

THAT MONSTER

THE HIGHER CRITIC

BY

MARVIN R. VINCENT, D.D.

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THAT MONSTER, THE HIGHER CRITIC.

Is the Biblical critic a dangerous, devouring beast?

A good many think so: at least a good many have an impression to that effect, which is a quite different thing from thinking. Nevertheless, impressions often carry people farther than intelligent opinions; and just because a mere impression, in seven cases out of ten, is untruthful, and because it cannot give a rational account of itself, and therefore does the more mischief,—it needs to be dealt with.

UNREASONING PANIC.

There is a story of a wag who laid a wager that he would break up a country menagerie and circus. Accordingly, when the rustic crowd had duly inspected the elephant and the hyenas, and were seated round the arena eagerly awaiting the entrance of the clown and the bareback rider, he rushed into the ring, waving his hat, and shouting: “Ladies and gentlemen, save yourselves! The Gy-as-cutus has broke loose!!” Dire was the panic that followed; numerous the bruises and scratches; appalling the damage to bonnets and draperies; but the tent was emptied at last, and the farmers and their wives and daughters were jogging homeward and congratulating each other on their escape, when it occurred to some of them to ask: “What *is* a gyascutus, anyway?”

The story very well illustrates one aspect of the popular attitude towards Biblical criticism. Upon the settled faith and tranquil content of a large body of Christians, breaks the cry, "The higher criticism has broken loose!" It is charging, head on, with smoking nostrils, against the Bible! It means destruction to the faith once delivered to the saints. Meanwhile few stop to ask, "What is higher criticism, anyway?" The majority run; that is, they evade the question with some such irrelevant platitude as "The old Bible is good enough for me." A few more determined souls, never for a moment doubting that higher criticism, whatever it may mean, is something deadly, "set the teeth and stretch the nostril wide," and solemnly affirm that Higher Criticism must be exterminated and the higher critics suppressed.

Might it not be worth while to ask whether there is any reasonable ground for this panic? "What *is* the gyascutus?" If we must fight a wild beast it is a great advantage to know the nature and the habits of the animal, and whether he can do all the damage of which he is said to be capable. It is said that the devil, in the form of an ox, once met Cuvier, the naturalist, and threatened to eat him up, whereupon Cuvier replied, "Can't do it: graminivorous!" It might possibly appear, on a closer inquiry, that the Higher Criticism is not, on the whole, an evilly disposed beast. It might possibly appear, incredible as it may seem, that he delights to browse in the green pastures of the Word, and to drink of the still waters of Siloa's brook. It might be found quite unnecessary to chain or to muzzle him, even in the dooryards of the defenders of the faith.

THE POPULAR IMPRESSION OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND
HOW IT IS FOSTERED.

If we try to define the impression which largely prevails concerning Biblical criticism, we find that it is substantially this: that criticism of the Bible means picking flaws in the Bible. Criticism, in the popular vocabulary, is synonymous with fault-finding, an utterly mistaken and one-sided conception. Again: that criticism of the Bible implies distrust of the Bible, or positive hostility to the Bible: that Biblical criticism is allied to infidelity: that a Biblical critic is a presumptuous intruder upon holy ground, an ungodly agitator, who is bent on undermining the sacredness and authority of Holy Scripture: that his function is, *per se*, superfluous and reprehensible. "Why," it is asked, "should the Bible be criticised at all? Is it not a sacred book, inspired of God, an infallible manual, to be implicitly received and unquestioningly believed? Why cannot the critics let the Bible alone?"

A few illustrations will show the use which is made of this impression in aggravating the popular suspicion.

A very eminent living divine was quoted some time ago as saying: "I see the divine authorship of the Bible as plainly as I see the authorship of the stars; . . . and when the critics pick away at the Bible, I say, 'Well, it is no great matter; if it gratifies them it does not hurt me. As long as all the universities in the world combined are not able to make another Bible that shall be so cosmical in its range of appeal, and so mighty in its power over men and women, over

mind and heart and life, and over the growing civilization itself to which it ministers, I rest assured that this is God's book and not man's.' ”

This statement is eloquent and telling. Moreover, it tells the truth ; and yet the truth is put in such a way as to create a wrong impression. Any Christian scholar would indorse what is said of the power of appeal and the evidence of divinity residing in the Bible itself, and also the contempt implied for a hostile, petty, captious criticism of the Bible. But the writer makes no distinction between critics. His phrase, “the critics,” is sweeping, and the whole passage implies a contemptuous tolerance of the Biblical critic *as such*. I do not assert that the author meant this ; but if he did not, his mode of expression was unguarded.

Another clergyman, also living, stated that in a certain theological seminary the students were told, in the theological lecture-room, the truth about the divine inspiration and authority of the Scriptures ; but that on coming under the hands of the New Testament professor, they were told that it was doubtful whether the last twelve verses of the second gospel were written by Mark.

Now both these statements were truthful, and yet they were combined in such a way as to make the whole statement false : that is to say, a contrast was made and emphasized which did not exist except in the writer's imagination. The impression he meant to convey was that sound, orthodox teaching in one department was offset by false and dangerous criticism in the other department. It was a cry of “gyascutus !” The writer was holding up a scarecrow. He may have be-

lieved in it, and have been as much scared as anybody, but it was a scarecrow none the less, and nothing else. Suppose the New Testament professor did say that, as he ought to have done if he did his duty, what of it? What *is* the gyascutus? If the accuser did not know that Biblical students for years have observed a striking difference between the diction of those twelve verses and that of the rest of the gospel, leading them to suspect that those verses were by another hand,—he was inexcusably ignorant of what, as a seminary graduate and a public teacher of Scripture, he ought to have known. Suppose the verses *were* by another hand. What difference does it make? The last verses of John's gospel are by another hand than John's. Moses certainly did not write the account of his own death in Deuteronomy.

A certain professor in another theological seminary stated in his inaugural address that he had on his table twenty-five books (I think that was the number, but a few more or less makes no difference) from which he had been trying to find out what Higher Criticism is, and that he had been unable to discover. The statement was so startling that a dignitary on the platform who has made himself conspicuous in the war against the higher critics, declared that *he* could have told him that. We are bound to believe the Professor's statement, but it was a proclamation of his own ignorance and a significant comment upon his competency as an instructor of young men. Yet he is one of the men who utters diatribes against the higher critics, and swells the cry, "The gyascutus has broke loose!"

Such illustrations might be multiplied almost indefi-

nately. Similar utterances come from pulpits, from denominational journals, and from speeches in ecclesiastical bodies. They all go to proclaim, not this or that position of Biblical critics, but the function of the Biblical critic, and the Biblical critic himself as such, and the science of Biblical criticism for the most part, as things to be suspected and kept at arm's length.

It may be freely granted, for the fact is notorious, that there is a criticism and a class of critics hostile to the Bible. The equipment of such critics is, in many cases, formidable. They are ripe scholars, deft and plausible reasoners, and vigorous thinkers. Their principles of interpretation are utterly rationalistic. They deny the supernatural in the evolution of Christian history: their aim is mainly destructive, and their conclusions, if generally accepted, would practically rob the church of the Bible. But, while this is undeniable, how utterly unfair it is to make such critics alone representative of Biblical criticism: in other words, to throw all Biblical criticism and all Biblical critics indiscriminately into one pile, and to label the pile with the name of its worst and most dangerous element.

THE TERM "HIGHER CRITICISM."

As already hinted, the term "Higher Criticism" awakens special apprehensions. One who might possibly confront the name "critic" with reasonable composure, finds the chills running down his back at the mention of a *higher* critic. He is a gyascutus of a peculiarly large, ferocious, and destructive species.

I am not aware that the addition of the word "higher" materially affects the state of the case. Very

much more has been made out of that unfortunate adjective than has any basis in fact. I certainly have no stand to make for the term "Higher Criticism." I might be disposed to think it infelicitous, not sufficiently explicit or comprehensive. The distinction between a lower and a higher critic is mainly technical. But to assume that because a term is not felicitous its meaning is therefore indefinite, is nonsense, and is in the face of all experience. Nothing is more capricious than the origin and application of names, and names stick, and have a sharp and definite meaning long after the circumstances of their origin have been forgotten. Higher Criticism means simply *literary* criticism, including all literary and historical questions raised by the composition and contents of the Biblical writings. Lower Criticism is *textual* criticism, embracing all that relates to the restoration of the Biblical text to its original form. Higher criticism has therefore a simple and perfectly definite meaning, understood by every scholar, and capable of being understood by any person of ordinary intelligence. As already hinted, a great deal too much has been made of the distinction between lower and higher criticism, so that the distinction has been magnified into a bugbear. The two go together. A sound literary criticism must always be based on a correct text, and the ideal critic must always be both a lower and a higher critic. As a writer in the July number of the *Contemporary Review* justly observes, "It would be difficult to say why careful and learned discussion on grounds of internal evidence should be called 'higher' than equally careful and equally learned discussion on grounds of external evidence. Both,

evidently, are capable of fully exercising the highest powers of the human mind, though it is easier and cheaper to conduct the former badly, and a more delicate and difficult matter to perform it well."

Let me give a single illustration. A student reads the gospel of Mark in the original Greek text, and carefully observes its literary peculiarities—its diction and style, its imagery, its phrasing, how far its diction is affected by the Hebrew tongue and by Hebrew moods of thought, and many other peculiarities. He finds in the history of Eusebius a quotation from a very early church father, Papias, to the effect that Mark wrote down the reminiscences of Christ's life as he heard them from Peter in his preaching or in private interviews with him. This leads him to investigate the genuineness of this passage of Papias, and to study the writings ascribed to Peter in the New Testament. In these writings he discovers a great many of the characteristics which appear in Mark. Then he turns to the book of Acts in which several of Peter's speeches are reported, and which contains certain narratives which must have proceeded from Peter himself, such as the healing of the cripple at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison. In the style and diction of these he finds the same characteristics which appear in Mark and in the first Epistle of Peter. He draws from these comparisons certain important and interesting conclusions; as, for instance, that Papias was right, that Mark's gospel contains reminiscences of Christ's life and sayings drawn in great part from the testimony of Peter, and therefore of an eye-witness: that the first Epistle as-

cribed to Peter was really his work: that there was a definite stream of Petrine tradition on which the author of the Acts drew. That is one of the simpler processes of Higher Criticism, but it will serve to illustrate the thing itself. It is a specimen of hundreds of inquiries applied to both Testaments with a view to determine on internal grounds the authorship and the history of the composition of different books. No sane person imagines that there is anything impious, presumptuous, heretical, or diabolical in such processes.

WHAT IS CRITICISM?

But let us now ask, *What is criticism?* since a misconception or partial conception of that word underlies much of the popular unrest concerning this subject.

Its fundamental idea is *separation*. It is derived from a Greek verb meaning "to separate." If I have in a basket fifty sound apples and twenty which are more or less rotted, and I put the sound apples into one pile and the rotten ones into another, that is criticism. But that process implies *judgment*, which pronounces an apple sound or unsound. Out of the primary meaning of the Greek word, "to separate," grew the secondary meaning, "to judge," since judgment always implies a separation of the true from the false; of the bad from the good; of reliable evidence from doubtful evidence. In so simple a matter as that of the apples, the process of judgment is easy. If one were called upon to decide as to the respective quality of a dozen diamonds, more knowledge and practised

skill would be demanded; and the sifting of the evidence on which turns the life or the death of an accused man often requires the highest wisdom.

Now there is presented to us a collection of documents known as the New Testament. On examining this collection we find ourselves compelled to sort out and classify and pass judgment on certain facts which attach to the different documents. For instance, we find that they have been composed by different authors and therefore exhibit different characteristics. We find that several of them are by the same author, and therefore exhibit similar characteristics. We find that reasons are assigned for suspecting that one or more of the documents were not composed by the author to whom they have commonly been ascribed. For example, we may hesitate, after weighing the evidence, to assign the Epistle to the Hebrews to Paul, or the second Petrine Epistle to Peter.

Again we find that there are two distinct elements running through all the documents of both Testaments. One of these is elevated, heart-searching, prophetic—in short, divine: the other betrays the operation of human modes of thought, employs current forms of speech and statements based on scientific notions now obsolete; is marked at times by careless writing or error of detail—an element which is distinctly human.

Similarly, we may find reason to inquire whether certain passages have not been inserted in the original documents. For example, is the story of the angel descending periodically into the pool of Bethesda a part of the original narrative, or is it a popu-

lar legend, originally written in the margin by way of comment, and afterwards inserted in the text by some copyist? Was the story of the woman taken in adultery a part of John's original gospel?

All such matters force themselves upon the conscientious student. He cannot evade them. He must examine them and form an opinion about them. He must draw lines between the work of one author and the work of another; between the original text and interpolations; between the genuine and the corrupted text; between the human element and the divine. He is a critic in spite of himself. His criticism is not the outcome of individual caprice; it is no diabolical contrivance deliberately aimed at the integrity of Scripture. It is simply the honest dealing of a fair and trained mind with phenomena which are patent. These phenomena are not imaginary, they are facts which demand explanation.

Criticism, in some form or other, begins the moment that one begins to study his Bible intelligently. No intelligent person can regard the Bible as one solid block of divine truth of uniform texture and grain throughout. Its varieties assert themselves on the very surface. Its books belong to different eras and have their distinctive marks. They have grown out of different local circumstances, and have been shaped by them. The Psalms are the products of different ages and authors. The first Corinthian Epistle grew out of one set of events, the second out of another, and the Epistle to the Romans out of another. No one who overlooks these facts can understand his Bible; but the tracing out and defining and classifying of these differ-

ences is criticism, and higher criticism. Criticism is not of scholars' making, but of the Bible's making, of God's making.

Suppose a critic makes a mistake, as he often does. Suppose a critic abuses the resources of scholarship, and employs them to undermine the sacredness and the authority of Scripture: such facts do not make against the value or the necessity of Biblical criticism, nor expose it to just vituperation. The fact that a man now and then uses an axe for the murder of his neighbor, or hurts somebody by a careless stroke, does not prove that an axe is a bad and hurtful thing. On such a mode of reasoning we should be compelled to reject the Bible itself, since no book has been more abused or made the instrument of more mischief.

Such things are rudimentary and self-evident to scholars; but I am not writing for scholars, neither am I setting up a man of straw for the purpose of knocking him down. The popular objection to Biblical criticism does not turn on the distinction between Higher and Lower Criticism, or on any other distinction within the field of criticism. It lies against Biblical criticism as such. The very name suggests mischief. Any critic is an intruder on holy ground. The Bible is not a subject for criticism, and should be let alone.

A FALSE ISSUE BETWEEN IGNORANT PIETY AND INTELLIGENT CRITICISM.

Now our discussion has nothing to do with the adaptations of the Bible to the lowly and uneducated. That it has a mission to such no one thinks of denying. If

the Bible were for scholars only, it would be useless to a very large part of the world. But there is a fearful amount of pious platitude in circulation, the general drift of which is to set believing ignorance over against critical study to the disparagement of the latter. The contrast between the "carping critic" and the "humble believer" has been worn threadbare, and like many such stock phrases, carries with it a falsehood. For while there are carping critics and humble believers, "carping" does not represent the whole body of Biblical critics any more than "humble" represents the whole body of believers. In many cases it would be much more to the point to contrast the carping believer with the humble critic.

In any case, the issue between pious ignorance and intelligent criticism of the Scriptures is an utterly false issue. While, as already remarked, the Bible has the power, under the influence of the Divine Spirit, to impart to the lowly and the unlearned a rule and ideal of faith and duty, an incentive to fidelity, and a comfort in sorrow, it is a fair question how large a proportion of such results is due to the Bible alone without the intervention of the human teacher. The Bible never disparages knowledge. It emphasizes it and presses it on its readers as an object of diligent search. Whatever it may give to an ignorant faith, it gives far more richly to an intelligent faith. Hence, I repeat, it is palpably absurd to raise an issue between an intelligent criticism and a blind and passive and credulous acceptance of Scripture, assuming some special illumination on the part of the unlearned which puts him at advantage as against the scholar: to say that "the insight of

a saint is of more value than the skill of a grammarian." That may be or may not be. It is entirely possible that an uneducated laborer, firmly grounded in the faith of Christ, might find in the gospel of John something which the author of "Supernatural Religion" could not discover. None the less it remains true that there is that in Scripture which the mere insight of a saint cannot apprehend or deal with. There are certain things which are revealed to the wise and prudent and are hidden from babes. If there is a region where the saint sees more and farther than the grammarian, there is also a region where the saint cannot see without the aid of the grammarian, and where the saint, if he attempts to play the role of interpreter or instructor, only makes himself and the Bible ridiculous. It is quite true that "the natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God," and that "they are foolishness unto him"; but it is also true that the spiritual man needs something more than spiritual illumination to enable him to weigh the evidence for a reading, to correct a mistranslation, or to settle a question of grammar, history, or archæology. The insight of a saint gives little or no help in determining the authenticity of Second Peter, or in explaining the meaning of baptism for the dead, and of the woman's having power on her head because of the angels. Piety, by itself, is helpless in the presence of such questions. Criticism alone cannot mount on textual and syntactical ladders to the beatific vision, but neither is pious ignorance winged for that flight.

The critical spirit and furnishing, balanced by a genuine faith, is that which always gets the best and the

most out of the Bible. To set these two against each other is to put asunder what God hath joined together, and grossly to slander both God and the Bible. The true formula is not "criticism *or* faith," but "criticism *and* faith." The man who regards his Bible as something to be merely received passively and believed unquestioningly, practically degrades into a child's primer the book which is adapted to stimulate and feed and train his best mental and spiritual powers. It is true that some people never get beyond the primer. Let us by all means be thankful for the primer, but let us not assert that the primer fills the place of literature. The Bible shows its divine character by inviting and encouraging the spirit of inquiry which is the foundation of all criticism. How a man can be in contact with God in a book or anywhere else and not ask questions it is hard to conceive.

CRITICAL TESTS LEGITIMATE.

Hence nothing can be more radically false than the position that the Bible is above criticism, and that it is the sacred duty of scholarship to let it alone: that it is a charmed thing, invested with a superstitious sanctity, fenced off from ordinary modes of investigation and treatment. That is a popular delusion which must be effectually dissipated before the Bible can take its true and high place in human thought. Such a seclusion of the Bible works more mischief than all the incursions of the most rampant and hostile criticism, because it belies the true character and intent of the Bible, which is most truly divine in being so intensely human. It has been evolved under human conditions: it has

developed itself co-ordinately with the history of the church and out of it: it communicates with men through ordinary human media: it uses human words and human figures of speech: it appeals to human qualities: it carries a revelation given "by divers portions and in divers manners" through individuals of different characters, temperaments, and attainments: its inspiration resides in characters rather than in documents, and finds its highest expression in the testimony of the God-man Jesus which is the spirit of prophecy. The medium of the revelation must be human if it is to be intelligible. If it is not intelligible it is not divine, and if it is human it must submit itself to critical tests such as are applied to other books. It cannot refuse the criteria appropriate to those human media through which God has chosen to transmit it. Hence the Bible is fairly subject to those literary, grammatical, historical, philological, and psychological tests which are applicable to Homer or Dante or Shakespeare.

On any other ground the Bible can never be successfully vindicated in the eyes of scholarly and fair-minded men. They will say: It is all very well for the Bible to appeal to faith, but if it cannot also appeal to fact, and sound reason and common sense, it is not worth fighting over. It is easy enough for you to prove the book to be anything you claim, provided you are allowed to suppress all testimony save such as you choose to adduce. The Bible is pre-eminently historical. It professes to relate facts and to relate them in sequence. If you refuse to have those facts tested by ordinary historical canons, you create a presumption of intentional falsification. You proclaim yourselves sus-

picious of the truth of Biblical history. The Bible is a literary product. It cannot evade literary tests: we laugh at a claim to an inspiration which exempts it from these or renders it superior to them. The Bible employs logic, and appeals to human reason. Let us test its logic by the rules which we apply to Aristotle or to Bacon. The alternative of such criticism is passive acceptance on authority, and this we absolutely refuse. The Bible comes down into our homes and marts, speaking our language, clothed in our forms of thought, and peremptorily claiming absolute mastery. It utters commands, and promises rewards, and threatens penalties. If it has a divine right to speak thus, it condemns many of our opinions and practices. But if it commands and threatens and promises and condemns on our ground, it must vindicate itself on our ground. It shall not be allowed to throw stones and launch darts, and then retreat behind the walls of a supernatural sanctity, declaring that it will not have the temper of its mail tried by our spear-points.

FATAL EFFECT OF A DEFENSE OF SCRIPTURE ON FALSE
 GROUNDS.

Nothing can be more disastrous to truth than a defense upon false grounds. The work of the reverent critic is also made necessary by the professed friends of the Bible; and the Bible has suffered more at the hands of these than from its declared enemies.

Nothing stands the enemy of Scripture in better stead than to have its friends and defenders assume untenable ground: to make claims for it which have no foundation in fact; for thus the true issues are con-

cealed; the real danger to the enemy is evaded; the conflict is shifted to ground where the assailant has a real advantage, and which the defenders themselves have furnished him.

For example, a challenger of the authority of Scripture is met with the sweeping assertion that the Bible is authoritative because every word and line has been so directly and infallibly inspired by God as to make it without error of any kind, verbal or historical. As a fact, the authority of the Bible does not rest upon verbal inerrancy, but upon something quite different and far higher and more convincing: but the defender chooses his own ground, and sacrifices the higher ground for the inferior and utterly indefensible position where the challenger is only too glad to carry on the fight. He turns the position, carries it by square and proved denial. He confronts the assertion with the Bible itself. He says that the Bible *does* contain errors of detail, and he points them out. He is entirely right. He scores a legitimate victory, and the defender of the Bible sustains a defeat which he need not have suffered if he had been wise enough to take different and higher and defensible ground. The case is all the worse when the representatives of a great Christian body, in council assembled, plant themselves upon this position, asserting the dogma of verbal inerrancy, and insisting that the teachers of the church shall accept and proclaim it under penalty of disfranchisement. In registering for themselves an imagined triumph, they register for themselves a crushing defeat, a verdict which a better educated sense of the character and claims of Scripture is certain to re-

verse within no long time. Meanwhile there is rejoicing in the tents of the enemy. The church has deliberately selected a position where his batteries can rake it. It has arrayed its own scholarship against itself: it has brought down on itself the indignation of its most intelligent and fair-minded members, and has sensibly weakened its hold on their loyalty. It has solemnly committed hari-kari before a sneering crowd of atheists and rationalists.

SOUND CRITICISM DEMANDED BY THE EXTENSIVE PER-
VERSION OF SCRIPTURE.

This is only one of hundreds of illustrations which show the mischief wrought by the assumption of false positions by the defenders of Scripture. A true and sound criticism is imperatively demanded at this point, a constructive criticism, to set forth what the Bible really is, and what the Bible really says. Thoughtful Bible-readers would be more awake to this necessity if they could be made to see how terribly the Bible has been overlaid and obscured and twisted and misread throughout the entire history of the church. It is one of the most disheartening and humiliating records in the history of religion. Some one once said of the Dutch people that a sufficient proof of their greatness lay in the fact that they were above water at all; and it might with equal truthfulness be said that one of the strongest evidences of the divine origin and quality of the Bible is its survival of its expounders. It has suffered more from its friends than from its enemies. The great, distinctive fact which, along with much that is reverent, earnest, and scholarly, marks the his-

tory of Biblical exegesis down to the Reformation period, and which reasserts itself subsequently,—is the practical rejection of the *actual* Bible, and the persistent effort to run it into the moulds of tradition, mysticism, philosophical speculation, scholasticism, and ecclesiastical dogma. This is no loose assertion. It is a matter of historical fact which any competent student can verify for himself, and it is by no means a thing of the past only.

The Bible has been practically turned against itself. It has furnished ideas which men have developed after their own fashion and to serve their own ends, insisting that the Bible was constructed after that fashion and for those ends. The Bible has been cited in justification of every conceivable monstrosity of speculation, of every theological nightmare, of every refinement of cruelty, of every whim of crank or fanatic, of every ghastly moral or religious hobby which has disfigured Christian history.

“The Devil can quote Scripture for his purpose.”

—“in religion

What damned error but some sober brow
Will bless it and approve it with a text,
Hiding its grossness with fair ornament.”

The Jewish translators of the Old Testament, about three hundred years before Christ, whose Greek translation was the Bible of Christ's and Paul's times, garbled the original Scripture in order to make it more acceptable to Gentile readers, and to conceal its blows at their own national conceit. They inserted rabbinical legends, they struck out or changed passages which

reflected upon the character of Jewish heroes or exposed the moral delinquencies of their ancestors.

In the days of Christ the Old Testament Scriptures were so overloaded with the enormous mass of rabbinic interpretation and comment, that the law itself was superseded and despised. The plainest sayings of Scripture were resolved into another sense, and it was declared by one of the Rabbis that he who renders a verse of Scripture as it appears, says what is not true. It was assumed that the Pentateuch was a continuous enigma, and that a meaning was to be found in every monosyllable, and a mystic sense in every hook and flourish of the letters. Jesus was literally justified in saying, "Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect through your tradition."

In the succeeding period Scripture suffered at the hands of allegorical interpretation, by which the law of Moses and the histories of Scripture became well-nigh unrecognizable. Genesis was declared to be a system of psychology and ethics, and the different individuals who figure in that book—Abraham, Sarah, Jacob,—denote different states of the soul. The Church Fathers—Irenæus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen—alter, misquote, introduce Jewish legends, and resolve the plainest statements and narrations into allegory. Anything which Origen thought could not be literally true, such as the stories of Noah's drunkenness and Lot's incest, any Old Testament precept which seemed to him unjust, he interpreted in a mystical sense.

In the period from the seventh to the twelfth century, the church claimed to be the sole infallible inter-

preter of Scripture, and treated the study of the original tongues as little better than a crime. In the scholastic era, the Bible served as the handmaid of Aristotle. We are suffering to-day from the new scholasticism of the post-Reformation era, built on party creeds, and fettering and emasculating a sound exegesis by an arbitrary and dictatorial confessionalism. The seventeenth century formulas identified inspiration with mechanical, literal, verbal infallibility; called the writers of Scripture "amanuenses of God," "hands of Christ," "scribes and notaries of the Holy Spirit," "living and writing pens." It was asserted formally that the very vowel-points and accents of the Hebrew Bible were divinely inspired, an assertion which was substantially reiterated in the presence of the New York Presbytery by one of the prosecutors of Dr. Briggs.

Time and space would alike fail to depict what the Bible has endured at the hands of popular expounders, half-trained or untrained, in sensational sermons, in motto-texts, in expositions, the atrocities of which would fill volumes, in which the preacher may be seen "riding furiously," Jehu-like, across country, some rampant fancy of his own. There is too much truth in the remark of a living scholar, that "preachers have become privileged misinterpreters."

The foregoing is only a slight and imperfect sketch. The details are innumerable, and are frightful to any sincere lover of the Bible. They prove, however, the imperative need of a sound, devout, scholarly, courageous, searching criticism applied to restore to the church the Bible as it is. They go to show that the best modern criticism is a new Protestantism which

faces the *real* Bible and labors to clear away the mountains of trash under which church councils, theological systems, and individual conceits have buried it. It is high time that a new face should be put on this matter; that the true critic should be recognized as a restorer and not as a destroyer: not as the impostor in the Arabian story, going about and offering to give new lamps for old ones, but as the true magician, holding up in the face of the dogmatists, pulpit mountebanks, false interpreters, packed councils, and heresy hunters of all ages, past and present, the old Word, which "is a lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path."

"THE OLD BIBLE IS GOOD ENOUGH FOR ME."

We often hear it said: "The old Bible is good enough for me;" and the phrase carries with it a savor of mingled pathos, piety, and humility which is very captivating to an untrained sense. The old Bible is good enough for you! So it ought to be good enough for you or for any one else. But you mean by the "old Bible" the Bible with a multitude of perversions, false interpretations, false applications, false theories of its origin and purpose sticking to it and encrusting it like so many barnacles. When you say that the old Bible is good enough for you, you mean that you would rather have the barnacled Bible than the pure original. You mean that you do not want the barnacles disturbed; and that you regard any attempt upon the barnacles as impertinent presumption. You mean that you are too indolent or too ignorant to face and examine the results of scholarly criticism, and that you

resent the intrusion upon your indolence and the exposure of your ignorance. You strike at the men who come to give you the real thing which you affect to prize. You call them hard names and drive them from your fellowship; and you probably think that you are doing this in the interest of Christian peace and truth. You are terribly deceived. You do not want the old Bible; but the Bible of the schools, of the allegorists, of the scholastic theologians, of the sensational preachers. The old Bible is not good enough for you.

IS THE HIGHER CRITIC A RESTORER?

But is it true, can it be shown to be true that the higher critic is a restorer and not a destroyer? Can any real advance in Biblical knowledge, any substantial helps to Biblical interpretation, any sounder theories of interpretation, any new light upon the historical relations of Scripture, any effective vindication of assailed books of either Testament be pointed out as the work of the higher critics? In reply it may be said, summarily, that nearly every real advance in the methods of Biblical study, and nearly every most solid and important contribution to both the interpretation and the defence of Scripture in the last century, is due to higher criticism. In the bitter, unchristian, and utterly indiscriminating attack upon the higher Biblical criticism, many of the leaders and promoters of that attack have been like a man who is living on the riches of his benefactor and endeavoring to poison him at the same time. For they are using freely in their defences of the faith, in their homilies, in their Bible-classes, in their written articles, results which have been won for them by the

higher critics. The pulpits generally throughout the country are to-day dispensing arguments and statements and defences founded upon the results of higher criticism. And if one were disposed to turn the tables and to enter upon heresy-hunting, he might easily find grounds for a most edifying array of presentations to ecclesiastical courts, in the books which perhaps the majority of their members are using, and which some of them are publicly recommending. Let any one, for example, study Funk and Wagnalls' advertising circular of Meyer's Commentary, and note the authors of the numerous hearty indorsements which appear therein. And yet Dr. Meyer never hesitates to say that a New Testament writer has made a mistake. He denies the authenticity of Matthew's gospel and of the Pastoral Epistles, and resolves into poetical legend Luke's story of the infancy of Jesus.

If these gentlemen, in short, could succeed in eliminating from the Biblical literature and the Biblical teaching of this day all the results of the higher criticism, they would spoil most of their own "crack" sermons, besides putting back Biblical knowledge two centuries at least.

HIGHER CRITICISM NO NOVELTY.

It possibly needs to be said that higher criticism is no new thing. There is, I believe, an impression on some minds that it is a "brand new" invention. If some of its assailants had read a little more widely, they would have discovered that many of the matters which they are treating as obnoxious novelties had been discussed before they were born, and that some of the conclusions which they are busily denouncing as horri-

ble and heretical have long been accepted facts in the churches of England and of Germany. There is still a disposition in orthodox circles to suspect everything on Biblical or theological topics which issues from Germany. "German rationalism" is a cant phrase in the mouths of many who use it with only the vaguest sense of its meaning. Over forty years ago Henry B. Smith caustically remarked that "the indiscriminate censure of all that is German, or that may be so called, is a sign rather of the power of prejudice than of a rational love for all truth."

WHAT IS DUE TO GERMANY.

It may be freely granted that Germany has evolved some theological and philosophical monstrosities, which is not altogether strange in view of the titanic struggle through which her faith has passed, and from which it has not yet wholly emerged. Yet it remains true that *no nation of Christendom has equalled Germany in the amount and value of its contributions to the accurate knowledge and sound interpretation of the Scriptures.* To Germany are due the most important and decisive vindications of the New Testament against the assaults of destructive criticism.

Let us look at a few instances. Ferdinand Christian Baur died in 1860. He was a man of immense learning, wonderful historic grasp, and great controversial acuteness. His theory of the origin of the New Testament writings struck at the historic roots of at least two-thirds of them. It involved the rejection of the four Gospels and of the Acts, and the spuriousness of all but four of the Pauline Epistles. It assumed that

the primitive church was divided into two antagonistic parties represented respectively by Peter and by Paul, Peter standing for the primitive orthodoxy, and Paul being regarded as an innovator and a heretic; and that the Book of Revelation was a veiled attack on Paul and his followers. Most of the New Testament writings were composed either in the interest of one of these two parties or with a view to reconcile them.

This theory, maintained with great learning and ingenuity, became the nucleus of a school in Germany, and exerted some influence in England; but its main positions were successfully refuted, and are generally abandoned even in Germany. They were stormed and carried by higher critics—by the school of Schleiermacher, by Bleek, Ewald, Meyer, and Ritschl. None the less Baur rendered a vast and permanent service to sound Biblical criticism and to New Testament study by his development of the principle of historic as distinguished from literary criticism, the principle that a New Testament book must be studied in the light of its historical setting. This principle is now universally accepted by all critical schools as the true basis of New Testament study, and has had a large influence in placing the New Testament books on a firmer and more defensible foundation in the minds of Christian scholars.

Strauss, in 1835, resolved the gospel narrative into a poetical fiction. His fundamental principle was that nothing which is supernatural can be historical. There is no such thing as an incarnation, and the resurrection of Jesus is “a world-historical humbug.” The issue, pressed home by his telling style and penetrating criticism, was the issue between a real Christ and a mythi-

cal dream. There was no god-man as a person. All that we have is a Christ-idea, the result of the Jewish belief that the Messiah would work miracles, and of the persuasion of Jesus' disciples that he was that Messiah. The "Life of Jesus" aroused a tempest in Germany, and its positions found adherents in both England and America. Some hints of its influence upon the younger minds of England may be found in that delightful book by Henry Rogers, "The Eclipse of Faith." To-day Strauss' mythical theory is as dead as himself, thanks to the higher critics. It fell under the fire of Ullmann, Tholuck, and Neander. Neander's "Life of Jesus" was the answer to Strauss'. McClintock translated this for American readers, and later, Dr. George Fisher, of New Haven, another higher critic, effectively exposed the fallacies of Strauss.

Numerous attempts have been made to assign the composition of our gospels to a late date. Baur, for example, placed the fourth Gospel in the latter half of the second century. This question is forced upon every candid student of the New Testament, "When were our gospels written?" since we are dealing with adversaries who are bent on showing that the gospels were composed at least a hundred years after the events which they relate. This, of course, eliminates the testimony of eye-witnesses, and weakens the credibility of all stories of miracles. In 1874 appeared in England the first volume of a book entitled "Supernatural Religion," by an anonymous author. Two more volumes followed. The work passed through several editions, and was trumpeted by the English press as the most dangerous and powerful attack ever made upon the

New Testament. It was a dangerous book to that class of students who are easily moved by daring assertions and by a parade of learning. The author aimed to show that there cannot be found a single distinct trace of any of the first three gospels except the third, during the first century and a half after Christ's death. Canon Joseph B. Lightfoot, afterwards Bishop of Durham, effectively pricked this bladder in a series of papers in the *Contemporary Review*. Bringing to the task a learning far larger than that of the anonymous author, with a dignified courtesy, but with merciless severity, he exposed the shallowness of his pretentious scholarship, and the weakness of his positions, and the book fell from his hands in a state of collapse. Bishop Lightfoot was a higher critic of the very first rank, and an earnest minister of the gospel, against whose piety and devotion to his calling no voice was ever raised. His four remarkable commentaries on Galatians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians, crowded with the processes and results of the higher criticism, are in the libraries of thousands of ministers on both sides of the Atlantic, and furnish sermon-material for hundreds of the men who are declaiming against the higher critics and their works; while his wonderful volumes on the Apostolic Fathers, the last work of his life, deal with some of the most complicated problems of early church history, and furnish important links in the chain of testimony which connects our gospels with the apostolic age.

But perhaps none of the services of the higher criticism surpass in value the vindication of the fourth gospel against the attempts to assign it to another author

and to a later date. The fight over this gospel has raged furiously since the attack inaugurated by Bretschneider in 1820. It cannot be said that the question is finally closed, nor that all its difficulties, some of which are serious, are satisfactorily disposed of. But while, twenty-five years ago, critical scholars would probably have admitted that the external evidence in the case of John's gospel was weaker than that in favor of the other three—they would say to-day that the external evidence for John's gospel is at least equal in amount and strength to the evidence for the synoptic gospels, and not a few would assert that, externally, that gospel is the best attested of the four. The development and marshalling of this vast and imposing array of testimony to the authenticity of the fourth gospel is due exclusively to the higher critics, and, very largely, to German critics. The church throughout the world owes an enormous debt to Neander, Bleek, Schleiermacher, Tholuck, Luthardt, Weiss, and Paul Ewald in Germany; to Godet in Switzerland; to de Presensée in France; to Westcott, Liddon, Lightfoot, and Sanday in England, and to Norton and Ezra Abbot in America. At one time, indeed, the school of Schleiermacher carried their enthusiasm for the fourth gospel to such an extent as practically to disparage the other gospels in comparison.

WHAT IS THE REAL ISSUE?

These illustrations will suffice. They cover points of vital interest to every lover of the Bible, and might easily be multiplied. They settle the question at issue. That question is not whether higher critics have not often assailed the integrity of Scripture:

not whether devout critics have not made mistakes, but whether these assaults and these mistakes are to be taken as representative of Higher Criticism, and whether Higher Criticism as such is to be branded as suspicious, condemned *en masse*, or superciliously whistled down the wind as beneath the notice of orthodoxy. Whistling is a cheap and painfully common accomplishment, and does not imply exceptional musical endowment or attainment. Before this sweeping, indiscriminating verdict is accepted, it might be well to inquire into the qualifications of the jury.

The question, again, is whether the higher critic is an intruder on Biblical ground: whether, apart from his personal attitude, his function is contemptible, superfluous, and dangerous. To this question the history of Biblical research utters an emphatic No! To proclaim the higher critic, as such, the enemy and the assailant of the Bible, and the higher criticism as only rationalistic and shallow, is to proclaim what is radically false, and grossly unfair. Let it be plainly understood that true learning and the scholarship are on the side of the higher criticism and not of its maligners: that the higher criticism is represented by men both in England, Germany, and America, whose attainments, position, and reputation are of the highest order, and whose piety is equal to their learning. The attempt to class as enemies of the Bible such higher critics as Schleiermacher, Tholuck, Neander, Meyer, Weiss, Ritschl in Germany; Westcott, Lightfoot, Sanday, Salmon in England, and Abbot and Briggs in America, not to speak of a multitude of others, is an attempt which must simply recoil upon

its authors. The work of these men speaks for itself. It is not free from error, as no human work is. That it has struck hard at certain accepted traditions, that it has shaken some strongly-rooted conclusions, that it has converted into open questions certain things which had been accepted as axioms, that it has compelled students to approach the Bible from other sides, and to study it under new conditions—is all true, and happily true. But its weight has been steadily on the side of the divine authority, sacredness, and right-reasonableness of Scripture. The patient and self-denying toil of these men, often traversing dreary, arid wastes of an obsolete literature for the verification of a single fact, tracing historical rootlets amid the accumulated rubbish of centuries down to their vanishing point, rummaging tombs and monasteries for manuscripts, bringing to light the buried words of palimpsests by the aid of chemistry, bravely confronting the numerous difficulties and complications of different families of manuscripts in order to get back to the original text—these things are an honor to Christianity. These are not mere loose and general statements. Pages might easily be filled with the proofs. Witness the work of Tischendorf and Tregelles, of Westcott and Hort and Scrivener on the New Testament Text. Witness the discovery and publication of the Sinaitic Codex. Witness the recovery of Tatiau's Diatessaron and the accompanying labors of Moesinger, Zahn, Ciasca and others. Witness the recovery of the Apology of Aristides, of the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, of the Gospel and Apocalypse of Peter, and the numerous careful and critical discussions of their bearing on the evi-

dence for the early existence and authority of the gospels.

What have the assailants and insulters of the higher critics to show in comparison? Let that comparison be faced and pressed. Buckle used to say, when a man was pointed out to him as distinguished, "What has he done?" We throw down the challenge to the men who are vilifying the higher critics as the enemies of the Bible: What have *you* done for the advancement of Biblical study? What do your leaders represent? Produce your catalogue of names. Produce their books, their researches, their discoveries, and let us see how it compares with the work of the higher critics.

I have thus endeavored to show :

That criticism or higher-criticism (I am not particular as to the distinction) is no intruder upon Biblical ground, and that the critic's function is neither superfluous nor contemptible.

That Biblical criticism is engendered by the very nature and structure of the Bible. That a sound criticism is made necessary by the false positions and untenable claims of the friends of the Bible, and by innumerable perversions and misinterpretations both of its character and of its substance.

That it is the aim of the true critic, instead of weakening confidence in the Bible, to lodge it more firmly and deeply in the faith of the church, by cultivating just conceptions of its character and intent, and by letting it speak for itself.

That the principal advances in Biblical knowledge and in the methods of Biblical study, are due mainly to the work of critics, and of higher critics.

That the admission of the existence and work of hostile criticism and of the errors of devout criticism in no way makes against the value and necessity of Biblical criticism itself: and that to represent criticism merely by its errors and abuses is both uncandid and unjust.

HALT!

It is about time to call a halt. If we cannot have charity, we must strike for justice. The holders of traditional views of Scripture have their rights which no one disputes. They have the right to hold and the right to announce and to advocate their views; but the exercise of those rights lays them open to fair discussion. Scholars of another type, who hold that tradition is not final, and that no aspect of Scripture is closed against investigation and critical handling, have also their rights, among which is exemption from unchristian abuse, misrepresentation and ecclesiastical persecution when they differ from the traditionalists.

There is greatly needed, in the first place, a clear, popular definition of the aims of the higher criticism, and a searching exposure of the attempts to befog its true character and to identify it with an infidel rationalism. A large part of the church is in the dark as to what Biblical criticism is and intends, and as to its general temper and spirit. It gets its impressions at second hand, and too often through those who only partially understand the subject, or who are bent on bespattering criticism in the interest of a dogmatic and overbearing ecclesiasticism. There is prevalent a false impression as to the bearing of certain critical conclusions upon the inspiration and genuineness of the

Bible. The idea prevails and is fostered, that the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the singleness of Isaiah, and the Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews are inseparably bound up with the integrity and inspiration of Scripture. The sooner that impression can be dissipated, the sooner it can be shown that a man who does not believe that Moses wrote the Pentateuch is not denying or assailing either the inspiration or the authority of the Pentateuch—the better. The inspiration of the Pentateuch does not depend upon its having been written by Moses. The Epistle to the Hebrews no less remains an integral and authoritative part of the New Testament if it be shown that Paul did not write it. Inspiration does not depend upon authenticity. No one knows who wrote the book of Job or many of the Psalms. They are none the less inspired for that reason: and to raise the cry of danger to the Bible when such things are asserted by Christian scholars, to scream frantically to the church to rush to the dykes and stop the inpouring and devouring flood, as if both her life and her Bible depended on the successful denial of such assertions—is simply to cry “the gyascutus has broke loose!” and to raise a panic which is as ridiculous as it is causeless. If it can be shown that the critics are wrong, well and good. If they are right, well and good also. If the church has been under any mistake about the Bible, she is the one most interested in knowing it. If the church has that faith in the Bible which she professes to have, she will not be afraid to have the truth about it appear: she will believe that the Bible will come out of the hottest fire of criticism, in a new

guise perhaps, but more glorious and with a mightier power of appeal than ever. Free discussion cannot hurt the church or the Bible.

Nor is it fair to identify the free discussion of such questions with the question of orthodoxy. No creed or confession makes it heresy for a man to believe that David did not write all the Psalms; or that there were two authors of Isaiah. No creed or confession requires any man to hold a particular theory of inspiration on penalty of disfranchisement. Both the Westminster and the Anglican articles content themselves with asserting the fact of inspiration without attempting to define its mode. It is only six or seven years since two most promising young men were rejected by the Presbytery of New York in the face of a declaration which Dr. Schaff affirmed would have satisfied any church council in Christendom, and all because they refused to affirm that the original autographs of Scripture were absolutely without error in all particulars. The test was one which the Presbytery had no right to impose, which was entirely extra-confessional, as is the recent deliverance of the Presbyterian General Assembly on verbal inerrancy. In any case the General Assembly has no right to frame and impose dogma, and that dogma is equally unconstitutional and unsound.

WHO SHALL TRY SCHOLARS?

A second point of challenge concerns the tribunals before which Christian scholars are summoned, and which are called to decide in issues that turn upon Biblical scholarship. The question of competency must be squarely faced and some plain things must

he said, even at the risk of giving offence. The trial of a Christian scholar on a question of critical scholarship by an assembly of five or six hundred men, a large proportion of whom are laymen entirely unfamiliar with such questions, is a palpable injustice and an offence against Christian decency. If there must be a heresy-trial, it should be before a commission of the scholar's *real* peers, and not of his ecclesiastical peers merely. A writer in a recent number of the *New York Evangelist* states that at the last General Assembly, the Presbytery of Dakota was represented by two Indians, "one a pure-blood, the other a French half-breed. One of them could neither speak nor understand the English language, the other could scarcely understand it and could not converse in it." And yet these two were members of the court which tried and condemned Professor Smith, and their votes counted as much as would the votes of Dr. Prentiss or of Dr. Parkhurst if they had been members of the Assembly.

I remember a lad in northern New York, a nice boy, who grew up in the shadow of the Presbyterian Church, who never went to college and never displayed any scholarly tendencies, and who, at an early age, took his place in his father's wholesale grocery and became, I believe, an efficient and excellent grocer. In due time his Christian character and general intelligence caused him to be chosen to the Eldership. I do not suppose that he knew whether Hebrew was read from left to right, or from right to left, or upside down; that he had the faintest knowledge of church history; that he could have distinguished a Greek character from a cunei-

form, or that he had any more critical knowledge of the Bible than he might have gotten in working out his Sunday-school lesson with a commentary and a lesson paper. Yet he was a member of the Assembly which tried Professor Briggs. And this is only one specimen of scores of ecclesiastical jurors whose lives are passed in trade and agriculture, good, devout men who read their Bibles, men of hard common sense, intelligent enough in dealing with any matter which they understand or can be made to understand, but as unfitted to sit in judgment upon questions of Biblical scholarship and criticism as an amiable Christian butcher is to operate upon a brain-tumor. Nay, even certain gentlemen of the legal profession, who have made themselves conspicuous in recent ecclesiastical prosecutions, and who have been indiscreet enough to put themselves into print, have furnished a significant commentary upon the wisdom of the venerable adage "Let the shoemaker stick to his last."

Let it be plainly understood, and the sooner it is understood the better for all parties, that criticism, Higher Criticism, has come to stay, and to fight if necessary. The time has passed for the Christian critic to stand hat in hand before the sanhedrims of the church supplicating for toleration. He has a right in the church and a place in the church; a right to speak and to be heard; a right to prosecute the free investigation of the Scriptures within the church, and a right to resist those who attempt to thrust him out of doors. It will be the part of wisdom for the church to take care how she deals with her Christian scholars, and to beware of arraying her scholars against herself. The church which pulls

down the men who seek to mount to the high watch-towers and to kindle the lamps of truth, may indeed succeed in keeping its lighthouses dark ; but it will not be very long before that church will go down in the world's charts as a barren, desolate, dangerous reef, bristling with menace of shipwreck.



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