

Critical Camouflage.

A SENTENCE in a recent book by a well-known theological writer is sufficient to start a suggestive train of thought. The Rev. J. K. Mozley, in *The Doctrine of the Atonement* (p. 51, note) has occasion to quote Pfeiderer as follows:—"It was natural for the Apostle (Paul), to whom the crucified Christ had become the keystone of his faith, to give to the Lord's Supper a mystical reference to His atoning death, and to seek support for this new mystical conception in a corresponding re-interpretation and extension of the traditional words by which Jesus had originally made the common meal a symbol of the inner fellowship, the covenant of brotherhood, among His followers." Mr. Mozley's comment on this sentence is unmerciful; and it is just. "In other words," he says, "Paul fakes the evidence in the most barefaced way to suit his own ideas. Was not one of the older apostles honest or courageous enough to protest?"

There could not be a better illustration of a common phenomenon. One of the discoveries of the present war is the art of *camouflage*. The critics discovered it long ago. "Re-interpretation" sounds so innocent. Even "extension" is not very obviously alarming to the unwary. But when stripped of its decorations this plausible circumlocution is laid bare by Mr. Mozley in its real nature and is seen to be a formidable display of heavy artillery against a vital Christian doctrine, the Atonement on the Cross, which is indeed the very centre of the Gospel message. All these fine words mean neither more nor less than this, that an inspired apostle is accused of deliberately falsifying evidence, and that his fellow-apostles are charged with conniving at the falsehood. To quote a well-known phrase, not strictly accurate as a translation in its own context—"so they wrap it up."

Two conclusions are suggested by this kind of treatment. The first is obvious. It is by this kind of *camouflage* that advanced critics have obtained first an opening, and then a firm foothold, for many theories which would otherwise have so shocked the sense of the Christian world that there might have been small likelihood of their general acceptance. The second is less patent, but is probably just as true in a great many cases, though doubtless not in all.

It helps to explain a most perplexing development of modern religious thought. Constantly when one is reading the books of critical writers, who are believed to be reverent and spiritual men, the question arises—How can a man like this have come to adopt conclusions which involve such terribly serious [presuppositions? The answer may well be just here—that the disguise of attractive circumlocution has positively deceived themselves. They do not fully consider the presuppositions in their naked repulsiveness. Not only does the circuitous phraseology with which they “wrap it up” soften the shock for unwatchful readers, but they are themselves taken in by their own *camouflage*. They do not realize how deadly is the artillery which they are with their own hands manipulating.

Of course this will not apply in every case. There are many Continental critics to whom it does not apply. And there are also some English ones. Some modern writers and teachers seem absolutely regardless of consequences and do not trouble to wrap it up at all. But these are not the most dangerous in reality. That may sound strange; but how often, in discussions on the subject, one may hear remarks of this kind—“Of course there are extremists and cranks: one takes no notice of them. But look at men like Professor A. and Dr. B.” (of the *camouflage* variety): “it is impossible to put down cautious and reverent thinkers of that type as setting out to destroy the Christian Faith.” We quite agree. It is impossible. But it is possible to believe that the fancy dress with which they adorn the notions they have accepted is attractive enough to deceive even themselves; and that in no other way could men so honest and true have brought themselves to pen such sentences. And it is also possible to believe that the disguised artillery which they have thus come to permit themselves to employ in the great conflict between Truth and Error, Light and Darkness, is all the more deadly because it is unconsciously directed at vital positions in the citadel of the Faith by men who are esteemed as distinguished champions of the Faith itself.

It is true that the time has come when it is very difficult to understand how this deception can have been so long maintained. In the earlier stages of the Modernist movement it could be better imagined, although many were even then far-seeing enough to give clear warning of the position to which we have now actually come.

We are now witnessing the spectacle of a leader of thought like the Bishop of Oxford passionately protesting against the application to the facts on which the Creed is based of the very principles which he has assisted in advancing with respect to other Bible facts. Nor are Bishop Gore, or any other such thinkers of his school, alone in this. Many Evangelicals, both Churchmen and Nonconformists, are in just as hopeless a position. Making every allowance for reluctance to part with a pet theory, we may surely claim that it has now become wellnigh impossible to comprehend how the pretence which has served for so many years can still be kept up as it is.

The illustration with which we started is a vivid one, and it may perhaps be the more heeded because in that case the disguise is penetrated by a writer who will not be suspected of narrowness or prejudice. But the process of which he sets us so good an example may be carried on to almost any extent by readers of modern theological literature and (alas!) by students at modern theological lectures. We venture to add two or three other examples, from some of the commonest critical theories of the time.

The authorship of some parts of Scripture has been widely questioned—and that not merely in cases where authorship has no bearing upon the contents of the revelation (as, for instance, in the Epistle to the Hebrews and some of the Psalms), but also where the very truthfulness of the narrative is involved. The Book of Deuteronomy and the Second Epistle of St. Peter are cases in point. We hear, perhaps, in some outspoken quarters of a “pious fraud.” But there is not much *camouflage* about that. “Fraud” has too nasty a sound; and there are quite a number of people who will not admit that it can be “pious” under any Jesuitical pretence whatsoever. So we are told it is not really fraud at all. “Forgery” is quite a misplaced term in such a matter. The literary customs of the age were quite different from ours; and it is not only unkind and uncharitable, but positively misleading, to prejudge the issue by any such harsh term. The prejudice which it imports is an enemy to unfettered inquiry. In fact, not even the eternal standards of right and wrong, truth and falsehood, which one would expect the Author of a Divine revelation to safeguard (whatever might be the imperfect notions of any single age on literary honesty), may be brought into the controversy at all. We are invited, in

a word, as the necessary condition of unprejudiced inquiry, to throw overboard all considerations except those which would affect any ordinary human writer. And so we are told in the politest phrases, that the standards of literary honesty in past ages did not condemn what we should condemn; and that we must not import our ideas on that subject (we don't want to do that: we only plead for *God's* ideas) into unnatural surroundings.

No one who is at all acquainted with present-day commentaries and expositions will repudiate this representation as a caricature. Some of the phrases in the last paragraph are almost verbal reproductions from several sources which happen to be at hand at the moment. Their argument is open to question, of course, in matters of detail (as to some of its assumptions) which we cannot now touch. Our present purpose is merely to point out that this kind of thing is as deceptive as Pfeiderer's thin disguise which Mr. Mozley so ruthlessly tears aside. And we know of no writer who has done the same work more relentlessly in the present matter than Mr. Gregory Wilkinson, who lately read a paper enforcing, on the authority of his practical experience in teaching the young, the dangers of this kind of theory for the morality of the rising generation—one of its many serious aspects. This paper was reported in full in *The Record* of January 31 and February 7. Here are a few brief sentences from it. He shows first, in one place, how the narrative in Exodus (and indeed in Leviticus and Numbers) constantly declares, "The Lord spake unto Moses," when, according to the critical view, of the Tabernacle for example, the Lord did not speak to Moses at all, the whole Priestly Code having originated by unknown authorship at the time of the captivity, and the Tent of Meeting, as described in it, not being historical. This view is elaborately argued by Dr. Driver (who is reckoned among the "reverent" critics, by the way) in a Commentary for schoolboys. Mr. Wilkinson declares that this "amounts to a complete stultification of the moral authority of the Scriptures." "The whole process tends to bring the Bible into the contempt of every intelligent schoolboy." Nor, he says, is it any good pointing to the truth or beauty of other parts of Scripture; for the whole is so knitted together that "all subsequent Biblical writers and our Blessed Lord Himself are either implicated in, or victims of, the impostures practised in the composition of the Pentateuch." "How is character to be developed,"

he asks, "by teaching our boys that the book which used to be so venerated in our Empire is compiled on principles of glaring dishonesty?" . . . "The very teaching of Scripture tends to become the means of bringing our own standard of morality down to the German level."

Now we know that those who have adopted the kind of views here described are (not unnaturally) very sensitive to the taunt of German influence. But, really, what have they to complain of? Is it to be supposed that the most universal tragedy of history has been played out before our very eyes for nothing in this matter? Are those who have protested for years before the war against German domination in Biblical study going to sit down and say nothing to the Church and to the nation when all their warnings are more than vindicated by this exhibition of German morality? They have chosen to make their bed, and they must now lie on it. We regret to find that they do not even yet find it more disturbing a bed than it is, but are at present vainly trying to escape its discomforts by proclaiming that German manners have nothing to do with the bed at all. It would of course be unworthy for those who have long foreseen the danger (though few anticipated the tremendous force of the catastrophe) to point the moral from any mere desire to secure an empty triumph: but it would be a betrayal of duty to Church and nation if such should fail to point it unflinchingly, and without any dangerous consideration for sensitive feelings. Old Thomas Fuller has warned us, in a rather different connection, against the so-called good nature which is mere flexibility. "If this be good nature," he plainly says, "let me always be a clown; if this be good fellowship, let me always be a churl." And so we cannot but feel that Mr. Wilkinson, and many others, are right to insist all the more, in face of what is happening, on the menace of German morality, for which we doubt not German criticism has at any rate powerfully helped to pave the way by undermining respect for the restraints and directions of the Word of God: and we are thankful to know that in the school with which he is connected, and we hope in others (would to God it were in all!), this Continental influence is not allowed to undermine British reverence for the sacred volume and British standards of moral conduct.

In connection with this matter, in which Mr. Wilkinson has exposed the disguise, we are reminded of another writer who has

done the same from a different point of view, showing the danger to spiritual apprehension as well as to moral practice. "It is a strange way of recommending Him to the present and to future ages," said Chancellor Lias some years ago, "to contend that He, Who was the Truth as well as the Way and the Life, has allowed His character and message to be obscured by falsehood and forgery, and that for the truth about Him He has left us to the researches of scholars who do not, and cannot, agree among themselves as to what He did or said." ¹

We turn now to one or two other illustrations of *camouflage* which can be more briefly set out. A very well known case is that of Psalm cx. Our Lord quoted that Psalm as David's. All the Synoptists make that clear. St. Mark adds words which surely ought to give pause to the most confident critic—"David himself said *in the Holy Spirit*." Yet the critics say that David did not write that Psalm. Now in the case of many of the Psalms it matters little who wrote them. The reason why it matters here is that our Lord definitely chose to say David did write it—and not only so, but in the plain and natural acceptance of the context He positively based an implied argument upon the fact; moreover, that St. Peter, speaking on the Day of Pentecost under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, also ascribed it to David, using words which are unmistakably interwoven with the course of *his* argument (Acts ii. 34). And what are we told in this case? Not, as a rule, that our Lord and St. Peter were in error. That would be too shocking to the spiritual sense. And so the bitter point must be wrapped up. It was not our Lord's mission to correct mistaken literary conceptions: if He had done so, He would not have been understood—the time for it was far from ripe: and as to St. Peter, and even our Lord Himself as well, they naturally shared the literary ideas of the age they lived in. And because all this quite obviously does not touch the difficulty about the effect of such mistaken ideas on their argument, theories are propounded that our Lord did not necessarily mean to endorse the current view of authorship, as every plain reader would at first suppose. This is how we are to escape the terrible conclusion that He Who is the very treasure-house of all wisdom and knowledge (Col. ii. 3) based a point of His teaching on a literary fallacy: and as to St. Peter, we really do not know whether

¹ Reported in *The Record*, February 20, 1914.

any trouble is taken to dislocate the point from the chain of his discourse at all.

But these are mere smoke-clouds, hiding the concealed attack—an attack so concealed that even its own authors in most cases do not know they are engaged in it. That is one of the most pitiable features of the case. For nothing could in reality be plainer. As if to emphasize the declaration (quite apart from the argument which our Lord had in view), two of the three evangelists who record it add the word *himself*—"David himself said . . ." St. Mark indeed has the word twice in the whole context; and it is notable that St. Peter has the same significant word in his speech referred to—plainly showing what place *he* felt the authorship of David had in the point he was enforcing. This is what an inspired apostle said, and what three inspired evangelists state that our Lord Himself said, about David; and two of the latter tell us that He said David spoke by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These direct statements are not touched by the critical explanation of His argument. Nothing, at all events, can get over the force of these plain assertions. Probably, indeed, if any one had come to the Saviour with a curious question about the authorship of a psalm, He might have declared it was not His mission to solve literary puzzles, just as He declined to answer other curious questions. But the case is altogether different when, for a definite purpose connected with His own teaching, He *deliberately takes it upon Himself to make a categorical statement*.

And all this elaborate manoeuvring is so painfully unnecessary, when the late Dr. Gifford, whose learning demands respect, has vindicated, in a famous university sermon, the authorship of the Psalm as David's. In this connection it is a cause for much thankfulness that Prof. Knowling, in his Commentary on the Acts in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, does not waste time in contending that it does not matter whether Peter was right or wrong; and it is significant that the first authority to whom he refers on the question of authorship (which he does not so much as discuss himself) is Dr. Gifford—whose sermon, by the way, has since been published in a cheap and accessible form by Longmans, together with another dissertation, under the general title "The Incarnation."

Our final example is from Dr. Marcus Dods's Commentary on the Book of Genesis in *The Expositor's Bible* series—a most excellent

exposition in so many respects, and so strikingly helpful in parts, that one regrets all the more a few extravagant assertions at the very beginning, which might well prejudice some readers against proceeding farther. Here is an extract on the Creation narrative:

“Children ask us questions in answer to which we do not tell them the exact full truth, because we know they cannot possibly understand it. All that we can do is to give them some provisional answer which conveys to them some information they can understand, and which keeps them in a right state of mind, although this information often seems absurd enough when compared with the actual facts and truth of the matter. And if some solemn pedant accused us of supplying the child with false information, we would simply tell him he knew nothing about children. Accurate information on these matters will infallibly come to the child when he grows up; what is wanted meanwhile is to give him information which will help to form his conduct without gravely misleading him as to facts.”

We have quoted fully because incomplete quotations are often justly made the subject of complaint. And it all sounds very plausible, no doubt. But it is mere *camouflage*! It is not, indeed, clear whether Dr. Dods meant that, under any conditions, we should supply children with information *really* false. In that case we should be obliged simply to reply that it was he who wrote without knowing anything about children. Certainly it is often necessary either to tell children that the time has not come for them to understand what they ask, or else to give them replies which are incomplete. But such answers must always contain *the truth in germ*. It is not only morally wrong, but fatally mistaken policy, to tell the child, as many people do, what he will all too soon find out is actually false. But yet, if Dr. Dods's analogy, when stripped of its *camouflage*, means anything at all, it comes to this. For he tells us, a little before, that the account of Creation is “irreconcilable with the teachings of science.” (Note the *camouflage* again. Why does he not say in plain language—“it is not true”? Doubtless he could not bring himself to that; but must wrap it up in some smooth phrase which will deceive himself as well as his readers.) The truth of course is that, though the account of Creation may not fully explain what occurred, it does contain *the truth in germ*. It may well be that humanity in its infancy could not comprehend, and did not need, a fuller account; but the All-wise and All-loving Father will never put His children off with untruths, as so many foolish and short-sighted parents do. Science has not yet spoken its last word, or learnt its last lesson either! If science is

irreconcilable with Genesis i. (and not all scientists will agree with Dr. Dods in this respect), it will be strange if it is the record of the Almighty which will ultimately be found to need revision.

Somebody, I think, in a telling sentence (which unhappily cannot be traced at the moment) described the process which has been the subject of this paper as "a fog of words." The military metaphors of the day have provided us with a similar line of thought, as we have considered the circumlocution of writers who are too reverent to put into plain language what is really presupposed, or too wary to shock the universal spiritual sense of Christendom by doing so. And the terrible consequences of undetected enemy devices in ordinary warfare—the havoc wrought by hidden gun or poison-gas,¹ or under the cover of some smoke-cloud—should indeed serve as timely warning against all that class of subtle and misty verbiage under which attacks on the Word of God, less open and more dangerous than those of undisguised assailants from without, are concealed with such art that even the authors of them are so often self-deceived.

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¹ Mr. Gregory Wilkinson, in the paper already mentioned, has the following phrase, though in a slightly different connection—"Faith, in the Christian sense, is asphyxiated. One needs to wear a gas-mask, so to speak, to avoid inhaling the spiritual poison which infects the very atmosphere of current thought."

