

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF RADICAL OLD TESTAMENT CRITICISM

Dear Mr. Editor,—As the doctor some months ago thought my congregation needed a rest, and so forbade my preaching or even visiting for three or four weeks, a good part of this time I spent in reading or re-reading a number of old and new books on the Higher Criticism. This is so live a subject that, though I have no reason to suspect that your readers are losing sleep at night from eagerness to learn my views, yet I'll jot down a few impressions nevertheless.

I wish, at the outset, to make a sharp distinction between Higher Critics as a class, and the radical wing of the Higher Critics, represented by Wellhausen & Co., the brilliant leaders of the dominant school of modern criticism. It is the latter I have in mind in this article.

I wish also to suggest that an intelligent survey of this subject is not the monopoly of specialists. Specialism has its dangers, not the least of which is intellectual near-sightedness, with its accompanying exaggeration of details and inability to see things in large and true relations. The premises, methods and results of the radical criticism are not above the inspection of ordinary scholarship and common sense.

It seems plain to me that the radical leaders of modern criticism are antecedently disqualified for a truly scientific investigation of the Scriptures, or for reaching true conclusions concerning them. Why? Because they exclude from recognition the most important and distinctive class of Scripture phenomena, viz., the supernatural. The Old Testament records are luminous with miracle and prophecy. They are starred with supernatural self-disclosures of God to His people. The hand of God and the voice of God are visible and audible throughout. But this entire class of facts, which form the characteristic and distinctive glory of the Bible, the radical critics rule out of court as incredible. By this infidel and arbitrary procedure they rule themselves out of the ranks of scientific investigators, for the

first essential of the scientific method is that it must embrace all the facts in the case.

For example, here is a man who sets out to describe and reason upon the scenery of the night. But not once in his study of the phenomena does he look up. To the moon walking in brightness, to the stars that hold their festival around the midnight throne, to all that forms the distinctive glory of the night, he never once raises his eyes. In fact, his deliberately announced initial assumption is the non-existence of these heavenly bodies. Such a man's diligent study may enlarge and clarify our knowledge of certain minor features of the nocturnal scenery, just as the radical critics have undoubtedly given us a clearer recognition and conception of certain elements of Scripture, but through his exclusion of the overhead phenomena from his field of observation his estimate of the significance and grandeur of the night must of necessity fall vastly short of the truth, and his general conclusions must of necessity be untrustworthy.

Just so with the Bible and the radical critics. Their deliberately announced exclusion of all the overhead phenomena accounts both for the low estimate they place upon the Bible, and for the low estimate that we are logically compelled to place upon their conclusions. The man who would fairly study and appreciate God's self-revelation, either in nature or Scripture, must look up.

It is easy to see how the denial of the supernatural vitiates nearly all the radical reasoning concerning the date and authorship of books of the Old Testament.

For example, if a book contains a clear and detailed prediction, the circumstantial fulfilment of which took place a century or more later, this at once proves that the book was written after the event and by a later hand; for divine preintimations of future events are ruled out as incredible. The effect of the radical presupposition on date and authorship will be further and abundantly illustrated as we proceed.

The total elimination of the supernatural means, of course, that the origin and development of the religion and people of ancient Israel was a purely natural process precisely like that of other oriental faiths and nations. This is confessedly the position of the leaders of the radical criticism, whose attitude, there-

fore, is not the impartial one, as they claim it to be, of the coldly scientific investigator. Their spirit and method are those of the advocate, and their aim is to prove that Israel's history and religion are the product of a purely naturalistic evolution throughout, "the supernatural not intervening," they declare, "in even one single point." Such an evolution, they tell us, implies in the case of Israel, precisely as in that of other nations, a long and gradual development from the most rudimentary polytheistic ideas of religion to progressively higher and purer conceptions.

But with this theory the Pentateuch is in open conflict. It represents the earliest progenitors of the nation—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and a few centuries later Moses—as possessed of a pure monotheistic faith, a true religious experience, and high spiritual attainments. Hence the radical conclusion is necessitated that Genesis and the four other books of the Pentateuch, with their high and pure religious ideas, were not and could not have been written till centuries after the time of Moses. Hence also the equally necessary conclusion that these books are unhistorical, and that the great figures of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, etc., are mainly or wholly mythical, "a glorified mirage," as Wellhausen says, "reflected back into hoar antiquity from a later age." He does not explain, though, why a later age should want to glorify their ancestral heroes with such a minute and circumstantial account of their sins and follies as we find in these early narratives.

The working of a false presupposition may be made clear by an illustration.

Suppose that in the year 4500 A. D. a radical critic should sit down to study the ancient records of the early history of the American people. Suppose that he should proceed on the assumption that the victory of the little handful of colonists in 1781 over the immense power of Great Britain was incredible, and that not till after the Spanish-American War, through the combined influence of McKinley's diplomacy and Roosevelt's big stick, did America take her place as an independent world power. This assumption is not near so radical and far-reaching as the critic's assumption that whatever in the Scripture is supernatural

is untrue, yet it is easy to see how it would distort and discredit the early history and records of our country.

The Declaration of Independence, the most famous of early American documents, would have to be given a date one and a quarter centuries later than the traditional one, and ascribed to a later hand than Jefferson's. George Washington, the foremost figure in our nation's life, Patrick Henry, Jefferson, Hamilton, and the other forefathers of our national history, would of necessity be regarded by our critic as largely unhistorical. Their advanced views of freedom and government and their heroic achievements, being a manifest anachronism at the early date assigned them in the records, would be looked upon as the legendary accretions that gather about the semi-mythical figures of a proud nation's past, the glorified mirage reflected from the patriotic imagination of a later age. And these very accretions of legend and fable, which would require centuries for their development, would prove indisputably that the narratives in which they appear could not have been composed earlier than about 2600 A. D.

It is plain, too, that everything in the narratives inconsistent with the initial assumption of the allegiance of our country to Great Britain down to the time of Roosevelt, our radical critic would reject, or readjust and recolor, after the well-known manner of his tribe; while every slightest hint of British influence during that period he would accept, emphasize, and magnify to the utmost.

Thus his final estimate and interpretation of the early American records would be in some respects as untrue to fact as the radical estimate and interpretation of the early Scripture records, and for the same reason, a false presupposition. And if our critic of 4500 A. D. were to label his conclusions "The Accepted Results of Modern Criticism," and look down with icy contempt upon all who held the traditional view in even a modified form, he would prove himself the lineal descendant of Graf, Kuenen, Wellhausen, Cheyne, Cousin Henry Preserved Smith and Co.

A false presupposition is pretty certain to work out into un-

believable conclusions. Radical criticism is no exception to this rule.

For example, the book of Leviticus, or the greater part of it, and large portions of Exodus and Numbers, are held by the Wellhausen school to have been written about 800 years after Moses by unknown scribes who lived during or subsequent to the exile. Of their names, or indeed their existence, we have not a scrap of knowledge, but in fertility and brilliancy of imagination they could throw Shakespeare and Walter Scott so far into the shade they would freeze.

These Scriptures contain the most detailed instructions concerning the tabernacle, the selection of Aaron and his sons to be priests, the Levites to be ministers, an elaborate tithe system to be their means of support, the appointment of Levitical cities, of sin offerings and trespass offerings, of a Day of Atonement, of a system of feasts of special historic origin and significance, etc., etc., etc.

Now, according to the Wellhausen school, these things, as recorded, never existed at all. They were mere fancies. We recall the directions Moses gives for the building of the tabernacle: its ten curtains of specified size and material, and of three colors, with loops of blue upon the edge from the selvedge and fifty clasps of gold; its protecting tent of goat's hair, with eleven curtains, the sixth to be doubled over in the forefront of the tent, with their fifty loops and brazen clasps, with the half curtain hanging over the back, and a cubit-length droop over the two sides; the boards for the tabernacle each ten cubits long and one and a half cubits broad, with two tenons in each, and two sockets of silver for the two tenons; and so on through page after page of minutest description of bars, and rings, and veils, and pillars, and hooks, and staves, and fillets, in number without number, the whole marked by such completeness and accuracy of specification that miniature tabernacles have often been constructed therefrom.

But this ancient tabernacle of the Lord and its furniture and surroundings, to whose pattern given in the Mount, and building by Bezaleel and Ahaliab, five chapters of Exodus are devoted, and whose rich spiritual significance is so eloquently set forth in Hebrews, never existed at all. The whole thing was spun out

of the brains of men who lived 800 years later and who entertained themselves inventing the myriad details of an imaginary tabernacle, and of imaginary festivals, encampments, ceremonials, laws, and minute regulations for imaginary situations of all kinds. Then they placed the whole in so lifelike a wilderness setting, and threw around it so perfect a desert atmosphere that, as Wellhausen himself admits, no hint of the real date of composition is apparent anywhere. Then, to cap the climax, these nameless geniuses succeeded in palming off their sacred novel upon the people of Israel as a *bona fide* work of Moses, while Ezra, one of the most honest and God-fearing men that ever lived, sat smiling by.

Nay, Ezra himself, we are told, from his pulpit of wood, reads it all to the people as the genuine law of Moses. The Levites stand open-mouthed with amazement to learn for the first time that in the wilderness their tribe was specially and permanently set apart by God for His service, with a liberal provision made for their wants, and forty-eight cities assigned them to dwell in. The people with dismay learn for the first time that, 800 years before, Moses had placed them under permanent obligations to pay tithes of corn and oil for the support of the Levites. The wise and godly scholars among them, expert in all the traditions of the fathers, stand agape at hearing for the first time these and twenty other capital and startling ecclesiastical novelties, which they could not fail to know were inventions. But so completely hypnotized are they and all the others that the whole elaborate fiction they accept at once, without a syllable of surprise or dissent, and forthwith it takes its place as the undoubted work of Moses—yes, and holds its place unquestioned for twenty-four centuries.

Why a school of criticism which can believe this should kick at the supernatural seems strange. Swallowing Jonah's whale is a small matter compared with swallowing all this. It would require fewer "oesophageal porrections."

Another characteristic conclusion, to which their false presupposition leads them, is that the book of Deuteronomy, or the most of it, was composed 700 years after Moses, in the time of King Josiah, about 622 B. C.

We are told in second Kings, 22d chapter, of Hilkiah's finding "the book of the law" (called the "law of Moses" in chapter 23: 25) in the house of the Lord, and bringing it to King Josiah, and the great reformation to which it gave rise. This law book, it is believed by most Bible students, was substantially Deuteronomy. Its date and authorship are indicated in Deut. 31: 24-26: "And it came to pass when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the Law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee."

But, of course, radical criticism can not admit the Mosaic origin of Deuteronomy. If such pure and elevated conceptions of religion as we find in Deuteronomy, such spirituality, faith, and devotion to God as breathed throughout that remarkable book were the product of that far back age of Moses, then the theory of the gradual development of the religion along purely natural lines receives its death-blow, for the spiritual altitudes reached in Deuteronomy are hardly surpassed by any other portion of the Old Testament.

To avoid this rock of destruction, the Wellhausen school assures us that it was not an old, long-neglected book of Moses that Hilkiah found in the temple, as the Scripture narrative implies, but a brand-new book just written by nobody knows who and placed there in the temple for the express purpose of bringing about a general reformation.

To palm off this pious fraud on Josiah and the nation as a genuine work of Moses, and therefore authoritative, the author gives a perfect trans-Jordanic setting and atmosphere to his production. He pictures the children of Israel, their wilderness wanderings over at last, encamped in the land of Moab and about to cross into Canaan. He puts into the mouth of Moses sublimely eloquent and spiritual farewell discourses, embracing a review of the desert journeyings, prophetic warnings and anticipations, the enactment or rehearsal of numberless laws and regulations to guide the people when settled in their new home, closing with the wonderful song and blessings, the whole containing some of

the most exquisite poetry and most beautiful and precious passages to be found anywhere in the Bible.

But this imaginary Moses of Josiah's time is not only a seraphic religious genius, he is also an antiquarian expert. He makes his pages to abound in minutely accurate references to the geography, history, and customs of a foreign region and an age seven centuries earlier than his own.

With this saintly elevation of soul and exact knowledge of antiquities, he combines in one beautifully rounded personality an almost superhuman depth of cunning and ingenuity of deceit. To make the delusion perfect and deceive the very elect as to the true date of his production, he writes in his book the most earnest commands to exterminate the Canaanites, though none remained to be exterminated; he gives explicit orders to destroy the Amalekites, though there were none to destroy; he delivers fervent prohibitions against returning to Egypt, though no one had dreamed of doing such a thing for centuries. Pages of such utterly misleading commands, pleadings, and warnings, in language of tender expostulation or fiery threatening, he writes in his book, ludicrously inappropriate to his own time, but perfectly fitting the far distant age of Israel's entrance into Canaan and the traditional character of her great leader and law-giver.

But further, since even an idiot or a blind man could see or feel the difference between a freshly written parchment, on which the ink was hardly dry, and an old, mouldy, defaced volume that had lain neglected in the temple for generations, our anonymous combination of Isaiah and Machiavelli, St. Paul and Judas Iscariot, stains and discolors his document to such an appearance of hoar antiquity that he fools all the literary and religious experts of his day and the whole Jewish and Christian world since, till DeWitte, Wellhausen & Co., 2,500 years later, expose the fraud.

And Jeremiah, one of the greatest and best of God's inspired prophets, was right there at the time. Either Jeremiah was duped, or else, as several radical critics maintain, he was a party to the fraud. A knave or a fool—we can take our choice. And, by the way, this reckless wreckage of great reputations is one of the amiable features of the radical criticism.

We are persuaded that to any fair and open-minded reader of the book of Deuteronomy, stamped as it is with the visible imprint of the Mosaic age and environment, the Mosaic unity of thought and style, the Mosaic character, genius and unique personality, and the Mosaic prophetic inspiration, the theory that it was the fabrication of an unknown forger who lived seven centuries later, will appear an incredibility of the first magnitude. As a German critic exclaims, "What a swallowing of camels is here." It is one of the logically astounding consequences of trying to estimate and understand the play of Hamlet, with Hamlet, that is God, left out.

It is distressing to note what straits some of the radical critics who obediently accept the conclusions of the dominant critical school are reduced to, in their endeavor to harmonize these radical conclusions with their conservative sense of the supernatural worth and sanctifying power of the Scriptures. To harmonize these two is an arduous task. But Canon Cheyne is equal to it. This difficult field is his self-chosen province and specialty. Diffidence is not the infirmity of his noble mind. One objection I have long had to his work on Jeremiah is, that, despite his utmost care, his own intellectual and spiritual superiority to the prophet will betray itself, and especially his far more exact knowledge of the times in which Jeremiah lived. This patronizing attitude, however natural under the circumstances, reminds one a little unpleasantly of Thos. Carlyle's Life of Sterling.

Cheyne accepts the radical conclusion that Deuteronomy was manufactured in the time of Josiah. He says in one place that Jeremiah was a joint author of it, in another that Hilkiah, who found the book, and Huldah, the prophetess, who endorsed it as genuine, were parties to the pious fraud. Says the Canon, "The dislike of reverent Bible readers for the theory of pious fraud is an exaggerated one." Just the mathematically proper measure of dislike we ought to feel for a pious fraud he does not tell us.

But how does Cheyne resolve the moral difficulty involved? He gravely informs us that, "what Hilkiah practiced was not deceit nor delusion, but illusion." What a wonder we had never thought of this simple and masterly solution! "Not delusion. but illusion." Shame on us for the sneaking suspicion we had

that this "Canon"-ized saint was the ancestor of Ananias and Sapphira!

And, can Cheyne spiritually enjoy the "literary fiction" of this "imaginary Moses?" Enjoy it? Why, he can hardly control his emotions. "He was a noble writer," he exclaims; "the holy affectionateness of Moses as he is here represented is most affecting." "I can enjoy the book as a whole as much as anyone, and can admire"—admire what? Its spiritual power? Its prophetic foresight? Its ardor of devotion to God?—"the skill with which the different parts have been put together." The ingenuity of its putting together is truly an object of delightful and sanctifying contemplation. "It is a *fine* imaginative account," he continues, "of the latter days of Moses, and I glow with pleasure as I read the concluding words, There hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses."

Now the Canon, by reason of his training in radical criticism, may be able to "glow" over this imaginative masterpiece, but I fancy the ordinary Christian, lacking the trained moral sense to appreciate the satisfying distinction between "delusion" and "illusion," will say to himself, "They have taken away my Deuteronomy, and I know not where they have laid it."

I repeat, in closing, that for the Higher Critics as such we have only admiring appreciation. Their studies have enlarged and rectified our knowledge of God's word in many important particulars. But the radical teachings of the present overlords of the critical realm and their copyists, whose conclusions are determined in advance by their infidel excision of everything in the Bible that is supernatural, are so revolutionary in their character, and involve such various and piled up incredibilities, that they are an equal shock to both Christian sensibility and common sense. Signs of a reaction are already visible.

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