

## "The Interpreter": A Church Monthly Magazine.

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The English "higher critics" seem on their good behaviour in their tone. They are thus a strong contrast with their German companions who are overbearing and irreverent. But what is it all in the sight of God? The more decorous exterior covers the same destructive unbelief. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

The Editor's name does not appear; but perhaps we may presume that the "Prefatory Note" emanates from "the — unnamed." He begins with these words:- "In the settled conviction that ignorance, not knowledge, is the enemy of Christianity, we seek the fullest light from every source to reveal the firm foundation of our Faith." Can anyone imagine a falser start? Since Christianity began, is there a single true believer who could so overlook the Word personal and the word written? "This is life eternal to know thee [the Father], the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou didst send?" Nor did His faithful bondman speak differently: "other foundation can no man lay beside that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ;" or if divine dogmas be asked, the same inspired voice answers, "being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets." These gentlemen give the impression of philosophic divines, like other philosophers, in quest of truth, which they have not and never find. There is but one Way; but they turn their backs on it, to "seek the fullest light from every source to reveal the firm foundations of our Faith!" They do not confess the one true Light which, coming into the world, lighteneth every man, whether he receives or rejects. He only is the Revealer and the revelation.

What exposes the incredulity at work is the perfect folly to a Christian believer of the next short paragraph. "Scientific processes have wrung her secrets from nature; the historic method has shed new light upon the ancient literatures, and patient research in archaeology has caused the dim and far off past [?of heathenism] to live afresh." If these students or teachers by grace knew themselves possessed of life in Christ, could they write such trash with cap in hand to such researches, interesting to men who know nothing better, not even seeking the Living One, but occupied with the dust of death? No Christian ought to fear such knowledge as these external pursuits yield; but he will never glean a single atom of divine truth from all of them put together.

Take the nearest approach to anything in Scripture. It was thought wonderful many years ago, as one looks back when Sir H. Rawlinson found and deciphered the cylinder which bore witness to the truth of Belshazzar's reigning in Babylon, notwithstanding the total silence of history. What it proved was that learned men who doubted the prophet believed a cylinder. What is the worth of faith grounded on evidence of this kind? None, if we believe our Lord's estimate as given in John 2: 23-26. If it be allowed that there must be antecedent faith, but that these evidences enlighten and sustain, one must demur again on the ground of John 20: 5-10, For here were two eminent and pious souls; yet the aim of the inspired record is to show that evidence, no matter how convincing, is not what feeds and edifies, but the truth revealed in the scriptures and God believed therein. Both Peter and John "saw and believed," "For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." And this is confirmed later in the chapter, where Thomas, who refused adequate testimony and never thought of the scripture, was shamed out of his incredulity by our Lord's condescension, yet rebuked by more than one word; and the true principle was affirmed in ver. 29, "Because thou hast seen, thou hast believed: blessed are those that saw not and believed." This is Christian faith, not the mongrel which

Christendom has brought forth alike to ritualism and to rationalism as here.

The age of faith was the apostolic only, when the holy deposit to the Christian was given fully and finally. But the germs of "the knowledge" falsely so called were already sown, "the profane babblings and oppositions" which the apostle sternly denounced as missing the mark concerning the faith. Most of the scanty remains of the second and third centuries betray a sprouting and spread which could hardly have escaped the indignant denunciation of an apostle. Apostolic succession is a fancy and a fraud; and because there was to be none, the saints and elders were, by all their writ, thrown on God and His word expressly. Judaising and Gentile philosophy did their deadly work, issuing in the formal and superstitious on the one hand, and in the sceptical and heterodox on the other, till all sunk into the dreary darkness out of which grew the haughty assumption of the Papacy and the vain rivalry of the Greeks and others, as disputatious and idolatrous as Rome. The Reformation began with a heavy blow at the shameless sale of indulgences to gratify the covetousness and the aesthetic taste of the pagan-hearted and infidel Pope Leo X.; but it was turned by grace to give an open Bible where it could. But the truth, though powerfully preached and largely blessed, was scarcely recovered beyond the remission of sins, not really the Christian's deliverance and proper relationship, still less his heavenly hope, the presence of the Spirit, the one body of Christ, and the purpose of God in setting Him over all things above, and the glorified with Him, and Israel with the nations below under His reign.

Soon reaction set in, but no spiritual progress; and now a fearful retrogradism, both unbelieving, earthly and human: one hankering after Babylon about to be judged with God's judgment on her for her idolatry and worldliness the other denying and seeking to destroy God's authority in the Bible from Genesis and onward, under the pretext of "the science of literary and historical investigation;" both preparing the way, little as they suspect it, for the apostasy and the man of sin, and a still more awful doom than corrupt Babylon's. This is what one is profoundly convinced is the spirit of the age, not of God, and the evident character of the "Interpreter," as we cannot but interpret it.

But it would not be perhaps fair to this new publication, nor satisfactory to enquirers, to condemn it because of the Prefatory statement of its merely human principles. Let us consider then its first and weightiest article, "The permanent religious value of the Old Testament by the Oxford Regius Professor of Hebrew." Does not this look a solid building superior to the attacks of incredulity? Dr. Driver makes the first and primary claim to that value to consist in its surprisingly elevated conceptions of God, but with grave abatement from the very first chapter of Genesis! Its science is *imperfect*, and in many respects *false*." Yet "its author, under the influence of the Divine Spirit, has grafted a wonderfully sublime and spiritual representation of the Sovereign Author of nature" etc. Here we have the hateful, impious and blasphemous spirit of error inseparable from the "higher criticism." The reality of God's inspiration of scripture is given up. For no instructed believer allows that what the apostle authoritatively reveals as to it in 1 Cor. 2, 1 Thess. 2 and 2 Tim. 3 (if we refer to no more) is to be lowered to what people call "the influence of the Divine Spirit," as on a Christian preacher in converting sinners or on a Christian teacher in truly expounding scripture to the edifying of saints. The absolute exclusion of error is the essential difference of inspiration, which is secured neither by men's piety nor wisdom but by the power of the Holy Ghost guarding against human infirmity and giving us the word of God Who knows all and cannot lie. The new criticism fatally sins against the N.T. doctrine of inspiration, and betrays *in limine* its own real infidelity.

It is as absurd in Prof. Driver to assume that Gen. 1 or any other scripture teaches "science" as in the late Prof. F. W. Newman to expect a disquisition on "logic" from the apostle Paul. I have never known a geologist whose self-sufficient scepticism gave occasion for insinuating falsehood against that chapter, whose words did not prove his own failure to understand what Moses wrote. All those who

have so written betray their ignorance, not of geology but of the scriptures in question. They hastily attack therefore not what is written but their own misconception. This is all which they, very unintentionally, prove. And no wonder. What geologist of reputation had any sufficient title to expound this word of God or any other?

Perhaps we might ask what peculiar claim Dr. Driver has to speak of "science," and in particular of geology, which is but partially a "science." Geology beyond doubt is as ignorant as men like Mill and H. Spencer (who are surely freethinkers enough to satisfy the most exigent of these new critics) confess themselves and all scientists to be, of primeval causes" Yet these "primeval causes were just here in question, which these philosophers, and others who rightly dub themselves Agnostics, own to be for science an impenetrable secret, or as one says the "dead wall" to which science leads, but cannot pass. Behind that wall is God, whom His own revelation can alone make known to man; and this is what is given in scripture.

Accordingly the O.T. is preparatory, as being .first promise holding forth a divine Deliverer, where death had entered; and then His law to Israel which was a restraint on man's fallen nature; governmental dealings too in varied forms, during which prophecy was given, in presence of ever growing declension, to assure believers; whereas nothing can convince unbelievers but the judgments which punish them, Isa. 26: 9. The N.T. is a revelation not only from but of God in His Son become man; grace and truth, that men, dead in sins, might live through Him; and that He might die for us who believe as propitiation for our sins. And it is the N.T. which gives perfection ("the law made nothing perfect") in Christ dead, risen and ascended. For He is coming, who will bring His own into His glorious likeness for the Father's house on high; as He will judge the habitable earth, and finally all the dead at the end, who during this life refused to honour Him by faith.

It is scarce needed to follow the platitudes Dr. D. adds, secondly, of man's duty to God and men: thirdly, of man's mutual duties; fourthly, O.T. examples of character, as models in a measure; fifthly, of devotional material; sixthly, of great ideals in human life and society; and seventhly, the great stress laid on a pure and spiritual religion; which last was chiefly a yearning for what did not exist. Our Lord certainly points in John 4: 21-24 to such worship in "the hour that now is," and in contrast with Jerusalem as well as Samaria. In all the Christian ring is as wanting as any just confession of Christ. There is nothing but what a Unitarian might receive or write; for they too speak of grace and love, as well of a great redemptive process in the earlier stages, consummated in the N.T. Throughout Dr. D., cautious as he is, drops words which every sound Christian must resent as libels on the O.T., incompatible with the principles and practice of the Lord and His apostles and prophets, and subversive of the faith in the Bible as God's authoritative word to man.