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1926

681ST ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, DECEMBER 7TH, 1925,
AT 4.30 P.M.

THE REV. A. H. FINN IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed and signed, and the HON. SECRETARY announced that the following had been elected since the last Meeting:—As Members: Percy O. Ruoff, Esq., and the Rev. Sidney Swann, M.A.; and as Associates: A. F. Kaufmann, Esq., Pastor S. F. Tonks, Miss Cheetham, Mrs. R. S. Elliot, the Rev. H. E. Anderson, the Rev. H. H. Meyer, D.D., the Rev. Rhys Bevan Jones, Alfred G. Webber, Esq., Miss E. E. Whitfield, the Rev. Thomas Miller, M.A., H. T. Shirley, Esq., and Miss E. F. Staley.

The CHAIRMAN then announced that Dr. Pinches had kindly consented to change dates with Mr. Michell, in order to allow him to be present and read his paper, which he could not have done on January 11th, owing to absence from England.

He then introduced Mr. G. B. Michell, O.B.E., His Majesty's Consul-General at Milan, to read his paper on "Scientific Criticism as Applied to the Bible."

SCIENTIFIC CRITICISM AS APPLIED TO THE BIBLE.

By GEORGE B. MICHELL, Esq., O.B.E., Consul-General at Milan.

"CRITICISM," says Sir Edmund Gosse, in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, "is the art of judging the qualities and values of an æsthetic object, whether in literature or the fine arts. It involves, in the first instance, the formation and expression of a judgment on the qualities of anything. . . . It has come, however, to possess a secondary and specialized meaning as a published analysis of the qualities and characteristics of a work in literature or fine art, itself taking the form of independent literature. The sense in which criticism is taken as implying censure, the 'picking holes' in any statement or production, is frequent, but it is entirely unjustifiable. There is nothing in the proper scope of criticism which presupposes blame."

“Candid criticism should be neither benevolent nor adverse ; its function is to give a just judgment, without partiality or bias. A critic (*κριτικός*) is one who exercises the art of criticism, who sets himself up, or is set up, as a judge of literary or artistic merit.” “Neither minute care, nor a basis of learning, nor wide experience of literature, salutary as all these must be, can avail to make that criticism valuable which is founded on the desire to exaggerate fault-finding and to emphasize censure unfairly.”

Scientific criticism may, indeed, be defined as a shrewd and minute analysis combined with a scrupulously fair judgment. It is not mere fault-finding, nor heresy-hunting, nor captiousness, nor censoriousness. It is not the taking of a theory and seeking to prove it from the matter in hand.

Thus it is manifest that scientific criticism requires a trained judgment, educated to examine all sides of a question with equal fairness and the utmost impartiality, skilled to weigh the *relative* value of all items of evidence, to reject the false, the specious, and the merely plausible, and to decide on the balance of the resultant established facts without regard to the effects on pre-conceived theories. It must, at the same time, be mindful of the limitations of our knowledge of all the circumstances, and the possibility of later discoveries which would throw a new light on points which may completely alter the judgment expressed.

A critic is both an analyst and a judge. He is not an advocate or an interested party. In delivering his judgment he is entitled, of course, to give his reasons for his findings ; but if he allows himself to seek to prove either one side or the other, he ceases to be a judge, and becomes an *ex-parte* advocate, a mere special pleader. He is, in short, an umpire, not a player in the game.

Such qualities are indispensable in all true criticism ; as applied to the Bible they are more than ever necessary. The *odium theologicum* is not a thing to be lightly aroused, and the Book that has been regarded as Divine for thousands of years by millions of people must be treated with special care and conspicuous justice.

It is clear, therefore, that not every one can be a truly scientific critic. The training of an expert in other subjects is, indeed, rather apt to disqualify the specialist from being an impartial judge. He can give good *evidence*, but the task of *weighing* that evidence as against other evidence is not his, but that of an expert in *evidence*, a specialist in *judgment*.

It may be objected that this insistence on keen and impartial

judgment in a critic is pedantic and hair-splitting. What matter; it may be asked, if the critic does not come up to this standard so long as he brings out valuable truths, and he proves his facts—at least to general satisfaction ?

I answer that, firstly, true science is nothing if not “meticulous”; and, secondly, that proof to the general satisfaction is not the true criterion; and, thirdly, that the lack of discrimination between the functions of an advocate and those of a judge has led, and must inevitably lead, to the propagation of innumerable and very serious errors.

Literary criticism is divided into two branches, viz., “Textual” criticism and the “Higher” or æsthetic criticism. In both of these branches the above-named qualifications of the critic are essential.

In both, also, scientific criticism proceeds by—

- (a) Taking the object to be judged *as it is*; not according to theories of what it ought to be, or may be supposed to have been.
- (b) Careful analysis of the facts *as they exist*.
- (c) The estimation with scrupulous impartiality of the *relative weight* of the various items of evidence yielded by the analysis.
- (d) The unbiased comparison of the resultants from these relative weights with other known facts relevant to the subject.
- (e) The establishment of the truth of the criteria and standards of comparison. These in themselves have to undergo the same process of criticism before they can be accepted as standards.
- (f) A cautious expression of opinion, which in many cases must be tentative and provisional, subject to revision on the production of new evidence.

Let us now apply these principles to the criticism of the Bible.

Taking first the textual criticism, it may be urged that here, surely, is the field of the expert. I agree. The field of the expert in *criticism*, i.e., analysis and judgment, not necessarily that of the Hebraist, the archæologist, the historian and the palæographer. These are the *witnesses*, not the judges.

The evidence of one or the other, or of all, may prove decisive, but that is for the *judge* to settle, not the witness nor the pleader.

Here, also, it is to be noted that the textual criticism is not at the disposal of the higher critic for him to accept or reject or to work out at his own convenience. The textual critic has his own laws, which he must obey, and once the text is settled on its own merits, the higher critic, the commentator, and all others have no choice but to take it as the basis of their work. In this respect the term "Higher" criticism, if it implies a plane of action superior to that of the textual, as if the latter were a lower plane, is the reverse of correct. The higher critic receives his orders from the textual critic, not vice versa.

And yet much of the higher criticism of the day is conspicuous for the play made with the text in the interest of theories.

Now there is good reason for believing that the text of the Hebrew Scriptures is extraordinarily free from corruption. There are two things about it which differentiate it from other documents, and which must be borne in mind in the textual criticism: (1) the reasons for the peculiar care with which it was transmitted, and (2) the character of the documents themselves.

(1) It is easy to imagine sleepy, monkish copyists, half-mechanically transcribing from old, crabbed, torn, and damaged manuscripts of a Greek or Latin classic, or an Anglo-Saxon chronicle, mistaking contractions, missing the line and carrying on from a similar word, bringing marginal notes, glosses, and tentative emendations into the text, making corrections of their own, notes of doubtful points, reference marks, etc., which will prove so many traps for successive copyists, and otherwise introducing changes which it is the work of the textual critic to discover.

It sounds plausible. But it is by no means a true account of the Hebrew scribes, who were far from monkish. Nor were the Hebrew MSS. allowed to fall into this corrupt condition before being re-copied for current use.

Accidental errors may have been overlooked in a few cases. But it is inconceivable that it could be the normal procedure. The text of the Bible was on a totally different footing to a Thucydides or an Asser.

(a) It was a sacred book, the standard of religion; the code of laws, civil and ecclesiastical; the ultimate reference in controversies—and none are so keen as religious controversies; the text-book of theologians of different schools; of primary as well as higher education; of the national history and literature: and

of the most zealous preachers and reformers. It was the battleground of endless disputes between parties, the object of the minute study of all earnest seekers after truth, the comfort of the exiled and the oppressed. How could unwarranted readings escape detection ?

(b) We know that from the time of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom there were Israelites scattered in many parts of the world. Wherever there were Jews there must have been copies of some parts, at least, of the Old Testament, and litigants to appeal to them, and captious persons to wrangle over words and doctrines. Indeed, there is no valid reason to think that this was not true of Israel from those early times that the Hebrew records claim for the foundation of the nation, say, the fifteenth century B.C. It is absurd to postulate that Israel could have had no code of law, no national poetry, literature, nor philosophy, and no historical records before the time of Amos. This would mean that the nation which has produced the most remarkable and permanent literature in the world lived in a state of blank illiteracy for seven centuries in the midst of the most highly cultivated civilization, and in the very high-road of traffic at that.

Is it possible that texts could pass through so much "meticulous" and jealous criticism without the errors being observed ? Could a manuscript be accepted in these conditions by all parties as a standard, if it were in any degree faulty ? And is there any evidence of serious faults ?

(c) If the *apparatus criticus* of Ginsburg, for the Old Testament, or of any good critical edition of the New Testament be examined, it will be found that the vast majority of various readings are a mere matter of spelling, nothing worse than misprints. If we admit that errors may have crept into individual copies, unobserved in spite of all this watchfulness, that they should be universal, simultaneous, and identical is simply unthinkable.

(d) Next, it is to be remarked that the text of the Bible has come down to us in more numerous and more ancient and well-preserved codices than any other literary work. These existed and were re-copied in many different places, and in different countries, from Media, Elam, and Babylon to Elephantine and Thebes in Upper Egypt. It is inconceivable that identical falsifications should have got into all, or even a few, of these widely scattered codices. Manuscripts might have been sent from one place to another to be copied, or as true copies of a

standard recension. But this would only show that such a standard recension already contained the errors that modern critics pretend to have discovered.

In all the cases where it is supposed that glosses, marginal notes, transpositions and omissions of words and clauses, attempted emendations and harmonistic insertions have found their way into the text, if these changes are present in both the Massoretic Hebrew, the Samaritan-Hebrew, the Samaritan version and the Hebrew underlying the Septuagint, this would prove that all these were derived from one single ancestor which already contained them all. This common ancestor must have contained *the whole of the Pentateuch as we now have it*, characterized by all these corruptions, and it must date from the time that the Samaritans received their Pentateuch, at latest.

But such a common corrupt ancestor presupposes an ultimate single ancestor in which these corruptions did not exist. It would require some considerable time for all these alterations to find their way into successive re-copyings of this earlier pure recension. For this means that one generation after another of students, commentators and copyists worked on their copies, annotating and correcting and then passing on their texts for others to continue the process, glosses, comments, midrashes, omissions, mistakes, transpositions, conjectural emendations, etc., gradually accumulating with each repetition. It also means that no standard copies of the pure original survived by which to control those in current use. Either a catastrophe that destroyed the pure original, or all its true copies, or a very long time for it to be forgotten, would be necessary to account for the survival of nothing but the "corrupt" recension from which the Massoretic and the Samaritan Hebrew and the Hebrew underlying the Septuagint are all derived.

And this "corrupt" recension must have been received, without suspicion of its faults, as authoritative by the Jews in all countries, the Samaritans and the Alexandrians. Thus we have the ancestor of our present texts, already tarnished by all their faults, dated at, and probably before, the time that the Samaritan received their Pentateuch, and the original pure text dating from many generations before that date.

For the date of the Samaritan, I must be content to refer to the work of the Rev. J. Iverach Munro on *The Samaritan Pentateuch and Modern Criticism* (London : Nisbet, 1911), and the Rev. J. E. Thomson's paper on "The Pentateuch of the Samaritans," in the

Journal of the Victoria Institute, vol. lii (1920). Good reason is shown for believing that the Samaritan text, as we have it, dates from the time of Hezekiah (about 715 B.C.).

I must not be understood as accepting the theory that corruptions had already crept into this common ancestor. I have given my reasons for holding that it was next to impossible. I am merely showing now that such a theory, if it were true, would necessarily require a still earlier date for the pure original.

As a matter of fact, there is practically *only one* recension of the Hebrew text, and there is no evidence, except that of the Septuagint, which is of little value for the purpose, that any other recension ever existed. Nor is there any record of a universal destruction of texts which did not agree with it. Such attempts as were made to extirpate the sacred Scriptures of the Jews could not have been successful in all parts of the world. And if they had been, it would have caused the total disappearance of the whole Old Testament.

(e) Now, the Septuagint version, of which a good account is given in the Rev. A. H. Finn's *The Starting Place of Truth* (London: Marshall Bros.), was not made until the third century B.C., and the reasons given above for care in its transmission apply in a much lesser degree. The use of this version was comparatively restricted until it was taken over by the Christian Church, and there was considerable difference of opinion among the Jews as to its value and authority. In fact, rival versions arose to supersede it, such as those of Aquila, Theodotion and Symmachus. Christian apologists referred to them, of course, but they do not appear to have been so carefully studied as the New Testament, and we may say that, in general, the Old Testament Greek MSS. were handed down much as were other Greek MSS., and so subject to the same vicissitudes. The Greek text is, therefore, of less value for the control of the original Hebrew documents.

But it is not to be lightly dismissed on that account. The possibilities of genuine ancient readings under apparent corruptions must be borne in mind. Primo Vannutelli has shown in a series of articles on "Les Évangiles Synoptiques," in the *Revue Biblique* for 1925, that a frequent cause of misunderstanding, both in the Massoretic and the Septuagint, was the inability of the Jews to distinguish between the sounds of the Semitic gutturals and the Semitic sibilants and dentals. This inability existed apparently from very ancient times, perhaps from the time they left Egypt, and has been preserved by the Samaritans.

It accounts for many of the discrepancies between parallel passages in the Old Testament, as well as in the Synoptic Gospels. Here is another point for "Textual" criticism.

It may be urged that the reasons I have advanced for the special care that hedged the Bible texts are of force only as regards later times, at earliest some time after the Exile. This brings us to the subject of the *character* of the documents.

(2) The Prophets, and some at least of the Priests, were as persuaded of the Divine character of the Hebrew Scriptures they possessed as any of later times. The Books of the Bible were written by men who were actuated, or at least believed themselves to be actuated, by the purest and most sublime ideal of the Holy and Awful God of truth and righteousness of their own and every later time, whom to misrepresent and in whose Name to lie would be to incur His most dreadful wrath and punishment, and that they were uttering His messages; and their works were copied and transmitted by succeeding generations of scribes who were equally persuaded of the same truth. The only case at all similar is that of the Qur'an, a fact to which Mr. Estlin Carpenter makes no allusion.

The Hebrew text, exactly as we now have it, has, therefore, a very strong *prima-facie* claim to extraordinary accuracy. The strict principles of ordinary justice demand that this claim be respected in every case until, in particular instances, it can be shown to have failed. And in each of these instances the burden of proof lies upon those who question it, and the proof must be absolute.

Even in the case of apparent corruptions which make the text so difficult of understanding as to be almost unintelligible the critic is bound to take the text as it stands and to assume, *prima facie*, that it is the author's own words, and that he had some reason for expressing himself thus. It is the critic's business to seek first a possible meaning, before proceeding to the drastic measure of emending the words, however plausible and necessary the correction may appear to him. The fact that certain texts have survived the long ages of incessant criticism and jealous care in transmission, and have come down to us in a form almost, if not quite, unintelligible, is the best proof that they are *genuine*, not corrupt. For these difficulties have not been discovered for the first time to-day, and if the text had been "corrected," "emended" and "glossed" in the way too often supposed, these difficult passages would have been the first to be so treated.

In short, with regard to "Textual" criticism in general, the salutary rules laid down, for example, by Dr. J. F. Postgate, in his article on the subject in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, must be constantly borne in mind.

Let us now turn to the "Higher" criticism.

The higher critic may also be, of course, a competent textual critic, and he may thus combine the two functions. But he has no right to subordinate the one to the other. He must be as honest, as independent and as impartial in his textual criticism as if he had no concern whatever with the result. That this is extremely hard to do, and the temptation to make his text fit a preconceived theory so strong as to be almost irresistible, is only too manifest in the vast majority of the higher critical work published.

It must be borne in mind that, as all the presumption, in the case of "Textual" criticism, is in favour of the strict accuracy of the present Bible texts, so in the case of the "Higher" criticism, *all the presumption is in favour of the Bible tradition*. The Tradition holds the field until, *in every case*, absolute proof can be shown to rebut it. Much has been made of the force of cumulative proof. Now the cumulative effect of a hundred bad arguments is just *nil*.

The whole subject has been very cogently treated by an able lawyer, the late Mr. Arthur Phillips, late Standing Counsel to the Government of India, in his *The Failure of the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament* (London: John Bale, Sons & Danielsson, 1923). Critics cannot do better than study this important work.

In no field is it more necessary to observe the rules of criticism than in enquiries that may so easily degenerate into fanciful hypotheses and an inevitable desire to try to prove them. The "Higher" criticism is in a special position and therefore needs a specially rigorous control. (1) It deals with highly technical subjects, such as Semitic philology, Archæology and Ancient History, of which comparatively few have a thorough knowledge; (2) in matters of religion there are bitter divisions of opinion, which fact leads many persons, who might be competent to judge, to leave them to experts, or rather to accept as experts those whose claim to authority they do not care to question; (3) a certain school has captured all the seats of authority and formed a close clique, so that it is hard for other voices to be heard; (4) the Bible has become the unhappy hunting-ground for cranks, and for young students on the look-out for subjects for

theses in which they can exhibit their originality, acumen, and learning. There has been too much readiness on the part of some to accept these lucubrations as serious criticism, especially when some "brilliant" suggestion can be made to subserve a popular theory.

I repeat, then, that a higher critic, like a textual critic, is both an analyst and a judge. He is not an advocate, nor an interested party. If he allows himself to seek to prove either one side or the other, he ceases to be a judge, and becomes an *ex-parte* advocate, a mere special pleader. In whatever else he may be an expert, the first essential must be that he be an expert in *evidence*, in the weighing of the *relative* value of items of evidence, and in judging of their relevance. He must be a specialist in *judgment*, and he must have no ulterior motives but strict justice to the author whose work he is examining.

For this purpose he must (a) take the work to be judged as *it is*. He is not at liberty to judge the work according to mistaken *interpretations* of it. Common justice to an author demands that he be judged on his *ipsissima verba*. (b) His statements must be accorded the *most favourable* sense possible. Fairness requires that a defendant who is not present to explain himself shall be fully credited with all that can be found in his favour. Thus as much ingenuity must be exercised in finding solutions of apparent contradictions, discrepancies, anachronisms, etc., as the opposing counsel may expend in exposing and insisting on them. It is most unjust to father upon an author errors which, if present, he might be able to refute. (c) As stated above, a higher critic cannot be allowed to manipulate the text without the consent of the textual critic. He must take the text just as it is given to him by the textual critic, with all its difficulties as it stands. Nor can the two functions be combined so as to favour a new reading in support of a special view of history, evolution, or religious doctrine which is in dispute. The moment this is done the critic abandons his rôle of judge and descends to that of a pleader. (d) He must first verify all his criteria, all his standards of comparison, all the linguistic, archæological, historical, chronological, ethical, and other scientific data before he can set them up as touchstones for testing the statements of an author. Where these are uncertain or imperfectly known, or known only in certain parts, his judgment can only be provisional and subject to revision.

Great as has been the gain in archæological discoveries of

recent years, it must be remembered that large and important gaps still remain in the early history of all the countries of the Near East ; also, much of our information is based on conjectural interpretations and restorations of fragmentary texts. The international history is well established for some periods, but for other and intervening periods, some covering several centuries, our knowledge is almost a blank. International chronology before the ninth century B.C. is also largely uncertain, whereas the Bible gives a connected chronology going back at least as far as the twenty-fifth century B.C. Whether this agrees with the secular chronology is another question, difficult to answer because the latter is so uncertain. It is often asserted that the Bible stories are incompatible with certain scientific facts. It is the critic's business to examine these facts, not to accept the assertion without further inquiry. Further, it is confidently held by some that the accounts in the Bible of Creation, the Flood, etc., are "myths" derived from Babylonian sources. A true critic cannot accept this theory without first applying the strictest tests and examining all the data in all their bearings. He must not be misled by specious arguments and superficial resemblances. Again, he must not take as axiomatic such a hypothesis as the evolution of ethical religions, and so begin by assuming that the worship of Jehovah arose from a form of Nature worship which began with benighted and barbarous Arabian tribes and "evolved" through various phases into higher forms borrowed from other nations, until some person, or a committee of persons, purified it into a henotheistic cult.

I have said enough to show that the work of the critic is no light task, and that it requires qualifications which are by no means common ; but I cannot admit that I have set the standard too high. On the contrary, I have but touched upon a few of the positive qualities of scientific criticism, and there are many negative prerequisites, pitfalls to be avoided, as well as conditions to be fulfilled. In such a case as the Bible, and in view of the serious consequences of belittling its value, the standards of criticism cannot be too high nor observed too punctiliously.

Personally I make no pretence to authority. But I have had many years' experience in sifting plausible stories and in testing bogus pretensions, as well as claims which, though good, suffer from unskilful presentation and ignorance of proper rights. And I have learnt the value of the maxim *audi alteram partem*. I cannot say that I have yet met with any attempt at Biblical

criticism that satisfies me, least of all that at present in fashion. The system exemplified in such works as Kuenen's *The Hexateuch*, Skinner's *Isaiah*, Charles's *Between the Old and the New Testaments*, and all the articles on Biblical subjects in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (11th edition), cannot be called criticism in any true sense of the term. It is nothing but an entirely one-sided special pleading. Its foundations are radically unsound and unscientific; all its standards of comparison are imperfect; its methods are unscrupulous, partial and, in some respects, antiquated; many of its arguments are illlogical, quibbling, dogmatic and, at best, crafty. I do not deny the great learning, the immense industry, and the wonderful cunning with which it is worked out; but I refuse to bow to the authority of great scholars, when I find that they have mistaken their calling, and have debased the honourable office of a judge to that of the "artful dodger."

That "modernist" system is a surrender to ancient infidel gibes. Unskilled, and perhaps unwilling, to find solutions to apparent difficulties in the Bible, it has accepted the position with an air of magnanimity, and now seeks diligently for more "discrepancies." Mistaking modern science for sheer materialism, it has set up a rationalistic system to which it is its whole endeavour to reduce the Bible. (I use the term "rationalistic," for want of a better, to describe a philosophy which excludes Divine intervention in material and human affairs.) Imagining that modern science has no place for Divine intervention, it denies the supernatural and takes as its object to explain away the Divine revelation of the Book. The "Higher" criticism of this school is thus nothing but a begging of the question *ab initio*, and a vast scheme of sectarian endeavour to establish a purely rationalistic theology.

Now the outstanding feature of the Bible, and the most important element in it, is its claim to Divine revelation. It is precisely this element that has been the cause of its preservation to our own days, and the Book certainly possesses a living power which is due to nought else. An honest and thorough criticism cannot fairly ignore this feature of unique and primary importance.

It is no excuse to say that literary criticism is not concerned with the supernatural, whether genuine or pretended. The *higher* criticism of the Bible, if it has any pretence to be scientific, is certainly concerned with it. To put it on the lowest ground, Metaphysics have as much right to be considered as any other

science. Though no one is obliged to accept the conclusions of, say, Lord Haldane, in his *Reign of Relativity*, Bishop Gore in his *Belief in God*, or Lord Balfour in his *Theism and Thought*, it is undeniable that there is something to be said in favour of the *possibility* of a Divine revelation, and the *fact* of the Bible claim remains to be at least discussed. In the absence of any such attempt, it is grossly unfair to assume its impossibility, and to seek by underhand means tacitly to sap the foundations of all evidence of such revelation. Honest criticism ought, above all things, to be *frank*. I maintain, therefore, that this foundation of such criticism is radically unsound and unscientific.

It would take far too much space, and it is not to my present purpose, to go into the details of the numerous transgressions of the canons of true criticism.* Here I can only attempt to show in broad outline that any possible other side to the question of Divine revelation is not only ignored, but is treated as mere traditional obscurantism. All serious work demonstrating the unsoundness of the rationalistic methods is dismissed in a contemptuous footnote, if it is noticed at all, and nothing is considered but the arguments of rationalists, mostly German, in favour of the thesis. Occasionally "conservative" writers are cited, in order to give an air of impartiality, but it is invariably the most feeble that are chosen for the purpose, like skittles put up to be knocked down again.

I have already alluded to the unscrupulous use made of a faulty textual criticism to force the text into the support of the rationalist theory; a large part of present-day Biblical scholarship is entirely taken up with this illegitimate labour. Liberal use is made of "probability" and the "argument from silence"—the latter, in most cases, founded solely on our ignorance. These critics arrogate to themselves an extraordinary ability to penetrate into an author's mentality and inner convictions and purposes, as also into the circumstances of his supposed times; these are substituted for his declared aims and opinions. The Prophets are reduced to politicians and religious sectarians.

A good example of the shifts to which the system is driven in order to get rid of the prophetic element in the Bible is to be found in the two appendices to Dr. Skinner's "Isaiah XL to LXVI" (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges). In these long and

* For a discussion of some of these, the above-named work of Mr. Arthur Phillips may be consulted with advantage.

involved arguments the various views of a great number of rationalistic advocates are reviewed for the sole purpose of finding a means to apply the 53rd chapter to some other end than a prophecy of the atoning work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, Dr. Skinner gives the case away in the following significant words (p. 278): "To suppose that the prophet transports himself in imagination to a point in time when the sufferings of the Messiah were over and His glory not yet revealed *would be to abnegate the task of historical exegesis, and take refuge in a mechanical view of prophetic inspiration.*" (The italics are mine.)

Now there is another side to the question, and true criticism cannot but take it into account.

The entire Bible is taken up with one fundamental problem, the salvation of mankind from sin. "Yahwism" is not a petty monotheism. The Jehovah of the Bible is the Author and Upholder of universal and inexorable Law, moral and material. But He is also the God of Love, Mercy, and Grace. In his wisdom He made man with a free will, and gave him the unrestricted exercise of it, with one simple and easy test of submission. If man had used this freedom so as to co-operate with the Love and Goodness of God, this would have given to His Creator a glory and satisfaction which nothing else could do.

Man chose to transgress God's Law, and forthwith the law of the conservation of energy came in to make this transgression both irremediable and progressively destructive. But the God of Love, Mercy, and Grace had no intention of allowing His creatures thus to perish through His own gift, and His purpose thus to be frustrated. The problem, then, was to combine the justification and the carrying out to the full of the Law in all its rigidity, for man's own good, with the Mercy and Love which should save him from the inevitable consequence of his constant transgression of it, and, after all, to bring man back to that communion with the Holy God for which he was created. This is the essential subject of the Bible from beginning to end, and it underlies every subject treated in the various Books. It is true that this purpose does not become clearly apparent until we reach the New Testament, and especially the closing part of it. But in the light of the later Revelation we can see that this is the key-note of the whole Book.

How petty, then, is the idea of an imaginary strife of interests between Priests and Levites on the one hand, and between Priests and Prophets on the other, which is made the basis for

the elaborate dissection of the documents of the Old Testament ! And how foolish the twisting of a few expressions of Amos, Hosea, and Micah into an indication of a late date for the sacrificial system of Israel, and the building up, on this false supposition, of a great scheme of "reform," to which the "redaction" of the Pentateuch is ultimately to be attributed !

We want a sane, honest, and fearless criticism of the Bible, as it stands, on the lines indicated at the beginning of this paper, with no axe of its own to grind, up to date in its international history, chronology and archæology, and in its science, Semitic comparative philology and psychology. It is a great task, and it has not been done.

DISCUSSION.

The Rev. A. H. FINN (Chairman) said : It so happens that, before I saw Mr. Michell's paper, I was engaged in writing a reply to an article on "Criticism," which contained Professor Robertson's definition : "All criticism is really an application of the principles of common sense by a person provided with the requisite knowledge of facts." On this I ventured to comment : "That, no doubt, is what true criticism should be, but it is to be feared that a good deal of what passes for criticism is no better than a prejudiced advocacy of views based on an imperfect survey of the facts," thereby somewhat anticipating Mr. Michell's description on p. 21.

When, a good many years ago, I first began to look into the "Higher" criticism, I can honestly say that I approached it with a fairly open mind, but was soon repelled by the clearly unfair presentation of the evidence, and the further I have gone into it the worse have appeared the arguments.

For a long time past I have been at work on a task, not exactly "Textual" criticism, but rather furnishing materials for it, namely a minute comparison of the texts of the Pentateuch. On this comparison was based my little work, *The Starting Place of Truth*, alluded to by Mr. Michell. Of the conclusions set forth in that book I will only touch on the most important. For the Pentateuch we have what we have not for any other ancient document, three witnesses, the Hebrew, the Samaritan, and the Septuagint. Now

the Samaritan and the LXX differ from the Hebrew Massoretic text in a very great many places, but in most of these the Samaritan contradicts the LXX, or the LXX contradicts the Samaritan. Still there are many passages where the Samaritan and the LXX agree against the Hebrew, and these are sufficiently numerous and remarkable to show that they cannot have been arrived at independently but must have been drawn from some common source, as, for instance, when they insert a long paragraph in Leviticus identical in every word. To have affected the Samaritan, this source must have been an earlier Hebrew text, and the Samaritan probably goes back to the time of Hezekiah, if not still further back to the time of the separation of the Northern ten tribes from the Southern two. Then when it is simply a case of one Hebrew text against another, it is allowable to weigh one against the other, and I think I have shown reason for concluding that the Hebrew text underlying the Samaritan and LXX is less reliable than the Massoretic. Even if it were not so, if we had to adopt every one of the variations in which the Samaritan and LXX agree against the Hebrew, it would not alter a single historical incident or modify a single precept of the Law.

The real importance of testing the higher critical theories lies in this, that if the Higher critical methods are sound about the Old Testament, we cannot logically refuse to apply them to the New Testament as Modernists do. That means that we should have to consider the greater part of the New Testament unreliable. It is asserted that many acts and utterances have been attributed to our Lord which He never did or said. Also that much of the Apostolic teaching is not really Christian, being derived from pre-Christian Jewish erroneous ideas, or from Greek pagan mystery religions, and therefore not binding upon the "modern believer."

The subject of Mr. Michell's paper may seem somewhat uninviting, but it is of immense importance as showing how unreliable and unsound the higher critical methods are. For this reason I consider it a privilege to have been invited to take the Chair at this Meeting, and feel sure that all present will join heartily in the vote of thanks to Mr. Michell for his valuable paper, which I have now the honour to propose.

Mr. CHARLES MARSTON expressed his great approval and appreciation of the paper. He pointed out that the assumption underlying

the criticism of the Bible was that Humanity now possessed a fairly complete knowledge of History and the Laws of Nature which of course was absurd, yet one Bishop had gone so far as to say that the Scientific criticism of the Bible was now practically an exact Science! How could this be so when Science was continually changing its outlook? The so-called Supernatural or Supernormal was a special stumbling-block of the critics; they based their criticisms on the denial of its existence. Yet it was attested to throughout history, both Pagan as well as Christian. No fair-minded man could possibly ignore the conclusions of Sir Oliver Lodge on the subject of Spiritualism; they would soon receive general acceptance, and must change the whole critical attitude to the Bible. Sir Oliver Lodge's latest book, entitled *Ether and Reality*, had an important bearing on the subject of the Unseen.

Mr. THEODORE ROBERTS wished that the Chairman's comparative recensions of the Hebrew, Samaritan, and Greek versions of the Pentateuch might be published, if necessary by subscription.

The lecturer's claim that his experience in investigation as a Government official qualified him to judge the work of Higher Critics reminded him of Sir Robert Anderson's similar claim in his *Daniel in the Critics' Den* on account of his legal experience as an investigator rather than an advocate, in which he (the speaker) likewise shared. The Higher Critics so specialized by the midnight oil that they seemed to have no experience of the ordinary facts of life.

He pointed out that Mr. Michell had confined himself to the criticism of the Old Testament, and suggested that, while the official custody it had enjoyed had guarded its text from the numerous variations of the New Testament text, this advantage was more than countervailed by the much greater number of New Testament manuscripts which had been preserved, a comparison of which ensured the ascertainment of the true text.

But he believed the basic error of the Higher Critics was their exclusion of the possibility of Divine intervention, whether it took the form of miracles or prediction. He pointed out that we found no "sign" miracles in the book of Genesis, which, as professing to give the earliest records, might be expected to contain the most incredible marvels if we followed the analogy of other religions.

In conclusion, he called attention to the Bishop of Salisbury's article in last Saturday's *Times*, which showed that while in the

nineteenth century the number of Protestant missionaries had gradually increased until they numbered 15,000 in 1900, the succeeding 25 years had seen this number doubled to 30,000, which unmistakably showed what this living Book was still capable of, for the Protestant missionaries were and mostly still are all men of the Book.

Mr. SIDNEY COLLETT said : I wish to add an expression of my very high appreciation of the excellent lecture to which we have just listened : and I congratulate the Council on securing the services of Mr. Michell for this occasion.

I have only two remarks to add to what has already been said.

First, I think the word "critic" is altogether out of place when used in connection with the Bible, especially in what is called *Textual criticism*. It is remarkable that the word "critic" is only used once in the Bible, *viz.*, in Heb. iv, 12, where we read : "The word of God . . . is a discerner (Greek *critic*) of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Therefore, seeing that the Holy Spirit has declared that the Bible is intended to be a critic of the human heart, it does seem to me an altogether irreverent position for any human being to set himself up as a critic of the Bible ! I would suggest that we drop the expression "*Textual criticism*," and adopt, as an alternative, the words "*Textual study*" or "*Textual research*." For that is what is really meant, and it is more becoming for mortals in dealing with the inspired Word of God.

Then, as to the dual authorship of Isaiah, to which the lecturer has referred, and of which the critics are so confident. This is one of the many points, raised by the so-called "Higher Critics," the answer to which is found within the covers of the Bible itself. It will be seen by carefully reading John xii, 38 to 41, that we have, first a quotation from Isaiah liii (which, according to the critics, was written by Isaiah No. 2), then comes a quotation from Isaiah vi (which, according to the critics, was written by Isaiah No. 1). Yet in verses 39 and 41 both these quotations are attributed by the Holy Spirit to one author ! Then, let the critics be who they may, I say : "Let God be true and every man a liar !" (Rom. iii, 4.)

Mr. PERCY O. RUOFF said : The able, judicial paper of Mr. Michell is a valuable contribution to the subject. It is with some trepidation that I submit that the argument of this paper would be strengthened by the omission of a sentence on p. 11 in the centre of the third

paragraph, which reads: "It (Scientific criticism) must, at the same time, be mindful of the limitations of our knowledge of all the circumstances, and the possibility of later discoveries which would throw a new light on points which may completely alter the judgment expressed." The latter part of this sentence pledges the future, but a judge can only give a true decision on the facts under review. If his criticism is contingent upon, or qualified by, some unknown factor it ceases to be of value.

The constituents of Scientific criticism under the headings (a) to (f) on p. 12 are very important, and if applied as tests to the conclusions of some modern critics, it will clearly be discovered that many of these conclusions which are proclaimed as "assured results" are without true foundations. For instance, let these tests be applied to the statement of Kuenen in *The Religion of Israel* (p. 225, vol. i): "To what one might call the universal, or, at least, the common rule, that religion begins with fetishism, then develops into polytheism, and then, but not before, ascends to monotheism . . . the Semites are no exception." Or to this quotation from Wellhausen: "For Moses to have given the Israelites an enlightened conception of God would have been to have given them a stone instead of bread." This is purely gratuitous and, it seems to me, the very reverse is the truth.

To quote Wellhausen again: "The giving of the law at Sinai has only a formal, not to say dramatic, significance. For the sake of producing a solemn and vivid impression, that is represented as having taken place in a single thrilling moment which in reality occurred slowly and almost unobserved." Here again, is an attempt at reconstruction which must be resisted in the name of Scientific criticism.

Sir James Fitzjames Stephen, in his *Digest of the Law of Evidence*, says, under the heading "Production and Effect of Evidence": "Whoever desires any court to give judgment as to any legal right or liability dependent on the existence or non-existence of fact which he asserts or denies to exist, must prove that those facts do or do not exist" (p. 108, 1899 edition). If many of the Higher Critics submitted their case to a court of unbiassed persons who asked for proper proof, they would find their claims rejected because the appropriate facts were lacking. Professor G. Adam Smith has said

that "criticism has won, and we have to discuss the indemnity." In this connection, it would be advisable to consult the jury, and not seek to force an issue. A distinguished modern preacher has said, somewhat sadly, that the findings of Higher criticism are not being received by a very large body of Sunday-school teachers and Church members. Their minds, he says, seem impervious, and their prejudices cannot be broken down. I would suggest that these resisting barriers against the tide of destructive criticism are erected in Christian minds through the work of the Spirit of God, and are abiding bulwarks.

Miss HAMILTON LAW said : My question has been partly answered by the Chairman. No one can criticize unless they have all the facts before them.

I would ask : Have the critics of God's Word all a available information before them ? *Reading recently about the Jews in Western Abyssinia, I was much struck by the fact that they have in their possession certain portions of Holy Scripture (O.T.) which they have apparently always had. These comprise, as I understand, the Law of Moses and the history of Israel up to the time of Solomon—no further—in what may be looked on as their own old records. This lends colour to one of the traditions concerning these people—namely, that they were sent by Solomon to Abyssinia in the days of the Queen of Sheba.

Have the critics traced the origin of such Scripture documents as are in the hands of these Falasha Jews ? And have they fully considered and given due weight to the testimony borne by these documents ?

The AUTHOR'S reply : Before replying to the discussion on his paper, Mr. Michell wished to express his high appreciation of the honour done to him in being allowed to open the new Session of the Victoria Institute with his paper. Also that his lecture should be presided over by Mr. Finn, whose work in the cause of Bible Truth is so important. He wished, too, to thank Professor Pinches for so kindly consenting to exchange the date of his lecture, so as to permit him to read his paper in person.

* I twice heard Mr. Flad speak about the Falasha Jews. Mr. Flad when a tiny child was in prison with his parents in Magdala in 1868.

With regard to the reference to Mr. Estlin Carpenter in p. 17, it should be explained that, through the exigencies of space, a paragraph relating to "The Documents of the Hexateuch," by Carpenter and Harford, had been excised, while this reference had been inadvertently retained. The paragraph omitted related to the specious argument summarized in p. 13, clause (1), of this paper.

With reference to the Chairman's work on the Pentateuch, the lecturer could only ardently hope that this would eventually be available for the general public. The edition of the Samaritan text, published by Bagsters in 1849, has long been out of print, and is very difficult to procure. The only other edition is a large and very expensive German work. Yet the Samaritan text is of the utmost importance for the scientific criticism of the Pentateuch.

In answer to Mr. Theodore Roberts, he wished to point out that in this short paper it had been necessary to confine himself strictly to the subject of "scientific criticism." But he ventured to think that it would be found that the principles laid down and insisted on applied equally to the criticism of the New Testament. But he welcomed Mr. Roberts' timely allusion to this fact.

While agreeing with Mr. Sidney Collett in the main, he could hardly give up the use of the word "criticism," as applied to the Bible, so long as it was confined to the proper meaning of the term as set out in his paper.

With regard to Mr. Ruoff's suggestion, the lecturer did not think the consequence of a prudent reserve in view of later discoveries would be quite such as Mr. Ruoff supposed. A decision on the facts under review may be perfectly true and valuable, so far as it goes. On points in which our information as to facts external to the Bible statements is imperfect, no judgment can be final as concerns these external facts. He thought Mr. Ruoff's contribution to the debate was, in other respects, most convincing.

Miss Hamilton Law's remarks were also most interesting. Mr. Michell could not help feeling that there must be Biblical documents still undiscovered that will yet be found, and which will throw a decisive light upon many subjects now in dispute. Not only in Abyssinia, but probably in Egypt, and perhaps in other parts of North Africa, it is well within the bounds of possibility that such discoveries may be made. It is very remarkable that the

great activity in archæological research, since the war, in countries where it was hitherto hampered by the misrule of the Turk, has been rewarded by very valuable finds.

Almost any day something decisive may be found. Meanwhile, it was not only in the lack of examination of the documents of the Falashas that Biblical criticism is at fault. There remains a vast field for young students yet to occupy. It would be well worth the while of a new school to take up the study of the comparative philology of the Semitic languages from the earliest to the latest times, tracing their development and their mutual relations and influence on one another. Only thus can the ages of different writers be determined, as, for instance, we can do in the case of Anglo-Saxon, Old English, Middle English, Elizabethan, &c., &c.

Then, the Cuneiform documents await a similar treatment in order to distinguish what things in Babylonian and Assyrian history, literature, and myth rest on late, and what on really ancient, testimony. We must get down to a groundwork of really scientific research based on facts and not on theories.