THE APOLOGETIC VALUE OF CRITICISM.[1]

NEW TESTAMENT.

A FEW years ago attention, in this country, was mainly occupied with the attacks of criticism upon the authenticity and historical worth of the Old Testament. Except to those who were acquainted with Continental thought, the New Testament appeared to be almost outside the area of conflict. This is now completely changed. The centre has shifted,—and so keen, so determined is the attack upon the New Testament, that Old Testament criticism, although no less destructive than heretofore, has hardly the same significance that it had. The object of this attack is no secret: it is so to discredit the authenticity of the Gospels as to undermine the Church's belief in the Godhead of Christ. Nothing less, therefore, than the truth of the Incarnation is at stake; and to say this is to say that the Church is fighting for her very life. Every other theological question has, for the moment, probably much more than the moment, fallen into the background.

Nor can it be denied that negative criticism, brought to bear upon the New Testament, has done much to produce unsettlement of faith in the educated world. Indeed, we may safely say that the disintegrating influence of Pfleiderer, Harnack, Schmiedel, Holtzman, Gardner, Martineau (to name a few representative writers of this class) has gone far deeper and spread far more widely than that of Strauss or Baur more than half a century ago. Beneath the spell of rationalism sincere Christians are in imminent danger of losing their hold upon the living Christ, the Christ of St. Paul and St. John, the Christ of the Church's creeds.

[1] A paper read before the Leamington and Warwick Clerical Society, December 19, 1906.

The humanitarian standpoint of the writers we have named is undisguised. Professor Harnack may open his discussion upon dogma by saying that "Christianity is that religion in which the impulse and power to a blessed and holy life is bound up with faith in God as the Father of Jesus Christ"; [1] but when we come to inquire into the sense in which he speaks of God as the Father of Jesus Christ, and of the relation in which Jesus Christ stood to God, we find that there is nothing transcendental in it,—that Jesus Christ is only the wisest and holiest of many teachers, who, from time to time, have appeared upon the stage of history. The Incarnation, in the Catholic sense of the term, is, on *a priori* grounds, set aside as being out of the question.

The object of the present paper is to urge what is apt, in some quarters, to be forgotten, namely, that the weapons with which the conflict on behalf of fundamental truth is maintained have themselves been forged in the workshop of the higher critic,[2]—that, but for the principles and methods of criticism, the Church would be wholly unprepared to meet the revolutionary and destructive process which has now been in active operation for three quarters of a century. It is not that the thoughtful Christian is afraid of extremists who deny that such a person as Jesus Christ ever existed. To the devout reader of the New Testament, to say nothing of Church history, such a contention is self-refuting. Nor

[1] *History of Dogma*, p. 1. It was of this book that the eminent German theologian, von Frank (by no means an ultra-conservative), said that it "amounts to the annihilation not only of dogma, but of the specifically Christian faith."

[2] If the expression "higher criticism" is used by the writer in a wider sense than is justified by strict and technical accuracy, it is in deference to the popular use of it in the present day, the term being indiscriminately applied to the whole range of modern criticism, whether textual, literary or historical. For the distinction between the various branches of criticism, see *The Higher Criticism*, Driver & Kirkpatrick, p. vi. ff.

do the more extravagant theories of those who do not go to this length carry much weight, or meet with much support. We did not, for example, wait for Mr. Andrew Lang's crushing reply before rejecting Mr. Frazer's explanation of the story of the Cross and the origin of the belief in the Godhead of Christ.[1] Common sense had already dismissed it as incredible. It is very different, however, when we are dealing with a criticism of which Pfleiderer, Harnack and Gardner may be regarded as exponents. In their writings, faith, instead of finding any solution for its difficulties, may only too easily meet with its own solvent; and much of the more or less formulated scepticism now prevalent is to be traced to the circulation of the views they represent in the popular literature of the day.

One would not, for a moment, deny that it is possible, at least for the present, for faith—intelligent faith—unaided by the learning of the critic, to face the rationalist without loss. Faith may be strong enough to say, "I know Whom I have believed,—let God be true and every man a liar." Whilst, however, there are some whose intuitive perceptions may place them above the reach of rationalistic criticism, there are many others far less impervious to assault, —many whose temperament and training make intellectual satisfaction a primary need—many who, before everything else, must have a reason for the hope that is in them. Speaking generally, the Christian religion, at any rate on its credal side, is doomed, unless it can claim reason as its handmaid. The negations of the sceptic are not to be met by bare denial, but by solid argument; and, unless Christianity can make its appeal to the rational faculty, it must slowly, but surely, cease to be the religion of the educated world.

To say this is to bid the higher critic welcome. This has

[1] Mr. Lang's criticism of Mr. Frazer's hypothesis occupies the chief place in his *Magic and Religion*, pp. 76–204.

long been felt and acknowledged in regard to the Old Testament.[1] No thoughtful and believing student of the Old Testament denies his indebtedness to the scholars who have enabled him to encounter, as he deems, on more than equal terms, a criticism which would upheave the very foundations of faith, and reduce the Old Testament to a compilation of purely human origin. No less indispensable to the support and safeguarding of the Faith is New Testament criticism; and no greater mistake could be made than to suppose that, on the one side in this controversy, is arrayed the whole mass of traditional and conservative opinion,—on the other side the whole body of higher critics. The question is not one between conservatism and criticism, but between critic and critic. The real battle of the New Testament is being fought between a destructive criticism on the one hand and a constructive criticism on the other: a criticism which rejects the Incarnation and Resurrection, which denies all historical worth to the Gospels, which traces the Christology of the primitive Church to illusion, and a criticism which, while freely employing historical principles and methods in dealing with Christian origins, aims at strengthening the foundations of faith, and counteracting the work of the negative critic. A brief glance at some of the great questions that have occupied theological thought during the present generation will illustrate and confirm this statement.

Let us begin at the beginning. It will hardly be disputed that a belief in the organic relation of the two Testaments is essential to our faith as Christians. Unless the Gospels have conveyed a totally wrong impression of actual fact,[2]

[1] Even so conservative a writer as Professor Orr says, "No one who studies the Old Testament in the light of modern knowledge can help being, to some extent, a Higher Critic, nor is it desirable that he should." (*Problem of the Old Testament*, p. 9.)

[2] This is, of course, what modern rationalism is trying its hardest to prove.

we may conclude with certainty that our Lord Himself regarded His work as being in direct and organic connexion with the Old Testament. Was He the victim of self-deception? It is equally certain that the Apostles and their fellow-labourers built upon the foundation of the ancient Scriptures. If they too were deceived, then, however innocently, they deceived the world: the very foundation on which they built is gone; and, with the foundation, must go the superstructure, so far as that superstructure carries with it the Catholic belief as to the person of our Lord.[1]

Accordingly, there is a resolute attempt on the part of rationalistic criticism to interpret the Old Testament on a naturalistic basis. The supernatural is excluded; redemptive purpose is denied; revelation, in any true and distinctive sense of the term, is ruled out. It is almost unnecessary to state that such a contention amounts to a denial of any organic relation of the New Testament to the Old. Thus (to take one of the latest examples of this treatment) Professor Nathaniel Schmidt, who is persuaded that the Christology of the Old Testament is a complete delusion, devotes an important chapter[2] of his learned work, *The Prophet of Nazareth*, to an examination of the supposed Old Testament basis of Christianity. *Seriatim*, he deals with "Messianic passages." Having weighed in the balances of his own judgment the "passages" usually regarded as predictive

[1] "The faith of the Apostles was not a new religion, but a new stage in the old religion of Israel, and it derived a large part of its claims to acceptance from this its appeal to the past in conjunction with the present. The dream of a Christianity without Judaism soon arose, and could not but arise; but, though it could make appeal to a genuine zeal for the purity of the Gospel, it was in effect an abnegation of apostolic Christianity. When robbed of His Messiahship, our Lord became an isolated portent and the true meaning of faith in Him was lost. This was one of the most fundamental subjects of controversy in the second century, and with good reason the watchword of the champions of the apostolic teaching was the harmony of prophets with Apostles." (Hort, 1 *Peter*, p. 57.)

[2] Chapter iii. "The Old Testament Basis."

and found them wanting, he at once draws the conclusion that his point is proved,—namely, that Christ has no place in the Old Testament.[1]

The question at once arises, how is this kind of criticism best met? Comparatively few, at the present time, would reply to it altogether on traditional lines as represented by Dr. Keith's *Evidence of Prophecy* and Bishop Wordsworth's *Commentary on the Old Testament*. We turn for help to the critic. True, there has been a certain measure of concession; for we cannot, or certainly do not, place the same reliance as the traditionalist upon particular "passages." Concession, however, does not imply surrender; the concession simply amounts to this,—that the organic relation of the New Testament to the Old is seen to stand more in the spirit than in the letter; "the predictive tone and temper of the whole Jewish history and literature is clearly distinguishable from particular predictions."[2] Accordingly, we take our stand not so much upon specific predictions (though we are far from setting these contemptuously aside) as upon the unfolding of great ethical and spiritual principles, which find their full expression in the writings of the New Testament,—above all, in the teaching, the character, and the person of Jesus Christ. We appeal, and confidently appeal, to the teleological character of the Old Testament in general, and that of Hebrew history in particular. "Israel has the idea of teleology as a kind of soul."[3] The expectant

[1] "Those (passages) mentioned are the most important and have been most widely recognized. Old Testament Christology stands or falls with them" (p. 39). Professor Schmidt finds no predictive element in the Old Testament; still less would he admit the perspective of prophecy. The immediate occasion of any so-called prophetic utterance exhausts, for him, its meaning. Thus, to give an example, he would see the complete fulfilment of Isaiah ix. 1 ff. and xi. 1 ff. in the re-instatement of Jehoiachin, and in the birth of his son Sheshbazzar (p. 47).

[2] Illingworth, *Reason and Revelation*, p. 136.

[3] Dorner, *System of Christian Doctrine* p. 274.

attitude of the Hebrew religion is one of the commonplaces of theology, so that "it is difficult for any candid mind to deny that the spirit of the Old Testament fulfils itself in the New." [1] Moreover, by thus diverting attention, in some measure, from specific to fundamental prophecy—in other words, as we have already said, from the letter to the spirit—a reverent and unprejudiced criticism has vastly strengthened the Church's faith in the Old Testament as a preparation for the fuller, higher teaching of the New. The gain is distinct and great. To-day, to the eye of faith, Jesus Christ stands forth, not so much as doing certain things and saying certain words in order to the exact fulfilment of certain predictions, but rather as the embodiment, the impersonation of fundamental truths, progressively and historically revealed in the earlier dispensation.

We shall be guilty of no digression if we refer briefly to the relation of criticism to the question of progressive revelation, since it has a very important bearing upon our subject. The principle of progressive revelation, which is now accepted almost as a truism, was, within memory, a rock of offence to many educated Christians; nor is it the least of the Church's debts to the critical movement that this stumblingblock no longer exists. There are indeed still those who think to make capital in the interests of infidelity out of the undeveloped morality of the Old Testament; [2] but, for the educated world, this difficulty has so completely disappeared that it is not easy to realize that it ever existed. Yet many of us can well remember the time when the Church was exposed to the same danger that threatened its very existence during the Gnostic controversy in the second century. There is much, it cannot be questioned, in the

[1] Orr, *Problem of the Old Testament*, p. 33.

[2] Mr. Blatchford, for example, appeals to the masses on this ground. This, as well as Mr. Blatchford's other controversial methods, is conclusively dealt with by Mr. Frank Ballard in his *Clarion Fallacies*.

Old Testament to shock the moral sense trained in the school of the New—much apparently sanctioned by God in the earlier dispensation which Christ could not incorporate in His own teaching.

What explanation could be given of this seeming conflict of ethical principle within the covers of the Bible? Where was the ground of reconciliation? By what principle was the Church enabled to resolve a discord that, for the minds of many, imperilled the organic connexion of the two Testaments so essential to the Christian faith? It was the critic that came to the relief of the Christian conscience by establishing the principle that *the end is the test of revelation*, —that the best of one age is not the best of another,—that the highest of patriarchal or Hebrew life was but a stepping-stone to something better,—that God has educated humanity as He educates the individual,—that as the individual rises on stepping-stones of his dead self, so is it with the race. "At whatever point revelation begins, *it must take man up at the stage at which it finds him.* It must take him up at his existing stage of knowledge and culture, and with his existing social usages and ethical ideas." [1] The Old Testament, misunderstood from the standpoint of its imperfect morality, was, not fifty years ago, in danger of being set aside as a purely human composition; rightly understood by the aid of historical criticism, we can claim this very feature of development as internal evidence of its divine origin. Nor is there, at the present time, any stronger proof of an inspired Old Testament than this evolutionary, this teleological impress of its contents. The very fact that it conforms itself to the principle of evolution strengthens our faith in its inspiration.[2] What, however, we have

[1] Orr, *Problem of the Old Testament*, p. 473.

[2] See Vernon Storr, *Development and Divine Purpose*, p. 12; and cf. Professor H. Drummond ("The Contribution of Science to Christianity,"

specially to note in connexion with our subject is this,—the spirit of modern criticism has thus firmly established the teleological structure of the Old Testament and its organic relation to the New. In so doing, it presents Jesus Christ to us as the more perfect Exponent of the Divine counsel, and directs the eye of faith to Him as the goal and fulfilment of the earlier economy.[1] "The Incarnation is no isolated event: as such its significance might be minimized, its reality questioned. But it stands in the most intimate connexion with that age-long preparation which we see unfolded in the prophetic literature. *Ever since the world began God's holy prophets* had been *preparing the way* (Acts iii. 21; Luke i. 70) for the apprehension of this crowning act of God's mercy and God's love." [2]

We proceed to illustrate the apologetic value of criticism from questions more exclusively connected with the New Testament. Towards the middle of last century, Strauss believed that he had finally invalidated the historicity of the Gospels by assigning to them a date long subsequent to the events which they profess to chronicle, bringing the Synoptics down into the second century, and the Fourth Gospel as late as A.D. 170. There is no greater name than Strauss in the long line of negative critics. But the very foundation on which he built has been withdrawn, and withdrawn by the hand of criticism. The searching inquiry into Christian origins conducted during the last half century has completely discredited the date which the radical criticism of seventy years ago sought to establish; and we may now, without fear of serious contradiction, place

EXPOSITOR, ser. iii. vol. i. p. 103 ff.), who points out the debt that theology owes to the theory of evolution in elucidating and interpreting the principle of progressive revelation.

[1] Rom. x. 4.

[2] Edghill, *Evidential Value of Prophecy*, p. 597.

the Synoptics in the third quarter of the first century (A.D. 65–85).[1]

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this decisive verdict of the higher criticism.[2] Accept Strauss's date of the Gospels, and you go a long way towards surrendering their authenticity; and with that virtually goes the historical portrait of Jesus Christ. That we should do so is the deliberate aim of the negative critic. To destroy the credibility of the Christian tradition is as much the object of Professors Schmiedel and Schmidt to-day as it was Strauss's in the middle of last century. And as with Strauss, so with his modern representatives; they cannot be encountered by bare denial; they must be met by argument and proof; critic must be met by critic. In this particular instance it will be seen that the value of criticism can be best expressed in terms of the value of an historic faith.

It cannot be said that criticism has done for the Fourth Gospel all that it has done for the Synoptics; but its efforts

[1] There are eminent scholars who maintain that the Gospel of St. Luke was written before A.D. 60. The question is of course intimately connected with the date of the Acts. See Dr. Dawson Walker, *Gift of Tongues and other Essays*, p. 217 ff.

[2] Professor Harnack, whose latest work so strongly confirms the Lucan authorship, and therefore early date, of the third Gospel, will not admit that this makes it the more historically trustworthy (*Lukas der Artzt*, p. 113). To this Professor Ramsay replies: "These are not the words of a dispassionate historian; they are the words of one whose mind is made up *a priori*, and who strains the facts to suit his preconceived opinion. In no department of historical criticism except Biblical would any scholar dream of saying, or dare to say, that accounts are not more trustworthy if they can be traced back to authors who were children at the time the events which form this subject occurred, and who were in year-long, confidential and intimate relations with actors in those events, than they would be if they were composed by writers one or two generations younger, who had personal acquaintance with few or none of the actors and contemporaries" (EXPOSITOR, December, 1906, p. 504). Cf. the following: "It would most unquestionably be an argument of decisive weight in favour of the Biblical history, could it indeed be shown that it was written by eye-witnesses, or even by persons nearly contemporaneous with the events narrated" (Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, 4th edn., p. 55).

have been far from fruitless. At the least it has succeeded in showing that Strauss was in error; and although there are scholars who would still bring the Gospel down as late as A.D. 140, there is now a general tendency to place it in the first century. With regard to its origin and history, opinion is as yet much divided, but the evidence for the Johannine authorship has been much strengthened since the days of Strauss and Baur by the work of a great band of scholars, English, Continental and American.[1]

The history of criticism, as it has affected the writings of St. Paul, affords another illustration of our subject. At the present time, of all the witnesses to the primitive Christian tradition, the Pauline Epistles take the foremost place. But it is well to remember that the outstanding prominence of this particular branch of Christian evidence is due to the attempt, just referred to, to "dissolve the life of Jesus into a mythology." Strauss himself hardly concealed the fact that he sought to establish a late date for the Gospels for the purpose of attacking their authenticity. It was not long, however, before critics as learned as himself, but less ready to part with their faith, showed Strauss that he had elaborated his theory irrespective of any evidence but that which the Gospels themselves supplied, and that he had never really faced the fact that, within a few years of the death of Christ, the Christian faith, *based on events recorded in the Gospels*, had been very widely disseminated. To this fact the Pauline Epistles are our most important witness; and the most complete refutation of the mythical theory—advocated by Strauss, abandoned by his successors, but revived in somewhat altered guise in our own day—is to be found in

[1] Conspicuous amongst these are Bishops Lightfoot and Westcott, Drs. Sanday and Salmon, Archdeacon Watkins, W. H. Hutton; H. and P. Ewald, B. Weiss, W. Beyschlag, F. Godet; Drs. Ezra Abbott and James Drummond, the two last writing from the Unitarian standpoint.

those writings. These letters, some of which were written several years before the earliest of the Gospels, are based upon the selfsame facts and teaching that are recorded by the Evangelists. They form the most cogent proof that we could have that the Catholic faith was not the product of imperfect, and even distorted, recollection,—that the Church was not built upon a Christ whose real characteristics had almost faded from memory. These letters embody, incidentally and allusively (just as we should expect in epistolary documents), the main features of the Gospel: they reproduce much of the recorded teaching of Christ; they contain the clearest possible proof that the writer's belief was, substantially, no other than that of the Apostles and other eye-witnesses. More conclusive evidence against the mythical hypothesis, in any shape or form, could hardly be desired.

But these Epistles of St. Paul have themselves been the subject of a fierce critical controversy which is not yet closed. The Pauline authorship of all but the four great Epistles (constituting the Hauptbriefe of German theologians), Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians, was called in question by the Tübingen school in the middle of last century. The position of these four was regarded as unassailable even by Baur and his disciples, but that of the rest was denied or disputed by the majority of Continental scholars. From the standpoint of faith, few chapters of the critical history of New Testament writings are more encouraging than the one which tells how the disputed Epistles have won their way back to a place amongst St. Paul's acknowledged works. To-day, as the result of this great critical struggle, the only Epistles whose claim to be genuine is seriously or widely disputed are the Pastoral Epistles and the Ephesians,—that of the latter much less generally and confidently than was the case a few years ago.

We cannot pass from our notice of the Pauline Epistles without touching upon the recent attack on the Hauptbriefe. Even these, which the radicalism of Tübingen had left to St. Paul, have had to run the gauntlet of criticism; and this avowedly because, if genuine, they afford unimpeachable witness to the historicity of Jesus Christ. In this revolutionary proceeding a Dutch theologian, Dr. Loman, led the way nearly a quarter of a century ago. Having adopted the view that Christianity was no more than a Messianic movement, and that Jesus Christ was a symbolic, not an historic, figure, it was indispensable to his hypothesis that the whole of the Pauline literature should be set aside as unauthentic. This position he maintained by the most arbitrary methods. In the main features of his contention Dr. Loman has been followed by a few extremists, chiefly of his own nationality; but by a vast majority of critics, of all shades of opinion, these views have been summarily dismissed as amongst the eccentricities of criticism. Even, however, for the most extravagant conclusions plausible arguments may be used, which can only be effectually met by solid learning; the most "utterly perverse and untenable arguments"[1] will take root in congenial soil, unless definitely disproved. The defence, therefore, of the Pauline authorship even of the Hauptbriefe is in the hands of the critic; and there with perfect confidence we may leave it.[2]

We pass to another conspicuous debt which the Church owes to the critical movement. One result of that move-

[1] So Bishop Gore characterizes the reasoning of Dr. Loman's school (*Bampton Lectures*, p. 248).

[2] Dr. Loman's views were at once strenuously opposed by two of the most famous, and at the same time advanced, critics of the day—critics moreover of Dr. Loman's own nationality—Professor A. Kuenen and Dr. Scholten. The subject is dealt with by Canon Knowling in *The Witness of the Epistles* and in *The Testimony of St. Paul to Christ*. See also Dr. Lock, *The Authenticity of St. Paul's Epistles*. [Church Congress Report, 1904.]

ment has been to throw fresh light upon every part and every aspect of the New Testament,—above all upon the person of our Lord, and upon His life in the flesh. Anything that enables us to visualize Him in His earthly sojourn, anything that removes artificiality, anything that makes Him more real, anything that lights up His sayings and doings, is so much gain to the Church. It would be difficult to exaggerate the gain that has actually thus accrued from the labours of the critic. When we compare all that was understood fifty years ago of what may be termed the "setting" of our Lord's portrait in the Gospels with what is known to-day; when we note the confirmation that modern research has brought to historical and geographical details in the New Testament writings;[1] when we think of the exact and vivid picture which the later learning has placed before us of Christ's social, intellectual, religious and political environment, we can realize something of what we owe to the critical spirit of our own day.

This debt of gratitude is a manifold one: it might be approached from many sides; but the great achievement of criticism from the standpoint of faith is the realism with which it has invested the story of the Evangelists—a realism which brings us face to face with the great Subject of whom they write, making Him live and speak and act before our very eyes. "The whole Jewish world is there," says Dr. Fairbairn, "a compact, coherent, living world, which we can re-articulate, revivify and visualize."[2] Again, "All is

[1] Doubtless many chronological and historical difficulties still await explanation; as, for example, the enrolment under Quirinius (Luke ii. 2), the death of Zachariah, the son of Barachiah (Matt. xxiii. 35), and the apparent chronological discrepancies suggested by comparing the synoptic account of the Passion with that of the Fourth Gospel. It is, however, beyond dispute that the general historical trustworthiness of the New Testament has been remarkably confirmed by modern inquiry. The same may be said in regard to geographical and topographical details.

[2] *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 386.

presented with the utmost realism, so grouped round the central figure as to form a perfect historical picture, *He* and His *setting* being so built together as to constitute a single organic whole." [1]

Now this convincing realism of the Gospels—this striking internal evidence of their historicity—is, to a very great extent, the fruit of the critical spirit. The historical criticism, which has done so much to make the personalities of the Old Testament real and living, has done the same for the New Testament; above all, it has clothed the personality of Jesus Christ with a new power. To those who humbly and reverently approach the Gospels, He is not less Divine than He was to our fathers, but He is more truly and naturally human; He is not less the Saviour, but He is more experimentally the Elder Brother. By apprehending so much better than we once did Christ's relation to His contemporaries, we better understand His relation to all time and to the human race. As we read the commentaries on the Gospels and the "Lives of Christ" written for past generations, do we not feel that our Lord's humanity was more than half hidden behind theological conceptions of His person? True, St. Paul desired no more to "know Christ after the flesh," but the Pauline presentation of Christ and His work is carried too far, if it diverts our thoughts from His life upon earth as depicted in the Gospels. It is there that we find Him sharing our lot, sympathizing with our infirmities, facing our trials, leading us in the narrow way that brings to the full fruition of God, revealing to the world the true worth and work and destiny of man.

Criticism is, as we have seen, an instrument that works opposite effects according to the hand that holds it. As employed by the rationalist, it encourages doubt and accentuates difficulties; as used by the believer, it reassures and

[1] *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 329.

enriches the Church. Working, not always, not indeed often, upon traditional lines, the believing critic has vastly strengthened our conviction that, in the Gospels, we are face to face with a Christ that created the Church, not a Christ that the Church created,—that the Evangelists have handed down, not cunningly devised fables, not literary products of illusion, but the record of a life that was really lived, of words that were really spoken, of a Messianic consciousness that had a real existence, of miracles, moreover, that were actually wrought.

We are thus led, in conclusion, to a very brief consideration of the miracles of the New Testament. In no department, perhaps, of theological thought has the constructive, as opposed to the destructive, aspect of criticism been better exemplified than in its dealing with miracles alleged by New Testament writers to have been wrought by our Lord and His Apostles. Rationalism, on *a priori* grounds, rules the miraculous out of its creed. But to those who accept the Incarnation as the fundamental truth of their belief, a non-miraculous Christianity is a contradiction in terms. It is, perhaps, true that, in his defence of miracle, the critic has not greatly reduced the intellectual difficulty of the subject: at the same time he has done *something* to meet the *a priori* attitude of negation adopted by the science of forty years ago, and *much* to bring out the significant contrast between the miracles that attended the birth of Christianity and the portents of ecclesiastical history and legend—a contrast which, as it vindicates the reasonableness, so lessens the inherent improbability, of New Testament miracle.

But the critical movement has surely done more than this. By fastening attention upon the person of Christ, it has paved the way for an honest and rational acceptance of the miraculous. Once realize, as the critic has helped us to do, the unique personality of our Lord,—and, since unique

personality is suggestive of unique experience, a serious barrier to belief in the miraculous is removed.[1] We have, in this way, been led to correlate the miracles of the New Testament with the person of Christ; we see them to be, "like Jesus Himself, supernatural, but not contra-natural"; [2] we contemplate them rather as signs (σημεῖα) than as wonders (τέρατα); we see in them a revelation of Christ Himself rather than of His power; they are acts of redemption, and thus signs of His kingdom. The miracles may not, indeed, be defended to-day with exactly the same weapons that Archdeacon Paley, or even Professor Mozley, used; their treatment [3] has not escaped the scientific and critical temper of the age; but their inner meaning, their spiritual and eternal import, has been more fully apprehended and interpreted; their congruity, not only with Christ's life and teaching as presented in the Gospels, but also with the Church's persistent faith as to His person, has been placed in a clearer and more convincing light.

Meanwhile, in regard to the greatest of New Testament miracles, the miracle of the Resurrection, criticism, if it has done nothing more, has exposed the unreasonableness of rationalism in its self-contradictory attempts to explain away what, apart from the Church's solution, is inexplicable. Whilst the negative criticism has put forward first one hypothesis, then another,—starting new theories only to abandon them and go back to old ones, not knowing its own mind, but always denying the possibility of that which cannot be proved impossible—it has never been allowed a

[1] "We regard the miracles of Christ as unique manifestations of His unique personality" (Illingworth, *Divine Immanence*, p. 119). This view of the subject applies with special force to the Virgin-birth.

[2] Fairbairn, *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, p. 336.

[3] This is well shown in Dr. Sanday's treatment of the subject in his *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 101 ff. On the naturalness and congruity of our Lord's miracles, see Fairbairn, u.s.; Illingworth, *Divine Immanence*, p. 88 ff.; Bishop Gore, *Bampton Lectures*, p. 46 ff.

moment's pause; it has been pursued, challenged, cross-questioned, and found wanting by the critic who is not prepared to put a naturalistic interpretation on the origin of Christianity, or trace the rise of the Christian Church to an illusion.

Those who are acquainted with the literature of the subject can appreciate the debt which the Church owes to criticism in regard to this vital question. But for the work of the critic, rationalism, even if not quite satisfied with one or other of its theories, might have rested in the conviction that there are various *possible* non-miraculous explanations. This, however, as hypothesis after hypothesis has been critically examined only to be discredited, has become increasingly difficult; and certain it is that scepticism has lost much of its self-confidence in dealing with this mystery. To what extent the efforts of the critic in bringing about this situation have been assisted by the results of psychical research it would be hard to say; perhaps more than orthodoxy is quite ready to admit. However this may be, there is at the present time a disposition to give up the problem as insoluble, and take refuge with Baur in a candid confession of ignorance. Rationalism will continue to treat the Resurrection as "a fact of psychology rather than of the visible world,"[1] and to maintain that "the empty grave offers a problem which objective history can never solve";[2] at the same time, it is forced to confess that "the Resurrection, when approached from the side of historical criticism, offers as great difficulties as when approached from the side of Christian belief."[3] It may be added that the voluminous modern literature of the subject affords a good illustration of the

[1] Dr. Gardner, *Historic View of the New Testament*, p. 162.
[2] Dr. Gardner, *Exploratio Evangelica*, p. 258.
[3] Ibid. p. 255.

fact that, whatever the difficulties of faith, those of unbelief are greater.

Did time permit, we might pursue the main contention of this paper into the region of comparative religion, and show that the questions (now much under discussion) which arise as to the originality and independence of the Christian religion must be left to those who bring to their task the trained skill of the controversialist as well as the ripe learning of the scholar.

Enough, however, has been said to demonstrate the fact that critic must be met by critic; the higher critic, who would subvert the very foundations of Catholic Christianity, by the higher critic, who holds fast to fundamental truth; in other words, destructive criticism must be met by constructive criticism. Enough, we hope, has been said to show that nothing could be more suicidal than to denounce the higher critic as a foe to faith. Our contention, on the contrary, is that the Church to-day can only fight her battles with the aid of the higher criticism. The rationalistic interpreter, for example, of the Gospels must be met on his own ground and with his own weapons. What does the ordinary reader of the New Testament know about the critical apparatus with which negation works out its revolutionary conclusions? It is not in the province of the amateur to pronounce upon alleged interpolations, marginal glosses, early misinterpretations, later additions, doctrinal enlargements, editorial emendations, and other possible factors, which play so large a part in the work of disintegration. Again, it requires the knowledge of the expert to bring a forced and artificial treatment of the New Testament face to face with its own inconsistencies, or to demonstrate in detail the bias that will sacrifice any portion of the text to preconceived opinion.

Considering the infinite importance of the truths at stake,

one can hardly be too cautious in dealing with the subject, or too much on one's guard against hastily accepting hypotheses and opinions as if they were assured results of criticism; but no greater mistake could be made than to disparage the critical movement and ignore its contributions to the cause of truth. The nervous alarm sometimes displayed in the presence of the higher critic inevitably creates an impression that faith fears the light, and deprecates the spirit of inquiry,—an impression which cannot fail to play into the hand of the sceptic. If, in these days, we are to prove all things and hold fast that which is good, we must not shrink from examining, beneath the light of criticism, the historic foundations of our faith; they will bear the strongest searchlight that can be turned upon them; and we may rest assured, to quote the words of a recent writer, that "the foundations of Biblical authority lie far beneath the historical and literary structure of the documents, and that the revision of historical and literary opinion, far from unsettling faith in revelation, tends to purge that faith of fear and doubt, and to advance it into the region of certitude." [1]

G. S. STREATFEILD.

[1] Cuthbert Hall, D.D., *Universal Elements of the Christian Religion*, p. 249.