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HIGHER CRITICISM.

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On scarcely any topic are opinions more widely divided than in relation to Higher Criticism. There are a very great many Christians and some leaders who have the ear of multitudes to whom the very name is an offence. A great denomination has been made responsible for the declaration, "We thank God that there is no Higher Criticism among us."* In short, as a most eminent American scholar said, "It has come to be considered one of the most dangerous forms of infidelity, and in its very nature hostile to revealed truth."† On the other hand, it is most highly exalted, not only by those who practice it and are expert in its use, but no less by throngs who accept the conclusions of their favorite critics without debate or question. The fact is that most people have only the most vague and hazy ideas as to what Higher Criticism really is.

This uncertainty and ignorance can scarcely astonish one in view of what appears on consulting the dictionaries. Of the three leading English dictionaries consulted, the first gave no definition at all, under either "Higher" or "Criticism." Nor did the other two agree. While giving substantially the same definition for "Criticism," as being inquiry into the text, origin, character and authenticity of literary and historical documents, they then part

* Bible Student and Teacher, April, 1906, p. 324.

† Professor W. H. Green, D.D., Preface to the Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch.

company. One says, "Higher criticism concerns writings as a whole; lower criticism concerns the integrity or character of particular parts or passages," a distinction really incorrect and misleading because out of harmony with its ordinary use by scholars; the other remarks, "The lower criticism commonly deals with the text of such productions, the higher criticism with the historical and literary features," a statement pointing in the right direction, but neither fully accurate nor sure to be grasped by all.

Should we undertake to form our own definition, we may well begin by noting that criticism is judging, and as applied to a book it would be forming an opinion about it in any way, as in art or music critic denotes one competent to form an opinion, a skilled judge. But if criticism is judgment, what is "Higher" criticism? It may be noted at once that the name is unfortunate. Higher Critics are often sneered at as if by their very designation of their undertaking they had set themselves up as superior, and this sneer has even shaped the title of a book, "The Higher Critics and the Highest Critic." (Was the author ignorant or malicious in choosing this title?) In spite of the fact that the name has been in use more than a century, it remains unfortunate. It came into use in this way. The first critical study of the Bible having been in relation to the establishment of the text, when the step was taken to more advanced study of the documents in the Bible, the distinction between textual study and broader study of the character of the writings was made by calling the former lower criticism and the latter higher criticism,* and though unfortunate, the name has somehow stuck, though more freely used in English than in German.

Various attempts have been made to introduce other names. In German we sometimes read of "innere kritik," (internal criticism). So too the names "literary," "historical" and the combination "historico-literary" have

* Eichhorn seems to have been the first to use these names.

been suggested, but no one of these seems likely to gain common acceptance, and most probably we shall continue to have the name "Higher Criticism," though many do not understand it, most would call it unfortunate, and some make a mock at it.

It is also to be understood that Higher Criticism is practiced no less outside the sphere of Bible study than within it, although it less often bears the name. Whenever any written thing is studied to see what story it tells of itself, its own origin, its own purpose, its own character, then we really have Higher Criticism. It matters not whether it is in a court of law, where a contract, a deed, a will, a letter or any other written evidence is scrutinized, or in the classroom or study of a teacher or student of any literature, ancient or modern, where some book is cross-examined, so to speak, till a confession is wrung from it, or in the public or private library or governmental archives, where the historian weighs the worth of some document, old or new, anywhere, everywhere, where the evidence of the written matter itself is gained, the process is really Higher Criticism. And while some well-meaning but ill-advised persons, in their reverence for the Scriptures sometimes protest against all Higher Critics and Higher Criticism, I never yet found one who would not use on his side of the argument any and all evidence which he could gather from the study of the Bible itself, and this made him in spite of himself a Higher Critic.

Of course not all study in relation to the Bible is properly to be styled Higher Criticism. A late author in the book which he entitles "The History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament" says that "Criticism is Bible study, or interpretation, as it must needs be pursued in an historical age. * * * The Higher Criticism, the original text having been found, aims at the historical interpretation of Scripture."* But there

* Professor Henry S. Nash, D.D., p. 11 of the book named above.

is a great deal of Bible study to-day, in what this author would presumably call "an historical age" (he doubtless meaning by this somewhat inexact phrase, an age in which prevails widely a disposition to consider how things came to be)—there is to-day, as there ought to be, much Bible study outside the realm properly characterized as critical.

First, there is all the study which goes to the establishment of the correct text of the Scriptures, for which, to be sure, most persons lack alike training and materials, but which is to some extent forced upon all in these days by the common use of the various revisions. Then there is exegetical study, the scrutiny of the language so as to answer the question, "What does the author mean?" Sometimes this study is slighted by the declaration, "The Bible means what it says," a saying not so much untrue as misleading. It ought to be put rather, "The Bible says what it means," and the finding out what is meant and consequently what is really said, is a very important part of Bible study, but lying outside the sphere of Higher Criticism. Then there is what has been called the literary study of the Bible, the investigation of the literary forms employed and the rhetorical significance of these forms, a branch of Bible study which has only lately come up, but likely to have increased attention hereafter, and having little connection with Higher Criticism. Then there is the study of all the history which may throw light on the Scriptures. All that can be learned of the past, its dates, politics, manners, customs, ideas, all has been used to throw light on the Bible, and this is important Bible study, but it is not Higher Criticism, though if combined with Higher Criticism it may gain higher value.

Higher Criticism is properly the making of the Bible, to illuminate itself, as a whole and in its several parts. Sometimes a great ocean steamer is brought into the harbor by the aid of half a dozen tugs, sometimes it comes in by the use of its own steam. Now Higher Criticism is

letting the Book navigate by the use of its own steam. It gathers the testimony, direct and indirect, all the testimony of the Bible itself to itself. And this testimony is of the highest value. Nothing about the Bible can be as important and as trustworthy as is the Bible itself. Of course this evidence must be searched for with diligence and scrutinized with care. The consequences are so momentous that we must guard ourselves against any false conceptions of the books which we receive as inspired, their date, their authorship, their composition, their transmission, and in answering these questions no evidence can be more conclusive than that furnished by the books themselves. The testimony of the Bible itself is all important, and consequently the gathering of this testimony and the weighing of its real meaning and worth, which is Higher Criticism, are of the greatest importance and value. If this work has not always been done fairly, carefully, well, the remedy is not to deny the possibility or the right of doing it well, but rather to demand and to exemplify fair and careful doing of it. If Higher Criticism, because of the use of faulty methods or false premises, has resulted in erroneous conclusions, these can be properly set aside only by better and more accurate Higher Criticism which carefully starts from verified premises and proceeds by correct methods, so that the conclusions are no longer erroneous. To be sure, when a man's position is due to prejudice, wilfulness or blindness, without reasons, it is usually hopeless merely to multiply arguments and ply him with reasons; but it is no less true that a man ought never to be asked to lay aside a conclusion derived from reasoning however faulty without showing him his error and giving him better reasons for a better conclusion. It is thus with statistics. Though it is proverbial how misleading they are, yet we must, provisionally at least, accept conclusions based upon figures, until we can find and show how they have been misused and how they ought to be used. In the same way, I admit, I insist that conclusions professedly

based on Higher Criticism are erroneous because of mistake in data or processes, but this means fighting fire with fire, using Higher Criticism to correct Higher Criticism. Where truth has been undermined by Higher Criticism wrongly used, it must be re-established by Higher Criticism rightly used.

There are many difficulties in relation to the practical applications of Higher Criticism which may well make us cautious in accepting critical conclusions, however confidently presented, until confirmed and verified. It is often spoken of as a science, and heed to its conclusions is demanded because they are "scientifically" reached. But in one important use of the name science, it does not properly belong to Higher Criticism. For instance, Morley said of Voltaire, he "hardly left a single corner of the field entirely unexplored in science, poetry, history, philosophy." Now as the word is here used, Higher Criticism is no more science than it is history or philosophy. Here science applies especially to the natural sciences, where the possibilities of experiment or the abundance of material renders verification of hypotheses so easy that certainty is practically assured. When this is the meaning of science, criticism like history and philosophy stands outside its realm. To be sure the name science has another application in which it may be used of Higher Criticism. If by science we mean merely ordered knowledge, a definite relation established between principles and facts according to a regular procedure, then the name may be allowed to Higher Criticism. But then we must be on our guard lest we surreptitiously bring over the element of certainty which rightly belongs to the name in its first sense and attach it wrongly to what is science only in the second use of the name. Great uncertainty still attaches to the practice of many a science in the second sense of the word. In this sense history is a science, but all over its field uncertainties abound. If history is a maze of uncertainties, uncertainty may attach to the conclusions of Higher

Criticism, though likewise dubbed a science. Even in the natural sciences there is somehow, somewhere chance for error. Medicine is a science in the strictest sense, but that does not guarantee its results.

Again, it ought to be remembered that there has never yet been a thorough, systematic and standard formulation of its principles as a science. In conversation with a physician of high standing not long ago the writer was informed that this physician studied under the first medical professor who ever taught the principles of diagnosis; that is, men had been practicing medicine more than two thousand years since Galen and Hippocrates without a careful statement of how to proceed in diagnosing a disease. In a similar way, men have been using Higher Criticism out of the Bible ever since they began to study written documents attentively at all, and have been Biblical Higher Critics by name more than a century, and there is not yet any recognized statement of the principles and methods of the science.* If the science of chemistry were in such a condition, with no accepted formulation of its principles and processes, a jury would be false to its oaths which did not have reasonable doubt whenever its verdict hinged on the testimony of a chemical expert.

Now this is not to be understood as casting discredit on all critical work. Some critics have done work that has been careful, successful, really scientific. The classic example of this sort of work is of course Bentley's "Dissertation on the Epistles of Phalaris." Similar credit is due to the discussions of the forgeries of Chatterton and Macpherson. The writer is told by a friend that Bancroft's *Life of Van Buren* was critically shown to have been written long before its publication. All this is pure Higher Criticism and has been successful and commendable. A piece of work substantially similar has been done in the sphere of the New Testament. The Epistle

* This statement should not be understood as slighting the very helpful popular work of Professor Zenos, "The Elements of Higher Criticism."

to the Hebrews was traditionally assigned to Paul, as may still be read in our Bibles, even the Canterbury Revision. But after thorough study of the letter itself, its style and thought, it has been decided with practical unanimity by scholars that it cannot have been the work of the Apostle to the Gentiles, a piece of pure Higher Criticism, but well done.

On the other hand, the work of Higher Criticism sometimes results in demonstrably complete failure. In 1899, the *Critic*, a literary journal, advertised a series of articles by a well-known Thackeray expert, in which were to be published hitherto uncollected papers of the great humorist, gathered from *Punch*. But at once another critic wrote in the same journal of "the absolutely untrustworthy character of the papers" already published, and the latter proved his contention by showing that he had had access to the payrolls of *Punch* and had verified from them the names of the real writers of the articles in question. In discontinuing the publication the *Critic* said, "An investigator writing at a distance from such first sources of information as the records in the office of *Punch* was not, of course, in a position to speak with any final authority concerning these unidentified contributions," words which might well be hung as a motto in the studies of many critics who at a greater distance from first sources of information assume to speak with final authority.

In any case we search in vain for a clear statement anywhere of the principle employed in proving or disproving authorship by Higher Criticism. Perhaps it might be stated thus. If unlikenesses increase beyond a certain degree, a single authorship becomes increasingly improbable until this improbability becomes sufficient to justify us in acting on it, though it can never reach positive certainty. Conversely, as resemblances are noted, confidence that there was only one author of both increases, it may be to conviction. The same principle is involved in the identification of persons and of signatures

and other handwriting, but all are more or less familiar with the practical uncertainties which beset such applications of it. It is no less uncertain business to apply it to literary compositions.

It may be interesting in several ways to consider the application of this principle to certain Epistles usually ascribed to Paul. In certain letters, notably those to the Colossians and Ephesians, the style is quite different from the Roman and Corinthian Epistles, and the thoughts, as well, are in many respects different. The documents have been searched as with a microscope, and the likenesses and particularly the unlikenesses have been carefully drawn off. The German critic Holtzmann has devoted special attention to this work and probably it would not be unfair to find in the Commentary of which he was general editor his own final conclusion, though the form of the following statement is to be attributed to von Soden: "If we combine all these observations as to style, ideas and literary position, we are forced to the conclusion that Ephesians cannot have had Paul as its author."* But Jülicher, a later, and many will say greater expert, who wrote in view of all his predecessors' work, concludes his own discussion thus: "Although, then, Ephesians may not belong to our unquestioned Pauline heritage, it would be equally impossible to deny the Apostle's authorship with any confidence."* Next in order of time Professor McGiffert, an eminent scholar of great freedom from any bias in favor of traditional views, while recognizing that the great majority of what he calls the "critical school" deny the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, yet himself holds that even on grounds of style identity of authorship "with Paul's acknowledged letters is not impossible," and finds that the doctrinal utterances are "sufficient * * * to confirm the explicit claim of the letter to be Paul's own production."† And

* Translated from *Handcommentar*, III (2te Aufl.), p. 100.

* Introduction to the New Testament (Eng. trans.) p. 147.

† Apostolic Age, pp. 383, 385.

latest comes Professor Bacon, of Yale, utilizing the materials of his predecessors and no less free from traditionalism, and he brushes away the arguments from style by saying we shall "find it easy to explain a few peculiarities of language and style,"[‡] and by a course of argument in relation to the thought, too long to quote here and too compact to summarize, turns the ideas contained into weapons in defence of Paul's authorship. While this bit of history forcibly exemplifies the uncertainties which beset the conclusions of Higher Criticism, it at the same time shows no less conclusively that the way to meet Higher Criticism which is unsound and erroneous is not to ignore it, still less to denounce, but to use it rightly and to turn its methods against itself.

An element of uncertainty, a possibility of error must always remain in the inevitable subjectivity of Biblical Higher Criticism, that is, in the fact that its measures are individual judgment and personal opinion, not any objective standard and test. If Holtzmann thinks that the arguments lead to the conclusion that Paul did not write the Epistle to the Ephesians, there is no way that he can verify and demonstrate his view as the *Punch* records showed that Thackeray did not write certain papers attributed to him. If a man thinks that free trade or prohibition is desirable, the experiment can be tried, in England or Maine, perhaps elsewhere, and his view is checked up. If a man holds that vaccination will lessen smallpox, or radium cure cancer, there is always a chance to test the accuracy of his opinion by experiment, but Biblical Higher Criticism unavoidably goes on unchecked and unverified to the end of the chapter in almost every case.

Another source of difficulty is the limited amount of material which can be used. In many cases where actual experiment is impossible there is much material. For testing theories in language or sociology there are vast and

[‡] Introduction to the New Testament, p. 121.

varied fields in which tests may be found. But the Bible presents phenomena which have no parallels elsewhere in literature, and so Higher Criticism has to deal with unique facts. For example, there is no other such problem in literature, ancient or modern, sacred or profane, as the so-called Synoptic problem. So, too, the problem of the Pentateuch stands alone. This problem is just the opposite of the Synoptic problem. There, to give the conclusion without the reasons, it seems that several sources have been differently combined in the several Gospels; here the different documents, if they ever existed, have been strangely combined into one book or series of books, and there is no exact parallel elsewhere in all known literature to such a fact.

Now the scientific method imperatively demands verification. The cornerstone of the inductive sciences is experiment or observation to check up hypotheses and previous results. If possible, an experiment is actually tried. If a chemist holds that helium is an emanation of radium, he watches the behavior of radium. If it is announced that photographs can be taken by X-rays, immediately all the physicists interested try it. If it is impossible actually to reproduce the phenomena desired, then the test comes by extended observation. Geologists are not quite certain as to their hypotheses concerning the formation of rocks and the earth itself, because they cannot reproduce the situation in question. But there must be verification, and so they search the world over and compare results gathered from a wide area, and these fresh inductions serve as in some sense equivalent to experiment. But neither course is possible for the Higher Critic, and so his hypotheses unavoidably go unverified.

Now one might think that this fact would lead to modesty on the part of those who practice this science, but few need to be told that it has not had this result. The men who constitute the great body of "the critical school" are peculiarly unlike most of the men versed in natural science, in their loudness of claim, their fre-

quently almost ferocious positiveness and self-confidence. Is it not possible that the explanation lies in the fact just mentioned, the impossibility of verification? Think how a great scientific man, a Liebig, a Helmholtz, a Virchow has been taught by his mistakes. He thought that he knew, but the first experiment taught him better and sent him back to interrogate nature more carefully. There is an old story of a difference in opinion of doctors by the bedside of the patient, and one ended his discussion with the simple remark, "You'll find out at the autopsy." The Higher Critic has no such test. He cannot experiment, he cannot verify, and while on that account he ought to be all the more modest in feeling and guarded in statement, the result has been the opposite.

Another thing which the man who gives himself to the natural sciences has to learn is to exclude everything but the one thing sought. The seismometer is to measure the earthquake shock, then it must be set where the vibrations of traffic cannot affect it. The astronomer wants simply the light of the star, then he must set his observatory away from everything which would interfere, and so the Lick Observatory is set on the top of Mount Hamilton. If chemicals are to be combined to prove anything, everything else must be excluded, and so a chemist of my acquaintance tells his students, to begin with, that they must wash their beakers so clean that if they had contained strychnine, they would not be afraid to drink out of them. Failure here means necessarily absolute failure in the experiment. But something, possibly again lack of verification, has led many Higher Critics to fail in this point. Higher Criticism ought not to be mixed with philosophy, and observation of facts should not be affected by theories. But unfortunately such has been the case. The conclusions of the most prominent Higher Critics have been protested against by many Christian teachers, and often with good reason, but in most cases, though the objectors have failed to understand it, what was really objectionable was not the

critical method, but the domination of the critics by philosophical theories. German Higher Criticism is very largely not this science by itself, a registry of purely scientific results. The procedure from beginning to end is controlled and warped by the idea of naturalistic evolution, or evolutionary naturalism, as one may prefer to put it. Evolution as evolution is not necessarily to be set aside, no more as a historical hypothesis than as a biological hypothesis. What is objectionable is naturalism seizing on evolution as a means to dominate Higher Criticism. By naturalism is meant of course that philosophy which excludes God from history, even when it claims to include him in all history, and which approaches the story of Judaism and of Christianity as recorded in their documents with the fixed presupposition that this history is like any and every other history, and so that it can be asserted that things *must* have happened thus and thus, in this order and with such and such results, and garbles the documents, and rewrites the history and denies the facts solely because of the theory that a merely natural evolutionary process controlled the whole, without any supernatural element, with no peculiar intervention of God. If on philosophical grounds it is asserted that God never specially intervenes in human affairs, that there is no prophecy, that miracles never happen, that God dealt with the Jews in the same way as he has dealt with all nations, and that there has been no incarnation, no resurrection, no divine guidance in history and no inspiration in composition, that is a comprehensible position to be proved or disproved on philosophical grounds. But the mischief in Higher Criticism has been that these purely philosophical presuppositions have controlled processes which should have been purely critical, and consequently have entirely vitiated them. It is to this importation of naturalistic philosophy into a field where it does not at all belong that we owe, in my judgment, the complete rewriting of Jewish history which stands out in most minds as the chief re-

sult of Higher Criticism. But this is in fact a vicious arguing in a circle. First the documents are rearranged to conform to a theoretical course of history. Then from these rearranged documents are drawn data which are thought to confirm the presupposed history. But nothing is gained logically by this process. Of course the magician can take out of the hat every rabbit he puts into it, and of course if the documents have been rearranged according to a theory, even by cutting them in shreds to make them fit, they will fit the history.

To this protest against adulterating Higher Criticism with philosophy, may perhaps well be added another against warping it to meet historical considerations. To be sure, most of us are not practically engaged in Biblical Higher Criticism. But it is to be remembered that the Higher Critic sustains to the common student a relation parallel to that of expert and juryman. The expert gives his judgment with his method and reasons; the common man decides the case. It may then be helpful to point out some of the possible sources of error on the part of the critical expert. Now sometimes assertions have been made as in the name of Higher Criticism which rest rather on historical and archeological considerations. When, for instance, it has been argued that there could be no element in the Pentateuch dating back to Moses, because writing could not have been known to him and his circle, that is not a critical but a historical position, which has of course been shown by the discovery of the Tel-el-Amarna letters to be such a gross blunder that those who made it only wish it forgotten. So, too, the argument that the Pentateuch could not have dated back to Moses because such a codification of laws would have been impossible at that time, an argument which the Hammurabi Code has shown to be another blunder, may have been put out by Higher Critics, but that did not make it critical, for it was supposedly historical in character, and should have been used and received as such. Care must be constantly exercised to distinguish con-

clusions which are really critical in character from those based on other grounds.

In this paper, a definition was first reached for Higher Criticism as the investigation as to the origin and character of books on the basis of what is in the books themselves, they being made to turn states evidence, as it were; then some of the difficulties in the practical application of the science were pointed out; then were named some of the elements, philosophical or historical, which are erroneously taken as essentially critical. It may be well in conclusion to point some of the results thus far attained by the practice of Higher Criticism. A late writer* has named but three: 1, the composite nature of the Pentateuch; 2, the proof that our present books of Isaiah and Zechariah are each the work of more than one author; and 3, the composite nature of the Synoptic Gospels. To these the present writer would add two more, one, already mentioned, that the author of Hebrews could not have been Paul, and the other that the author of the Fourth Gospel must have been, if not John himself, then one closely associated with him, a disciple of his and a product of his teaching. Of these the second, the plural authorship of Isaiah and Zechariah, shocks many students greatly, but needlessly. This conclusion does not militate at all against the character of these books, as they have been recognized by the church in all ages, nor is it based on any doubt as to the existence or nature of inspired prophecy. It rests simply on the principle that God adapted the message which he inspired to the men who received it, and that part of the messages in these books are adapted to one age and part to another. It may be added that we have no sufficient reason for asserting that the works of prophets could not have been combined in transmission. It need shock the faith of no one to accept this conclusion, if proved. That the Synoptic Gospels show the use of documents in their

* Dean Burnham in *The Encyclopedia Americana*, art. *Higher Criticism*.

composition is in line with the claim of Luke to have investigated and used all sources of information, and that earlier documents should have been incorporated in the Pentateuch is no more surprising, and in neither case is there any decision as to the date of composition. Finally, it will be observed that the conclusion stated as to Hebrews is not out of harmony with ancient tradition, and that the conclusion as to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel is, so far as it goes, directly in support of the ancient and uniform view of the church.

It is often represented on both sides that the work and results of Higher Criticism are destructive to the view that the Bible is due to the peculiar agency of the Holy Spirit. Those who pose as especial friends of the Bible fear it; those who hold to the opposite view rejoice in what are claimed as its conclusions. The fact is that both are in error. While many Higher Critics are hostile to the view that the Bible is God's book in a unique and authoritative way, yet it cannot be fairly asserted that the results of the assured principles and carefully guarded processes of Higher Criticism are such in any sense. Reverent Biblical scholars have but to master the principles and methods of Higher Criticism to make it serve their cause. As captured Russian battleships swell the Japanese navy, so Higher Criticism will yet contend for the age-long truth.