

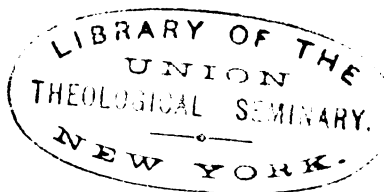
TIMELY TOPICS.

POLITICAL, BIBLICAL, ETHICAL, PRACTICAL.

DISCUSSED

BY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS, PROFESSORS AND EMINENT
WRITERS OF OUR TIME.

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NOTES ON THE NEGATIVE CRITICISM.

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(I) There is very evidently in Germany, and to a certain extent in England and America, a party who are bent upon establishing a doctrine of inspiration and a rule of faith, which shall admit as their basis the fact of proved errors in the Holy Scriptures. This party is composed in the main of the negative critics. The critics, *i. e.*, the biblical scholars, who are engaged in the critical study of the text, authorship, etc., of the books of the Bible, are usually divided into two classes, the lower and the higher. The lower critics are those who are engaged, in the main, in studies dealing with the text of Scripture in its original languages; the higher critics are chiefly concerned with what may be termed the literary criticism of the Bible. The critics may again be divided into positive and negative, in view of the motives which control their work. The negative critics are thus called because the things which they assert are ordinarily denials or negations. They always oppose what they term the "traditional" views as to the integrity, authenticity and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. They deny, for instance, that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, that Ezra was the editor of Chronicles, that Daniel is a canonical book, that the evangelists are accurate historians, and some of them, that the Word of God is anywhere an infallible record. They accord, as a rule, the Scriptures scant credit, and are more ready to believe secular than sacred historians. Their actual purpose, whether intentional or

unintentional, is to discredit the Bible. Those of the number who are found in the United States, while they rebuke many Christians for being Bibliolatrists, are themselves decided Teutolatrists, repeating verbatim the lessons set them by their German masters.

(2) That the school of the negative critics first became a power in the world of religious thought some sixty years ago, but in that period of time the changes of position by the leaders in the school have been as rapid and as numerous as those of a kaleidoscope. In a recent number of the *Methodist Review* the well equipped Methodist scholar, Dr. Mendenhall, gives the following statistics respecting the theories concerning the several books of the Bible promulgated by the negative critics during the past forty years. He writes: "The grand number of theories respecting the Old Testament books is 539. The number of theories applied to the New Testament books is 208. Adding 539 and 208 we have a total of 747 theories applied to the biblical books since 1850." And then Dr. Mendenhall adds: "Of the 747 theories 603 are defunct, and many of the remaining 144 are in the last stages of degeneracy and dissolution." And yet certain of the negative critics desire the Church to follow them and accept as a basis of doctrine certain theories of the critical school which within ten years may be simply objects of scholarly curiosity and amusement. The Protestant Churches have no desire to place their creed as exhibits in a historical museum.

(3) The tide seems to be turning against the negative school. One of the latest works in the Old Testament department issued in Germany is "Zahn's Deuteronomy," dedicated to the "eminent American apologete, Dr. Wm. Henry Green, in Princeton, with sincere esteem." This treatise is one of great ability, and resolutely maintains the traditional views of the Mosaic authorship, historical accuracy and inspiration of Deuteronomy. Again, in Eng-

land the present trend of thought is unfavorable to the negative school. I have seen the statement that recently Prof. Margoliouth, Arabic Professor in Oxford University, England, has vindicated the integrity and authenticity of Daniel, and has compelled the acquiescence in his views of Profs. Driver and Cheyne, the foremost champions in Great Britain of the negative criticism. If this be true, then, so far as that prophetic book is concerned, Prof. Briggs' inaugural is already a back number. Literary critics, who reconstruct the Bible out of their inner consciousness, are continually meeting the fate of those German critics who flatly denied that Bering, the navigator, ever visited the northwest coast of the American continent. The log-books of Bering's voyages have recently been given to the public by the Russian Government, whose employee he was, and German criticism has met by the publication an overwhelming defeat. It is now proven incontestably that Bering sailed over the waters which bear his name. As in geographical, so in biblical records, the German critics are at war with facts. Dr. W. C. Prime, one of the most eminent of Egyptologists, writes: "The great discoveries of antiquities which have been made in Egypt have a much broader significance and importance than in their mere historical character. They not only reveal interesting facts in regard to the intercourse between Egypt and Asia thirty centuries ago, but in making these revelations they annihilate a very large part of the so-called 'Biblical Criticism' which, during the past quarter century, has assumed to judge ancient historical books and tell us how far they are true and how far they are false." To put this third main point concisely: For fifty years the advocates of negation have brought charge after charge against the integrity of biblical books and the accuracy of biblical history, only to go down to defeat before the advance of knowledge in ancient Oriental history, and in biblical philology. The past unites with the

present in evidencing that the Bible is an anvil which has worn out every hammer lifted upon it.

(4) The positive class of critics is the one which has done acceptable and profitable work for Anglo-Saxon Christendom. It is in the main this class of critics who, laboring together in England and America, have satisfied for the time being the demands of that supreme work which God and His Church have entrusted to critical scholars, the giving to Christians not a list of the errors to be found in the Scriptures, but a revised biblical text. The German negative critics, on the other hand, with their imitators, have been engaged in the main in the work of depreciation and destruction. Criticism with them means usually disparagement of opponents and overthrow of the historical accuracy of the Word of God by any means within their power. If I know anything of Anglo-Saxon Christendom, with its intense practicality; with its readiness to believe the best about men, not the worst; with its insistence that the Bible, like other books, is to be judged even in this matter of inerrancy, by its general character, not by the discrepancies which may here and there appear in its text; then I am certain that this issue now raised will be settled in a decisive manner.

(5) The inerrancy of the Scriptures, whatever allegations may have been made to the contrary, is a doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and was the received doctrine of the Presbyterian Church at reunion. There is no probability that Presbyterians will adopt any doctrine of inspiration which admits as its basis alleged errors in the Scriptures. They do not believe that the Bible in its first and only inspired form, any more than man at his creation, was imperfect. It is with the uninspired human connection that change and imperfection appear therein. The alleged proved errors in the Holy Scriptures are either discrepancies, owing to errors made by copyists, or seeming

errors arising from human ignorance, and which, as already indicated, God is removing gradually by the increase of our knowledge.

(6) The main principles which control the two schools of criticism are totally opposed. I quote here a part of Dr. Watts' (Belfast) crushing reply to Prof. Blaikie (Edinburgh) in this very matter of inspiration, and apply it to the negative school and its adherents. The quotation reads, "While the principle of your theory [*i.e.*, the negative critics] is a mere inference from apparent discrepancies not yet explained, the principle of the theory you oppose is the formally expressed utterance of prophets and apostles and of Christ Himself." Protestants must refuse to follow the negative critics in taking biblical errors as a basis for a doctrine of inspiration. They should take for that basis the affirmations of Scripture, and should refuse to minimize Scripture doctrine in order to excuse inability to explain Scripture difficulties.

(7) Thorough-going Protestants do not believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures merely on an *a priori* theory, or on the testimony of any man or Church. Protestants believe that the Holy Scriptures are inspired because the Scriptures themselves make the claim. Are the Scriptures credible or are they not when they assert that they are inspired? Believing that the "Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, being immediately inspired by God, are authentical" (Westm. Conf. of Faith, Chap i., Sec. 8), *i.e.*, are to be believed, Presbyterians should resolutely maintain the plenary inspiration and the infallibility of the Word of God.