

THE
REFORMED CHURCH REVIEW

No. 4.—OCTOBER, 1903.

I.

THE HIGHER CRITICISM AS APPLIED TO THE
PENTATEUCH.

BY REV. PROF. F. A. GAST, D.D.

The method employed by the higher criticism is, as we have already seen,* the same as the method employed by science with such marvelous success and such splendid results. Only the object is different,—in the one case, nature; in the other, history. For the higher criticism deals exclusively with questions of a historical character pertaining to the origin and growth of Biblical literature. Its method is the inductive, basing its conclusions on verified facts. For these it searches diligently—making as complete a collection as possible even of such as have apparently but a slight bearing on the question under discussion—scrutinizing them from every point of view—combining them and drawing inferences from the combinations—and so, from isolated and scattered facts, advancing step by step to a general hypothesis explicative of the facts.

If, however, new facts are discovered or old facts receive a better interpretation, the hypothesis may have to be modified or even cast aside. A hypothesis is valid only when it explains all the known facts. Criticism, like every other science,

* REFORMED CHURCH REVIEW, July, 1903.

V.

SOUND EXEGESIS THE BASIS OF EFFECTIVE PREACHING.

BY REV. PH. VOLLMER, PH.D., D.D.

Exegesis is the art of ascertaining and unfolding the true meaning of the inspired writers, according to established hermeneutical principles, without adding to it, subtracting from it or changing it in any way; in other words, without forcing upon the authors a meaning in harmony with preconceived opinions. This exegetical process deserves to be called sound when it furnishes a clear answer to the three simple questions, namely, (1) What does the text *say*; (2) what does it *mean*; (3) what does it *teach*; in other words, when a given text is correctly explained, interpreted and applied.

Take a concrete case and imagine a preacher with a selected text before him. The first question he should ask is, what does this text *say*. To ascertain this he must proceed as in the case of other writings, seeking by the aid of grammar, lexicons and commentaries to explain its terms, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, sections and chapters. This is called grammatical exegesis, the first stage of which is the etymological examination of the principal words. Great aid may be derived from a sober and skilful tracing of words back to their roots. Luther says somewhere that he had long been in doubt as to a real meaning of that fundamental New Testament term, repentance (*μετάνοια*), Roman Catholic exegesis having succeeded in completely obscuring it even in the minds of theologians. Melancthon one day explained to him that the preposition *μετά* in compound words often expressed the idea of transposition. This at once opened Luther's eyes as to the primary meaning of the term and from that time on he invariably de-

fined it as expressing a complete change of mind followed by a corresponding change in conduct. These word studies are especially important in the case of synonyms. For example, in James I: 17, there are two terms for the same general conception. One is *δόσις*, gift, which expresses the idea in general; the second is *δώρημα*, which implies the idea of fullness and liberality. The Revised Version, therefore, correctly translates, "Every good gift and every perfect boon is from above." Or take the familiar phrase "in Christ," and "in God." A careful distinction will show that it may express a fourfold union. God is in us as He was in Christ, by a personal union, or as He was in the prophets, by a special illumination and power, or as He is in the children of God, by a renewal of their whole man, or as He is in all men, by His general providence.

But etymology is slippery ground because words continually change their meaning. For this reason Biblical terms must also be studied historically. In the New Testament this is the more important because Christianity has greatly changed the Greek by removing it from its sphere and obliging it to give expression to a life to which it was originally foreign. The world of new thought which Christianity called into being formed new terms to express them, or emptied old terms of their former meaning, filling them with a new one. In proportion as men were converted, they converted the language. Plato certainly could not have understood the Greek of the New Testament except by becoming a Christian. For this reason, all the dictionaries of the world, based on classical Greek alone, would never help the student to interpret the New Testament. For example, the term *Logos* means in Plato word or reason; in Philo, the eternal reason, Jehovah; But in St. John, the Son of God, and in Hebrew IV: 12, the Word of God. Moreover, the peculiarities of the New Testament writers themselves must also be considered. For inspiration expresses simply the idea of Divine assistance and guidance, and does not mean the destruction of the personality

of the sacred writer. The word *faith*, *e. g.*, is used by Paul to express his idea of a mystical union with Christ, while James understands by the same term mere orthodox belief. From these considerations it follows that there are few things which we should have more at heart than to awaken in us an enthusiasm for the grammar and the lexicon. When rightly used we shall gain better results from them than from many volumes of dogmatics. They will prove instruments of training the mind into close and accurate habits of thought and will increase our intellectual wealth. By it we become aware of delicate variations in an author's meaning. We can not make any secure advance in sound exegesis without a patient investigation of the forces of words and their precise value. Disappointment awaits him who thinks to possess the whole without first possessing the parts of which that whole is composed. Translations of the Bible are insufficient for this purpose, because, first, no translation can give all shades of meaning contained in the original; secondly, the best translation can not be thoroughly understood after the generation in which it was made without resort to the original, and thirdly, even the best translations which the people have, do not allow the holy writers to speak in modern English or German to the people. The recently revised translations in both languages teem with obsolete idioms. When, therefore, the question is asked, sometimes even by educated ministers, what advantage will an imperfect knowledge of the original languages give us, since we really cannot master them, I answer, in Paul's phraseology, much every way; first of all, it will enable us to understand the best commentaries which are all based on the original text. We may not be able to write English like Shakespeare, or German like Schiller, but we can understand them and admire the thoughts which they so beautifully express and which lose much of their power even in the best translations. Dr. Briggs, therefore, is right when he says: "Only the philologist can be an interpreter. Others than philologists may become interpreters of the Scripture by depending upon the labors of

the philologist in the translations and expositions which they produce."

The second question which sound exegesis asks is, What does the text *mean*? That is, it endeavors to find what was in the mind of the sacred author when he penned these words. This process is called interpretation or historical exegesis. As the whole external and internal life of a people, its social and political conditions are reflected in its literature, it follows that sound interpretation is impossible without at least a general knowledge of history, archaeology, geography, chronology, etc. And here it is where traditional exegesis has made her greatest mistakes, and where modern progressively orthodox exegesis has reaped its finest harvest. Dr. Henry S. Nash says: "The old exegesis took the Bible out of its historical setting, and removed it from its relations to definite times and concrete situations, causing the men of the Bible to speak altogether in the language of the men of a far later time. The aim of our (the modern orthodox) exegesis is to find the Bible at home within its history, and having found it there to listen patiently and reverently while it tells its story in its own tongue." Closely connected with this process is the so-called psychological method, that is the endeavor to ascertain not only what the author said, but why, under the influence of any given circumstances, he said it just so. Horne says: "The scope is the soul of the book, and that being once ascertained, every argument and every word appears in its right place and is perfectly intelligible. But if the scope be not duly considered, everything becomes obscure, however clear and obvious its meaning may really be." Luther would not have called the epistle of James an epistle of straw if he had understood that its design is not to combat justification by a living faith, but to combat reliance upon dead orthodoxy for salvation. Sometimes the book itself states the scope, but generally we have to find it out by a careful study of the context. Therefore, to interpret without regard to the context, is to interpret at random; but to interpret contrary to the context is to

teach error. For example, in 1 Cor. VII: 1, Paul says: "It is not good for man to marry." A little startled by this remarkable statement, we read on to verse 26th, in which he says: "It is not good for the present distress." Taking the text and context together, the true interpretation appears, which is, that marriage is an excellent thing, but may be very inexpedient in times of severe persecution.

But interpretation is not preaching. The teacher in the class room may stop when he has ascertained what a given text says and what it means, but the preacher must go one step further and ask the third question, what does this text *teach*, that is, what is the underlying permanent principle applicable to the faith and practice of God's people of all times and climes. In other words, he tries to make the Biblical author talk English and German to his congregation, assembled in Philadelphia and not in Palestine, composed of people living in the twentieth century and not in the first century, surrounded by social, political and commercial conditions entirely different from those in the Roman Empire. This is called application, or doctrinal and practical exegesis.

As an illustration of the whole exegetical process as heretofore explained, take, *e. g.*, the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. What it *says*, the words, clauses and allusions, are easily explained. More important is it to find out what the parable means, *i. e.*, to ascertain what was in the Lord's mind when He uttered it on the Tuesday of the Passion Week. But the most important question is: What does the parable *teach*? A careful consideration will make it plain to the preacher that the lesson contained in it for His people as well as for all times, is that of stewardship and rigid accountability according to each individual's endowments and ability. Or take James V: 14: "Is any among you sick, let him call for the elders, etc." What the passage says is easily understood. What James means, is, that in the absence of the medical profession in those times, the elders should care for the bodies as well as for the souls of the members. What it teaches in

our own times is that if a church member is sick he should call for the minister for spiritual consolation because sickness depresses the spirit, and he should also call in a reputable physician and give all faith-curists, Dowieists, quacks and Christian Scientists a wide berth.

Of course, these three steps need not to be followed independently, one by one. They will often intermingle. While engaged in word studies, practical applications will come to the preacher's mind, and vice versa. But all the three steps should be regarded as the component parts of a thorough exegetical process.

But a man may be an interpreter according to the most approved grammatical-historical method and yet he may not do justice to the Scripture. Therefore, besides these varied intellectual acquirements, sound exegesis calls for two moral qualifications, the first of which is a *supreme regard for the truth*. God will not hold guiltless any one who tampers with the truth in the interest of preconceived opinions. This demand can, of course, be only very relatively realized. Strictly speaking, no sphere of knowledge is without its presuppositions. Even the physical scientist postulates a number of self-evident axioms. The personal equation plays a most important part in everything that man does. No man's mind is *tabula rasa*, least of all that of the preacher. He can not entirely divest himself from his nationality, early training, theological education, mental habits and moral character, and approach the Bible as a new-born babe. Hence we observe that the majority of the exegetes study the Bible with the expressed or implied aim of finding in it either a confirmation of the statements of their adopted creed or of the principles of their philosophical system. The ideal interpreter, however, is the man who earnestly endeavors to empty his mind of everything which is merely of a theological or philosophical nature, and to approach the Bible simply as a living member of that same mystical body of Christ, the founders of which partly accepted and partly wrote themselves the history of

God's revelation to men contained in the sacred volume. We are well aware that some critics would denounce even experimental religion and warm love for the Bible as a mental condition unfavorable to the clear apprehension of the meaning of its contents. If this state of mind disqualifies a man for scientific Bible study, then, of course, we had better sit at the feet of those cold-blooded literateurs whose minds are saturated with presumptions of just the opposite character, and who care as little, and sometimes less, what becomes of the Bible at their hands, as philologists care what effect their criticism may have upon the people's opinion concerning Homer, Niebelungen, or Shakespeare. This, of course, would be acting on the presumption that an indifferent lawyer, or a personal enemy was better qualified to apprehend the real spirit of a father's letter, than that father's son. But who will concede that or trust to "unprejudiced" results of such a character? If, therefore, the demand that the search after the truth should be pursued without preconceived opinions is to have a meaning, it is this—but this it must mean—that the Bible should be approached with candor, fairness and love for the truth; without stupid dogmatism and narrow-minded bigotry; with a mind free from self-inflated rationalism and fanatical naturalism. In other words, the preacher should cultivate a disposition such as Cowper describes in his familiar lines:

A critic on the sacred book should be,
Candid and learn'd, dispassionate and free,
Free from the wayward bias bigots feel,
From fancy's influence and intemperate zeal.
For of all arts sagacious dupes invent,
To cheat themselves and gain the world's assent,
The worst is—Scriptures warped from its intent.

Closely connected with this is a second moral qualification of the successful exegete, namely, sympathy with the divine truth, congeniality of the inner man with the objective truth as it is in Jesus. By this I do not mean to give expression to

that commonplace thought that in order to be a good preacher one must be a pious man, for this goes without saying. What I wish to emphasize is the well-established scientific principle that cordial sympathy and love for the Bible is essential to an adequate understanding of its contents. The explanation of this scientific law is simple enough. The student penetrates into the contents of the Bible most profoundly and conveys the impressions and ideas received most vividly when he is dealing with things that have entered most intimately into his own life. These will leave the most clearly defined impressions upon his own mind. A genuine sympathy between his spirit and the spirit of Christ will enable him to interpret the deepest ideas of the Scriptural truth by a sort of divine intuition. This principle is not peculiar to Bible study. It is readily recognized in all other spheres of life. Music, art and literature will only disclose their beauty and secrets to those who have a heart to love them. Beethoven, Raphael, Shakespeare and Goethe may receive conventional praises from prosaic natures, but they will never be truly appreciated by them. "Willst du den Dichter recht verstehn, musst du in Dichter's Lande gehn," says Goethe. This principle of sacred hermeneutics is emphasized in the simple language of the Bible itself. The clearest enunciation of it is found in 1 Cor. 2, 6-16: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." It is, therefore, not remarkable that unspiritual men can not penetrate into the deep things of God's revelation; on the contrary, it would be the most remarkable phenomenon if men without the life of God pulsating in their heart could be for us trustworthy guides in interpretation. Prayer and the love of God are just as important to the successful exegete, as grammar and lexicon. "For, when the heart is dead, the eye can not see," said Carlyle. And the opening of the eyes comes not from acuteness of intellect and capability of scientific investigation, but from purity of heart, from innocence of life, from a reverent, loving and obedient disposition toward God. "Blessed are

the pure in heart, for they shall see God." "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine." To know the truth is something more and vastly greater than to know things about the Bible which contains the truth. For these reasons the greatest preachers of the world have been men who combined in their personality genuine piety and profound learning. "God must be loved in order to be known," says Augustine. In the same spirit Dr. Briggs writes: "The Scriptures can not be understood from the outside by grammar, logic, rhetoric and history alone. The Bible is to be understood from its center, its heart, its Christ." And to the same effect Bishop Maggee writes in "The Gospel and the Age": "There is no demonstration of the Gospel possible for the natural man. We can demonstrate it for you neither by the authority of an infallible church nor by the reasoning of an infallible philosophy. Wisdom is justified of her children. And of them alone. Believe it and you will know its truth. Try the remedies we offer you and you shall experience their efficacy. The Gospel of Christ crucified must always stand in irreconcilable antagonism alike to those who would harden it into a superstition and to those who would dissolve it into a philosophy. The same idea is eloquently discussed in the justly famous sermon by F. W. Robertson, on the topic, "Obedience, the organ of spiritual knowledge."

Having outlined the process of what we understand by sound exegesis, the question arises, how and in what way will sound exegesis make our preaching effective in the best sense of the word? I will confine my answer to four points. First, by deriving most of our material directly from the fountain of living water, our sermons will show a degree of *freshness* not otherwise attainable. There is a difference between a drink from the mountain springs directly and one from the spigot in our house after the water has passed through the Schuylkill, the reservoirs and the water pipes, carrying along quantities of mud and dangerous microbes. There is also a

difference between the taste of an apple plucked directly from the tree and one preserved in a jar or dried by the process of evaporation. There is a difference between the beauty of flowers in the garden and those preserved for the use of lectures on botany. I am very far from undervaluing the systematizing of the teaching of the Word of God in catechisms, or dogmatical and ethical treatises. The educated mind naturally craves for it, and will not be satisfied with anything less. A preacher who wants to teach with any degree of self-consistency must have some theological system. To merely know the facts is to be no higher than an animal. An educated man must know the relation of facts to each other and to mankind. But what I insist upon is that getting the truth principally through catechisms and the dogmatics is getting it at second-hand, at a discount, in an artificial, abstract form, by which it inevitably loses much of the power and beauty, the plainness and perspicuity of its natural setting. Encyclopedias of quotations from Shakespeare, alphabetically arranged, are certainly useful books. One can see at a glance what the poet has ever written on subjects like "God," faith, conscience, liberty, etc. But if any one supposes that he will, through such books, receive an adequate idea of the grace, beauty and power of the works of the myriad-minded poet, he is sadly mistaken. In order to get that he must study Shakespeare's plays in their natural form, as penned by him. Just so with the Bible. "God is a spirit," is a grand dictum even in its disconnected form, quoted as a proof text in the catechism; but how much more powerful and fresh does it appear when read in its living, natural, organic connection in the story of the Samaritan woman! When, therefore, on the Lord's Day, the preacher succeeds in plucking such a sweet fruit, full of its natural juice directly from the tree of life, and without first pressing the juice out of it, presents it to his people in all its freshness, they will gladly accept of it, and, figuratively speaking, take a big bite of it, and while the sweet juice is running down their cheeks, they will go home, feel-

ing, thinking, and sometimes saying, "Indeed the statutes of the Lord are sweeter than honey and the honeycomb" (Ps. 19, 11). The charge of dullness in the pulpit has become proverbial, and only the immediate approach to the Bible will successfully do away with it. The old German mythology speaks of a river called Ygdrasil. Old men who bathed therein became young again. Sound exegesis is that river for the preacher. It will give us freshness unpolluted by the muddy river of cheap sensationalism. Contact with those masterpieces of Biblical literature will brace up the preacher's own intellect.

Sound exegesis, in the second place, will make our sermons effective, because it will strengthen the preacher's faith in the essentials of God's revelation, and will thereby enable him to exert a convincing influence upon his people also. Reverent biblical criticism is a sacred obligation. It can never hurt, for living faith rests on foundations which lie far beyond the reach of any critical conclusions. True as we know all this to be, yet experience has taught many a preacher that even reverent criticism often has a tendency to impair the robustness of our spiritual life, for the simple reason that the critical atmosphere is in itself chilly, often malarial and not altogether healthy. Professional critics of secular literature even have been heard to complain that they had almost lost the faculty of really *enjoying* a piece of literature. In the case of a preacher, a similar experience would seal his fate as an effective preacher, for, as Theremin truly says, "In proportion as the sacred orator loses the conviction of the Divine authority of the Bible, his eloquence must also lose its power." And Longfellow adds, "The sermon is no sermon to me, in which I cannot hear the heart beat." Now, sound exegesis, as we understand its process and its spirit, will strengthen the preacher's conviction in the word of God, on the principle of Bacon's dictum that a mere nipping at the Word of God increases doubt, while deep and constant draughts removes them. And as convictions are contagious,

a Bible student will also impress and convince his people, in other words, his preaching will prove to be effective.

Sound exegesis will, in the third place, make our preaching effective, because it will make our sermons instructive. Didactic preaching of the right kind is very popular. Men thirst for information. The preacher makes a mistake who thinks that only men with college education can think. And yet, Spurgeon's criticism, I think, is only too true, that "many sermons are deficient in solid instruction, biblical exposition and sound argument; they are flashy rather than fleshy; clever rather than solid; entertaining rather than impressive, reflective discourse in which doctrine is barely discernible, brilliant harangues from which no food for the soul could ever be extracted." There are preachers who, *e. g.*, during the whole season of Lent, entertain their people with sentimental gush, criticisms of the disciples, railing against Judas, praising the women at the cross; but for a well-reasoned-out sermon on the relations of Christ's sufferings and death to our salvation they find no time. Only thorough Bible study will supply this deficiency. It will enable the preacher to dissipate ignorance, awaken thought, sow the seeds of truth in the minds of men and make them children of light who grow in knowledge. A preacher who excels in the faculty of lucid, logical and forceful statement will be listened to with profit, for we all know that it is a great gift to make the profound truths of the Bible clear to all classes of our people. They have a right to the very best we can give them. The principal truths of the Bible, as Parker says, answer more questions, satisfy more aspirations, respond to more necessities, and supply better motives for service than any other system that invites the confidence of men.

Sound exegesis will, in the fourth place, make our preaching effective because it will saturate us with the beautiful language, the forcible style, the clear and simple logic and the picturesque, plastic and concrete diction of the Bible. It will wean us from preaching in theological terms and Latinized

language, as well as from the abstract presentations of the Christian truths.

I presume very few will dissent from what has been said concerning the way to become effective preachers. But in order really to profit from a discussion like this the following or similar rules should be observed. (1) Make it a rule, allowing few exceptions, to read at some part of every day two chapters in the Old and one in the New Testament during your whole life, beginning in Genesis and Matthew; (2) at convenient periods, about once every month, read a brief book, or a section of a larger book through at one sitting, as you would read a play or a sermon, in order to get a total impression of its contents; (3) study every week one chapter exegetically according to the method indicated in this paper; (4) make yourself thoroughly familiar with every detail of the life of Christ by studying a harmony of the four Gospels, and when preaching from a text in the Gospels always consult this harmony in order to become familiar with all surrounding incidents. I would also recommend a careful perusal of the Apocryphical books of the Old and New Testaments, of the works of Josephus, of books on travel in the Holy Land, of historical novels, like "Ben Hur," "Quo Vadis," and Ebert's novels on Egypt, of Rawlinson's "Egypt and Babylon," and Brown's "Assyriology, its Use and Abuse." These and similar books are pleasant, and some of them light reading. They are at the same time very instructive, throwing strong flashlights on the correct interpretation of the Bible. Some ministers plead lack of time for such thorough Bible study. But must not a man find time for the essentials of his calling? Moreover, what is in most cases wanting is not so much time, as self-discipline and the cultivation of habits of order. Others attempt to clothe their laziness in a pious-looking garb by pretending to rely on the promise that the Holy Spirit would teach them. But is it not presumptuous to suppose that the Holy Spirit will reveal the sacred mysteries of salvation to the indolent? I would say, from

my limited experience, for the encouragement of all of us, that the gift of preaching is susceptible of great improvement. But the development of that gift depends, to a great extent, on our heeding of St. Paul's advise to Timothy: "Give thyself to reading, neglect not the gift that is in thee; meditate on these things" (1 Tim. 4, 5).

Coupled with every vocation is some indispensable *special* fitness. A lawyer is helped in his profession by many accomplishments, such as a good general education, insight into human nature and a cheerful disposition; but woe unto him if he is deficient in the knowledge of the law of the land! So a preacher derives help in his work from a great many sources, from a good general education, wide reading, command of language, the gift of imagination, a good voice, a commanding presence, a retentive memory; but he will signally fail as a really effective preacher if he neglects thorough, sound, continued Bible study. In the life of a minister, some things are unnecessary; many things are desirable, but one thing is needful, and that is the searching of the Scriptures.