

CHAPTER XVII

Higher Criticism and the Mission Field

I HAVE been urged to add to the foregoing pages a few remarks on Higher Criticism and the Mission field. The subject is a wide one, demanding more space than can be given here. It is, moreover, intensely pertinent, for nowhere do the assumptions and conclusions of the Bible critic appear more important than in an environment of heathen religions. It is now almost universally considered as a mark of enlightenment and intelligence to regard all religions as expressions of the Divine; while the distinction between Natural and Revealed Religion has in the minds of many disappeared almost to a vanishing point. In other words, to use the language of a great thinker—all forms of religion are either “correlated phases of one life” or “necessary stages in one process of development”; and although Christianity is the crown and glory of all religions, yet there is but one Divine principle seeking to find expression through them all. On the other hand, to insist that there is a wide and impassable gulf between Natural and Revealed Religion is regarded in many

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quarters as the mark of an unenlightened and narrow-minded ignorance.

In speaking of Higher Criticism, two schools are generally recognised—the more destructive and extreme on the one hand, and on the other, a party of more moderate views which appears satisfied with accepting some of the so-called “assured results” of *textual* criticism. And yet the sympathy of the thoughtful and educated layman will always lie with the more extreme party, as being more consistent and logical. The moderates, while fearful of being considered fifty years behind the theological times, and so accepting the work of the *textual* critic, are yet apprehensive of adopting the advanced position demanded by the more consistent logic of their more destructive brethren.

Before speaking of the practical effects of these modern theories in the mission field, as we have seen them, a few remarks on the underlying principles of Higher Criticism may not be out of place, because these principles and the distinction between Natural and Revealed Religion are not only closely related to each other, but have the most vital connection with our presentation of the Gospel to heathen peoples.

Leaving alone, then, the mere textual onslaught as being altogether secondary, we find that the foundation and stronghold of Modernism is its view of Evolution. It has indeed been calmly assumed without any adequate proof that, as a matter of fact,

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Religion has moved in the three stages of Polytheism, Pantheism, and Monotheism, and in just that order. If this be so—a fact and not a theory—then it is obvious even to a schoolboy that the Old Testament has to be reconstructed and the Monotheism of Gen. i., as appearing in the dawn of History, is utterly misplaced and at best is but the pious fraud of some later reformer.

On this foundation the most rational theories of Criticism rest. Those theories may be extreme and offensive to the sober-minded, but at any rate they are consistent and reasonable. Demolish the foundation, and much if not all of the superstruction tumbles therewith. For as regards mere *textual* Criticism, it would be just as easy and no less plausible to prove that “Endymion” and “Hyperion” were not the work of one and the same author, as that the Pentateuch was compiled by half a dozen different redactors. Textual Criticism may be made to prove anything its perpetrator pleases! No! the serious question to be answered is as to the truth or falsity of its underlying principle—the Evolution of Religion. This is the real issue at stake. Has Religion moved in these three stages and just in that order? Was Polytheism the beginning? Did Pantheism emerge as by a process of natural development? Is Monotheism the final and beautified product of the two preceding? In other words, is there no qualitative distinction between Natural and

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Revealed Religion? Is the difference merely one of degree and not of kind? Are the things which the Gentiles sacrifice to idols offered to devils, as St. Paul declares; or, as the modern theologian asserts, are all religions the expression either in "correlated phase" or "necessary stage" of one underlying Divine principle in man?

Perhaps no one has made a more masterly statement of the theory of Evolution of Religion than Prof. Edward Caird in his Gifford Lectures. His deductive philosophy carries more conviction than the so-called scientific inquiry and somewhat slovenly thinking of Prof. Max Müller, who has treated of the same subject. Were this the place, it would be interesting to dwell on Prof. Caird's view of Evolution in general; and though we cannot discuss it fully here, we may at least note that he virtually gives away the position he is seeking to establish, when he admits—

"The transitions, from motion to life, and from life to sensation and consciousness, are qualitative; and the endeavour to extend those principles, which enable us to explain the lower terms of the series, to all its higher terms, is doomed to inevitable failure. Thus the general faith that the world is an intelligible system requires to be justified in a different way in every new science. Physics and chemistry have secrets which cannot be unlocked with a mathematical key; nor would biology ever have made the advance which in this century it has made, without the aid

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of a higher conception of evolution than that which reduces it to a mere mode of motion. And if the effort which is now being made to explain the nature and history of man is to succeed, it undoubtedly will require a still higher conception or principle of explanation." *

His attempt to re-establish his position by making a distinction between a "higher and lower conception of Evolution" surely makes a throughgoing Evolutionist smile at the attempted compromise. But passing on to his application of the principle of Evolution to Religion, we find that the moral flaw in his argument is far more serious and no less apparent than his defective metaphysics. His position, to state it briefly, is that "the identity of human nature in all its various manifestations, in all nations and countries, . . . implies that these manifestations in their *co-existence* can be connected together as different correlated phases of one life, and in their *succession* can be shown to be the necessary stages of one process of evolution." †

What does this, when translated in more concrete terms, imply? Surely it can only mean that Hinduism, for example, with its obscenities, Mohammedanism with its slavery, polygamy, cruelty, and fanaticism, together with the fetishism of the pagan African, are "correlated phases of one life." It means that the early religions of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome, with

* *The Evolution of Religion*, vol. i. p. 5.

† *Ibid.*, vol. i. pp. 24, 25.

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their superstitions, absurdities, and immoralities, Phallic worship with its unmentionable rites, are "all *necessary stages* in one process of evolution" (the italics are mine). One would think that the dreadful import of Prof. Caird's pregnant phrases had but to dawn on the mind, and every moral instinct would rise up in revolt against such an interpretation of supposed facts. I say "supposed facts" because his reasoning collapses here no less seriously than in his view of Evolution in general. After asserting that "different religions are in many cases at least to be regarded as successive stages in one process of development," he says—

"Though there may be great difficulties in placing the different religions in any definite genetic relation to each other so as to exhibit a complete scheme of development; though, perhaps, it is an unattainable ideal to arrange all the forms of religion according to such a scheme, yet there can be little doubt or controversy as to the general direction in which the current of history has run."*

But what serious-minded man will be prepared to erect so top-heavy a superstructure as the Evolution of Religious Theory on so flimsy a foundation as this? The professor's phrases—"in many cases" and "the general direction in which the current of history has run" and "perhaps it is an unattainable ideal," his "though's" and "perhaps" and "little doubt" and

* *The Evolution of Religion*, vol. i. p. 56.

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“great difficulties,” etc.—can hardly warrant his dogmatic assertion that “the successive manifestations are necessary stages in one process of evolution.” Perhaps he intends us to look to Prof. Max Müller for the classified and convincing data in support of his startling premises. Alas, he expects, and we look in vain! The plain man who is asked to substitute for the eternal verities of Divine revelation these unstable inferences of a modern philosopher, and build thereon a superstructure against which his whole moral nature revolts, may be pardoned if he decline the favour.

The inductive method of Prof. Max Müller does not yield any more satisfactory result. Until a more absolute proof is forthcoming, provided by an almost omniscient acquaintance with the data of religious history, it would be impossible to induce any certain principles from the limited and undigested data available even to such a savant as Prof. Max Müller. No, the inductions of the science of religion on the one hand, and deductive theories of a Hegelian philosophy on the other, are equally unconvincing. If, then, the theory of the Evolution of Religion breaks down, surely the demand for the reconstruction of the Old Testament goes with it. The chasm between Natural and Revealed Religion remains, and the modern fashion of speaking of heathen religions as lower forms of Divine revelations disappears. Certainly, to many of those who for many years have been brought into close contact

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with the living death of heathenism, be it Buddhistic, Pagan, or Mohammedan, that fashion does appear an unmeaning and mischievous sentiment!

I pass on to speak of some of the practical effects of Modern Criticism as we have seen it in the mission field. They are, alas! continually before us. As the Japanese Church is comparatively small, it is obvious that there can be but few leaders of distinctive ability, and therefore the majority of those who are occupied with Higher Critical theories have taken them second or third hand from English and German text-books. I fear, moreover, that many of them have but a superficial understanding of the matter in hand, and yet do not on that account hesitate to speak *ex cathedra*. Alas, the dogmatism of the Critical School carries them away, and intellectual vanity considerably helps in the process. There seems to be with it so little real perusal and study of the Bible itself. Most of the time is given to books about THE BOOK.

One very earnest and successful evangelist told me the other day that his brother—a graduate of a leading Theological College—had informed him that he no longer had much use for the Bible. On asking him how many times he had read it through, he received the significant reply, “Not once.” Lectures, theological treatises, and magazines told him all he needed to know about it!

Not many years since I became acquainted with

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a young European resident in Japan. He was very earnest, self-sacrificing, and devoted in his efforts to lead men to Christ, both Japanese and "foreign." I knew of none more wholehearted in the service of the Lord. To-day he never attends a place of worship, and has given up all his work for Christ. Meeting him not long since, I inquired of him with some care. Attendance at a leading Japanese church, where modern theology is taught, disabused his mind, he said, of all such narrow religious notions as he formerly held. He has no more interest in religion, and I fear Christ is now nothing more to him than a name. He himself attributes his "fuller light" to his acquaintance with modern criticism. A missionary told me quite recently of one of the leading and most earnest young men of his church. Desiring to be trained as a worker, he was sent to — Theological School, where advanced Biblical criticism is taught. Within a year he had left convinced that there was nothing in Christianity after all, and the last I have heard of him is that he is dying of consumption, without God, without Christ, and without hope in the world.

Not long since I met a graduate of another theological college, where criticism of a moderate order is presented to the students. After finishing his course he was on the point of giving up his intended ministerial work. He did not know that he really believed in anything at all.

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Another who graduated at the same college I knew well before he entered—a bright, earnest soul-winner. He returned home after three years, cold, dead, formal, and unhappy, and it took some years before he regained his zeal and love for the Lord, if indeed he has ever fully recovered it at all.

In the year 1892 there was an unusual work of grace on the Pacific coast of U.S.A. amongst the Japanese. Some of those who are to-day the most spiritual leaders in Japan were saved at that time. Among them was a man remarkably converted, whom it was soon evident that God had chosen as a special instrument. He was much used of the Lord in America amongst his own nationals, until some years later he returned to Japan. Here he was appointed English teacher in a large Mission school. Almost at once a Revival followed; both teachers and students were convicted of sin in no ordinary degree. Many were converted and saved of the Lord. His next appointment was to the pastorate of a country church. He had not been here long before all his old fire and evangelistic zeal had disappeared. He shortly afterwards resigned and returned to America.

In 1911 Mr. ———, one of my personal friends, who told me the story, and who himself was one of the converts of the '92 Revival, visited America for some special meetings. He had been very intimately acquainted with him in the early days of his Christian

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life. Making inquiries as to the whereabouts of his old friend, he learnt to his amazement and sorrow that he was keeping a house of shame in the town of —. With the greatest difficulty he contrived to meet him, through the good offices of a mutual acquaintance, and begged him to tell him the story of his downfall. It appeared that after leaving the Mission school for his new pastorate he was induced to read books of modern criticism, in the hope, we presume, of making himself more intellectually fitted for his task. The result was spiritual bankruptcy. The solemn fear of God, the quick sensitiveness to sin, swiftly disappeared, and he found himself robbed of all life and power. “You may pray for me,” he said to his old friend, “if you believe in it, but I have given up all that sort of thing long ago,” and so they parted; but not before my friend, in the entrance of his house, had got down on his knees and poured out his aching heart for this poor deluded and unhappy soul.

There is neither space nor need to speak of many more who have given up all thoughts of the ministry, and all faith in the Gospel, after graduating in theology from a seminary where Higher Criticism is taught and defended.

One other instance with a happier sequel must suffice. — San, after finishing his theological course, and filled with modern views on the Bible, was

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appointed to work in a certain town where he found that his church or residence was opposite a Buddhist temple. Watching the old people go in to worship, he said to himself: "These people look far happier and more contented than I am; why, then, should I seek to disturb them with a teaching that brings me no peace? What folly it all is!" He was shortly after taken very ill, and brought near to the gates of death. Here, face to face with the greatest and most unflinching of all tests, he discovered that he was in no wise prepared to meet his God. Unsaved, he at once found out the dreadful fact. God graciously restored him to health, and with it gave him the grace and determination to forsake all his supposed wisdom. He resigned his ministerial work, left the city and went to another institution for a truer preparation, where he eventually was converted to God.

My pen is not Quixotic, nor am I writing at random. For, as another Missionary of ripe experience said, when I asked him if he knew of any instances of theological students losing their faith in Christ, as well as abandoning all thoughts of the ministry, "Why, the history of — College abounds in such instances!"

Many others, moreover, who have not given up their ministerial work, remain in the churches to scatter, I fear, seeds of scepticism and unbelief.

Turning from individual cases to a more general

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survey, one can but deplore the employment of advanced critics in so-called Evangelical seats of learning.

Not long since a Japanese professor at a certain theological college, which itself is by no means free from the presentation of moderate critical views, was discovered to be so outrageous in his opinions and teaching that he was asked to resign. He was immediately, without any demur or apology, invited to occupy a chair of theology at another theological seminary.

I myself have heard with my own ears the lectures of a well-known professor of yet another institution which could only be termed appalling.

In talking over the condition of affairs with Missionaries of ripe experience, I find them of the opinion, with myself, that one of the crying evils is the literature placed at the disposal of young theological students. Only saved from heathenism a few years at most, without any careful training in the perusal and study of the Scriptures, they are plunged into surroundings where all the vapourings of German, English, and American critics are at their disposal. It seems the proper thing nowadays to stock the libraries of theological colleges with this kind of literature; and these young men, already predisposed to a sort of think-as-you-please attitude, find plenty of *pabulum* for their intellectual pride. They are in some respects hardly to be blamed, for unless a course of teaching is

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adopted, to counteract and show both the moral and metaphysical defects in the underlying principles of Destructive Criticism, what can prevent an untrained and uninstructed mind from swallowing wholesale the wisdom of German savants when their college library abounds with their learned volumes.

These, then, are some of the results as we have seen them. For sixteen years I have been labouring in this country, and have travelled many thousands of miles in all directions, met Missionaries of all denominations, seen all kinds of work, mixed with Christians of all classes and persuasions, and have never yet seen or heard of any individual or any body of Christians brought nearer to Christ, and made more earnest or intelligent workers in His Kingdom, through the influence of Modern Criticism. I have, on the contrary, seen and heard of many bewildered, deceived and spiritually ruined thereby. It is the consensus of opinion among the most earnest workers, that wherever it comes it brings blight and paralysis into the churches. The present condition of weakness and lack of evangelistic zeal and devotion can unquestionably be traced in some large degree to its desolating influences.

In conclusion, I might add that in my judgment the more moderate school of Criticism is the more dangerous of the two—for inasmuch as a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, the less extreme



A BAND OF EVANGELISTS.

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views lack, as it seems to me, the foundation of real solid thinking and tend to divert the mind from the problems concerned and the real issues at stake; and so, while satisfying it with supposed solutions of mere surface and textual difficulties, rather hide the evil of that modern apostasy which denies that there is any qualitative distinction between Natural and Revealed Religion.

It is not long before the honest and more thoughtful mind, finding itself dissatisfied with a mere superficial explanation of things, makes its way into the deeper jungle of Destructive Criticism, there to lose, in some cases for ever, all its confidence in God and His salvation.

The only hope is that the day is not far distant when the spiritual laity of our home countries, who give so liberally to the support of God's work in heathen lands, will make a strict and searching inquiry as to what is being proclaimed in the name of the Everlasting Gospel, and yet which is, alas, in some cases so far removed from its spirit and its truth.

Information about the work of

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