

men have a better right to say it. He then runs over the list of concordances, from the unpublished work of Euthalius Rhodius in 1300 to the latest edition of Bruder in 1888. And he ends with a most unmistakable testimony to the superiority of the new Concordance of Moulton and Geden

over them all. 'Bruder,' he ends, 'excellent in its general plan and in its mechanical execution, is sadly defective in that it has not been adequately corrected to conform to the critical texts published in recent years. All the others suffer from this cause and from various defects of plan.'

The Historical Method in Theology.

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CHRISTIANITY is so much bound up with history that the first duty of the student is to ascertain, as nearly as may be, what were the historical facts. He will do so by the same methods by which he would ascertain the data in any other branch of historical inquiry. So far there is no difference between sacred history and profane. Only one caution must be given. The historical method must not be employed as a covert means of getting rid of the supernatural. Wherever it has been so used, the use is wrong. It is no longer really the historical method. In itself that method is just as applicable to supernatural facts as to facts which are not supernatural. It is concerned with them only as facts. On the question of the cause of the facts it does not enter. To reject that for which the evidence is otherwise good, merely because it is supernatural, is a breach of the historical method; and where this is done the cause is sure to be ultimately traceable to that which is the direct opposite of this method, viz. philosophical presupposition.

These main points I may assume. I may assume that every care has been taken to find out the facts, and I may go on to the next step, which is to put the facts so ascertained into relation to other contemporary facts, and to construct a living picture of the whole.

Here comes in the difference between the newer methods and the old as applied to the Bible. The old asked at once, What is the permanent significance of the biblical record? The newer method also asks, What is its permanent significance? but as an indispensable preliminary to this, it asks, What was its immediate significance

at the particular place and time to which each section of the history belongs? Clearly here there are different points of view which will need some adjustment, and I think that it may be best for me to take a concrete case in which the difference comes out rather conspicuously. I will take the case of prophecy.

It will be instructive to cast back a glance over the treatment of this subject in recent years. One who is not a specialist on the Old Testament can only profess to give what seems to him to be the main landmarks, and those only in relation to the present subject. Thus regarded, it would seem that the turning-point in the study of prophecy during the present century was the work of Heinrich Ewald. Ewald's leading works were being translated during the latter part of the sixties and throughout the seventies (*History of Israel*, 1867-1874; *Prophets of the Old Testament*, 1876-1881).

Ewald had a vivid imagination and penetrating insight; he threw himself back into the position of the prophets, and he sought to present to us the message which they delivered to their own age. He is allowed on all hands to have done this with very considerable success. The prophets became once more living figures who spoke directly to us because they spoke directly to the men of their own day. In England the popularizing of Ewald's methods begins with Dean Stanley's *Lectures on the Jewish Church*, the first volume of which appeared in 1863. But this accomplished writer caught rather the picturesque externals than the real heart of the matter. A more thorough grasp was apparent in Robertson

Smith's lectures on the *Prophets of Israel and their Place in History*,—a significant addition,—first published in 1882, and in a new edition, with an introduction by Dr. Cheyne, in 1895. In the meantime (1877), an English translation had appeared of Kuenen's *Prophets and Prophecy in Israel*. Of all Kuenen's works this is the one which some of us find it hardest to forgive. No doubt he was a great scholar and a man of wide learning; nor need we dispute the claim which some of his friends make for him to have had also a calm judgment in matters of criticism. But in this work he deliberately sets himself to prove that the words of the prophets were in every sense their own, and not, as they asserted and believed, the word of God; the conclusion being that there was no real converse between God and the human soul. This Kuenen set himself to prove; and the book in which he did so was as thoroughly an *ex parte* statement as one could easily see out of the law courts. That was certainly not an application of the historical method. The most searching answer to Kuenen was a work entitled *Der Offenbarungsbegriff des Alten Testaments* ('The Conception of Revelation in the Old Testament'), by Dr. E. König, now professor at Rostock. In this, Kuenen's thesis was directly grappled with, and it was maintained with much boldness and force, but not without some crudity and exaggeration, not only that the prophets were really moved by the Spirit of God, but also that when it is said that 'God spake,' and that the prophet heard or saw in a vision, there were actual sounds audible by the bodily ear and actual sights seen with the bodily eye.

It is one of the great merits of the Germans that they seldom let an idea drop when once they have taken it up. They test and criticize it, and go over the ground again and again, until they have reduced it to some more workable shape. This has now been done for König's leading idea by Dr. Giesebrecht, of Greifswald, who contributed a paper to a volume of Greifswald essays, which he has since reissued in an enlarged form as a monograph under a title which we might paraphrase 'The Prophetic Inspiration' (literally, 'the endowment of the prophets for their office,' *Die Berufsbegabung der Alttestamentlichen Propheten*, Göttingen, 1897). This seems to me to be a treatise of great value. Dr. Giesebrecht belongs to the critical school, but he has handled his

theme with a candour and openness of mind which I should call really 'historical' in the sense of which we are speaking.

Two points especially concern us. One is that he insists strongly on the reality of the prophetic inspiration. The belief of the prophets that they were moved to speak by God is to him no mere delusion, but a real objective fact. And the other point is that he also contends for the reality of the gift of prediction; not of unlimited prediction, but of a power specially given at particular times, and for the accomplishment of special Divine purposes. This, I think, will mark the lines of the answer to a question which will inevitably arise when we consider the application of the historical method to such a subject as prophecy.

I have said that the historical method seeks to place the facts which it discovers in relation to their surroundings. It takes the prophet as primarily the preacher, teacher, and guide of his own day and generation. But does it therefore refuse to him the gift of prediction? Does it confine the range of his message to the particular society to which it was given? It cannot do so if it is true to itself. It cannot be denied that the prophets were thought by their contemporaries to predict events, and that the power was considered so important a part of their divine commission that special regulations are laid down for its exercise (Dt 18). It cannot be denied that they themselves believed themselves to possess the power (*e.g.*, Jer 28). It cannot be denied that many—though not all—of the events which they predicted came true, the non-fulfilment of certain prophecies being due, in part at least, to the conditional nature of prophecy. (Jer 26³, 13, 19). These are facts to which a sound historical method must do justice. To attempt to get rid of them is not to explain, but to explain away. And such facts supply a touchstone by which to distinguish between a true application of the historical method and a false. An instance of the former, *i.e.* of a right application, may be seen in a writer of our own, Dr. Driver's *Sermons on the Old Testament* (pp. 107-113).

I am not prepared to say that the subject of prophetic prediction has been exhausted. The last word has not yet been said. The different kinds of prophetic outlook need to be classified and considered separately. But I do believe

that, after some aberrations, the inquiry as it now stands is on right lines.

Another question may arise in connexion with the characteristic of the historical method to present each successive stage and phase of revelation in relation to its surroundings. It may be asked whether there is not a danger in this of explaining it away as revelation. I reply as before that any theory or mode of presentation which seeks not only to explain but to explain away, whatever else it may be, is not the historical method. To explain without explaining away might be taken as the motto of that method. When, therefore, we see, as may be seen, in commentaries on the New Testament an increasing number of parallels from Jewish sources — especially from the apocalyptic and other literature of the centuries on each side the Christian era: the Book of Enoch, the Fourth Book of Ezra, the Apocalypse of Baruch, the Psalms of Solomon, the Book of Jubilees, the Assumption of Moses, nearly of all which have recently been made so much more accessible in good editions than they were; when we see copious quotations from such books as these, it must not be supposed that an attempt is being made to reduce the New Testament writings themselves to no higher level. And I may remark in passing that, although they vary somewhat among themselves, the level of the books I have mentioned is not really low. They at least come within the 'sphere of influence' of the Old Testament revelation. When compared with the New Testament they show the point of departure, the ideas that were in men's minds, ideas which it was impossible to ignore, and which were taken up; some to be added to and developed, some to be corrected, some to be denounced and opposed. Even in the case of our Lord Himself, this connexion with the current teaching is very noticeable. He puts new meanings into words, but the words that He uses are not new. Take, for instance, such leading conceptions as those of the 'Kingdom of God' or of 'Heaven,' His own title 'the Son of Man,' His teaching as to the Fatherhood of God, the Second Coming, and the Judgment. In all these instances He starts from the current language, though He recasts it and puts it to new uses.

The recognition of this is one of the leading principles in the study of the New Testament as it is being prosecuted at the present time. And do we not all feel that it has gained greatly in

richness, fullness, and reality? The more we can set before our minds in concrete shape the way in which Christianity affected the actual men and women of the generation to which it was addressed, the more we shall understand the message which it has for other ages, including our own, because it speaks to us through those permanent elements in human nature which are the same in all ages, and connect the remote past with the present.

My own belief is that at this moment the conditions of biblical study are more favourable than ever they have been, and that just because it is being conducted more and more upon the lines of that historical method which we are invited to consider. The historical method itself is being better understood, and perverse applications of it are being discarded. On the Continent of Europe, for some fifty years, the dominant theory which was supposed to cover the history of the Church in the first two centuries was that which took its name from the University of Tübingen. This theory, although those who held it passed for representatives of the best science of their time, was the reverse of historical. It was really a product of the Hegelian philosophy; it went on the assumption that all progress proceeds by a certain law—the law of affirmation, negation, and reconciliation, or synthesis. This formed the scheme into which the facts were compelled to fall, whether they did so naturally or not. I do not say that the theory has done no good. It has thrown into relief certain groups of facts which are not likely in future to be lost sight of. To set against this was the arbitrary way in which it treated a great number of the data, deciding upon the conclusion before it had settled the premises, and, as a consequence, manipulating the premises to suit the conclusion. But whatever the balance of good or evil in the Tübingen theory, as a theory it is now dead, and its epitaph has been written in the striking preface to Professor Harnack's last great work on the *Chronology of Early Christian Writings*. It is true that this deals primarily only with the chronology, and true also that Dr. Harnack holds a number of opinions in which many of us would not agree with him. But his book was important as a sign of the times, and as a return to a sounder method of inquiry.

In England there had always been great reluctance to admit the Tübingen inferences, but there had not been the same skill in formulating prin-

ciples. Now this is practically done in what we call the historical method. To study the facts as they really were by patient weighing of evidence, to approach them in a teachable spirit, ready to catch the least hint which they give spontaneously from within, and careful not to force upon them conclusions brought from without; this is a method which carries with it a promise of sound advance. Not least among its merits is this, that

by its help we may hope to acquire a better understanding of the supernatural. Not crudely rejecting it as too many have done, and not crudely accepting it, as if the simple pronouncing of the name rendered any further explanation unnecessary, but reverently studying the laws by which it acts, we shall be enabled in some degree to enter into the counsels of God, and obtain some further insight into the method of His dealings with men.

Sermonettes on the Golden Texts.

BY THE REV. D. A. MACKINNON, M.A., MARYKIRK.

Romans viii. 28.

‘And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.’

THIS verse contains a glorious truth. Like some bright star shining from heaven on a dark world, it sheds light on God’s people—His lovers and loved ones—during gloomiest hours in the night of time.

1. The promise is made to those who *love God* and are the *called according to His purpose*. A twofold cord is not easily broken. Such a double cord binds Christians to God in Christ. From the human side, love goes up and lays hold of God. From the Divine side, God’s purpose stretches down and holds men with iron grip. When the first railway was made across the Rockies, the engineers wrought from both sides. At a certain point the two lines met, and the iron road was complete. The Cross of Christ is that point at which, in the middle of the great barrier of sin, human love and Divine purpose met to unite a sinful man to the holy God.

(1) *Them that love God*.—Hate is strong. Devils hate; and were hate the champion passion, Satan and sin would triumph. But love is stronger than hate—the David that can slay Goliath. And God is love.

Love to God is a genuine human affection. The lover of God loves Him, not because he has heard his name called on the muster roll of the chosen, but because peace, purity, and deep

satisfaction are found in God. He has seen a vision of the King in His beauty.

This love may run in various channels. One with an eye for beauty of form and figure in nature is constantly saying, ‘My heart leaps up when I behold.’ It flows with largest volume in the river-bed of the Incarnation. We love Him, because He first loved us.

(2) Those lovers of God are also the *called according to His purpose*. Here a corner of that veil is lifted which hides the mysteries of redemption. Each lover comes to God in Christ with free will and heart, and yet has to thank God for the coming. The act of man and the grace of God coincide. That track on which the lover of Christ has freely entered is the track of the eternal purpose. His *I will* answers to the Divine *thou shalt*.

A youth becomes a soldier, and finds that besides satisfying his own ambition, he is a recruit of Government. It nurses him when sick; compels him to serve, should he wish in a fit of disgust to leave; and puts him into the field, irrespective of his own will. In the Christian warfare it is the same. God enlisted, cares for, disciplines, promotes, and pensions His soldiers. As a writer on this Epistle has said very beautifully: ‘I ought to have loved God always. It is of His mercy that I love Him now.’

2. In the case of those who love God and are the called according to His purpose, *all things work together for good*. No wonder! for God is behind the scenes.

Every man is fearfully and wonderfully made;