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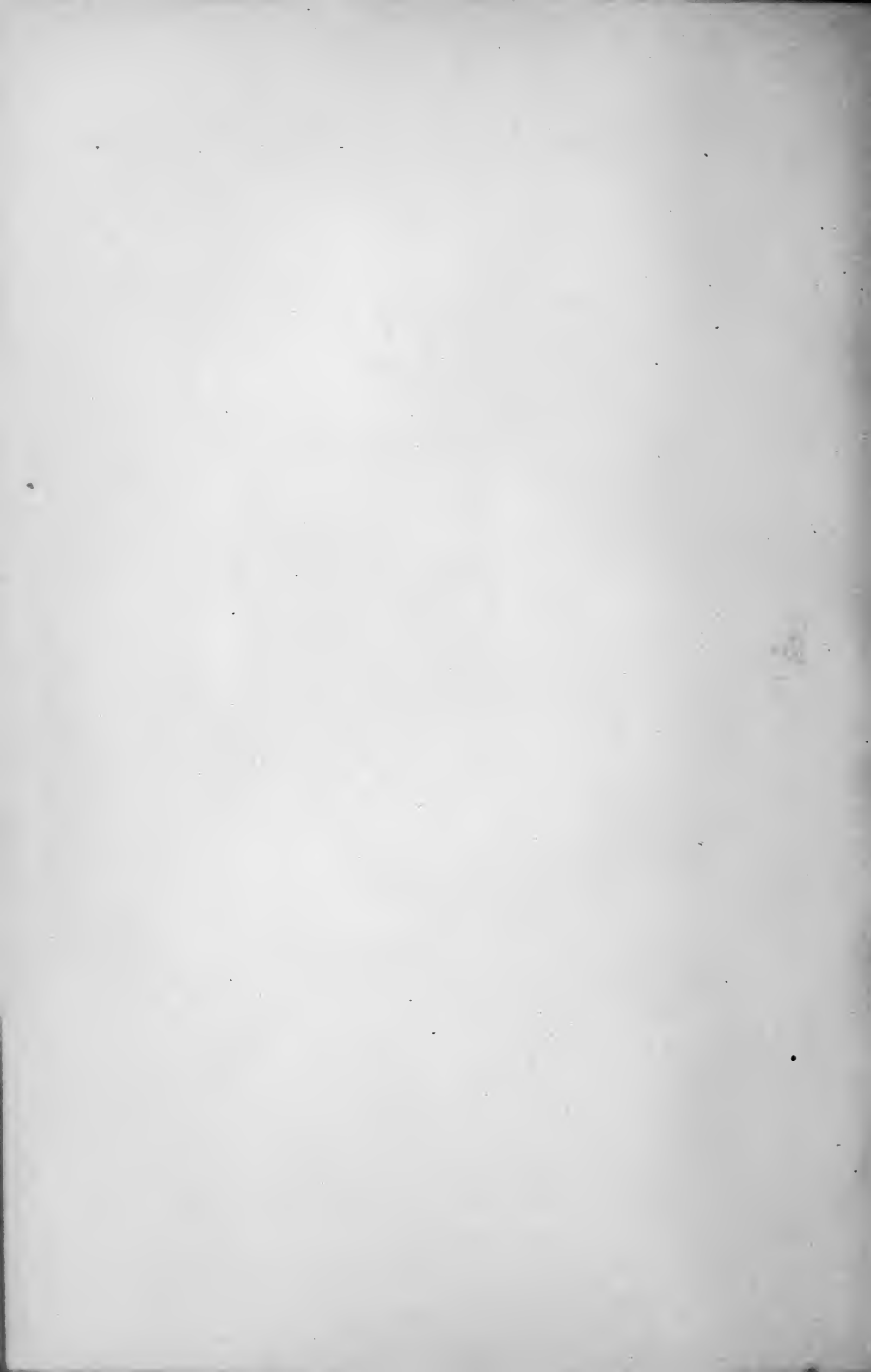
Biblical

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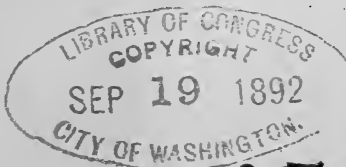
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TRUE BIBLICAL CRITICISM.

Handwritten scribble
BY
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TRUE BIBLICAL CRITICISM.

INTRODUCTION. In opening I assume that I am writing for an audience of believers, who are not themselves biblical critics, and do not expect to become such, but who are forced by circumstances to form some opinion as to the trustworthiness of modern biblical criticism. The necessity of some intelligent inquiry is the more pressing because they must often have been compelled to say, as the Athenians did to Paul: "Thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know, therefore, what these things mean."

Baptists are as much bound by their organic principles to be open-eared as the Athenians; for they insist on personal intelligence as the basis of faith: but also as open-eyed; for whatever threatens the verbal explicitness, the accuracy of record, or the unequivocal simplicity of meaning in the language of scripture, threatens the foundations of their denominational life. If the words of Christ's commands are questionable or unimportant; if his allusions were not intended to be taken by the common people, to whom they were addressed,

in their natural sense ; if they were not intended, when recorded, for like apprehension by the simple-minded, who are incapable of " scientific " subtlety in detecting concealed reservations, then we are wrong in holding every man as bound to understand and obey the plain and positive letter of the Word. If it really belongs to the " wise and prudent," and not to " babes," to save themselves by superior acuteness from being misled or left in harmful error by the " ignorant " or " evasive " use of the Old Testament, then Rome seems more than likely to be right in withholding the Bible from the unlearned as a dangerous book.

Driven from the Bible as the unequivocal and ultimate source of authority, we have no other refuge. We cannot retreat with the Romanist to an infallible Pope, nor with the ritualist to an autocratic church, nor with the more elastic interpreters of language can we readjust ourselves to the decree of custom, convenience, or expediency. If we cannot be reasonably certain what Christ said, and if the people who heard him could not be equally certain what he meant, our continued isolation as a people is absolutely indefensible.

While we are bound, therefore, to give courteous heed to every messenger who promises help to understand God's Word, however startling his message, we are all the more bound as its import becomes more serious, to scan diligently his credentials. That his words are friendly, or that he is himself a friend, does not preclude question. The hostile " Greeks " may bring dangerous " presents,"

and friends may unwittingly lend themselves to error. Peter was betrayed into a misleading course, and had to be "blamed." The Deists of the last century avowedly wrote to save Christianity from the "unreasonableness" of "orthodoxy."

The drift of modern criticism has not been reassuring. In the beginning, Astruc did not question the Mosaic authorship of Genesis: in our day, English critics, even, have evaporated David and Daniel, as well as Moses. American critics, who contrast themselves as "evangelical," with others whom they style "rationalistic," seem to forget, while accepting the "method" of the German scholars and appealing to the verdict of the "majority" as conclusive, that if the "method" is "scientific" the results ought to be uniform and final; and that the "majority" of the world's Hebrew scholarship is German, and accepts the conclusions of Wellhausen.

When the path goes swiftly down, and the earth softens into mire, it is well to hesitate, and reassure ourselves as to our guides. What are the nature and function of criticism, and when, how, and how far, and to whom, may it become an essential or helpful counselor?

The popular conception of criticism

I. THE NATURE OF CRITICISM. has come to have an acrimonious tinge. The critic is supposed to be a kind of vicious fly that loves to irritate sore spots; or a mosquito, insignificant in itself and only visible when filled with the blood of some

nobler creature. "Critics are authors who have failed," said an author who had not failed, but who had been stung.

Etymologically, this definition is incapable of justification. Criticism is essentially discriminative judgment, and implies at least theoretic impartiality. Yet here, as elsewhere, a "fossil history" is manifest in the ripened significance of the word. It reminds us that, practically, criticism may gravitate from impartiality only in one direction: it may condemn, but it can never laud without ceasing to be criticism. Its business is with defects, objections, or suspicions: and since these are not infrequently the critic's own, he tends to become judge and accuser in the same cause. Naturally, therefore, the word has taken on an acrid meaning.

It is important here to notice some confusion of thought, arising from careless or perverse misuse of terms. Fogs hide the movements of an enemy, and endanger our own. An occasional whistle of inquiry may help to locate us and shape our course.

I. "*Study*" and "*Criticism*" are not Identical.— Study aims to understand or interpret. It implies faith and sympathy as essential to the best results. The critic, on the other hand, is neither a disciple nor a believer, but a judge. Criticism logically excludes sympathetic hearing, and demands scepticism as conditional to its entrance. Except there has been a doubt aroused there is no question to be decided. The critic advances one step in unfriendliness beyond scepticism, if we accept

Montaigne's famous motto as illustrative of the latter: "I do not understand, I pause, I examine"; for the critic does not pause, waiting simply for additional light. He proceeds to admit unfavorable allegations as at least probable and, thereupon, without malice, to be sure, as may fairly be assumed, but also without sympathy, to pronounce upon them. The "blessed" disciple trusts other than logical avenues of knowledge. He "believes" although he has "not seen." The sceptical hearer "sees" and "believes." But the critic does not believe although he has seen. He must first apply the scalpel to the eye and the psychometric gauge to the processes of the mind before he is ready to admit the authority of either faith or vision.

Study may indeed lead to criticism and the critic may be studious; and so may a lawyer play tennis and an athlete study physiology, advantage accruing from one change to the other in either case. But study and criticism are thereby no more identified than law, athletics, and physiology. There is no justice in the insinuation that all study anterior to or independent of the results of modern criticism has been unproductive or delusive. Augustine was less critical than Jerome, but not less profound in scripture interpretation. Luther was far inferior to Erasmus as a linguistic expert, but far superior in reaching the marrow of the Word.

2. "*Criticism*" and the "*Higher Criticism*" are not *Convertible Terms*.—There is a common tendency unlawfully and insidiously to appropriate broad terms in

behalf of narrow claimants. The "lean kine" thus "eat up the fat ones." The bishop of Rome has monopolized the term "Pope," once belonging to many. The "scientific method" to-day is claimed as exclusively descriptive of the method of physical science, as it once was not. In like manner the wreaths of conquest won by criticism, in all its spheres, are complacently laid upon the narrow brow of the "higher criticism," as if there were no other. Whoever challenges its claims is thereupon stigmatized as repudiating the achievements of modern scholarship and as being unfriendly to honest research.

But the "higher criticism" is but a nebulous segment of the whole critical sphere, embracing in itself minor and equally nebulous subdivisions. Inasmuch as there is a prodigious difference in the bases, the methods, the degrees of definiteness, and the consequent trustworthiness of the inductions, in each of these separate ranges of inquiry, it is of the utmost importance that each should be discriminated and tested independently. To ascribe a common and equally imperious authority to the processes of textual criticism, which follow reasonably fixed and intelligible canons, and the mantic prophesyings of speculative historians woven out of the looms of arbitrary theory, is to create a sea of confusion that the "leviathans" of criticism may "play therein."

3. "*Criticism*" is not the true antithesis of "*Tradition*."—Instead of the old saw, "Whatever is, is

right," it seems at times to be insinuated that "whatever is, is wrong," presumptively at least. For the fact that a belief has become traditional is supposed to discredit it. The conclusions of "criticism" are opposed to the faith of "tradition," as if the one were necessarily intelligent and valid, while the other rested upon passive unintelligence in the present, and mythic haze in the past. There is no such antithesis in fact. Critical opinion may readily become traditional, as has happened in the case of the theory of the composite structure of Genesis: a theory handed down with modifications for a hundred years. On the other hand, well-attested fact may become the subject of tradition without disparagement of its reality. Traditional views are entitled to the fair presumption that arises from their survival, viz.: that wide and repeated tests have only confirmed them.

If it were only intimated that certain views were to be suspected because they had been universally and persistently held, and were therefore presumably wrong, while certain other views were presumably right because novel and held by only a few through whose ingenuity they had been discovered, the fallacy would at once appear. Critical conclusions may be false as well as true, and traditional opinions may be true as well as false; but the truth or falsity of neither the one nor the other is to be determined by false antithesis. In both alike, proof must be furnished at the cost of earnest, painstaking, impartial examination. Nothing else will meet the legitimate demand.

II. THE RELATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF CRITICISM. No criticism can be trustworthy that mistakes or transcends its normal range and functions. It is bound to notice, therefore, that :

1. *Its function is negative and exceptional.*—Its offices are called for only when difficulty has arisen and doubt has supervened. The conditions supposed are therefore not normal but abnormal. It is not bread, but medicine. For the believer to accept it as either “sincere milk” or “strong meat,” would be like adopting a regular diet of calomel and jalap. Things that are serviceable are not alike serviceable always and to all.

It is plain also that criticism can never be in any just sense “constructive,” as it is sometimes called. It can at the best become restorative only by dissipating the objections it has considered, and perhaps suggested. It creates nothing; it adds nothing; it can only negative negations, leaving the original structure unaffected, save as it is released from assault.

2. *Its inductions rest on a necessarily narrow base.*—The eye of the critic is necessarily confined to the internal phenomena disclosed in the subject of criticism. It does not range even so widely as this, but busies itself especially with specific sections and with the defective elements in these. The Romish priest whose ear is constantly at the confessional is apt to form an unfavorable judgment of the average morality of human nature. Nosology is not physiology. Microscopic study of warts does not fit one for the appreciation of Greek statuary.

Even supposing that there were a broader, corporate consideration of the subject, it could yield at the best but fragmentary results. For internal evidence cannot determine external relations. Spectrum analysis no doubt advises us of the substance, and gives some hints of the relative attitude of the sun toward us, but it cannot give the needful data alone for the interpretation of the whole system of the universe. It is only "within his own art" that any one is to be trusted. If that art be narrow its assumption of oracular wisdom ought not to be inconsistently wide.

Since the validity and trustworthiness of induction depend on the breadth and variety of facts from which it proceeds, it seems hardly discreet to appropriate the name to the exclusive behoof of processes that limit themselves confessedly to a corner of the field of observation.

3. *Its methods are fallible and its results, at the best, uncertain.*—The dogmatic assurance with which the "discoveries" of the critics have been ever and anon announced, coupled with the vaunting of their unimpeachably "scientific accuracy," would lead one to imagine that some new instrument of precision had been invented, by help of which one may reach results in literary, historic, and theologic realms with as infallible certainty as by the rule of three. But the method of induction, so far from being new, is only, as Prof. Huxley has elaborately shown, the extended application of the instinctive tendency to "put this and that together." So far is it from insuring automatic precision in result, that,

in unskillful or careless hands, it is more readily pervertible to false uses than the deductive. In the selection of facts, in their grouping, in their interpretation, in the inferences derived therefrom, there is the amplest room for the intrusion of theoretic preconception, at every step: and the supposed verification of the result, by its correspondence with the facts, thus becomes delusive, because it is a correspondence only with unconsciously preadjusted facts. How endless are the possibilities of permutation, and how divers shrewd guesses may be confirmed by skillful play upon specific groups of data, any one may easily see who is familiar with the children's game of "logomachy."

In the region of textual criticism, the facts are usually palpable laws of inference fairly agreed upon, with conclusions probable; although even here there is room only for more or less emphatically probable opinion. But in that of literary and historic criticism, there is opportunity for unchecked play of the crudest and most inconsistent fancy. Renan and Matthew Arnold hold each a high place as acute and learned anatomists of style; but the one judged the style of Paul to indicate the most delicate spiritual sensitiveness, while the other found in it evidence of untempered coarseness. Edward A. Freeman was a master in historic research; but he held that the alleged canons of historic criticism, by which the improbable, or the recurrence of identical circumstances in ancient documents, are to be rejected as incredible, are wholly untrustworthy. The real presumption, as he contends,

is in the other direction: since the writer would not have risked his reputation for veracity by recording the extraordinary were it not true. And in fact, "it is the unexpected that is most likely to happen."

The conjectural writing of prehistoric history by the help of scattered hints, monumental or other, however fascinating, is curious rather than profitable at the best. But when the only positive testimony that remains from early times is deliberately set aside, because inconsistent with the exigencies of modern theory, and we are asked to substitute for the record by early writers of what, as they affirm, did happen, the opinion of our speculative contemporaries as to what ought to have happened, the absurdity of the proposition, when regarded as "scientific," becomes conspicuous.

4. *Its contradictory negations are not equivalent to positive proofs.*—A distinguished scholar, in a recent lecture before an audience of Sunday-school teachers and others, set out with indignant emphasis the "plump contradictions," the errors through false translation, the "grammatic ignorance," the careless citations, the "rabbinic fancies," and other glaring infirmities of the New Testament record. It would have been quite excusable if the simple-minded hearers had concluded, from the point of view taken, and the intensity of utterance evoked, that the chief result of inspiration was to make the New Testament writers more stupid, slipshod, and perverse than their neighbors. Later on, it was urged that in view of these defects it was the duty of all alike not

only to abandon, but distinctly to protest against the "traditional" view of the Bible. And this upon the ground that, however the critics may differ among themselves, they are absolutely unanimous in repudiating the "traditional" conception; whatever may ultimately appear to be right, that, at least, is certainly wrong. That is to say, if the lantern appear to fifty of us red, but to John, James, Henry, Peter, George, and William, it appears respectively blue, green, yellow, purple, white, or black, we must surrender our impression; because, however they may differ among themselves, they are unanimous in declaring us to be wrong. It does not seem to have occurred to our counselor that the unanimity of conclusion against each of the individual critics is still more complete since it includes us with all the other critics. Each of the critics is therefore severally wrong. How can they then be corporately right? One German critic affirms that the Jews expected a Messiah; the next denies it. But from these contradictory premises with the utmost nonchalance they draw the identical conclusion that the gospel story cannot be true!

5. *It has no voice in the settlement of ultimate questions.*—Biblical criticism is simply criticism of the Bible, not, as is too often imagined or practically implied, criticism of some particular theory of inspiration.

Supposing the Bible to have been shown historically veracious, scientifically accurate, ethically sound, grammatically and rhetorically faultless: it is not therefore shown to be inspired, since the same is possible, at least,

of purely human productions. On the other hand, it is impossible to disprove inspiration by disclosure of defect in either of these particulars, unless we are prepared to define in advance the exact limitations under which it would please God to deliver his messages to men. Before we essay to determine *how*, it is essential to satisfy ourselves whether the Bible is *somehow* supernatural in character. The problem of fact normally precedes that of origin, and the solution of either involves questions and phenomena vastly broader and more complex than those shut up in the narrow chamber to which criticism holds the key.

III. **ESSENTIAL** It has been said that "he who
CONDITIONS OF knows one language only, knows
SOUND BIBLICAL none." It is certain that the critic
CRITICISM. who attempts to exercise his office,
 treating a part as isolated from the
 whole, or the whole as independent of its environment, is on the way to grievous error. The anatomist might have studied endlessly the pastern joint of the horse, and never have suspected its homological significance, had he not taken into account the whole creature and his zoological relations. There is an atmosphere, so to speak, of modifying presumption arising from such a broader view, in which alone just critical vision is possible. The experience of mankind, as it has been embodied especially in the ripened forms of judicial procedure, may supply some general criteria for guidance in the premises. Ap-

plying these, as we proceed, to the case in hand, it may be noticed that :

1. *The inquiry ought to proceed on the basis of faith rather than scepticism.*—To assume human testimony to be generically and presumptively false would not only tear up the foundations of history and evaporate the conclusions of science, but would make judicial inquiry itself nugatory. Mankind has practically repudiated the theory of Hume, that experience begins with doubt. The child believes instinctively, and learns only slowly to doubt. Our common stock of opinions, on which the operations of our daily life are based, has been accepted unverified, in great part, from our ancestors or our contemporaries. Unless we are prepared to gravitate into absolute Pyrrhonism, we cannot assume doubt as a necessary beginning point or normal atmosphere. Doubt in fact begins nothing except disintegration or decay. It bars action, chills affection, stifles receptivity of mind, benumbs and chokes the nobler impulses of the soul.

That which secular experience has wrought out as a practical conclusion has been anticipated in the religious realm by the teachings of revelation. Doubt is not the condition of salvation, nor one of the graces in the Christian scheme. It would seem oddly incongruous, that the rule of presumptive faith experimentally forced upon the unbelieving world, and practically accepted by it as the basis of its inquiries, should be arbitrarily reversed by the Christian believer, when approaching the book which, above all others, exalts faith as the root and

crown of virtue, and which demands faith as an essential preliminary to any complete disclosure of its divine credentials. The "Greeks seek after wisdom," but lacking faith the "wisdom of God" is to them "foolishness." He who from the beginning accepts unbelief as the normal attitude of humanity can never become "established" in things human or divine.

2. *In the order of inquiry, external evidence should precede internal.*—The immediate aim of inquiry, and the only valid basis of decision, is fact. The nearest fact comes naturally first, being most clearly visible. Inquiry normally proceeds, accordingly, from the concrete to the abstract, from the present to the past. To reverse this order, beginning with the remote or theoretic, would be to build a cantilever bridge from a centre in open space.

Should an ancient deed, for instance, be offered in evidence, the natural order of inquiry would be: who is now in possession of the property described, and how far back does such possession go; from what custody does the document come, and what relation does it hold to prior links in the chain of title; what collateral testimony do monumental records supply, and the like. Only after these preliminary researches, and in the light of the presumptions raised by them, would it be legitimate to explore the document itself, and pass upon alleged alterations or flaws in it.

Were Shakespeare's commentators to confine their gaze upon the anachronisms, the violations of the tra-

ditional "unities," the local obscurities, incongruities and inanities of the text, they might readily repudiate not only the unity, but the sanity of its authorship. But the whole contour being regarded, and its literary environment, they accept the presumption of genius, partially obscured by flying fog of circumstance, and proceed lovingly and confidently to interpret, in accordance with such presumption, that which they are thus bound to regard as primarily harmonious and luminous.

The Bible is in possession of Christendom, whose very name, whose geographic limits, and whose calendar it has determined, to say nothing of its persistent and increasing supremacy over the ripening thought of the world. In sharp contrast with Judaism, but in precise parallelism with the contrast of the Old Testament and the New, Christianity knits itself upon the advancing European as did that upon the stagnant Asiatic life—the old regime parting from the new in temper and in time, as the Hebrew language of the Old clave into fixity while the Greek of the New went flexibly onward into the vocabulary and thought of the nineteenth century. Now the Old Testament, with its fundamental Pentateuch, comes to us from its lawful custodian, the Jewish people. That this nation, an exotic, yet inextinguishable in all lands, the persistent and inexplicable problem of the historian, should have been "preserved to a life beyond life" seems inexplicable, except it be that it might be a persistent witness to the integrity and genuineness of

the venerable volume which records its past, predicts its present, and is the essential and only existing bond of its national unity.

The Bible, it is flippantly said, must be treated "just like any other book." This is at once, and summarily, to repudiate in advance its claims to supernatural origin and authority, and to ignore the fact that it has historically proven itself wholly unlike any other book. A carpenter's rule may measure ordinary city walls, but it does not follow, because the New Jerusalem is a "city," that it may safely be gauged in like manner. The mere circumstance that the Old Testament has palpably and inextricably interwoven its fibres into the whole texture of Jewish life and character, and that, so far as we can retrace the facts, it is true to their history, that history itself being as is generally acknowledged a "standing miracle," is of itself enough to forbid the indiscriminate classification of this extraordinary book with the ordinary literature of the world. No criticism of any volume, least of all of a volume which thus historically stands apart from all others and likewise towers above them, can be sound which refuses to take account of and modify its methods in accordance with the anterior presumptions created by environing facts.

3. *Judgment must proceed upon the best evidence attainable.*—All human testimony, even that of sense, is fallible. Obtuseness or obliquity of vision, passion, and divers other subtle influences may intrude to vitiate in greater or less degree the authority of the most posi-

tive affirmation. Beyond this, as facts recede in distance or in time, the danger of omission, distortion or entrance of accidental or fanciful elements becomes greater. Hence the superior value of written records, and of monumental inscriptions; especially if these have been so secluded from possible human touch as to preclude the possibility of later tampering with their contents. Such contemporary records are among the highest, while remote oral tradition is among the weakest of the various forms of evidence. Nevertheless, tradition, even the remotest, is of the nature of evidence; and being in some instances, the only evidence, it is the best accessible. For at least a hundred years it is ordinarily regarded as trustworthy; and, when accompanied by collateral custom, as was the deliverance from Egypt by the passover observance, and the rescue of the people in the time of Esther by the still persistent Feast of Purim, its authority may be indefinitely prolonged.

But on the other hand, theoretic assertions made solely on the basis of supposed inevitable laws of human action, are not only not the best evidence—they are not evidence at all. They can no more be weighed against the direct utterances of monumental or written testimony than moonshine can be weighed against silver. It is true that a fossil tooth or bone may enable the paleontologist with some confidence to infer the whole form of the lost creature; but this is because in the animal world concomitant variations of parts are almost absolutely uniform. In the complex, sensitive and capricious

movements of the human soul no such subordination to type is discoverable. Life, in its very first and lowest manifestations, reveals itself as defiant of the mechanic rigors of physical and organic law by changes of form too swift and too irregular even to be photographically reported. What cannot be even reported in its simplest and most incipient movements, can certainly not be predicted in its ripest and most subtle interplay.

It is not a little significant that, in the very time when historic criticism had begun to melt away the foundations of faith in the records of Rome and Greece, and was beginning its destructive work upon the Hebrew records, the Rosetta stone, the Behistun inscription, and the Moabite stone furnished, in quick succession, the long-wanted clues to the meaning of the past; while at the same time the mounds of Mesopotamia added immensely to the material for the exploration of that past by the torchlight of direct testimony. New and daily increasing evidence from Egypt has so far swelled the volume of positive and unimpeachable information that Prof. Sayce has ventured triumphantly to say: "We have dug up Homer. We shall yet dig up the Bible." While we await further revelations from this source we may remember that the archæologist's spade has often already, by a single stroke, rent hopelessly more than one elaborately spun and brilliantly gauzy fabric of speculative history.

4: *In the construction of documents favorable intentions are to be indulged.*—The same presumption which

attaches to testimony at large requires the *prima facie* acceptance of documents—especially if they be ancient—as authentic, whole, and veracious. Where external evidence does not forbid, their contents are to be treated, so far as any reasonable elasticity of language will allow, so as to avoid apparent contradiction, preserve a rational meaning, and uphold validity and intent. A life of Washington which in one chapter called him uniformly George, in another General, and in another President, could not under such a rule be denied integrity of authorship because of such idiosyncrasies, so long as any reasonable explanation could be otherwise suggested. An account of the signing of the Declaration of Independence at Philadelphia on the 4th of July, 1776, and of the death of two presidents on the same day of the year, might readily be objected to as mythical—as Theodore Parker once suggested—because of the improbable coincidence of the deaths referred to; because of the suspicious aptness of the name Philadelphia; and because 1776 is singularly enough the product of 444×4 —suggesting some occult symbolism. But we do not feel obliged to accept such an interpretation as conclusive, since another and more generous construction is consistent with reason. Until it becomes absolutely impossible to believe that the same author might find valid reasons for characterizing the Infinite One as “Almighty” in an account of creation, and “Eternal” in an account of the beginning of the moral history of the race, we are not bound to cut asunder a narrative

the essential unity of which, and its fundamental relation to that which succeeds, cannot well be denied.

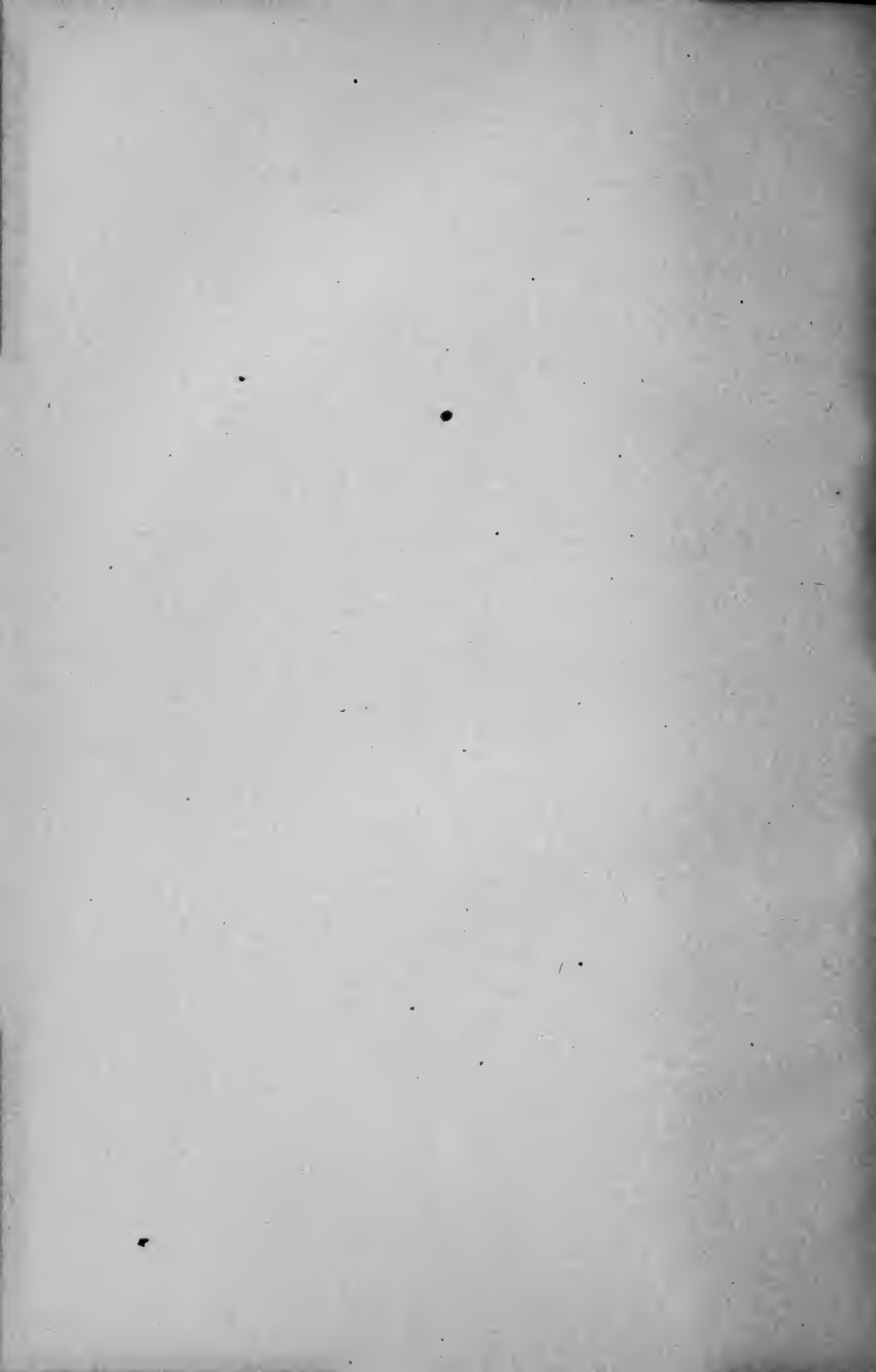
Nor is it necessary to resolve the story of Abraham, of Moses, or of Samson into myth because of the significance of their names, nor that of the wanderings in the desert because of the recurrence of certain round numbers, considering that all names may once have been significant, and that arithmetical precision may not have been an intuitive accomplishment of the infant world. In a word, the generous intendments which human wisdom has enforced, even upon the bloodless interpretations of a court of justice, and which ought fairly to be enlarged in the less rigorous field of literary review, cannot justly be abandoned in the discussion of the Bible.

On the whole, biblical criticism need neither disturb the peace nor consume the attention of the ordinary believer any more than the astronomer's prediction, which we are not prepared to contradict, and cannot reasonably hope to see verified, that this planet will one day fall into the sun. If such a catastrophe should happen in our time, we cannot do better than be found at our appointed tasks. Among the things for which Paul represents the Bible as "profitable," he failed to specify the cultivation of the critical faculty. Instead of encouraging Timothy to put away, among "childish things," the "traditional" faith, he rather exhorted him to "continue in the things which he had learned" and "been assured of." We cannot safely be ignorant of

the way of salvation, but we may safely consent to be ignorant of much else. Having learned that way, it concerns us far more to walk in it than to determine “scientifically” who wrote the Pentateuch.









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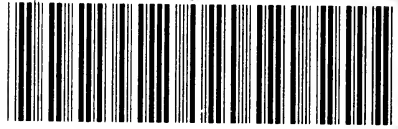
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