men ought to be able to pray together, although they belong to governments at war with each other, and meet after a battle, where they fought under hostile flags which yet float invasion and defiance from opposing lines of martialled forces. If they take the Bible as the directory of prayer, they can pray in common for all dearest to their hearts, because all is included in the one petition, "Thy will be done," "Not as I will, but as thou wilt"; they might both belong to the same church, and the one be in as good standing as the other. Their political views are their own, for them they are responsible only to God, and the church may neither control nor complain of the same.

Another way in which the same principle is taught in the Bible is, that the church's only weapon is the sword of the Spirit, that its prophetic work is confined exclusively to instruction and persuasion, and that it is a kingdom not of this world. If so, it is forbidden all alliance with the state, all resort to coercive machinery for accomplishing any purpose, all ends to be achieved by mere human skill, or judgment, or effort. The church, as such, must always act with the sword of the Spirit in the right hand, and the index finger of the left hand pointing to Christ himself, the centre of the eternal world. It is of "the truth," the truth to

which Christ came into the world to bear witness, and which pertains to man's eternal well-being.

If the church were practically convinced that it is the body of Christ, that he is its head, that apart from him it is nothing but a headless carcass, and, claiming to be anything, lies with horrible presumption; that its office is to speak in his name, and represent his authority; that the Bible is the counsel he gives through it to men; that Christ speaks through it only as it declares the gospel; that its only weapon is the word, and its only work instruction and persuasion in the doctrine and to the life taught in the Scriptures, then it would be silent when the word is silent, and spiritual in its ordained work, as it is in its ordained end and origin and methods and commission, and would not "render its courts, which God ordained for spiritual purposes, subsidiary to the schemes of any association founded in the human will, and liable to all its changes and caprices."

One has called attention to the distinction between advisory declarations of the church, and those decreeing terms of communion. But if the church is the organ of Christ, it should always speak with divine authority and expect to be heard with reverence and submission, not only for the agreement of its utterances with the word, "but also for the power whereby they are made as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in his word." The voice of the church should always be the voice of God, and this is never so emphatic and solemn as when it comes through it. It is idle to say that the church may declare what it pleases so long as it does not claim to bind the conscience. It always binds the conscience, except when it can be shown that it transgressed its divine rule. So long as it claims to be the church at all, by virtue of this claim it asserts a right to be heard as the prophet of God, and it ought not to issue recommendations to regulate manners or gain the adoption of methods without the warrant, explicit or implied, of the revealed will of God.

But it has been said that secular societies operating for moral ends are often great helps to the church in respect to her spiritual work, and that, therefore, the church should ally itself with them.

If this argument in favor of secular deliverances on the part of

the church is good in one given case, then it is good as an argument in favor of the handling by the church of all secular matters. Money helps the church, therefore the church may tell her people how to make money, and laud the successful accumulator of riches. Health helps the church, therefore it should make scientific deliverances on hygiene and *materia medica*; and therefore the benefit of education authorizes ecclesiastical deliverances on the best system of government for schools and colleges and universities, and on pedagogy and kindred topics in general.

Dr. Thornwell's answer to this plea for secularity in pulpits and judicatories is conclusive. Writing to his friend, the Rev. John Douglass, he says, speaking directly in relation to temperance societies: "I regard them as secular enterprises for temporal good, having no connection whatever with the kingdom of Christ, a mere embalming of the corpse to arrest the progress of putrefaction. In this light I think it well that the potsherd of the earth engage in them. They are a great service to society. *Others* regard them as really helps to the cause of Christ, instruments of building up his kingdom—that is, as a *means of grace*, for the kingdom of Christ on earth consists in grace. In this sense I oppose them, because they are not appointed by Christ. Their true position is among the institutions of civil society. There I cordially recommend and encourage them." Acting as a citizen, the great theologian recommended societies for moral ends, if they were useful to society, but acting as a preacher and presbyter, he could not recognize them at all, because they were not appointed by Christ as means of grace.

Such means of grace instituted by man are very dangerous. To propose any other good to the sinner than Jesus Christ is very apt, if the sinner complies with the proposal, to result in making the man a self-righteous moralist, and erecting between him and the Saviour the barrier of decency and self-complacency, than which perhaps none affords so great security to unbelief. The work of the church is to bring men to Christ, and that, in no round-about-way of reform, but directly and immediately by faith in him, even though the sinner be a Philippian jailer, a Corinthian drunkard, or a persecuting Pharisee, or even a greater sinner than either.

“The church of Jesus Christ is a spiritual body to which have been given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life to the end of the world. It is the great instrumentality of the Saviour, through which, by his eternal Spirit, he dispenses salvation to the objects of his love. Its ends are holiness and life, to the manifestation of the riches and glory of divine grace, and not simply morality, decency and good order, which may to some extent be secured without faith in the Redeemer, or the transforming efficacy of the Holy Spirit.” Is it not enough for the church, enough in respect to honor and to time and means, enough in respect to the affections of the Christian heart in the hour of preaching and hearing, and in the season of Presbyterian attendance, to be charged with the work of gathering and perfecting the saints, and fitting them for heaven? Do Parliament and Congress find that the work of advancing and maintaining secular happiness is enough to engross all their attention, and shall the man or the body charged with the cure of souls long for more, or turn aside to other work?

“’Tis not a cause of small import,
The pastor’s care demands ;
But what might fill an angel’s heart,
And filled a Saviour’s hands.

“They watch for souls, for which the Lord
Did heavenly bliss forego ;
For souls, which must forever live
In raptures, or in woe.”

FRANCIS P. MULLALLY.

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