

THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

VOL. XXXVI.—OCTOBER, 1898.—No. 4.

REVIEW SECTION.

I.—“BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT”—A PRACTICAL PRINCIPLE.

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No question is of more importance at the present time than that relating to the standards of evidence which it is proper to set up as the basis of religious belief and activity. So much is said about the necessity of securing “scientific” proof for everything, and there is such a general misconception of what scientific proof is, that widespread errors concerning most important subjects are manifesting themselves. In many quarters it is coming to be difficult to establish a firm belief either in any historical fact or in any principle of action, because they lie outside the realm of experiment and immediate observation. Hyper-criticism is everywhere the mother of skepticism.

A little well-directed attention, however, will show that in all the practical affairs of life we are compelled to walk by faith, and not by sight, and to accept probability, rather than certainty, as our guide. The one thing certain respecting all our plans is, that we must accept the best light we have as an imperative command to action. It is suicidal for any one to insist upon the removal of all difficulties from the pathway of action, and upon the elimination of all hazard from the battle of life. The demand of duty is that we follow the clearest light, that we listen to the voice which is most distinct, and place implicit confidence in that providential ordering of the world which makes it impossible for us to be wholly inactive.

This principle is recognized in most emphatic manner in the oft-

NOTE.—This periodical adopts the Orthography of the following Rule, recommended by the joint action of the American Philological Association and the Philological Society of England:—Change *d* or *ed* final to *t* when so pronounced, except when the *e* affects a preceding sound. —PUBLISHERS.

from the American Press, has great advantages over almost every other work of the kind, inasmuch as the critical and exegetical sections are entirely distinct from the homiletical, as in Lange and others; whilst the homiletical sections, which should not be consulted at all until the outline of the sermon has been fixed, contain a great wealth of material in the form of sermons, sermon-outlines, etc., that should enable the conscientious sermonizer to improve and enrich his outline, so as to make it the very best of which he is capable. Whatever masters a man may study, and of whatever homiletical helps he may avail himself, let him realize that there is no royal road to preaching; that nothing can take the place of the beaten oil of laborious study of both text and theme; and that he is the only true preacher who gets his mind and heart so full of a theme that as he opens his lips his thoughts spontaneously leap forth, suffused with the glow of his own emotion, and pervaded with an energy that is the exact measure of the extent to which the thoughts have become dominant principles in his own character and life.

III.—THE ACCREDITED PRINCIPLES OF THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

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THE term Higher Criticism, tho invented by a German scholar, is almost exclusively used by English and American critics. It is not to be found in the treatises of the Dutch critic Kuenen, and but rarely in the works of German specialists. Instead of this familiar phrase, these authorities use the plain terms Criticism, Critical, and Critic. This simple fact may serve as an index of the difficulty of defining the accredited principles of the Higher Criticism, and warn us to proceed cautiously with our subject. But the first thing required by caution would appear to be to define our terms, beginning with the phrase Higher Criticism. Until a better one can be produced, we shall do well to adopt the definition given elsewhere by the writer, which is: "The discovery and verification of the facts regarding the origin, form, and value of literary productions upon the basis of their internal characteristics and contents."* It may be well also to premise, for the sake of clearness, that we are concerned with the Higher Criticism in this paper only so far as it is applied to the Bible.

How Are Principles Accredited?

If this conception of the Higher Criticism is the correct one, the next step in our inquiry will be, What is meant by accredited principles?

* Zenos, "The Elements of the Higher Criticism," p. 9.

A principle, from the nature of the case, is not accredited, like an agent or representative, by authority from without. It requires no seal or signature from the hand of a monarch or the officers of a legislature. No court of inquiry can declare it valid and sound, or unsound. Principles and methods are accredited when they are tacitly accepted by those who are best qualified to judge in such matters. In other words, accrediting is a matter of growth. It is a recognition, slow or rapid, of that which is sound and valid. The history of the accrediting of methods and principles everywhere shows that such principles and methods generally emerge out of a mass propounded and applied, and that a process of instinctive selection operates in them, causing the setting aside of the worthless, and the disengaging of the sound and the true for the freer and more untrammelled use of them. Accrediting is complete when the acceptance of these principles and methods is universal. It is not meant, however, that there should be no exceptions to this universal acceptance. It is sufficient that exceptions be sporadic and isolated, and easily to be accounted for by the law of eccentricity, to make their existence of no effect. Whenever a considerable group of men through a representative or representatives enter a protest against methods and principles announced or used, such principles can not be said to be accredited. This is the case, for instance, with the system of principles used by Kuenen. Prof. Willis J. Beecher formally,* and Dr. W. H. Green incidentally in his numerous refutations of Kuenen's conclusions, have protested against the principles on which this author bases himself. And they have done this as representing many others who agree with them—at least as far as the criticism of those principles and methods is concerned. This is not saying, of course, that Kuenen has used always and only unsound principles and methods, but that as a system his science of criticism is not accredited. On the other hand, some of the principles of Kuenen have been accepted by all of his opponents as well as his followers. Thus it is seen not only what we would call accredited principles, but how we think they have been accredited.

Difficulties in Constructing a Science of Criticism.

When we now come to ask, What are these principles that have been universally accepted? we are met again with serious difficulties. First of all, the field of operations is vast and bewildering in its complications. It consists of a literature whose extent as well as character might well discourage him who would search through it for standards and principles. It is a field, too, in which much confusion has prevailed; in which truisms have been proclaimed with the glamour worthy of new discoveries, and absurdities have been couched in mystifying and oracular terms. The distinctions between postulates, principles, methods, and results have been disregarded, and things have

* *Presbyterian Review*, vol. iii., p. 708.

been jumbled together in a most woful confusion. Things good, bad, and indifferent have been said with the same air of authority. So great, indeed, is this literature, and so complicated, that many would look upon the task of sifting it with a view to discovering the elements and constructing the science of the Higher Criticism as a hopeless one.

The second difficulty which meets us is the fact that the science is born of strife. The development of the fundamentals of the Higher Criticism is somewhat like the development of international law—the result of dispute. As long as there is peace among the nations, they are unconscious of any code of laws governing their relations. The moment war breaks out, no matter from what cause or to what end, they not only feel the existence of the code, but find it necessary to alter it in some particulars. And when the war is ended, something has been gained for the code of nations. But the war must end and the treaty of peace must be signed before the gain can be said to have been safely made. Just so in the case of the Higher Criticism. It has been worked out in the midst of a controversy, and the controversy has not yet ended. This makes it difficult to formulate what has been attained. Some would even say that it is impossible to do this. But a controversy such as that out of which the Higher Criticism emerges has its natural stages; and it is the part and duty of those who are interested in it to take advantage of these stages in order to regulate the mode of carrying it on, by registering the gain made for the science by pointing out to the contending parties how much there lies in common between them; how much they have conceded to one another—not in the way of results, it may be, but in the way of fundamental assumptions and principles of work. Such a stage we think has been reached, and the task of gathering up the principles that have been recognized as valid and valuable by all parties concerned we deem an exceedingly important one. It is only as an agreement is reached as to what is valid and sound procedure in criticism that the controversy will lose its acrimony and settle down to a friendly discussion.

Beginnings of the Higher Criticism.

But we return to the question, What are the principles that have been recognized as valid and true? Perhaps the best way to answer this question will be to cast a glance on the history of the controversy. Before the appearance of Astruc's epoch-making treatise, entitled, "Conjectures Regarding the Original Memoirs which Moses Appears to Have Used in Composing the Book of Genesis", there was only one method of reaching answers to the questions: Who wrote the books of the Bible? What is the literary form of each of them? What its beauty as a poem, its credibility as a history, its value as a cosmogony? This was the way of tradition. From time immemorial, some views had been held on these questions and handed over from generation to generation of scholars. But experience proves that during the course

of transmission such traditions are unavoidably altered; and it was natural to ask whether the works themselves did not in some way furnish materials that could be used in rectifying some of these inevitable aberrations of tradition. Astruc's work did not indeed formally discuss this question. In fact, the author seems to be unconscious that there was any such question at all. He took it for granted that upon examining the literary peculiarities of the book of Genesis he would discover facts upon the basis of which he would be able to supplement tradition with reference to the authorship of Genesis. Tradition ascribed Genesis to Moses. These literary facts indicated to his mind that Moses used documents in composing the first of the books of the Pentateuch. He would reconstruct and characterize these documents as far as possible. The special fact with which he began, as is well known, was that there were several names to designate God, and that they were used not indiscriminately, but uniformly each in certain sections of the book. The use of these names he thought was characteristic, and the sections in which each occurred were works of different authors. Hence he called one of them the Jehovist, and the other the Elohist.

First Principle: Literary Features as Criteria of Origin.

Such a method could not but bring to view the broad principle: That it is proper to reason back from the language of a document to its author. The author is the cause of a writing, and there is a correlation between cause and effect in this as in every other sphere of activity. The validity of the principle is so obvious that it may be safely said it could never be challenged in the general form in which it is here given. But, on the other hand, in this general form it would prove of very little use. Accordingly, in the history of its application there has been a considerable amount of progress toward defining the conditions under which it may be used, and the conclusions which may be warrantably reached by its use. It would require a treatment of our subject far more extensive than that allowed by the nature of this article to indicate all the checks and cautions that have been recognized as necessary in order to secure reliable results by the use of literary facts. But some may be mentioned by way of illustrating how the general principle has been narrowed down.

At first the tendency was strong to use the principle very rigidly in the analysis of books thought to be unities. Wherever differences of expression were perceived between two parts of a writing more or less consistently maintained, the parts were immediately declared works of different authors. The practise of critics has become much more cautious. It is not every sort of difference that indicates difference of authorship. It is not the same difference that under every condition points to the same conclusion. Style may change with the changing periods of a writer's age; it may change with change of employment,

and even with the nature of the subject on which he may be at any time called upon to write.

The accredited literary principle of the Higher Criticism, then, is neither the general and truistic abstraction that the style of a writing reflects the individuality of its author, nor the indiscriminate and sweeping rule that the style so reflects the author that he may be recognized in it at once and without difficulty; but that under given conditions and within certain limitations the language of a document may be used as a basis of conclusions as to its authorship. It will be seen at once that the results of the application of this principle could not be very radical. The critic might even complain that our statement of it is too conservative; that it hems him in too much, and practically reduces his work to a narrow margin. But the critic can afford to waive this complaint, because his science is not limited to the literary principle as the only one that he has at his hand.

Second Principle: Historical Settings as Criteria.

Side by side with it there has come to be recognized the historical principle. This, stated briefly and in general terms, is: That a writing fits in to the historic setting in which it arose. Given the historic setting and given the harmony of the writing with it, this harmony is presumptive evidence that the writing originated in it. But, like the literary argument, this principle also has undergone a considerable clarification in the course of its history. It has been realized that while in general every production springs out of a given setting and shows plainly the signs of that setting, yet every setting has a generic aspect—that is, one common to many others with itself—and a specific aspect, which is peculiar to itself. In order to be sure of his argument, the critic must be able to identify the setting not by its generic features, but by the specific. He must show that the marks left by the historical surrounding on the writing are those which only the setting he claims for it could have left on it. Let us take a concrete illustration. The Forty-eighth Psalm is entitled “A Song of Deliverance.” On closer examination we find that it speaks of the assembling of kings, apparently against Zion. They approach the Holy City to destroy it; but they are dumbfounded, dismayed, and hasten away. The Psalmist rejoices over their discomfiture. Who were these kings? What is the age or reign to which the Psalm fits in? The situation would appear to be quite clearly defined; and yet its features are common to at least two historical settings: that under Ahaz, when Rezin and Pekah combined against Jerusalem and came down into Judah, devastating its territory; and that under Hezekiah, when Sennacherib encamped about Jerusalem. In both cases the danger was imminent and the deliverance signal, and we can easily imagine the Psalmist of one or the other situation breaking forth in such words as are contained in the composition before us. What the modern reader or

student has a right to insist on is that the correspondence between the historic setting alleged for a document and the characteristics of the document shall be real and specific; otherwise the conclusion of the critic must be considered only a working hypothesis or theory. On the other hand, what the critic has a right to insist on is, that when he has made out a case of exact correspondence between the internal marks and the environment to which he ascribes a document, he has done his task as a critic, and his conclusion is established. The critic's great danger lies in the direction of overestimating the strength of his argument. He begins his work with the expectation of making valuable discoveries. It would be very disappointing to him not to have discoveries to announce. The non-expert layman must save him from this danger. Men will not have occasion to think of the Higher Criticism as a purely conjectural method of procedure if due regard is paid by the critic to the demand that what he calls historical facts and factors shall be truly historical—that is, actual in history, and not simply inventions of his own imagination.

Third Principle: Religious Thought as a Criterion.

But the course of criticism as thus far practised has forced a third principle to the front, and caused its recognition as a valid and sound one. This is, that the theological system, or, more properly, religious thought, of a writer may serve as a basis of identifying him. This principle may be applied in one of two ways: first, in using religious thought as a characteristic of the individual; and second, in using it as a mark of a period or stage of development. Its first application is so much like that of the argument from style that it will be unnecessary to dwell on it further. The second application takes it for granted that a law of development operates in religion; that even in the formation of the product of supernatural revelation this law has been followed. Consequently, in the earlier ages of Biblical history, ideas are more primitive and elementary; and in the latter, more complex and elaborate. If a writing shows the latter characteristics, it may be presumed to be late. Thus far this principle also is universally recognized as valid. The danger of the critic here is from the temptation to impart some unphilosophical theory of evolution. And as a matter of fact, many have tried to apply this principle with rationalism as a basis. Accordingly, to many, rationalistic criticism and Higher Criticism have appeared to be synonymous. There is no necessary connection between rationalism and the Higher Criticism; but it is easy, by the subtle infusion of the naturalistic philosophy, to color the results of criticism. It is the duty of the critic to guard against this danger.

Fourth Principle: Cumulative Force of Combination of Principles.

Finally, let it be noted that the principles already enumerated may be used singly or in combination. The validity of the results will

depend on whether the principles corroborate and support one another in leading to the results; *i.e.*, if they converge. If a conclusion is reached by the application of the literary principle alone, its value will not be very great; if by that combined with the historical, it will be greater; but if the literary, historical, and theological principles can be shown to unite in support of it, then its value will be so great that, if tradition contradicts it, it may be fairly assumed that tradition is in error.

IV.—THE PLACE OF MIRACLE IN THE MODERN CHRISTIAN'S FAITH.

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It is a striking fact in the history of Christian apologetics that often what has been at one time an argument for the Christian faith is later placed in the catalog of things to be defended. The stalwart wooden warship, once the monarch of the seas, is powerless before an iron man-of-war. An attack on the historic element in the Scriptural narrative demands an historic reply. Scientific investigation of the literary quality of the Bible must be met by a scientific answer. Iron must clash with iron. The fulfilment of prophecy based on a false exegesis of disputed texts minutely elaborated into imaginary coincidences was once held to be one of the mighty weapons of the faith, a challenge to all unbelievers. Now we do well if in the light of modern historical knowledge Hebrew prophecy be made reasonable to believers. The facile dogmatism as to authorship, chronology, the unique character of the revelation to the Jews, now must give way to strenuous thought, honest concessions, and careful discrimination in statement of the truth. Greater than all these, the miraculous element in the Bible, once a battering-ram of the faith, is in modern apologetical works an outpost to be defended against the heaviest cannonade. We need waste no time in lamenting this change. Truth is ever in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of God, and not of man's intellectual reason. Truth is protean, and deathless because protean. The vessel is temporal, the truth is eternal. Very old wine must take a new wine-sack. Time, which rots the sack, but mellows the wine. A scientific, materialistic age, with little sympathy for anything which is spiritual, may be expected to have trenchant criticism for the whole subject of supernaturalism.

It is the purpose of this paper to give in a condensed form the general results of the recent discussions of the subject of miracle—resulting from the changed point of view adverted to—as found in the standard works of modern apologists. It will be convenient to consider:

First, the sharpening of the issue—not miracle, but the supernatural, at stake.

Second, the change of argument from the discussion of the abstract possibility of miracle to the probability of miracle, and the quality of the evidence involving the test-miracle, the resurrection.

Third, the great moral miracle, the character of Christ.

In the light of these considerations the true idea and purpose of Biblical miracle will appear.

I. The sharpening of the issue—not miracle, but the supernatural, is at stake.

"The supernatural and the miraculous," says Prof. H. B. Smith, "are not identical. The miraculous is one mode or manifestation of the supernatural." The discussion of the miraculous element in Scripture therefore leads to the higher question, the reality of the supernatural. The seriousness of the issue is now fully appreciated by Christian writers, who are shaping their arguments