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UNSCIENTIFIC CRITICISM OF THE BIBLE*

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I. Unscientific Criticism of the Bible as History

"Modern criticism of the Bible, since it awakened from its dogmatic slumber, has been largely conjectural. It will, doubtless, become strictly scientific; but in order to become so, it must be far more largely self-critical than it has yet been. The criticism of the higher criticism by competent critics is a chief want of the age, and for modern Biblical criticism itself a necessary means of transition to a positively scientific condition." These words of Professor Flint I might take as the text of this address on "Unscientific Criticism of the Bible."

This is an age of advancing science, and the spirit of science is entering into and pervading every branch of human learning. The progress of the experimental sciences of physics and chemistry has been so remarkable, and has produced fruits of such manifest utility, that the principles and methods by which their results have been obtained are being applied to every other subject of study. The great men whose learning and labour have advanced these sciences have been distinguished not only by keenness of observation and accuracy of experiment, but by the boldness and fertility of their imagination in inventing hypotheses and constructing theories. But all their hypotheses are rigidly tested by facts, and if they fail to stand the test are ruthlessly rejected and generally forgotten. As Sir William Ramsay says, "Progress is made by trial and failure; the failures are generally a hundred times more numerous than the successes; yet they are usually left unchronicled." Thus, the rejection of a multitude of unproved hypotheses is found to be a necessary condition of the progress of these sciences. The whole pathway of their advance is thickly strewn with rejected hypotheses and exploded theories.

Now, when the methods of these sciences, in which the phenomena are comparatively simple and the laws comparatively easy to ascertain, are applied to sciences which deal with man and his thoughts and experiences, and his character and religion, in which the phenomena are vastly more complex and the laws more obscure and elusive, there is still greater need of severely testing by facts every hypothesis and theory and sternly sacrificing all that do not stand the test. And if this is true in dealing with psychology, ethics, sociology and history, it is still more emphatically true when we are dealing with the criticism of the Bible, which involves questions not only of man's

* The first part of an address delivered at the close of the session of the College, April 12, 1906. President Leitch is also Professor of Biblical Criticism in the College.

Reflect on some of these marvelous incidents. For instance, the Annunciation of Gabriel to Mary; the Annunciation of the angel to Joseph; the Birth of the Savior in Bethlehem, agreeably to Micah v. 2; the Visit of the Wise Men of the East, who worshipped the Holy Child, presenting their costly gifts; the Flight into Egypt, according to the Angel's warning; the Slaughter of the Innocents by Herod, so that he might take the Infant King's life; the Five Great Songs of the Church—Ave Maria (Luke i. 28-33); the Magnificat (i. 46-55); the Benedictus (i. 68-79); the Gloria in Excelsis (ii. 14); the Nunc Dimittis (ii. 29-32). Look for a moment at the Magnificat (Luke i. 46-48): "And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord. And my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Savior. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed," etc. See! Mary even realizes that she is to be the mother of her own Savior. Nay, is she not thoroughly conversant with all those never-to-be-forgotten events that convulsed both heaven and earth? "Quite true," it is returned: "But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke ii. 19). But did she continue to do so after the Lord Jesus came to years of understanding? Believe it who can!

A human person subsists by himself, but the human nature subsists in a person. The Lord Jesus Christ had no human personality of His own, but His human nature subsisted in the second person of the Godhead by a personal and indissoluble union. Mark! The meanest, lowest and least intelligent, so to speak, of the insect, fish and brute creation, know their own species, as we have seen, without being introduced, and associate with the members thereof. But the holiest, wisest, highest and most intelligent being that ever existed did not know who He was, according to the dictum of some of the modern "wiseacres"—did not know that He was the Messiah until at His baptism He was informed by His Father. Oh consummate folly! Oh monstrous heresy!

HOW MUCH OF IT IS TRUE?

Rev. H. B. Pratt, D. D., River Edge, N. J.

One of our religious weeklies has recently published a communication from beyond the Sea, entitled "Egyptian Civilization before 4,000 years B. C.," on which, with humble confession of my own ignorance of such matters, I beg leave to ask the maturer judgment of the Editors of *The Bible Student and Teacher*, or that of some of its many well qualified readers. We are used to reading in the secular press statements of the kind there made in reference to the antiquity of the ancient civilization, which violently impugn the truth of Bible History; but when they appear in a religious journal, it seems to me the proper thing to do to challenge them, and ask what truth there really is in them. Like the rest of his School, the writer makes his statements with a degree of confidence which puts to shame the diffidence of many who profess to believe and even to teach the Bible. "There was at last [he says in reference to recent alleged Egyptian discoveries] before the world evidence of the

closing history of the period previously considered prehistoric, showing the development of the art, writing and civilization of Egypt, and the composition of a race which since has maintained its character during 6,000 years. The question was, Where was all this civilization of 5,000 years B. C. developed?"

With equal confidence Prof. Hilprecht is reported as speaking of buildings and other remains of the ancient civilization of Assyria and Babylon, which go back 6,000, or 7,000, and if my memory does not mislead me, 8,000 years before Christ. Now does even a remote degree of certainty attach to these ancient dates? Another writer placidly assures his readers that modern discoveries in Egypt compel us to recast our chronology in such a way as will locate Abraham "in modern rather than in ancient times;" or words to that effect. Now how much of all this is "gold," and how much is simply "brass"? We live in a day when, for many of the purposes of real or pretended scholarship and science, "brass is more valuable than gold,"—as many of our "Higher Critics" have taught us.

On the Cincinnati Southern Railway, the "High Bridge" passes, like a spider's web, over the Kentucky River, at a height of some 250 or 300 feet above the stream, on a single span of perhaps 1,200 feet from bank to bank. At first the trains passed slowly over the yawning abyss; but at the time I was there they told me that after making the terminals perfectly straight, so as to put the trains in exact alignment before they reached the bridge, it was found to be safest to put on all possible steam and go flying over the point of danger at the rate of 40 miles an hour. Now does that illustrate the animus and modus operandi of our Higher Critics and their foster brothers, the archæologists of the same school?—most bold where least secure!

The written history of the Bible dates back to the times of Moses; which I am old-fashioned enough still to place at about 1,500 years before Christ; and we have by divine revelation and by the pen of Moses (or of scribes who wrote under his inspection and superintendence), the authentic history of Abraham and Lot, which it will not hurt us still to place at about 1,900 B. C. Now then, is it a fact, or is it fiction, that the monuments and written records of Egypt and Babylon, by any fair and reliable interpretation (for so far as I can see the translations vary very widely), carry us back 2,000, 3,000 or even 4,000 years before Abraham was born? Is consecutive written history good for anything? or is it only clay tablets and hieroglyphics (which our savants have only recently begun to decipher), with paintings and monumental inscriptions (made by unknown hands, and which Prof. A. H. Sayce avers have often been tampered with), and disconnected papyrus rolls, and the like, that are to be relied on?

We lay the written word of God to pledge, with Jesus Christ our Lord as sponsor for the reliability of the record (John v. 45, 46), that (all systems of chronology apart) in the days of Abraham and Lot, "that goodly land" which Jehovah gave as a heritage to Abraham "his friend"—"the glory of all lands," as Ezekiel fondly called it, even in the days of its decadence and his own captivity—was **so sparsely peopled** that God bade him, with his immense encampment, or encampments, to "walk through the length of it,

and the breadth of it," and survey it all, the land which his newly-found God had given to him,—as in fact he did with perfect freedom, without incommoding anybody;—so sparsely peopled, that when the worldly-minded Lot, whose substance also was so great that their respective encampments could not, or would not, live in peace together (and therefore he preferred the society and fellowship of debased pagans to the altar of his godly uncle, in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed), Abraham could generously bid him to lift up his eyes from the top of the mountain-range back of Bethel and view the whole land, and choose what part he liked best, saying: "If thou wilt take to the left hand I will take to the right; or if thou take the right hand, I will take the left" (Gen. xiii. 9);—so sparsely peopled that one hundred years later, Abimelech, king of the war-like Philistines of that day, could with some show of reason, if not of truth, say to Isaac: "Go from us, for thou art much mightier than we!" (Gen. xxvi. 16).

Now, this is written history, inspired written history; and is it believable by Christian men, to whom God has given the spirit of "little children" to believe unquestioningly whatever He tells them, that this goodly land, emptied and drowned out by the waters of Noah's flood, "a land flowing with milk and honey," though lying at the very door of Egypt was still thus empty of inhabitants for a period of 2,000, 3,000 or 4,000 years after Egypt had become great in art, letters, riches, civilization, population and power? I freely confess that I am not well posted in the recently discovered and as yet but partially deciphered facts of ancient Egyptian history, and in this regard may be esteemed far behind the times; and therefore I ask of those who have a better right to know, How much of all these supposed discoveries and these dates is reliable and true?

For my own part I have more confidence in Moses and the Prophets than in all the monuments of Egypt, read and unread. It is easier for me to believe that these men are mistaken, that "much learning has made them mad," turned their heads, or that prejudice against inspired Scripture has warped their judgment, than to believe that the Bible record is untrue. I have far more confidence in the facts of Scripture history than in all the supposed "findings" of infidel or skeptical Egyptologists. I believe the Bible as it reads, and had rather pass for a fool all my days and be accounted wise in the day of judgment, than be accounted the wisest man in or out of Germany now, and pass for a fool then!

EVANGELISM*

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While appreciating deeply the honor you have done me in asking me to address this representative conference of our giant and glorious Methodism, at the same time I realize and shrink from the responsibility which your invitation places upon me. I interpret that invitation as one to speak for the

* An address by Dr. Carson, a member of the Evangelistic Committee of the Presbyterian General Assembly, before the New York East Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, April 4, 1906.