

ARTICLE V.

ABRAHAM AT BONN.

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FOR three years, vacation courses of lectures have been given by members of the Theological faculty at Bonn. The school was based on that at Mansfield College at Oxford, and was undertaken in accordance with the expressed wish of various pastors of that locality. In 1892 there were sixty in attendance, and in 1894 nearly twice that number. At this last session Professor Meinhold delivered a lecture which has attracted great attention, perhaps more than it deserves, at least more and more diverse than the lecturer anticipated. It might have been said of it that it precipitated a conflict between the Church and the universities, were it not for the fact that the marvel is that the conflict was so long delayed.

The subject was "Beginnings of the Religion and History of Israel." He chose it, he says, in response to inquiries as to the effect of criticism upon the Old Testament. In the treatment of it he has not shrunk from a frank avowal of his attitude toward the most delicate questions of Old Testament criticism, and his critics, though complaining sometimes of lack of clearness, yet find him clear enough to furnish them a good target.

First he gives a sketch of the subject in accordance with the teachings in the German schools, it being substantially the same as is found in Sabbath-schools in our own country, though perhaps at points more liberal. In the various children's text-books of religion he finds more emphasis upon historical matters than should be found in such books, and also

too great use of the typical meaning of religious usages and institutions. This misconception of the function of the Old Testament continues into the literature prepared for scholars of maturer years. It is needless to say that he judges the whole scheme to be erroneous; the excuse for its existence is found in the old theory of inspiration, which vouched for the credibility of all Bible narratives indiscriminately.

He continues as follows. The compilation of the Pentateuch from various post-Mosaic documents is a received fact among Old Testament scholars, and this origin carries inevitable consequences with it, this among others, that the patriarchal narratives disappear entirely as sources to be relied upon or used directly by historians of that period. He who wishes to retain the patriarchs as historical personages must maintain the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch, and the old view of inspiration too. He condemns Delitzsch for beginning with Gen. iii. his "Messianic Prophecies in historical order"; he finds that while Köhler sets out to give simply the biblical view of the early history of Israel (in default of agreement among critics as to the course of the history itself), he as a matter of fact fails to make it sufficiently plain that it is not necessarily history which he is writing. A *saga* may not be assumed to be history; it must first be proven historical before it can be used as such. He, therefore, disagrees with Lotz, who holds that the patriarchs existed because the case against them is not made out. He further opposes Kittel's practice (his theory is confessedly correct) of assuming that what is testified to by all the documents is historical; even Kittel's course results in the elimination of all but a small residuum, and this not the most important. He shows this by extensive illustration, and his writing at this point certainly shows, if not a lack of due reverence for the Scriptures, at least lack of consideration for the feelings of those who think that some reverence is due. He should have devoted a part of the time spent in this brilliant pas-

sage to a brief reference to the question, certainly pertinent, whether the various documents are preserved to us in their completeness.

He now proceeds to say that there is no ground for maintaining a sojourn of the Hebrews in Canaan before Moses' time, and thus no possible room for the figures of the patriarchs. His proofs follow forthwith. Religion does not bring with it an extraordinary knowledge of affairs in the sphere of experience, so that Israel's being confessedly a religious people does not differentiate it in the least from others as to its knowledge of its own early history; the rule that no people knows its beginnings holds for Israel. No people develops from a family; it is rather an aggregation of diverse elements. The proper names in Gen. xlix. are used collectively, and what is here true of the so-called sons of Israel is true of the patriarchal names throughout Genesis.

Passing to another mode of argument, he notes that at the time when Abraham is supposed to have lived, Canaan had already passed beyond the stage of civilization which he represents. There were fixed cities with their kings and considerable culture. Nomadic Abraham is inconceivable in such surroundings. In a footnote added in the edition of the lecture which is before us, Meinhold remarks that this argument has been disputed, and he lays little stress upon it. His chief stress is laid upon an argument from biblical theology. The ancient notion was that Jahveh had his abode at Mount Sinai; that thence he issued and through his people possessed Canaan. The former conception is the one found in the song of Deborah, in the Elijah narrative and in Hos. v. 15. That is to say, not until long after the exodus does the notion of Jahveh as dwelling in Canaan supplant the earlier view. Now the patriarchal narratives present the later conception, and that not incidentally but as an essential feature of the history. We are therefore compelled to assume a late origin of the tradition.

The conclusion at which he arrives is that the patriarchs are nothing further than ideal Israel, and their relation to Jahveh is but the reflection of the intercourse between Israel and their God in the best period of their history (800 B. C.). For a historical scheme of the beginning of Israel's religion and history the stories of the patriarchs possess no value. He confesses, he says, that the first impression from this result is extraordinarily disheartening; but it is to be borne in mind that the patriarchs do not hold an important place in biblical literature outside of Genesis; there is no reference to Abraham in the pre-exilic prophets, and only incidental allusion in later prophets. For Israel the beginning was the Exodus. It was later Judaism which emphasized the importance to the nation of descent from Abraham. Paul says much of him, but Paul's purpose in so doing is to show that physical descent from that patriarch is not essential for the inheritance of the promises made to him.

Meinhold now turns to the constructive side of his task, for which he reserves just one-half his time. Having rejected the Bible traditions because they originated not less than a thousand years after the period described, the information which he seeks to give he derives from Arabic sources. The comparative study of religions furnishes him his materials. Fetichism and Totemism he finds to be characteristic of the Semitic races, and he argues that this was the early form of religion in Israel. Naturally this involves a direct derivation of the Hebrew race from the Arabian stock. Having this solid (?) foundation under our feet, we can turn to the Bible and admit as corroborative testimony what it says that harmonizes with these known (?) facts. Accordingly he finds hints of this Fetichism and Totemism in the numerous traditions of sacred stones and heaps of stones, in the stone altar itself, in the ark, in the mazzebah, the ashera, and the groves, in springs and wells, in calf worship, in the brazen serpent, and in the traditions of those ancestral heroes, the patriarchs.

As understood by the lecturer his theme includes Mosaism, as the real beginning of the religion of Israel, and he proceeds to define the work and importance of Moses. The tradition is now near enough its subject to be of value. The man Moses lived. He learned from the Kenites the religion of Jahveh (= storm-god) whose abode was Sinai, and through Moses this god becomes the God of the Hebrews and thus emerges into history. From Moses on, the changes in the religion were a true evolution, God working indeed, but always by the use of natural law. Moses introduced ethical features into the religion, but did not eliminate entirely the heathen elements referred to above as constituting the pre-Mosaic religion.

The lecture has met with widespread and severe criticism. It is somewhat intemperate in its tone, and has provoked equally extravagant replies. In this case, as so often, a really debatable subject is thrown into discussion in a way very poorly fitted to elicit a calm treatment of it. The criticisms are very diverse. There is the usual number of men who pass judgment without knowing what Meinhold said; others are aroused by the address to a passionate condemnation of everybody and everything which varies from their own position; another class of criticisms is from critics more moderate than Meinhold who think that they and the science are misrepresented and endeavor by sober argument to correct the evil results of the utterance. First and last the whole German Church seems stirred up by it. It may appear strange that a Church which has submitted for so many years to the propaganda of the new criticism should be so aroused by a really unimportant address, in which the novelties are so easily discredited, and the truths are commonplaces in critical literature: but the wonder is rather that it should have been so long seemingly indifferent to the movement now burdened by another extravagance. The universities have for many years been teaching one thing to theological students, and the church, in which these same

students have become pastors, has been believing the opposite thing about the Bible. The relation has been one of hostility, and the Church has maintained itself only because it has been able to control the instruction of the school children, as Meinhold complains, and these early acquired views have not been altered by attendance upon the universities. There is evidence, however, that the present alarm is heightened by the fear that there are many adherents of the new views among the clergy themselves.

This is not the place for a detailed examination of the arguments either *pro* or *con*; we have stated his position in outline, and it will suffice to say that many of his positions require the assumption of premises which are not commonly conceded, and need not be. He has a very restricted notion of inspiration; he rejects much evidence that is usually held to be fair; his exegesis and etymologies are not always in accord with the consensus of scholars; he places unwarranted reliance upon hypotheses not yet known to be facts; he ignores archæological evidence of no slight importance. Such offences against the true critical spirit are not infrequent, and his critics are not slow to charge him with them.

One contention made by Meinhold involves so much that we venture to draw special attention to it. He insists that he who adopts the current critical view of the Pentateuch as composed of post-Mosaic documents must reject the existence of the patriarchs as he himself does. It is not enough to make the creation and fall narratives mythical, it is not enough to discard here and there a suspicious detail of the patriarchal stories; the very last vestige of these narratives must be wiped away, the existence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is to be denied by one who would be regarded as scientific. Is this a fair statement of what is involved in the adoption of the principles of literary criticism and the application of them to the Pentateuch? Is it true that the student finds no place to pause between the admission of post-Mosaic documents and

the rejection of the patriarchal narratives? Meinhold is not the only one who asserts it. The same prospect is held out by the opponents of higher criticism, who use it as an awful warning against taking the first downward step. It makes a capital danger-signal. It is like the picture of the drunkard lying freezing and bruised in the ditch, which we remember as constituting our earliest temperance lecture. The radical critic argues, You would be scientific and the only scientific position possible is the one indicated; therefore you must hold it. The champion of the traditional view argues, You will of course not be willing to give up Abraham, the higher criticism involves so doing; therefore reject higher criticism.

The question as stated is a very practical one. It is true, the courageous reply to the apologist of the older view would assert utter disregard for the consequences; Abraham, David, Isaiah, John, the Church, may stand or fall—we will have the truth. But we are not all so bold. Most of us are a little timid, or as we prefer to call it, conservative; not that we are without faith in the ultimate triumph of the Bible, but we believe that God proposes to use means to maintain the truth of the Scriptures, and perhaps our own efforts may be serviceable to that end. For many minds the common assertion of conservative and radical is sufficient to keep them closed against the claims of criticism.

Whether timid or not, most of us are too busy or too incompetent to pursue for ourselves the thorough and vast investigations which alone can put us in a position to judge independently what is the truth. All but a few must take our knowledge of the sciences second hand and must get our philosophical and religious systems ready made. The question then is of great practical importance to the Church, Is a moderate criticism tenable? To what lengths, as a minimum, will higher criticism lead one who adopts it and holds it consistently?

As we apprehend the issue, both between traditionalist and
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critic, and between critics of the various schools, it is the student's attitude toward the supernatural and especially toward inspiration. It is difficult to state the matter so that the statement shall commend itself as fair, for our views are the result of so many influences and so diverse, working together and opposing one another, and that simultaneously, that the logic of the situation is not patent. Our opinions form a bundle of inconsistencies and yet we repudiate the thought of a possible strife when we analyze them. The traditional theory of inspiration, the one that still prevails in the rank and file of the churches, does not, strictly speaking, allow an investigation into the origin of the Scripture. The questions raised by literary and historical criticism are already comprehensively and finally settled in the adoption of this belief in inspiration. Obviously, then, he who would give serious attention to the claims of criticism must assume the attitude of one who has not yet finally adopted a theory which prejudices the matter, must for the time become a critic. This openness of mind is not asked by criticism as a favor, but is demanded by the nature of the case. To hold a theory of inspiration is to predicate something of the Bible; the nature of the Bible is the precise question which criticism claims to be studying; to refuse to re-open the question in the presence of what purports to be new light, is not an exercise of faith or of reason. Criticism asks of us only such a mental attitude as we take toward every candidate for our favor. It asks us to formulate no theory of inspiration in advance, and obviously any theory deduced from the facts in hand may be held as a result of study. It will of course be understood that in practical life and for the vast majority of us, the logical order is not followed in the acquisition of knowledge in this sphere or any other.

If the critical spirit has been represented correctly, as involving openness to the reception of new truth, it follows that there exists a very strange fellowship in opposition to it. We have seen the traditional positive theory of inspiration to be

hostile to it, and exactly the same attitude of prejudice, more or less incapacitating the mind for recognizing truth, is taken by those who hold in advance that there is no inspiration; that God acts in the world only by natural law, and by such natural laws as man can formulate and understand; and that there is no revelation of God other than that which is effected by the operations of the natural forces of the universe. Evolution is the motto, and that because there can be no other method of getting on. This is exactly the position taken by Meinhold, as will be seen by reference to even the outline of his argument already given. It is the critical position of not a few Old Testament scholars, but it is not true that they are led to it by their adherence to the critical theory as to the authorship of the Pentateuch.

What is the relation between the current theory of the composition of the Pentateuch and the historicity of the patriarchal narratives? Recalling the course of argument employed by the masters in this field, we observe that certain of them, convinced of the unhistorical character of the narratives and after demonstrating the same to the reader, use this fact as one proof that Moses did not write the Pentateuch. They produce many other proofs, but none can be more startling and conclusive, if the fact is conceded. All debate ceases, if for no other reason, because it was this very Mosaic authorship which was relied upon to vouch for the truthfulness of the narrative, and if this last is yielded, no one is interested in championing Moses as the author. Other critics do not concede the untruthfulness of these narratives and therefore it is not adduced by them as an argument for non-Mosaic authorship. These rely upon other more widely conceded facts and it is the soberer reasoning of these more moderate critics that has and is to have a following in our country. Still others perhaps not known as critics, but who have for argument's sake consented to consider the Pentateuch a subject for examination as to its authorship and date, conclude

that the traditional view is the correct one. Now if the conclusion reached is the test of affinity, the first two groups will be classed together. It is the company of the second group which Meinhold is reluctant to keep, while the conservatives would fain ignore any distinction between them. There is, however, a very marked distinction and only a careless judgment will fail to recognize it. The shibboleth of the Mosaic authorship is important of course, but still more essential is the scholar's attitude toward inspiration and the supernatural, and judged by this criterion there is a great gulf fixed between Meinhold and the scholars whom he distinguishes by criticizing; while there is seen to be no essential difference between moderate critics and intelligent adherents of the Mosaic authorship. In reality the narratives of the Pentateuch abound in particulars which are more or less improbable. No one can deny this fact. The critics harp upon it as forming a great part of their stock in trade; traditionalists must insist upon it, for otherwise there is no room for the supernatural. This incredibility is held by some to concern only the most unimportant, insignificant details, at which no sane person would take offence; by others, to extend to the most fundamental and far-reaching representations. In the explanation of these statements every conceivable use is made of inspiration, from an absolute denial of the doctrine and a consequent rejection of any help from it, to complete reliance upon it as a general solvent for all difficulties. Consider how Bible scholars treat some supposed miracle. Those who require a purely natural development of history and religion and a purely human origin of the Scriptures reject the incident at once as not being a true history. For them the case is settled without examination of evidence merely by their rejection of the supernatural. Quite different is the conduct of those who are willing to admit the operation of inspiration and supernatural power. For them the incident is not excluded because it would be a miracle, or admitted at once because it claims to be a miracle. They

find it necessary to examine testimony from every possible source, and they will reach not absolute certainty in their own minds even, but simply some degree of probability that the event occurred. They will, moreover, differ greatly among themselves as to the readiness with which they invoke the aid of the supernatural. One will call it in only as a last resort, another will gladly find in the improbable an instance of the immanence of God in nature. Just here, it may be incidentally remarked, is to be found a sufficient explanation of many of the much bruited disagreements among critics. Instead of proving the dishonesty of the workers and worthlessness of the work, they simply illustrate the varying attitude of scholars toward that little fragment of the infinite among the finite which is named but not described as inspiration.

It is to be hoped that it is clear that Meinhold's naturalistic views are not due to his acceptance of the documentary hypothesis or inseparable from it, but are only another exhibition of the prejudice with which man may, and he in particular does, approach the subject. If he rejects the supernatural, that does not make him a critic. If I admit the supernatural in history or in the origin of the Bible, that does not prevent my being a critic; on the contrary we claim that we are recognizing a broader range of facts and approaching our study in a fairer way in so doing. It however remains true that the critical spirit will admit the miraculous only on reasonable proof. The record of the resurrection of a dead man is not to be as readily accepted as that of one waking out of sleep. Criticism may admit a miracle, but if so it will not be because it has not been subjected to scrutiny. It may reject a miracle, but if so it will not be because it is impossible that one should occur.

It is often asked just where the line is to be drawn between the historical and unhistorical in the Pentateuchal narrative; and a slow or evasive answer or varying answers from different students is held to discredit all critical work. If the sit-

uation has been fairly stated, it will be seen that there can be no absolute unanimity on the part of scholars and no one can draw a line for himself sharply dividing the historical from the unhistorical. Certain portions are clearly historical, others are clearly mythical, but between these two extremes there is a great mass of matter about which there must always be doubt whether from lack of any real evidence or because the scholars' attitude with reference to questions of inspiration and the supernatural must make good the absence of any decisive evidence.

It is clear that intellectual assent cannot be required to that which does not itself command assent. A decision cannot be essential in a matter which is in its very nature indeterminate.

The great attention which the address has received cannot fail to produce important results. The religious and secular newspapers are discussing the questions involved; magazines are publishing articles and pamphlets are issued on both sides. The discussion is reaching all classes of thinkers; other churches than the state organization are affected by it. One complaint is that the leaders in the new theology form the authorities to whom the social-democrats appeal in their fight against the Bible. The topic holds the chief place at church conferences and anniversaries. Conventions are called with a view to formulating a policy in the contest.

The phase of the problem which is of most practical concern to the Church is how its theological students can be saved from exposure during their university course to the doctrines of radical critics. Overtures are made by presbyteries to the church authorities praying that professors be restrained from teaching such doctrines. These protests have been met with a reply in effect as follows:—While we recognize the unhappy relations existing between church and university, we would draw attention to some points that are reassuring; it is true that some theologians promulgate as truths what are only notions, but such utterances often counteract each other. The

evangelical truth is by no means abandoned and unattested among students of scientific theology. "Moreover it must not be lost sight of that it would be contrary to the fundamental position of our evangelical Church, which strives to attain to ever greater clearness and truth in matters of doctrine, if the attempt were made to oppose such investigations by external means. It must be firmly maintained that errors which appear in scientific investigations can be fought and overcome only by witnessing to the truth and by weapons of scientific discussion."

Another method which has been suggested for securing relief is to establish a "Free [from state control] Theological Faculty" which should be organized to teach on the basis of expressed loyalty to the doctrines of the Church. This proposition was opposed by the authorities, and was not received with unanimous approval by the Church papers. Others recommend the granting of greater liberty to theological students than at present with regard to the university which they must attend and where they must pass their examinations before entering the ministry. Whatever comes to the Church by way of formal relief, real help will be gained by the exercise of moral influence over the appointing powers by a Church aroused to the strong conviction that they want theological professors to be loyal to the standard. If the discussion runs its course, good will come to the Church in the way of a stronger clergy and more intelligent laity. There ought to be no danger lest a hundred ministers should be stampeded by the words of a single professor at a summer school. Benefit will also arise from the distinction which is made between the essential doctrines of the Church and the body of traditional belief which has gathered about the standards and is thought by many to be church doctrine. Meinhold is charged with teaching contrary to the doctrine of the Church in rejecting the existence of Abraham. He replies that so far as he is aware, that patri-

arch's existence has never been guaranteed by any standards of the Church.

A very salutary result may issue, and it is greatly to be hoped that it will,—in the more general recognition throughout the churches of the distinction between such critics as Meinhold shows himself to be, and critics of the stamp of Delitzsch and Orelli. It is a great grief to scholars who are really loyal to the Church to be regarded with suspicion. German scholars will not return to the discarded belief in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and the Church cannot be united on that basis. That no serious attempt will be made by leaders of the church party is seen from the course of this discussion. A speaker at a church convention at Berlin in May, called for the express purpose of giving shape to the opposition to the universities, attempted to state what should be accepted as the definition of inspiration, and in the name of the Church to repudiate the analysis of the Pentateuch. The President, after a recess, during which he had taken counsel, remarked that there was no church doctrine as to the "how" of inspiration, and that it was sufficient to hold to the fact; and the influential *Allgemeine Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* regrets that Moses and Isaiah were made shibboleths by the speaker. The same paper publishes a careful reply to Meinhold by Professor Orelli of Basle, who at the outset acknowledges the composite character of the Pentateuch. Zöckler also, in the *Beweis des Glaubens*, replies to him entirely on the basis of a moderate higher criticism. It thus seems clear that the opposition to the extreme left of the critics will bring into more cordial relations the mass of the Church, and the extreme right of the critical school.