

Our Contributors.

Historical Criticism VI. *

Genesis, ch. iv, v 16

TEXT. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree." Isaiah, Lv: 13.

These words describe the effect of God's word in the world. It has a power to transform, to change existences from crude to refined. It can take old poems and apply them to higher uses. Thus Pagan art was transformed by Christianity. The chisels, paints and canvas remained the same, but it was new ideas which they were used to embody. So language was transformed under the influence of Christianity. Words took on new meanings. It could only be by a transformation that words could express the Christian ideas of love and meekness.

This same transforming process was at work in the pre-Christian era. The inspired writer of Genesis takes the old mythological form and fills it with the spiritual realizations of a man who had a historic religion, that is a religion which is not a speculation but a real experience of God's goodness toward men.

This literature is not like other literatures, though there are some who wish to put it on the same level. Such men forget that behind a literature there is a life. Now the life of the Jewish people was a unique life. The Jews are as some one has said 'a miracle in history,' and a unique life must give rise to a unique literature.

Again we are told that there is a great deal that is obsolete, that it is a heterogeneous conglomeration. This too is a mistake. There is in all life a something inborn, which persists in all stages of development, and which gives individuality to the man, or to the nation. This something we call the genius of the man, the genius of the nation. It is a clue to the meaning of the life, a unifying principle, giving consistency to its different parts and manifestations. Now the genius of the Jews was for religion. This is the unifying principle of their history, that in the lives of their representative men, even the earliest, we can trace a gracious motive working to a holy issue. Even in the beginning of their religion we find the spiritual element. With this clue the old is not 'obsolete,' and instead of a 'heterogeneous conglomeration' we find in the Bible a systematic and consistent history.

It was this genius for religion that made their history unique, and, therefore, it was this genius that made their literature unique. This is what gives it its distinction, and this too imposes upon it its limitations. Just as a picture may not give us much topographical information and yet be a great work of art and produce its proper effect, so the fact that the Bible does not tell us all we should like to know about ethnology or geography, does not effect its value as a revelation of God and of His will concerning man. We must remember that the geni-

us of this literature is religious.

In approaching the fourth chapter, therefore, we do not ask what is its ethnological value, nor, what is its 'prophetic' contents, its religious ideas?

We find several deep truths. (1) In all religious service God looks on the heart. The fault was not in the sacrifice, but in the heart of the man who offered it, a heart full of ambition, pride, self-will, jealousy. But God requires "mercy and not sacrifice."

(2) Religious opportunity is a searching moral test. Christ is set for the rise and fall of many. Religion revealed the murderer in the heart of Cain. The sacrifices, like the tree in the garden were not the causes of character but the occasion of its testing. This is a great note to be sounded in 850 B.C., through the forms of primitive history.

(3) The writer in his pictorial anthropomorphic style would teach us that God is deeply interested in man, in his moral choices, in his use of that freedom of will, in which lies the possibility of moral progress or of moral defeat.

(4) Remorse is not repentance. Cain found the fruit of sin very bitter, but he utters no word of repentance as it is defined in the Shorter Catechism.

(5) Two wrongs do not make a right. The death of Cain would not atone for the death of Abel.

(6) In the midst of wrath, God remembers mercy." He appointed a mark for Cain, lest any finding him should kill him." And he went out from the presence of Jehovah, and dwelt in the land of Nod i.e. the land of wandering. This may well be symbolical and mean that there is no rest for the wicked, that peace comes only from right relations to God.

How rich are these verses in prophetic elements that reveal the character of God.

Notes by Nemo

I have been looking over 'The Memoirs of Paul Kruger told by Himself.' It is an interesting book, and must be regarded as an important document for the historian of South African affairs, but it is too expensive to have an extensive circulation among ordinary people. I extract, for the benefit of your readers Paul Kruger's address to the clergy, one of a number, which he delivered at the time of his inauguration as President, May 1898.

REVEREND SIRS, SERVANTS OF GOD'S WORD:—When I turn my eyes upon you, a favorite text rises to my mind; "How beautiful are the feet of them that publish peace." I say "publish peace;" I know that that is your task upon earth. The right of criticism was instituted by the Devil, for he said to Adam and Eve; "Eat of the fruit of this tree and ye shall not die and ye shall be like Gods"; and in this way the Devil has led away thousands upon earth to build on their own merits, and thus to oppose God's Word and to unsettle all things so that there is no foundation; and if an eye is not kept upon this preaching, you know what the Christians upon earth, who stand by God's Word, have to fight against. I do

not speak of minor points, but of the main point; and he who holds fast to that has to fight against the spirit of the air. The Devil laid hold of Cain's soul, and the latter did not accept the punishment; he placed himself on God's level, made his sacrifice, and expected God to be content with what was beautiful in Cain's eyes, and Cain sang hymns of praise to the Lord which came from nature, but which he thought was pleasing to God. But God rejected them, because God found no religion in Cain. He was outside God's words. But how beautiful are the feet of them that publish peace, like Abel. He acknowledged the judgment that fell in Paradise, that man was condemned which the devil brought about together with the right of criticism—and to kill a first-born lamb—this refers to Christ—yes, and prayed in the spirit that the punishment which he deserved might fall upon the lamb, as otherwise he would suffer eternal death. God accepted the sacrifice and heard his prayer, and there we have the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. The severity of the law is not respected by men because of the Devil's right of criticism; and it is even so with Christ's work of redemption, through the Holy Ghost. Then preach these words; "How beautiful are the feet of them that publish peace." Stand firm in the struggle. The Devil goes further and respects nothing; for we read; "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between her seed and thy seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." So at last he comes to the Son of God in the wilderness—and with the same intention he comes to the whole earth—and says to Jesus; "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." But Christ says; "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Then he sets Christ on the pinnacle of the Temple and the Devil says to Him; "If Thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence; for it is written, He shall give His angels charge over Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." But Christ answering says; "It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Then the Devil takes Jesus up into a high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world, saying; "If Thou wilt worship me, all this shall be Thine." But Christ says, "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

See there your preaching of the Gospel you servants of Christ, founded on God's Word, and if you preach thus, you will be a help to the State, for it rests upon God's Word as shown in article 8 of the constitution. The people says that it has liberty, and that is so, but based upon God's Word, for the maintenance of law and order. That is a thing that does not proceed from men; for I myself did not understand one of the depths of that article, how God at that time led us. Reverend sirs, preachers, stand firm in the faith; for how beautiful are the feet of them that publish peace in Jesus Christ; for the Devil's doctrine of criticism says that man has become as a god and can secure his own happiness by his own lights and his own reason and his own merit, and therefore that he shall not die. No, stand firm, and preach in accordance with God's Word, for then

*Notes of the sixth of a series of sermons by Rev. G. M. Milligan, D.D. of Old St. Andrew's Church, Toronto.