
A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

ARTICLE I.

THE PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY OF LEADING OLD TESTAMENT CRITICS.

BY PROFESSOR ALBERT C. KNUDSON, D.D., MALDEN, MASS.

It is frequently asserted that many of the conclusions to which modern biblical critics have come, are due to an un-Christian philosophy rather than to the logic of facts; but this assertion is seldom accompanied by any attempt at proof. It will, therefore, be a matter of interest to inquire into the history of biblical criticism, with the view of determining how far, if at all, this charge is justified. The present study will confine itself to the Old Testament.

In the history of Old Testament criticism, there are eight names of preëminent significance: Benedict Spinoza (1632–77), Richard Simon (1638–1712), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), Martin Leberecht De Wette (1780–1849), Heinrich Ewald (1803–75), Wilhelm Vatke (1806–82), Abraham Kuenen (1828–91), and Julius Wellhausen (1844–). There are, to be sure, other Old Testament scholars of note who, in some regards, would be worthy to rank with any of these. But these eight, in my opinion, mark more clearly than any others the chief stages in the development of Old Testament criticism.

To Spinoza belongs the distinction of having first outlined the program of modern biblical study. He clearly formulated the principles of a strictly grammatical and historical treatment of the Old Testament, and in several matters of detail anticipated, in a remarkable way, the conclusions of later scholarship.

Simon was the first to write a critical history of the Old Testament as literature. He devoted his attention, however, chiefly to the history of the Text and the Versions. It is, therefore, a question whether he is entitled to be called, as he sometimes is, the father of Old Testament introduction. There is, also, not much that is new in the matter that he presents. But the genuine historical spirit which pervades the work, and the method which he introduced into the treatment of the subject, were new, and mark an epoch in biblical study.

Eichhorn, who was the first to apply the name "higher criticism" to the analysis of the biblical books into their earlier and later elements, was also the first to write a comprehensive introduction to the Old Testament from this point of view. For this reason, he is often spoken of as the founder of Old Testament criticism. While not the author of the documentary hypothesis with reference to the structure of the Pentateuch, it was he who first gave it general currency.

De Wette was the first clearly to see and point out the serious difficulties involved in the traditional view of the course of Israel's history. That history, he contended, could not be reconciled with its alleged starting-point. Hence the books of Chronicles are unreliable, and the Pentateuch is for the most part unhistorical. Deuteronomy he assigned to the seventh century. In the study of the Pentateuch he was, as Wellhausen says, the "epoch-making pioneer of historical criticism."

To Ewald belongs the distinction of embodying the main results of criticism, reached up to his time, in a monumental history of Israel. So far as the conception of the general course of Old Testament history is concerned, his work marked no advance. Indeed, it is claimed, and perhaps justly, that by the influence of his great name he stayed for a quarter of a century the normal development of historical criticism. Nevertheless, by his preëminent genius as an interpreter of Scripture and by the immense extent of his labors, he did more than any other man before or since his time to promote the critical study of the Old Testament.

Vatke's significance lies in the fact that as early as 1835 he wrote a work in which he anticipated the conclusions to which Old Testament critics in general have come only during the past twenty or thirty years. The most important new feature in this work was the assignment of the Priestly Code to the post-exilic period. But the importance of the work did not lie simply in this conclusion with reference to the development of Old Testament literature, but in the masterly exposition which it gives of Israel's history from this new standpoint. Wellhausen declares that this book of Vatke's is "the most important contribution ever made to the history of ancient Israel," and says that from it he himself "learned best and most."

To Kuenen belongs the credit of reviving Vatke's theory concerning the date of the Priestly Code, and contributing more to its establishment as an article of faith in the critical school than any other man, except Wellhausen. His work on "The Religion of Israel," written from this point of view, was epoch-making in its field.

Wellhausen enjoys the distinction of bringing the debate of almost a century concerning the structure and origin of

the Pentateuch practically to a close. His "Prolegomena to the History of Israel" was, as Kuenen says, "the crowning fight in the long campaign." With such extraordinary skill and ability did he marshal the facts in favor of the late date of the Levitical law, that the leading Old Testament scholars one after the other yielded to his conclusion. And at present this view with reference to the development of Old Testament literature is generally regarded as an assured result of criticism.

Since these eight names thus stand in the most intimate connection with the development of Old Testament criticism, they may be taken as representative of the movement as a whole. We proceed, therefore, to state briefly their philosophical and theological views, with the purpose of determining the relation of philosophical and theological standpoint to the work of Old Testament critics in general.

Among students of Spinoza, there is a difference of opinion as to whether he should be classed as a pantheist or as an atheistic monist. Some have indeed claimed him as a theist. A century or so ago, Goethe spoke of him as "superlatively theistic, superlatively Christian." But the weak sentimentalism which gathered about his name at about that time, as a result of the reaction against the irreligious deism of the eighteenth century, has now most of it passed away. If any religious character attaches to his philosophic system, it can be only that of pantheistic mysticism. His identification of God with nature, his thoroughgoing necessitarianism, his rejection of the notion of purpose in every form, and his exclusively intellectualistic or rationalistic attitude toward life and history, remove him about as far from Christian theism as one could well get. Whether he be called a pantheist or athe-

ist is a matter of slight consequence. The question is one chiefly of words. Anyhow, the same naturalistic scheme is implied in both pantheism and atheism. And it was from this naturalistic standpoint that Spinoza approached the Scriptures, and the subject of religion in general. He looked upon each as purely and simply a natural product, and that not of the highest type. His own system, of course, left no room for miracle. But he did not reject the miraculous narratives of Scripture as mythical; he treated them as highly colored reports of natural events. The only thing that appealed to him in the Bible was its ethical content; and this he regarded as presented in an imperfect form, as it necessarily had to be, so he thought, in order to be adapted to the multitude. For religion in its positive and popular form he had a feeling of disdain. It was irrational. His own religion, or rather substitute for it, was an apotheosis of intellect. He himself called it "the intellectual love of God." By this he meant simply a passion for and delight in knowledge as such, a devotion to truth for its own sake; and not a religious sentiment. It was this accommodated use of language on his part that led, later, to such an extraordinary misunderstanding of his teaching,— perhaps the most remarkable instance of the kind in the history of philosophy.

Richard Simon studied Descartes in his earlier years, and was a Roman Catholic throughout his life. But he had no special interest in philosophy and theology as such. The Cartesian principle of doubt probably stimulated him in his researches, and the Roman Catholic stress on tradition may have given him a feeling of freedom as over against the Scriptures which he would not have had as a Protestant. But these matters were wholly incidental to his work and of no special significance. By nature he was a rationalist. He was

devoid of deep religious feeling, had no taste for poetry, and felt a distinct aversion to everything mystical in religion. His membership in the Order of Oratory would naturally have led him to attach himself to the Jansenist movement; but the Augustinian type of theology, to which this movement was committed, was repugnant to him. He allied himself with the latitudinarian element in his church, and apparently had no inclination to seek any other fellowship. This was not due to any hearty adoption of the Roman Catholic standpoint in theology, but rather to indifference to it. Theological conviction with him was a subordinate matter. His interests were primarily philological, critical, and historical. It was from these points of view that he approached the Scriptures. And so long as he was permitted to carry on his investigations in these fields, he was quite willing to subscribe to the official theology, and even to become an apologist for it. His divergencies, however, from the traditional view with reference to the origin of the Scriptures, and his free criticism of the church fathers, were far from being in harmony with the dominant temper of his church. His connection with it is therefore to be regarded as accidental.

Eichhorn was a product of the German *Aufklärung*. Under the influence of Herder, he struggled against some of its tendencies, but succeeded only imperfectly in overcoming them. He accepted in a general way the current naturalistic deism, and followed to a large extent the current rationalistic method of interpreting Scripture. Still he was sympathetic with the church, and sought to win back the educated classes to religion. It was his conviction that many had been led to look with scorn upon the Scriptures because of the miraculous character mistakenly attributed to them. One of his professed purposes, consequently, in writing his "Introduction to the

Old Testament," was to commend the Bible to such people, by showing them that its supposed miraculous and supernatural elements were, for the most part, due "to pure misunderstanding and to ignorance of the oriental style of speech." On this latter point he laid particular stress. But while not accepting the miraculous element himself, he did not offensively reject it. On this subject he maintained, on the whole, a conciliatory attitude. His own critical conclusions were remarkably conservative. He defended the genuineness of the Pentateuch, contending for its origin in the Mosaic age. Still, his interest in the Bible was chiefly literary and historical. He had no deep appreciation of its religious contents. Religion itself did not appeal strongly enough to him to enable him to penetrate into the heart of the Scriptures.

De Wette was a theologian as well as a critic. He came at first under the influence of the cold rationalism of Paulus, but from this was soon delivered by Fries — a philosopher in whom there has recently been a revival of interest in Germany. Fries combined the Kantian criticism with the faith-philosophy of Jacobi. He restricted the intellect to the phenomenal order, but held that the mind through its feelings laid immediate hold of the ideal world of reality, of God and immortality. He thus stood opposed to the pantheistic and intellectualistic tendencies of Hegelianism. He believed firmly in the personality of God, and put the emotions above the logical processes of the mind. Still, he held to a kind of religious apriorism. Religious truths, he taught, are independent of history; they are innate in the human mind. History simply furnishes symbols of them. This conception of history, De Wette enthusiastically accepted from Fries, and applied to his study of the Scriptures, and of theology in general. In harmony with it, he placed much less stress than had hitherto

been done on the authenticity and historicity of the biblical documents. He assigned, for instance, the great body of the Pentateuch to a relatively late date, and rejected the biblical miracles, viewing them not as exaggerations or misunderstandings of actual events, but as myths. Along, however, with this negative attitude toward the traditional teaching of the church, De Wette had a warm and profound interest in the positive and practical side of Christianity. These diverse tendencies he thought it possible to harmonize by the theory of symbolism, that is, by treating biblical history and Christian dogmas as symbolic of religious ideas. But his own attempt in this direction did not prove satisfactory, even to himself. As he grew older he became more and more conservative. This appears clearly in his attitude toward miracles. At first, he said that, for the educated mind, it was "settled" that miracles never actually occurred. Later, he wrote that it was "at least doubtful" if they had ever taken place. And still later, he declared, in criticism of Strauss, that "the appearance of Jesus Christ as the sinless, infallible, perfect man is the first and supreme miracle upon which all others depend, and the primary question has to do with faith in this miracle. By this it is to be decided who holds with us and who not."

Ewald had no early training either in philosophy or in systematic theology. He was, however, a profoundly religious man, and theological questions had an intense interest for him. He combined more perfectly than any one up to his time the spirit of criticism and the spirit of faith. As Wellhausen says, "he had the utmost confidence in science as well as in Christianity and lived in perfect peace with both." His theological position may be described as that of a moderate evangelical orthodoxy. The traditionalists of his day regarded him as an enemy of the faith, and he in turn took the same attitude

toward the Tübingen school. He had no sympathy with any form of religious apriorism, attaching himself unreservedly to historic Christianity. A recent biographer thus sums up his views on the central points of Christian theology: "He held to the unique divinity of Christ, and, unlike Schleiermacher, he looked upon Jesus as realizing in a very special manner the prophecies and types of the Old Testament. He believed in the sinless life, in the all-availing death, in the literal resurrection, and in the eternal glory of him who was born in Bethlehem." From this summary of his theology, it would seem clear that Ewald must have accepted the reality of miracles. Yet on this point there is a difference of opinion. Wellhausen, for instance, says: "He fills his mouth with miracles, but does not believe in them," and Pfleiderer remarks: "He does not actually believe in miracles, but does not openly deny them." Such statements as these are probably due to the fact that Ewald laid no special stress on physical miracles as such. The great miracles with him were psychological. Hence, in his description of the biblical miracles, he frequently did not commit himself on the question of their objective reality one way or the other. He felt no necessity of so doing, for the data did not seem to him decisive. On the general subject of miracles he says in his "History of Israel": "The province of religion is also that of miracle, inasmuch as it is that of the pure and strong faith in the presence and operation of heavenly powers, in doing as well as suffering" (vol. iv. p. 83). It was this deep spiritual faith that gave to Ewald an appreciation of biblical religion such as was new in the history of criticism. Himself "a prophet with backward gaze," he interpreted the prophets of old to the modern mind as it had not been done before.

Vatke was a philosopher and theologian as well as a

critic. In criticism he received his chief inspiration from De Wette; in philosophy he was during his earlier years, when he did his most important work, a thoroughgoing Hegelian. It was his aim, in his reconstruction of Old Testament history, to furnish a practical application of the Hegelian philosophy of history. In this regard, and also as regards his conclusions, he may be called the Strauss of the Old Testament. As Strauss reduced the Gospel narratives for the most part to myths, so Vatke concluded that the Pentateuch was almost wholly mythical. In their general theory of religion they also agreed, though Strauss was bolder in some of his ideas, and also in his expression of them. Rejecting miracle and the personality of God, they translated Christianity, in true Hegelian fashion, into speculative ideas. Vatke, for instance, says: "I do not to be sure pray to a person, but I immerse myself in the thought and feeling of an intensive Eternal, which is richer in content than religious prayer." With such an attitude toward positive religion, it is not surprising that his book on the Old Testament, significant as it later became, did not commend itself, at the outset, to Christian scholars. And had it not been possible to separate between the author's theology and his critical views, it is certain that the latter would never have attained their present vogue.

Kuenen was a frank and vigorous exponent of the naturalistic view of biblical history. Two of his leading works — that on "The Religion of Israel," and that entitled "The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel" — are in the nature of polemics against supernaturalism. His attitude on this point is said to have been arrived at empirically, but it must also have stood in close relation to his philosophy and theology. He calls himself a theist. But theism is an elastic term; and, in view of its good reputation, is becoming more and more so.

Kuenen himself, for instance, says: "In a truly ethical pantheism I can recognize a form of theism not incompatible with Christianity." And in the light of this remark, how far his own theism, with its "staunch determinism," is to be distinguished from pantheism, is a question. In any case, his persistent polemic against the supernatural shows such a want of sympathy with historic Christian theism that whatever theistic faith he may himself have professed must be regarded as differing in important regards from that of the church. And of this he himself was well aware. The denial of the supernatural was with him no mere question of history, it was a question of *Weltanschauung*, a question that affected the very nature of religion. This is clear not only from his books, but also from the so-called "modern" movement in Holland, of which he was a leader. This movement was, as Wicksteed says, "an attempt of singular boldness and vigor to shake the tradition of Christian piety free from every trace of supernaturalism and implied exclusiveness." It is true that, along with his denial of the exceptional character of biblical religion, Kuenen made extraordinary acknowledgments with reference to its ethical superiority; but he was always careful to add that this did not imply any superiority of origin. This view, which he repeatedly expresses, can be regarded only as philosophically superficial and religiously offensive. It was probably due to want of philosophical training, and lack of religious warmth. "Dry as cork" was the way his critics described him; to which his friends indeed replied, "But clear as glass." This clearness, however, did not extend into the higher ranges of philosophic and religious truth. His naturalistic theism did not rise much above the naturalistic deism of a century ago.

Wellhausen received his chief impulse to Old Testament

study from Ewald, but in his distinctively critical work "learned best and most" from Vatke. In philosophy he was in his student days strongly influenced by Lotze, and seems since to have adhered to the general type of thought which Lotze represented. Toward the close of his "Israelitische und Jüdische Geschichte" he makes this profession of faith: "I am not a mere part of the mass of mankind, a product of my time and environment, as science proclaims in tones of triumph, — as though there were cause to triumph in that. In the center of my being I come into contact with the eternal. To be sure, I must for myself win and unfold this inner life. And to this end I must, above all else, believe in it; I must believe that I do not perish in the mill in which I am driven about and bruised, but that God stands behind and above the mechanism of the world, that He can work upon my soul, can draw it upwards to Himself and help it to reach its own ideal, and that He is the living bond of an unseen and eternal fellowship of spirits. Man does not live by demonstration but by faith. Faith in freedom and faith in God are the same; one does not exist without the other. Both freedom and God are found only by faith. But faith need not be troubled. Faith is certainty."

Wellhausen also professes to find in the Scriptures "a real revelation from the living God"; and it is said that he regards it as the end of all his work "to set forth this revelation with convincing clearness." He furthermore speaks of Jesus as "a divine miracle," and says that He was "more than a prophet; in Him the word was made flesh." In spite, however, of such utterances as these, and in spite of his theistic faith, he discards the miraculous altogether. In doing so, he did not indeed assume the rôle of an advocate of anti-supernaturalism; but still he did break with the historic Chris-

tian faith. And when, in 1882, he left the theological faculty of Greifswald, it was, as he said, with "the distinct consciousness of occupying no longer the standpoint of the evangelical church nor that of Protestantism."

As we now look back over this survey of the philosophical and theological views of the leading Old Testament critics, it appears that most of them occupied distinctly heretical positions. Spinoza and Vatke were clearly non-Christian in their philosophy. The naturalism of Eichhorn, De Wette in his earlier years, Kuenen, and Wellhausen is also out of harmony with historic Christianity. Simon's position in the Roman Catholic Church was anomalous. He was really heretical, in spite of his protestations to the contrary. The only one who could be classed as evangelical in his belief was Ewald. He accepted the miraculous element in Scripture, and felt himself at one with the historic faith of the church. All the others, with the exception of Simon, rejected miracles, and held to some form of religious apriorism, either intellectualistic or æsthetic.

In view of these facts, it is not surprising that many look with suspicion upon the conclusions to which Old Testament criticism has come. They have the idea that these conclusions are the outcome of unbelief, rather than of any purely scientific method of biblical study. And for this notion there is undoubtedly some justification. It must first, however, be pointed out that there are manifest reasons why the critical movement should originate, and for a time be prosecuted outside of the circles dominated by an earnest Christian faith. For one thing, only there could the necessary freedom be found. For ages, Christian piety had been so intimately bound up with certain views concerning the origin of the Scriptures,

that its very existence seemed to be involved in the maintenance of those views. Any attempt, then, at their revision, in quarters where religious conviction was strong, would necessarily have met with strenuous opposition. Again, the impulse to such revision was, primarily, intellectual. The men who engaged in it were, most of them, moved by a passion for knowledge rather than religion. And such men under modern conditions of life naturally found the extra-ecclesiastical atmosphere more congenial to them. There knowledge might be pursued for its own sake, regardless of consequences. Furthermore, the stress on the natural, as opposed to the miraculous, which underlies modern criticism, was necessarily at the outset more or less repugnant to religious minds. To treat the Bible as one does other books seemed, at first, sacrilegious. It is, then, not strange that the critical movement took its rise outside of the main current of Christian thought, and maintained itself almost exclusively there for some time.

We recur now to the influence which un-Christian philosophical and theological views have exerted on the development of Old Testament criticism. And here we must distinguish between the main conclusions of critics with reference to the history of Old Testament literature on the one hand, and their attitude toward and estimate of the religious contents of the Old Testament on the other. So far as the former are concerned, it cannot be shown that any one of them is the direct outcome of any special philosophical or theological standpoint. Take, for instance, the late date of the Priestly Code, which seems to give chief offense to many conservatives. It is true that both Vatke and George, who first promulgated this view, were Hegelians. But that the view itself was logically deduced from the Hegelian theory of de-

velopment is by no means clear. Bruno Bauer started with the same Hegelian theory, and from that point of view defended the Mosaic origin of the Old Testament law. Again, there is no doubt that the philosophic basis which Vatke gave to his critical views interfered with their acceptance. It deterred Reuss, who had reached the same general conclusion even before the publication of Vatke's views, from reading his book. And when this theory of the origin of the Priestly Code was later revived, and finally accepted, by the great body of critics, it was on altogether other grounds than its harmony with the Hegelian philosophy. Otherwise, scholars occupying the believing standpoint would not have accepted it. It cannot, to be sure, be denied that, in the development of this view, antipathy to the miraculous played a part. The influence of this antipathy is clearly traceable in De Wette, Vatke, Kuenen, and Wellhausen. But this attitude of the leading advocates of the theory prejudiced the minds of many against it, rather than the reverse. No doubt its final adoption by many evangelical scholars implied, on their part, the relinquishment of the older jealousy for the miraculous as such, and also the relaxation, to some degree, of the older notion that strict historicity is essential to the idea of revelation. But apart from these inevitable concessions to modern thought, the acceptance of the late date of the Levitical law involved no necessary departure from the Christian theology of the past. And the same is also to be said of all the other main conclusions of Old Testament criticism.

But when we come to the general attitude of many of the leading critics to the Old Testament, and to their estimate of its religious contents, the situation is different. Here the operation of philosophical and theological presuppositions is not only evident; it is the decisive thing. And here it is also

that critics have given chief offense to the church. There are two fundamental points, as we have seen, in which most of the leading Old Testament critics have departed from historic Christianity; namely, in their dogmatic rejection of the miraculous, and in their religious apriorism. The latter naturally carries with it the rejection of the authoritative significance of biblical history, and the former has frequently led, not only to an irreverent treatment of the biblical miracles, but to the depreciation of the Scriptures as a whole.

Of these two departures from Christian teaching, religious apriorism is the more fundamental. If religious truth is innate, in the sense that it develops of itself in the human mind without any determinative word from without, it is clear that history is of subordinate significance to religion. It may furnish symbols of religious truth; but myths would serve that purpose about as well. It is not, then, a matter of vital importance whether Scripture contains historical elements or not. If the negative should ever be proved, the *idea* of Christianity would still remain; and *that,* it is claimed, is the only important thing. This line of reasoning has, in recent times, been adopted by some as a refuge from the destructive work of criticism. No historical fact, it is said, can be established with absolute certainty. History at the best can only give probability. It cannot, therefore, be made the basis of religious faith. For faith requires unshakable certainty. And this can be found only in the heart itself. The specious air of piety with which this view is presented, at first deceives some. But its amateurish, superficial, and abstract character is evident on careful reflection. Our faith in God is exposed to philosophic criticism in the same sense that our faith in Christ is exposed to historical criticism. From the logical point of view, one is no more "certain" than the other. To

suppose that faith ought to show its superiority to historical criticism by assuming an attitude of indifference to the most radical conclusions of critics, is as absurd as to hold that it might with impunity be allied with a materialistic philosophy. The latter extreme, indeed, as well as the former, has in recent years been advocated. But both are irrational. The historic Christian faith has as much, and no more, to fear from the historical criticism of to-day than the theistic faith of a century ago had to fear from the philosophic criticism of its time. And as for religious certainty, we have in it the product of a complex process. It is due to no single cause, subjective or objective. It is, however, certainly true that nothing has contributed so much to it as the historic movement which found its fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth. Furthermore, religious faith is not identical with the universal longings of the human heart for some higher power to which it can link itself. Such native longings are the condition of faith, but they are not faith. Hunger does not feed itself. Food must come from without. And so faith, to be faith, needs an objective assurance. It needs the divine word of authority. It is here that the fatal defect in Kuenen's conception of prophecy is to be found. He sees in it "a testimony, not as out of heaven to us, but a testimony to men's need, and to Israel's peculiar destination to seek the Lord, if haply, they might feel after him, and find him." But a mere testimony to our need does not satisfy the need. Such a view of Scripture not only denies the function of revelation in the production of faith; it betrays ignorance of the very nature of faith.

How barren every aprioristic view of religion has been, history well attests. It has never been anything but a parasitic growth. To a limited number of people in academic cir-

cles it has always appealed, and will probably continue to do so. Every generation or so it has a temporary revival; the academic mind heaves its Sisyphus stone. But nothing ever comes of it. The quest for a satisfactory abstract religion is as idle as the attempt to invent a perpetual-motion machine. It is necessarily foredoomed to failure. All such religious movements are hopelessly bankrupt before they start. Like the cloud above Niagara, they will probably continually accompany the great historic current of Christian faith. But they will never have any self-sustaining power, — if the testimony of history is to be trusted. In any case, such a conception of religion can never be accepted by the Christian church. In so far, then, as critics have been influenced in their estimate of the Old Testament by this view of religion, their work will have to be purged before it can be made at home in the world of Christian thought.

The rejection of miracles naturally follows from the aprioristic standpoint. From this point of view, a sufficient motive for the miraculous does not exist. But even among those who hold to historic Christianity, there has been a tendency in recent years to give up the belief in physical miracles at least. The special difficulty with miracles of this kind is not logical but psychological. It is due not to thought but to the imagination. As a difficulty of the imagination, however, it is real. And to this is added the fact that the modern religious mind does not feel the necessity of miracles in the same way that men did when the deistic philosophy was dominant. Miracles then seemed the one way of finding God, and the one way in which he could manifest his living presence. Now the natural as well as the miraculous is referred to a divine causality. God is to be seen in the ordinary ongoings of nature as well as in the marvelous. Hence there is a tendency

to reject physical miracles altogether, not as impossible, but as superfluous. For the only essential thing, it is thought, in religious history, is the presence of God. And this may have manifested itself without miracle.

The older rationalists treated the biblical miracles as simply exaggerations of natural events. Since the time of De Wette it has been customary in critical circles to look upon them as myths. This view, when taken universally, has naturally not commended itself to Christian thought. Hence to meet the case of such believers as find it difficult to accept miracles of any kind, it has been pointed out that the sense test is not the sole mark of objective reality. "There might be a spiritual awareness of reality beyond sense which should be a revelation that could never be judged, or tested by sense. . . . And if there were such awareness beyond sense, it could be described only in sense terms, and would thus be liable to misunderstanding." Physical miracles then — at least some of them — might be viewed as sense expressions of actual spiritual experiences; and thus their objective religious content, which is the only important thing in any of them, would be preserved. This theory may perhaps be the correct explanation of such miraculous narratives as those of the resurrection.

But the surrender, not to say open rejection, of all physical miracles, is of very doubtful apologetic value. The reasons or causes that lie back of it are in most cases mixed. Obsolete notions of a mechanism of nature, and psychological influences of a dubious character, mingle with more or less of genuine Christian thought and sentiment. But the latter is seldom, if ever, the decisive factor. Then, too, the rejection of miracle in the material world leads easily to the rejection of miracle in the world of spirit. And to take this latter position is to deprive

Christianity of its distinctive character. The Christ of faith gives way to the "Jesus of history." And this "Jesus of history," aside from being a fiction of the modern critic, is of relatively slight religious value. The church was founded upon the Christ of faith, and will hardly be able to exist apart from him. Those who put in his place the so-called "historical Jesus," are forced to admit that, thus far, the Christian faith has been propagated chiefly by means of illusion and error; and that the truth about Jesus has succeeded in making relatively small headway. Whether a truth so impotent as this is really truth, is a question which the native pragmatism of the human mind naturally raises, and usually has little difficulty in answering. But, however this may be, the incarnation of the Son of God is the central teaching of Christianity, and in any sense that gives to it a real significance this teaching involves a stupendous miracle. If it is accepted, the question of biblical miracles in general is set in a new light. It is then seen that these miracles — in part at least — fit in with the Christian view of a divine revelation of grace, and form worthy factors of it. And "this system," as Professor Bowne says, "with its past history and future outlook is its own proof. Whatever dogmatism may say, science has no objection to it. Historical investigation will never do away with it. And so long as it proves itself the power of God unto salvation, men will believe it — miracles and all. It will never long be recommended to faith by diminishing its miraculous character, for when it comes to believing, we insist on believing something worth while. There is no attraction in a minimum of belief, providing the belief be really worth believing."

As a result of adopting this distinctively Christian standpoint, we do not feel constrained to accept any particular Old Testament miracle. We feel perfectly free as over against

them all. But we do object to a dogmatic rejection of them. Miracles, it is true, do not have for us the significance they once had. The old antithesis between the natural and the divine has given way to the doctrine of the divine immanence. Revealed religion consequently does not stand so sharply opposed to natural religion as was formerly the case. But it does not follow from this that the old distinction between the sacred and the profane has been altogether obliterated, and that no special and unique character belongs to biblical history. Theistic, not to say Christian, thought requires us to hold that there are different degrees of divine nearness. God is not present everywhere, among all peoples, in the same sense and to the same degree. He came nearer to Israel than to other nations; and, if so, it is possible that miracles formed a part of that nearer approach. Anyhow, such is Christian belief. And from this point of view the work of Old Testament criticism must be revised and carried on, if it is to be fully naturalized in the Christian church.