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*BIBLICAL CRITICISM IN THE ELEVENTH
CENTURY.*

FOR many centuries it was only in Mohammedan countries that the Bible had any chance of being fairly criticised. In Christian communities independent examination of both Testaments was tabooed; the same was the case with regard to the Old Testament among the Jews, and though no scruples of conscience would have prevented them from examining the New Testament, such a proceeding would have been dangerous in the extreme where they lived at the mercy or rather the unmercifulness of the followers of the Gospel. It might have been expected that the Moslems would have been burdened with the defence of both Testaments in addition to that of their own Koran, since the latter claims to confirm both the Law and the Gospel. Against this contingency the sagacious founder of Islam provided when he suggested that the statements of Jews and Christians concerning the contents of their Sacred Books were untrustworthy: whence by easy stages there proceeded the doctrine that the real Law and Gospel had been withdrawn from circulation, and only worthless substitutes survived. This theory still serves as an outwork which Christian missionaries to Moslems must somehow penetrate before they can attack the fortress itself; and in a manual for the use of such missionaries published last year¹ the author's efforts are largely devoted to proving that the existing Testaments are those which the Koran professes to confirm.

The belief in the spuriousness of the Jewish and Christian Bibles is not indeed held by all Moslems, some of whom are satisfied that they are genuine enough to be used for histori-

¹ St. Clair Tisdall, *Mohammedan Objections to Christianity*.

cal, archaeological, and even theological inquiries. These persons find the Koran sufficiently confirmed by them; and indeed one who can find in the Old Testament the text "He shall be called a Nazarene" should have no difficulty in finding in it the description of the Prophet Mohammed. But controversy with Jews or Christians usually forces Moslems to maintain the doctrine of the spuriousness of both Testaments as their surest weapon, since the ignorance of the author of the Koran is otherwise the strongest point made by the antagonist.

The ordinary Moslem is probably satisfied with the Prophet's hints on this subject, which amount to little more than a charge of habitual misquotation brought against the Jews and Christians of his time; but there are at all times earnest students who prefer to sift the evidence for themselves. Not content with their Prophet's assurance, they endeavour to find internal proof of the spuriousness of both Testaments. Probably they are surprised by the ease with which the desired evidence comes to their hands.

The earliest work by a Mohammedan in which the Testaments are shown by internal evidence to be spurious is said to be the treatise on Sects, Creeds and Fancies by Ibn Hazm of Cordova, who lived from 994-1064. Of this work an account was some years ago given by Goldziher, in a treatise on the Zahirites, to whose Sect, Creed or Fancy Ibn Hazm belonged. His purpose is to refute all philosophies and religions except his own; and thus he finds occasion to demonstrate the futility of Judaism and Christianity. His biographer tells us that he was notorious for the sharpness of his tongue, and this notoriety was not cheaply acquired. Though he appears not to have studied Greek or Hebrew, he clearly took pains to make himself acquainted with translations of both the Old and the

New Testaments, and indeed of the former in renderings made from both the Hebrew and the LXX. He also is aware of the existence of the Talmud and produces one or two passages from it. Further, he had seen the works of Josephus, had consulted Jewish and Christian scholars on various difficulties, and been present at debates in which the merits of the three religions were discussed. Hence his objections are only rarely based on mistranslations or misapprehensions of the meaning of texts, and as a scholar he compares most favourably with the bulk of his co-religionists.

Comparison of his treatise with modern works of similar import—of which the Rationalist Press Association has issued or re-issued a great number—shows that thought in the eleventh century, when released from *a priori* assumptions, was similar to thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Objection can be taken to the Bible on physical, historical, moral and theological grounds. From the first kind of objection the Mohammedan critic naturally abstains, except in rare cases; for the miracles of the Gospels are to a considerable extent attested by the Koran—indeed with additions. But some modern works also avoid this form of attack, following the opinion of J. S. Mill, that the belief in miracles is not illogical where the presence of a cause sufficient to produce them is assumed. But in the remaining three classes of objections the Moslem critic constantly coincides with modern writers, and if he has not noticed every contradiction in the Gospels discussed by Strauss, one reason is that he does not profess to empty his quiver. The canon employed by the author of *The Four Gospels as Historical Records*, that where two stories conflict, one must be false, but both may be, is stated clearly by Ibn Hazm. Hence he collects the discrepancies in the Gospels from the Genealogies to the various accounts

of the Resurrection. Then he attacks the moral character of the Christ of the Gospels, not, like Evan Meredith, with the view of traducing the Founder of Christianity, but rather like J. R. Greg, in order to show that the Evangelists were untrustworthy. A false prophecy being to his mind inconsistent with the character of a Prophet, he condemns the authors of the Gospels for ascribing to Jesus the declarations that He would be entombed for three days and three nights, and that the Second Coming would be within the lifetime of His followers. Since a Prophet cannot say what is untrue, those sayings are condemned as apocryphal which evidently conflict with the facts. Christ cannot have promised His followers that any two of them agreeing together could obtain by prayer whatever they desired. He cannot have promised that if they had a grain of faith of the size of a mustard seed they would remove mountains—unless, indeed, the Christians were prepared to grant that no member of their community had ever possessed faith equal in quantity to the smallest of all seeds. He cannot have both declared that He came not to destroy the Law, and have repealed the Mosaic law of divorce.

His criterion for distinguishing genuine sayings of Christ from spurious does not differ materially from some that have been used by recent writers, and indeed are still employed. Mr. Greg, in a once popular work (*The Creed of Christendom*, 3rd ed. 1874, ii. 7), asks whether any one can maintain it conceivable that Jesus should have conferred the awful power of deciding the salvation or damnation of his fellow-men on one so frail, so faulty, and so fallible as Peter? Much the same criticism is made by Ibn Hazm on the well known passage in the first Gospel. "In the 16th chapter we read that Christ said to Peter, 'Unto thee I make over the keys of heaven, and whatsoever thou forbiddest on earth shall be forbidden in heaven, etc.';

then four lines further down he says to Peter, continuing the same discourse, 'Follow me, thou opponent, and thwart me not, for thou knowest not the pleasure of God, but only the pleasure of men.' Small as this section is [I omit the author's abuse], it contains two atrocities. The first is that he makes over to the wretch Peter the keys of heaven, and gives him divine power; the second that after giving him these keys and making him either autocrat of the universe or associate with God, he tells him that he is an opponent and ready to thwart, ignorant of God's pleasure, and only acquainted with the pleasure of men. Surely to a person of that sort the keys of the very humblest apartment should not be made over. But then we notice that in the 12th chapter of Mark,¹ 'Christ associates the other Apostles with Peter in this power, not excluding Iscariot, who betrayed him for thirty dirhems. What then is to happen in heaven and earth if they differ on any question of forbidding and permitting? You answer that they will never differ. What difference, I ask, can be greater than that between Iscariot and the rest on the permissibility of taking thirty dirhems for their master's life?' Ibn Hazm argues like Mr. Greg—certainly using many stronger expressions—that this story must be an invention, because it disagrees with the character of Christ, which they have otherwise ascertained, the Moslem writer from the Koran, Mr. Greg from his general impressions. When a saying appears to be worthy of the Speaker both critics regard it as genuine, and here too they are sometimes agreed; thus the argument by which Davidic descent is disclaimed for the Messiah appears to both to be historical. For the fabrication of the spurious sayings Ibn Hazm throws the blame on the Evangelists; and those modern critics who adopt this criterion for separating true sayings from false can find no better scapegoat.

¹ Rather, Matt. xviii.

Another class of objections may be termed theological, as they are based on doctrines currently received among Christians. Naturally much is made of those passages which seem to exclude the idea of the divinity of Christ. Thus the prayer "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" is made the subject of a dilemma. Was this prayer answered? Then what right have the Christians to taunt the Jews with a sin which has been forgiven them, and for which therefore they are no longer responsible? Was it not answered? How then is such failure to be reconciled with the divinity of Him who uttered the prayer? Similarly he argues from two well known passages that the Sabbath must still be binding on Christians, or the Gospels must be untrustworthy.

His extreme literalism has, perhaps, enabled him to detect one or two contradictions which more modern critics do not notice. He finds a discrepancy between the assertion that John came neither eating nor drinking and the account of John's food which the Gospels contain. This is because the Koran expressly declares that all Prophets came eating and drinking, i.e., subject to the ordinary needs of mankind. A more curious objection is to the prophecy of Christ that He would be slain, "when all four Gospels state that He died a natural death." This objection is due to the fact that the method of crucifixion in use in Moslem states often permitted the victim to linger for some days.

His criticism of the Old Testament is largely occupied with arithmetical difficulties, and he declares that the fabricator must have been poorly equipped in mathematics. Some of his points are rather trivial, as that Moses must have lived at least 122 years and not only 120; but others are more serious and familiar to all who are acquainted with modern criticism. He regards the growth of the Israelitish people in the interval between Joseph and Moses

as a sheer impossibility, and communicates some notices he had purposely collected of abnormally large families ; fourteen sons he found was a high average even in polygamous households. To the pedigree of David he makes some objections also grounded on statistics. But many more of his attacks are theological, i.e. directed against verses which ascribe to eminent persons acts or words for which they could not in his opinion possibly be responsible. Thus Sarah could neither have lied on the subject of her laughter, nor have contradicted the assertion of the Deity on the subject. With perhaps more reason he declares that a man guided by God like Joshua could not have uttered the terrible sentence which condemned Achan's innocent family with Achan to the flames. The Psalms are condemned by him for polytheism, since they not only mention God's son (Ps. ii.), but even His daughter and son-in-law (Ps. xlv.) ; and for profanity in comparing Him to a giant moistened with wine—a state which all experience shows to be one not of strength and vigour, but weakness. The major Prophets he charges with gross anthropomorphism. The prophecies concerning the glories of Abraham's descendants he declares to be serious exaggerations if they refer to Israel, equally serious understatements if they refer to the Arabs. From the Talmud he only quotes one or two absurdities.

Of the origin of the Biblical Books he advances certain theories. The Pentateuch he supposes to be in the main the work of the Rabbis ; he can find no evidence of the existence, during the political independence of Israel, of more than one copy of the Law, kept in the Temple at Jerusalem ; since the Jews were alternately idolatrous and monotheistic, and the priests shared in the general apostasies, what more likely than that they tampered again and again with the text ? and thus he accounts for the polythe-

istic passages. Long after the termination of the Jewish state and indeed its partial restoration, Ezra produced a copy from memory, which is unlikely to have been trustworthy. That the Pentateuch is wrongly assigned to Moses and the Book of Joshua to Joshua is shown by the well known anachronisms.

The authorship of the Gospels is not disputed by him, though he considers the names of the authors no guarantee of the accuracy of their statements ; a view which may be compared to that recently advanced by Dr. Drummond of the Johannine Gospel. John, our Arabic author informs us, was commonly believed to have translated Matthew's Gospel from Hebrew into Greek—a fact which makes the discrepancies between his Gospel and that which he translated all the more discreditable. All the Christian sects were agreed that Matthew's Gospel was written in Judaea nine years after the Ascension : that of Mark the Aaronite in Antioch twenty-eight years after the Ascension : that of Luke, like Mark a disciple of Peter (?), in Achaia, some time later ; that of John in Athens more than sixty years after the Ascension. Of the Pauline writings he has a strange notion, which he ascribes to the Jews of his time. They asserted that Paul had been suborned by contemporary Jews to corrupt the newly founded Christian religion, by introducing the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. This story was taken quite seriously by Ibn Hazm, who observes that this malicious people had tried the same with Mohammedanism ; a Jewish convert had introduced the doctrine of the divinity of Ali, which was held by a branch of the Shi'ites. In his attack on the Jewish religion our author vehemently upbraids the Rabbis for resorting to such tactics.

That the Jews and Christians had answers to all these objections cannot be doubted, and indeed their replies are

sometimes adduced. They were either identical with or similar to the answers to be found in apologetic works of our own day. The best answer was undoubtedly to retort with attacks on the Koran, which can easily be shown to contain the fellow to most of the objections which are brought against the two Testaments. Naturally Ibn Hazm on the defensive is a very different person from Ibn Hazm on the offensive, and resorts to a variety of evasions in the case of his own Sacred Book which he would by no means permit to be used in defence of the Sacred Books of others. The canon that the Koran being the composition of God must be made out to be worthy of its author is of course no better than the same canon when the Old or New Testament is substituted for the Koran ; and what has been gained by the application of rational criticism to one of these books is lost when the critic refuses to apply the same balance to the rest. Hence his work could only fan the flame of fanaticism in the communities with whose books it dealt, whereas the use of the even balance of science might have provided a basis of agreement for the more enlightened members of those communities.

One sect of Jews, of whom unfortunately little is known, appear to have drawn from the difficulties which all sacred books involve some better results than the determination to defend their own at all costs. The Jesuists, or followers of 'Isa, or Jesus, of Ispahan, appear to have assigned the three revelations co-ordinate value and to have regarded the communities founded by Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed as equally in the right. References to this interesting sect are exceedingly rare, though they are to be found outside the work of Ibn Hazm, who of course has to refute their creed as well as others. The same doctrine is said to be maintained still in the African state of Kong, probably without reference to the opinions of Jesus of Ispahan. Nor

is it known on what arguments this remarkable personage based an opinion which contained the remedy for so many ills. It appears, however, to have been an endeavour to compromise between the Jewish denial of Abrogation, against which Moslem theologians constantly argue, and the fact that the Jewish system showed no signs of spreading to any large portion of the human race.

If Ibn Hazm's work be collated with modern polemical treatises, such as W. Jekyll's *The Bible Untrustworthy* or the tract of St. Clair Tisdall mentioned above, one might fancy that time had stood still or at least marked no progress during 850 years ; precisely the same objections are being urged against the Bible in 1905 as in 1050, and the same answers frequently given to those objections. But to the non-polemical treatises of our time this criticism does not apply. From the standpoint whence dogmas are treated not as corresponding with objective truth, but as phases of human or national development, the very passages which to an Ibn Hazm prove the spuriousness of the Bible become evidence of comparative genuineness. For they show that the new dogmas, even when enforced by fire and sword, were unable entirely to efface the older doctrines, the remains of which therefore are evidence of continuity of tradition from pre-historic into historic times. But the criticism which is able to employ such evidence must be conscious of the fact that an established religion is not the work of one person, but, like the Roman republic, the product of many ages and many men.

Of this system, according to which contradictions, inconsistencies, ethical and physical errors in the Sacred Texts are not scandals to be hushed up, but valuable fragments of history, it would be strange if we found any trace in a mediaeval writer. But the study of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures by a man who was freed from the notion

that their contents must be made at all costs to correspond with an *a priori* theory of the Word of God, could scarcely fail to lead him a few steps in the direction of modern criticism, and had not Ibn Hazm's purpose been achieved when he had discredited the Gospels, he might have produced some positive conclusions of interest some 800 years out of due time. Thus the criticism which has been quoted on the story of Peter and the keys shows that he had in his hand the premises for a fruitful investigation which only fanaticism prevented him from conducting. His notions of the origin of the Pentateuch also resemble the conclusions of the most modern criticism in some curious ways ; for he could not be expected to anticipate the theory that Ezra was a myth. The passage, therefore, about Ezra which, in Wellhausen's opinion, had been strangely neglected as late as 1880 had already received a due share of attention in the Moslem criticism of the Bible of the eleventh century. D. S. MARGOLIOUTH.

NOTES ON RECENT NEW TESTAMENT STUDY.

Two works in English, of different size and temper, have recently appeared upon the problem of Jesus Christ's life and teaching. The larger of these, *The Prophet of Nazareth* (1905), by Professor N. Schmidt, author of the scholarly articles on *The Son of Man* and *The Son of God* in the fourth volume of the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, is a series of studies on the historical and dogmatic significance of the person of Christ. The book is not a unity, nor is there any attempt to grapple exhaustively with the problems of the gospel history. The fifth and sixth chapters do little more than condense the articles already referred to, and it is only the ninth, tenth and eleventh which form a continuous contribution to the subject of the volume's title. Dr. Schmidt's position on the historicity of the Gospels approximates to