
A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

PRESENT DAY CRITICISM.

In view of some recent developments in the sphere of advanced theological thought in Germany, T. Kaftan has been moved to write a pamphlet with the suggestive title *Wo stehen wir?* The question is not an untimely one for both teachers and students of theology in Great Britain at the present time.

By the term "student" I do not simply mean those who are *in statu pupillari* at our Universities and Theological Colleges. There are many men who, so far as the occupations of busy pastoral work will permit, keep up the student spirit throughout their lives. They have no time to give, and no contribution to make, to the processes of historical and critical research. In the results, however, of these processes they are deeply interested and they regard it as a matter of sacred obligation to keep, to some degree, abreast of the output of them in the press.

Students of theology, in this general and comprehensive sense, can hardly fail to observe with deep concern that in some recently published theological literature a new tone and spirit is, with marked emphasis, asserting itself. It is manifest in three books that have lately been issued: *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, by Professor Lake, the *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, by Dr. Moffatt, and *Miracles in the New Testament*, by the Rev. J. M. Thompson. Each book is from a scholar of acknowledged eminence and high academic standing. Each has appeared about the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. The question, therefore, is not unnatural: "Do these works represent, in the main, the standpoint now reached by theology and criticism in England and may they be regarded as prophetic

of the standpoint from which the theological teaching of the twentieth century will be given ? "

What are the general conclusions with which a careful reader of the three above-mentioned works would find himself faced ? Broadly these : that Jesus Christ was the son, in the ordinary human way, of Joseph and Mary ; that He performed no " miracles " in the usual acceptance of that term ; that after His crucifixion He *did* " appear to His disciples in some such fashion as to force on them the conviction of His continued existence ; but that these " appearances " were quite unconnected with any literal bodily resurrection—in fact, the " empty grave " is a myth. That many of the New Testament writings must no longer be attributed to the authorship of the Apostles or the Apostolic men to whom early tradition has assigned them. They are the work of unknown men, nameless geniuses living at the end of the first or in the early years of the second century.

Many who read these pages, doubtless, received their own education in theology in the last twenty or thirty years of the nineteenth century. They cannot therefore help comparing these recently published books and the three authors of them with the books and men of their own younger days. Many names occur at once to the mind. The bearers of some of them have now passed to their rest ; the majority, however, are still with us in active vigorous work. It is curious that, without any artificial grouping, the names, in certain instances, seem naturally to fall into sets of three.

First and foremost comes the great Cambridge triumvirate, Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort. In succession to them, at the same University, we naturally think of Swete, Chase and Stanton. In present day Oxford, the names of Sanday, Driver and Lock, are perhaps most prominently representative of its theological teaching. The name of

Durham has its worthy representatives in Robertson, Plummer and Knowling. Amongst the brilliant names associated with Trinity College, Dublin, those of Salmon, T. K. Abbott and Bernard are worthy of exalted rank. Amongst the leaders of Free Church scholarship there spring at once to the lips the names of Salmond, Moulton, Fairbairn, Denney, Adeney, Orr, Ramsay, Findlay,—with another triumvirate of somewhat younger men, Garvie, Peake and F. H. Moulton. Others may hasten to add the name of some revered teacher of their own, but these names may be permitted to stand as representative of the best English theological scholarship during the last thirty years.

Is there any difference between these men and the three more recent writers of whom we are now speaking? I think there is; a difference not merely in conclusions and results, but in method, tone and temper. It may, of course, be suggested by some critical reader, that the distinguished men whose names I have just enumerated do not form an absolutely homogeneous group; that some of them are more conservative, and some of them more decidedly "advanced" scholars. That is quite true. But when every allowance has been made for that consideration, I think it still remains true that there are certain features, broadly characteristic of them all, which serve clearly to distinguish them from the three writers under discussion.

Amidst all the difference there is one point of resemblance that may be gladly emphasised. No one can deny that our three scholars are men of great intellectual brilliance, of devoted industry, of very great courage in proclaiming and maintaining what they believe to be the truth. And in this respect, our other and larger group need fear nothing from the comparison. Without exception, older and younger, Anglican and Nonconformist, they too stand for exact scholarship, profound learning and the fearless love of

truth. The point of contact may be frankly conceded. Let us now attend for a moment to the contrasts.

It would be, of course, impertinent and very presumptuous, within the limits of such an article as this, to attempt any detailed discussion of the far-reaching issues, both for theology and for history, that have been raised in these lately issued works. Opponents, more than worthy of Mr. Thompson's steel, have appeared in the pages of the *Guardian*. In recent numbers of the EXPOSITOR Professor Ramsay has dealt faithfully with Dr. Moffatt. Professor Lake's book has had an exhaustive and scholarly reply in Professor Orr's *The Resurrection of Jesus*. In contrast with all these fuller discussions my twofold purpose is a very simple one. It is, firstly, to indicate quite generally some of the contrasts between these somewhat "advanced" theologians and their more "conservative" predecessors and contemporaries. Secondly, to ask whether these more "conservative" results and the methods by which they are reached may not still continue to claim the assent of practical, common-sense Englishmen.

I cannot help feeling that there *is* the greatest possible difference in tone and spirit between the works of these two sets of scholars. And let me hasten to say that it is strictly of the "works" I speak. Each of the writers in question, for anything I know to the contrary, is a sincere and devout Christian. And, in any case, personal criticism would be an offensive impertinence. But I am sure that no one of the three would refuse to any one of his readers the right to form and put on record his own personal impression of the published work.

And, in the exercise of this privilege, I feel bound to assert that in the work of the larger group of scholars there is a general tone of reverence, of awe, of being on holy ground, of dealing with God's written Word, which is singularly lack-

ing in the other three. There is in them, as it seems to me, a coolness, a remorselessness, a merciless and unfeeling destructiveness, all expressed with calm dogmatic assertion which makes older men rub their eyes with amazement and indignation; while younger men, who are not at all obscurantist, but have been trained on the older lines, find it inexpressibly painful. It represents, of course, the intrusion into English theological literature of certain aspects of the Dutch and German spirit. It may be argued, in some sort of defence, that the critic must be strictly critical and that the New Testament must be treated strictly as other books, and subjected to the same critical processes if truth is ever to be discovered. I believe that a great fallacy underlies this general proposition, and that to start out with the idea of treating the Bible "as other books" is to place oneself straightway at a standpoint from which it is impossible ever to do full justice to it. If I were asked to mention a specimen of minute, searching, fearless criticism, carried out in the older method and temper, I should specify Hort's posthumous Commentary on the earlier chapters of 1 Peter. For minute care, for massive learning, for exposition at once profound and simple, it stands almost without peer in English exegetical literature. To turn from such a writing as this, and to read, for example, the sentence on p. 551[1] of Dr. Moffatt's book in which he accounts for the Johannine deviations from the Synoptic tradition, is to pass into another atmosphere. The sentence referred to is very typical and very characteristic of the general tone of the book. If Dr. Moffatt would speak of the Fourth Gospel in a way a little less *de haut en bas*,[2] and with a little

[1] "The 'Johannine' deviations from the synoptic traditions are to be referred partly to the freedom of the writer's imagination, working under the influence of certain religious preconceptions, and partly—when they are accurate—to an independent historical tradition."

[2] Cf. also his remarks on the Pastoral Epistles, p. 415. "They repre-

more appreciation of the place which it holds in the veneration of many who read his book, he would find them far more prepared to consider his theories of its authorship and composition. Passages of somewhat similar quality dealing with the miraculous in general and the Resurrection in particular could be adduced from the works of the other two writers.

The attitude of mind which finds expression in these books is bound to be coupled with a drastic treatment of the text of the sacred writers. Mr. Thompson's account of our Lord's birth can only be obtained from St. Luke i. by the excision of those verses which are most material to St. Luke's account. Professor Lake's treatment of the Synoptic presentment of the events of the first Easter morning is a striking example of authorities being racked and tortured to supply a version the precise opposite of that which their texts apparently contain. The same writer's supposition that the "young man" in St. Mark xvi. 5 was a youth on the spot who tried to persuade the women that they had come to the wrong tomb and that "the most obvious view for that generation in which angelology was so powerful a force, was that he was an angel" is also very characteristic, and quite fails to do justice to the combined force of the Synoptic tradition when viewed as a whole.

While speaking of the criticism of the text of the Apostles and Evangelists, a word may be said on a phase of present-day investigation which has proceeded to very wild and improbable lengths. We are most of us familiar with *Quellenkritik* and know something of the process indicated—the process of detecting by a minute investigation of a writer's

sent not only a natural extension of the letters and speeches, e.g., in Luke's history, but a further and inoffensive development of the principle which sought to claim Apostolic sanction for the expanding institutions and doctrines of the Early Church."

words the varied sources from which he derives his information. It cannot be questioned that such investigation is very fascinating and has led to certain results which possess a high degree of probability. The general dependence of the First and Third Gospels on a combination of St. Mark and Q—the body of "sayings" (or are we to say "narrative and sayings?"), the presence of a special source for St. Luke's Birth Narrative, the possibility of St. Philip the Evangelist's being a special source in the earlier part of Acts —will readily occur to the mind.

But it should be remembered that many of these suggestions are only brilliant hypotheses, and are probably bound to remain such. At present each man appears to have his own hypothesis as to the limits and the contents of Q. It is surely well to recall ourselves to the fact that what we have to do is to interpret the Gospels, Acts and Epistles as we have them; that "source" theories are very subjective things, and when they become complicated, are infinitely precarious. To what a condition the unfettered use of them can reduce the Gospel narrative may be seen most clearly in Wellhausen's *Einleitung*.

One cannot help feeling that in this process of *Quellenkritik* there is tendency very much to underestimate and minimise the personality and the general power of judgment of a St. Mark, a St. Luke, a St. Paul, and a St. John. It is so easy to lay bare, with fancied certainty, the varied sources from which a particular writing is drawn and to say that the general credibility of a narrative is no stronger than that of its sources. But surely this way of regarding the matter is to reduce the writer who has used the "sources" to absolute nonentity. May we not attach a very high degree of value to the judgment of the writer who discriminated between his sources, accepting some and rejecting others? Some of us—*pace* the modern way of regarding

these matters—are still, in view of a comprehensive survey of the facts, prepared to believe that a St. Luke and a St. John were Divinely guided in their use of the available material—or, to put it at the least, were not unintelligent compilers of variegated and mutually contradictory "sources," but were well equipped for the discrimination of truth from falsehood in relation to alleged facts which formed the basis of all their power to live and of all their hope of immortality.

May we not also, in this treatment of the Gospel sources, when it comes to balancing opposing possibilities, permit what one may call "human" considerations and general "common sense" to have some weight in the scales? In other words, is not a hypothesis that is more matter of fact and ordinary in its character a little more likely to be true than one that is purely literary, and not unartificial at that? Take, for instance, St. Luke's narrative of the Birth. Professor Lake, in a letter to the *Guardian*, speaks of "the unsatisfactoriness of the actual evidence in its favour, the absence of any evidence in the earliest documents, and *the ease with which it can be explained as due to the tendencies of contemporary thought* (the italics are mine). Put in the scale against this, Professor Sanday's view that this narrative can be reckoned, with a high degree of probability, as one of the earliest sources; that St. Luke, during his stay in Palestine at the time of St. Paul's imprisonment there, had opportunity of access to most reliable sources of information—possibly to the women associated with the Virgin herself, and not improbably, as Dr. Chase has recently pointed out, to St. James the brother of the Lord. Is it not at any rate as probable that St. Luke's information was in this way derived from first-hand and reliable sources as that the story is a later development "due to the tendencies of contemporary thought"?

Another feature of present-day criticism in certain quarters is the general attitude to ecclesiastical tradition—an attitude much less respectful on the whole than that of English scholars generally. Mr. St. John Thackeray puts the matter in a nutshell when he says: "Among the factors to be taken into account by the modern critic early tradition should hold a foremost place and should never be lightly disregarded."

In this connection, for example, it may fairly be claimed that there is a greater degree of ordinary, human, matter-of-fact probability in the Irenaeus tradition that St John lived to a great age, and wrote the Gospel that bears his name at Ephesus—with the connecting link of that tradition in the person of Polycarp, the pupil of St. John and the master of Irenaeus—than in the precariously attested view that St. John was martyred at an early stage. It is difficult to think that this latter hypothesis would have met with so great favour if it had not been such an effective instrument in excluding St. John from any possibility of being the writer of the Fourth Gospel.

One could quote many other instances where common sense might be of service. It seems far more probable, to put it bluntly, that the relation of *Colossians* to *Ephesians* is to be explained by the fact that they were written by the same man, about the same time, than by any such fantastic theories of literary dependence, as, e.g., that of Holtzmann. It seems far more probable that the recognised differences of the Pastorals from the admitted Pauline Epistles can be explained by advancing age and preoccupation with new needs, than by any theory of accretions gathering round certain genuine Pauline *reliquiae*. It still remains more probable that the minute topographical knowledge displayed by the author of the Fourth Gospel betrays the native and the eye-witness, than that it is "Guide-book"

knowledge amassed by one who was a stranger to the land. If this passage seem unduly dogmatic in tone, it may be pointed out that no expression stronger than "more probable" is used. And one ventures to think that views which may fairly be classed as "common-sense views" are on the whole more probable than highly artificial theories of literary dependence and construction.

The curious fashion of excluding the great personalities of the Apostolic age from the authorship of the works traditionally assigned to them, and of attributing these works to unknown writers of a later age, has been adequately treated by Professor Ramsay in recent numbers of the EXPOSITOR. It is—may we not hope and believe ?—a passing phase, which, one ventures to think, will take its place before long among the curiosities and antiquities of criticism.

On the question of Miracles in the New Testament, to the discussion of which Mr. Thompson's book is devoted, it must suffice to say that the treatment of the literary evidence will depend entirely on the philosophical presuppositions with which we approach the investigation of it. If we conceive Nature as a rigid system, with "uniformity" as its final and absolute characteristic, then no amount of evidence will suffice to attest a miracle. If, however, in Wendland's strong and ringing phrases, "Belief in miracle stands simply for the fact that if God is alive He must reveal Himself in definite acts". . . . "To believe in the living God and to believe in miracle are the same thing"; that is, if we can banish "the uniformity of nature" from our philosophical vocabulary and believe that God *can* and *does* display His Divine power on the stage of human history —then we approach the literary evidence for the New Testament miracles in a more appreciative and less hostile spirit. We shall not be so ready to rule out the bodily

resurrection and the empty grave as impossible and unthinkable things.

Johannes Weiss in his *Paul and Jesus* has an interesting sentence with reference to our Lord: "In the other discourses of Jesus we are constantly surprised by the numerous appeals to the common sense of mankind, and this is a feature which is eminently of a popular nature and without appeal to scholars. Wisdom and experience of life, not scholarship and criticism, are the leading principles."[1]

It is true that the investigation of the New Testament history and writings *is* a matter for "scholarship and criticism." But is not that scholarship and criticism likely to be on firmer ground, just so far as it is modified by "common sense," "wisdom" and "experience of life"? In a word, if English scholarship will be true to its past attitude of reverence, of sobriety, of cautious judgment, of steady determination to mistrust brilliant and startling short cuts to truth, it will best play its own most fitting part in all future developments of criticism and theology.

DAWSON WALKER.

[1] *Paul and Jesus*, p. 70.