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894TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

HELD IN THE CAXTON HALL, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY,
22ND MAY, 1950

ERNEST WHITE, ESQ., M.B., B.S., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed and signed.

The following elections were announced:—Martyn H. Watney, Esq., M.A., M.B., B.Ch., M.R.C.S., Fellow; Miss Myra Light, Fellow; S. F. D. Orr, Esq., B.A., Member; P. B. Bagnall, Esq., B.A., Member; J. P. Cohen, Esq., Member; D. C. Abbott, Esq., Associate; B. M. N. Brown, Esq., Associate; J. H. Jackson, Esq., Associate; M. J. Turner, Esq., Associate.

The CHAIRMAN then called upon the President, Sir Frederic G. Kenyon, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.Litt., LL.D., F.B.A., to deliver his Presidential Address entitled "The Institute and Biblical Criticism To-day."

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

THE INSTITUTE AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM TO-DAY

By SIR FREDERIC G. KENYON, G.B.E., K.C.B., D.Litt.,
LL.D., F.B.A.

I AM not sure that the time has not come when I should cease to offer you an annual Presidential Address. At the time of life which I have reached it is not likely that I should be able to embark on any new line of inquiry; and I have already said most of what I have to say on the subjects with which of late years I have been chiefly concerned. What I say to-day will in part repeat what I have said already; but there are a few points which I should like to emphasise once again. And I can at least promise to conform with the desire for brevity somewhat wistfully expressed by our late Secretary, Col. Skinner.

I am, however, encouraged to offer these remarks by two papers to which our members have had opportunities of listening within the present year. One was the survey of the early activities of the Institute, by Mr. Titterton, the other was the survey of Recent Trends in Biblical Archæology by Mr. D. J. Wiseman. The former of these recalled the circumstances under which the Institute came into being and the subjects with which it was then principally concerned; the latter gave an exhaustive survey of the most recent problems of Biblical archæology which have occupied us recently, and which occupy us to-day. Between them, they show how the centre of gravity has shifted in our subject, and in what different ways we are now called on, in the words in which our objects were defined eighty-

five years ago, "to investigate important questions of Philosophy and Science, and to combat unbelief by directing attention to the evidences of the Divine care for man that are supplied by Science, History and Religion."

The main object of our existence remains the same, to vindicate against hostile criticism the validity and authority of the Christian religion; but what I especially wish to emphasise is the extent to which the conditions in which we have to fight have changed in our favour. In the latter years of the nineteenth century the champions of Christianity were mainly on the defensive. Natural science was in the heyday of the progress which took rise in the discoveries and doctrines of Darwin, and there were many who believed that Natural Science held the key to all the problems of existence and that the day of religious beliefs was over. At the same time, within the sphere of religious study itself, a school of thought asserted itself which questioned the authenticity and trustworthiness of the fundamental documents of Christianity and applied the utmost freedom of scepticism to their narratives. "Advanced" thought, as it called itself, flourished rampantly, and orthodoxy was pushed aside as an outworn tradition, discredited by modern science and by modern scholarship. And against this attitude the state of our knowledge of biblical archæology did not supply arguments which could effectively convince those who did not wish to be convinced. The advocates of the Christian faith fought at a disadvantage, and on the defensive.

Now all this is changed, and the point which I wish to make is that we are no longer on the defensive. It is no longer the Christian scholar that is out of date. The up-to-date scholars are now those who recognise the authenticity and authority of the Christian literature; it is the critics who formerly claimed to be "advanced" who are now belated and behind the time. The last half-century has been a period of wonderful, almost sensational, advance in our knowledge of the conditions under which our religion took its form and in which the books which contain its credentials were produced; and discovery after discovery has tended to establish the essential soundness of the traditions which, from the point of view of human scholarship, are the title-deeds of our faith.

I have dealt with parts of this subject in previous addresses, but the material is constantly growing, and it will do no harm to recapitulate it here, at least in summary.

With regard to the Old Testament, the great change came in the years lying around the turn of the century. Previously, our knowledge of the area lying between the Euphrates and the Nile was, except for the books of the Old Testament, practically a blank. It was the accepted view that writing was unknown in all this part of the world before the beginning of the first millennium. For Greece, Grote put its origin as late as the seventh century; and for the Hebrews, Wellhausen put it no earlier than the ninth. The Mosaic age was supposed to be far outside the scope of written record. The first shock to this established doctrine was given by the discovery of the Tell el-Amarna tablets in Egypt in 1887. These, though including no works of literature, proved the habitual use of writing in Palestine and Egypt as far back as the fourteenth century B.C., about the time of the entry of the Hebrews under Joshua into Palestine. But far more decisive were the discoveries made in Babylonia, where sites such as Telloh, Nippur, Ur, Kish, Warka and others yielded thousands of tablets dating back as far as the third millennium B.C., or even earlier. Among them were many literary or semi-literary works, including notably the Sumerian story of the Flood. Most remarkable, from the point of view of the early Hebrew literature, was the discovery in 1901-2 of the stele containing the Laws of Hammurabi, king of Babylon about the eighteenth century B.C., who, whether he was a contemporary of Abraham or not, was in any case far anterior to Moses. This revealed the existence in Babylonia of a code of laws as comprehensive and detailed as the Pentateuch, and containing many provisions of very similar character.

These discoveries established beyond question two things of vital importance for Old Testament scholarship—the early use of writing and the existence of elaborate codes of laws far beyond the age of Moses. These propositions have been amply confirmed in recent years. The blank areas on the map between Babylonia and Palestine have been filled up by excavations which have revealed the kingdom of the Canaanites at Ugarit, the Mitanni on the Upper Euphrates, the Hurrians (or Horites) at Mari, lower down the river, and still more at Kirkuk and Nuzi, beyond the Tigris—while up to the north-west the discoveries at Boghaz-keui in 1906 revealed the archives of the great Hittite empire, the very existence of which had not been suspected until the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

All these discoveries have thrown a flood of light on the Old

Testament literature, and particularly on that part of it which was considered as historically the least reliable, namely, the Pentateuch. The laws of the Hurrians, of which we have evidence approximately contemporary with the books of Moses, are particularly illuminating in this respect. They contain not a few provisions identical or nearly identical with those of the Pentateuch, and are a decisive warning against ruling out any of their enactments as anachronistic. The boot is now, in fact, on the other leg. Instead of the Mosaic legislation being whittled down to a few verses and regarding all the rest as later accretions, the presumption now must be in favour of the antiquity and authenticity of the Mosaic legislation. Whether Moses was in fact its author is, of course, quite another question, on which archæology can throw no light: and reasons may be shown for questioning the antiquity of particular provisions; but the possibility of detailed legislation as early as the age of Moses is decisively established, as well as the antiquity of not a few particular laws and customs which used to be assigned to much later dates. The warning of the danger of dogmatic denials where our evidence is scanty is striking and decisive.

The discoveries at Ras Shamra of the archives of the kingdom of Ugarit touch another aspect of Old Testament history. They have given us a picture of the Canaanite religion from the Canaanite side. We now have knowledge of the Pantheon of El, Baal, Asherah and other Canaanite deities from the point of view of their worshippers, and not merely from that of their deadly enemies, the worshippers of Jehovah in the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. We can see its more attractive side, and the nature-worship often embodied in it, as well as the features which decisively differentiate it from the religion of Jehovah—its polytheism, its stories of unedifying strife between its various deities, and the total lack of morality in much of its outlook. When the discoveries of the Ras Shamra literature were first announced, there were those who eagerly claimed that here was the original of the religion which we find in the Old Testament, but the fact is just opposite. Here we have the authentic picture of the polytheistic religion of the Canaanites, of which the monotheistic worship of Jehovah was the irreconcilable enemy. But we can appreciate better than ever before the conditions against which the prophets of Israel and Judah had to struggle, and the beliefs which dominated nearly all the rulers of the northern kingdom and not a few of the southern.

All these discoveries have put us in a much better position than our ancestors to appreciate the perspective of the history covered by the Old Testament. We can see, as they could not see, that it is a history of development. To them it was a single picture; the enactments of the Pentateuch, the practices of the early chieftains and kings were as applicable to ourselves as the pronouncements of the great prophets. Anything that could be found "in the Bible" was regarded as immutably applicable for all time—though there was a tacit avoidance of certain features such as polygamy, and (though not always) of indiscriminate massacre. So ingrained had this belief in "the Bible" become in Victorian days that it was regarded as almost irreligious to substitute the conception of a *progressive* revelation, suitable to the intellectual and religious development of the people of Israel from the days of the Patriarchs down to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It seems to me that one of the most useful services of our Institute would now be to act as the interpreters to the general public of the true message of the Old Testament in its historical development. It would then be easier for the ordinary student to realise the full benefit of the teaching of the great prophets and psalmists, without stumbling over the crudities of early civilisation which he inevitably finds in the narratives of the periods of the patriarchs and kings. And it enables the believers in Christianity to speak with their enemies in the gate, to meet scholarship with scholarship, and to challenge with a picture of progressive revelation the nihilistic doctrines of their critics.

Still more recently we have received illuminating evidence which strengthens our confidence in the reliability of the Old Testament as it has come down to us. I refer, of course, to the discovery of Hebrew manuscripts in a cave near the Dead Sea. These include a nearly complete copy of the book of Isaiah, which is assigned by those who have studied it to the late second or early part of the first century B.C. Hitherto the pedigree of the Hebrew text could be carried back no further than the so-called Synod of Jamnia, in the last years of the first century A.D.; and (in view especially of the not inconsiderable variations shown in the Greek Septuagint version) it was possible to doubt whether the Hebrew text had not suffered substantial editorial modification at that date. Now, if the pre-Christian date assigned to the Dead Sea manuscript by all who have worked on it may be accepted, that doubt is removed. The Septuagint

can no longer claim any considerable priority in date, and the evidence justifies us in believing that the meticulous accuracy which characterises the so-called Massoretic text dates back at least to a period some centuries earlier than the fall of Jerusalem.

It is therefore now established beyond question, first that written records go back in all the area between the Nile and the Tigris at least to the age of Moses, and in some parts much earlier; secondly, that legislation at least as elaborate as that of the Pentateuch dates back at least as far; we have now first-hand knowledge of the Canaanite religion of Baal; and our confidence in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament as it has come down to us is greatly strengthened. We may have still more to learn when the Dead Sea manuscripts have been more fully studied; but that is the picture as it now lies before us, and its character is encouraging.

In the case of the New Testament, the advance in our knowledge and the consequent strengthening of the traditional or orthodox position have been equally remarkable, though of a different kind. Here it is a question of the dates of our earlier manuscripts of the several books, and the consequent time available for the evolution of the books themselves. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, when the critical school was at its height, the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament were the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, of the first half of the fourth century. This left a gap of the best part of two centuries over which the destructive critics could play with their disintegrating conjectures, although their style was somewhat cramped by the evidence of Irenæus in the last quarter of the second century. But within the last twenty years this interval has been very materially reduced. Primarily this was the effect of the discovery, announced in 1931, of the Chester Beatty Biblical papyri, including, in addition to several Old Testament manuscripts, copies of the Gospels and Acts, of nearly all the Pauline Epistles, and of the Apocalypse. All these are assigned by palæographers to the third century, the Pauline manuscript to the very beginning of the century or even to the end of the second, the Gospels and Acts to the first half of it, and the Apocalypse probably to the second half. So far, therefore, as the Gospels and Epistles are concerned, this cuts off a full century from the interval as previously fixed, and correspondingly reduces the period over which conjecture is free to plan. But this is not all. Both in the Gospels and the Epistles there has been time

for the development of various readings. The text has affinities both with the type of text found in the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, and also (though to a less extent) with that of the Western group of authorities. No textual scholar would say that here is the uncorrupted original, from which all later authorities have diverged; on the contrary, it is evident that divergences have already come into existence, and the papyri have drawn their text from authorities of more than one type. How long a period must be allowed for this development it is impossible to say; but it is clear that the date of origin is being pressed further and further back.

But again this is not all. As you probably all know, in 1935 two discoveries were announced which have a most vital bearing on this subject. One was the discovery in the Rylands Library at Manchester of a tiny fragment of the Fourth Gospel, which had been there since 1920 but had remained unidentified. This was assigned by palæographers, both in this country and in Germany and in America, on purely palæographical grounds, to the first half of the second century. The second discovery, made among papyri recently acquired by the British Museum, was of some fragments of a new Gospel narrative, showing close verbal affinities both with the Synoptic Gospels and (what is especially significant) with St. John, and this also is assigned by palæographers to the first half of the second century.

The fact that these papyri are but small fragments does not diminish their significance. Where there are now only a few square inches there was once a complete manuscript; and (unless the judgment of the papyrologists can be disturbed) we must accept the facts (1) that the Fourth Gospel was not only extant but was circulating in Egypt in the first half of the second century, and (2) that it was sufficiently well known to be utilised in the construction of another narrative of our Lord's life. But if this is so, the date of composition of the Gospel itself is pushed back, at latest to the years about the beginning of the second century, and therefore to a period within the life-time of those who had known St. John, if not to the life-time of the Apostle himself.

I will apologise once again for repeating much of what I have said before and what many, if not all, of you know very well yourselves. But I would plead that repetition of important truths is permissible, and sometimes even necessary. It is so, I think, in this case, because these truths, which are of vital

importance, are not yet as universally realised as they should be. Otherwise we should not have had writers of distinction, in this country and abroad, ignoring the dictum of Harnack (uttered at the very beginning of this century) that the traditional chronological framework of the New Testament documents is in all essentials correct, and that all hypotheses as to the historical course of things which are inconsistent with this framework must be abandoned. Harnack, after all, was not an Anglican cleric who might be supposed to be bound by his Orders, but the most learned Biblical scholar of his generation. Nevertheless, not only have we seen his dictum ignored by those who should have known better, but also the more recent evidence as to the dates of the Gospels is passed over as though it were of no consequence. It is necessary, therefore, to repeat this evidence until, if it cannot be refuted, it is generally accepted. Its acceptance would not put an end to research into the origin and methods of composition of the Gospels; but it would bring the whole examination within the limits of the period when the apostles and those who had known them were living. Theories of *Formgeschichte* and hypotheses of repeated redactions and reconstructions are ruled out for want of time for such developments. We must go back to the face value of the documents and treat them as normal human compositions in a limited framework of space and time.

I would suggest, further, that the members of our Institute should regard themselves as the evangelists of the new, or rather the revived, doctrine. We are not now fighting a rearguard action against the forces of progress and scientific enlightenment. It is those who formerly claimed to be the torch-bearers of progress who are now the out-of-date obscurantists of fifty years ago. It seems to me to be the function of the Institute to be the interpreter of modern scholarship to the public which takes an interest in the subject but has not the technical knowledge which is the basis, or part of the basis, of belief. The extent to which modern discoveries have undermined the critical scholarship of the past is by no means fully realised. Whole masses of the literature of the last century have really and quite definitely to be relegated to the rubbish heap. Much of it may have served a good purpose for a time by compelling a closer and fuller examination of the evidence, but its conclusions, so far as they require a second-century date for most of the books of the New Testament, ought now to be finally abandoned.

I should wish, therefore, to see the Institute claiming a position in the vanguard of progress, and ceasing to be regarded as coming dangerously near the attitude which is generally characterised as "fundamentalism." The position of the Institute, as I see it, is to provide the scholarly basis for an up-to-date assertion of the authenticity and trustworthiness of the documents on which Christianity rests. But more than this: I would urge that the Institute should put all its weight behind the doctrine of the *progressive* character of the revelation of God to man embodied in the Old Testament. In this way we can restore the full value of the Old Testament, which was at one time thought to be imperilled by the claims of Science. We can now, in my belief, welcome the progress of natural science, without surrendering any jot of the territory which rightly belongs to religion; and we can claim to be in the vanguard, and not a recalcitrant rearguard, in the progress of Biblical study.

Dr. WHITE (Chairman) said: I am sure that I shall echo the thoughts of all of us when I say that we are very grateful to our President for the valuable summary he has given us of the present position of Biblical Scholarship, and for the lucid and concise way in which he has expressed his thoughts.

It is refreshing and encouraging to observe the optimistic note he sounds when he says that the conditions in which we have to fight have changed in our favour, and that we are no longer on the defensive. This is especially heartening as coming from the lips of one who speaks with the ripe experience and profound knowledge of an expert who has spent many years of his life in the study and contemplation of the subject with which he treats.

Sir Frederic Kenyon urges that "the Institute should put all its weight behind the doctrine of the progressive character of the revelation of God to man embodied in the Old Testament." We hope to have the opportunity of a discussion on this important subject which will be opened by a paper to be given by one of our Vice-Presidents, Rev. H. S. Curr, during the 1951 session.

It seems to me that for the main body of Christians who are neither scholars nor experts in Archæology, there are two extreme attitudes of mind between which we should steer a safe middle course.

There are those who close their minds to scholarship. Perhaps

they have heard something of the more destructive critical views current in certain circles a few years ago, and not altogether without advocates even now. Fearing and disliking what is called the Higher Criticism they reject all the results of scholarship, classing them together under the general heading of Modernism. They ignore the valuable contribution which scholars have made to the better understanding of the text of Scripture and to the historical background of the Biblical writings, especially of the books of the Old Testament.

At the other extreme are those who hail every new discovery and each new hypothesis as infallible truth, the rejection, or even criticism of which they regard as a sign of ignorance or obduracy. They fail to take into consideration that the conclusions at which scholars arrive are tentative, and always subject to modification by the results of further investigations and discoveries. The views and conclusions of scholars are in a constant state of flux, as the history of Biblical criticism over the last fifty years has clearly shown. We need to keep our minds open, to consider all the theories and discoveries in the light of the Bible itself, and to remember that truth is gradually revealed and errors discarded, only as we seek after knowledge humbly and in a spirit of patient enquiry.

After all, the Bible is God's message to man. It is a spiritual book spiritually discerned, and as Christians we do not need to be convinced of its truth as God's revelation to man. We need neither be alarmed by destructive critical theories, nor unduly elated by the impressive evidence of its accuracy and authority, for it is the "Word of God which abideth for ever."