

Pastor and People.

ADVERSITY.

I know that Thou, O Lord,
Of very faithfulness
Hast caused me to be troubled thus
Is Thy compassion less?

Could'st Thou our Father be
And Chastisement withhold?
Thy very pity must correct,
Thy tender mercy mould.

Where shall the saints be found
Who did Thy chastening lack,
Or where the martyrs, who endured
The flame, the sword, the rack?

They, in their Lord's behalf,
Held as a gift from heaven
The holy privilege of pain
To them, as followers, given.

How cowardly, how base,
Must such as I appear,
Called to be saints like them, who yet
The smallest trial fear!

And when I think of Him,
The Sufferer divine,
With whose reflected victory
The crowns of martyrs shine,

Into the dust I sink,
Dumb for my very shame,
Save when beneath His cross I plead
For pardon in His name.

Harriet McEwen Kimball, in *Congregationalist*.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AND MODERN THOUGHT—HIGHER CRITICISM, ETC.

BY REV. W. D. ARMSTRONG, M.A., PH.D.

(Concluded from last week.)

That the modern theory of Higher Criticism as well as the trend of all modern Biblical criticism should affect the doctrine of Inspiration is to be expected. It will not, however, as free thinkers are fond of averring, do away with it altogether. "Every Scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable for doctrine," etc., will stand. Some of the critics speak as if their views would not effect the doctrine of Inspiration at all, but when they speak in this way, we would like very much if they would define what they mean by inspiration. Indeed, the Church is waiting for its teachers to speak a strong sure word on this question of inspiration. We would like so much a definition that would cover all the facts of the case. With the exception of those who have adopted an extreme naturalistic theory of the origin of the Bible it is admitted by all that the Scriptures are a divine-human product. "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." But to what extent were these holy men controlled by the Divine Spirit? To what extent was the truth influenced by the human medium through which it passed? This is the crucial question. This is the great battleground of debate to-day. As might be expected modern Criticism emphasises the human element, and certainly does not look with favour upon any theory of inspiration that would pronounce the Scriptures inerrant. The disposition to minimize the divine element in inspiration is more dangerous to truth than the disposition to minimize the human, but both extremes should be avoided. It is clear that the true view must give to both elements their proper weight.

There is a theory of Inspiration once almost universally held in our Church, and still revered, a theory quite recently brought prominently under your notice by a Princeton professor, one of its most distinguished advocates. According to this theory you ask the Scriptures themselves how they are inspired, and they are interpreted as answering in the words, "plenary," "infallible," "inerrant." When pressed by the question what about the discrepancies and errors found in the documents, the advocates of this theory reply, "These are not so numerous as some allege. They refer only to the *minima* and trivialities of Scripture. With fuller light and reference to the original autographs they would vanish altogether."

"But," reply the advocates of another and

freer theory, one perhaps more in sympathy with the spirit of modern criticism, "no living man has seen or is likely to see these autographs. The autographs are myths. The oldest manuscript does not date farther back than the tenth century. Further, your *a priori* theory of absolute inerrancy and faultless perfection has led to wrong views of the Bible and to some strange mistake. Were there not those, who, holding that the Bible must be perfect in every respect, contended that its Greek must be pure Attic Greek? God would have used no other. But investigation soon proved that it was not pure Attic Greek. Again, did this theory not lead some learned men (the Buxtorfs) to maintain that the Hebrew vowel points were inspired? And this view was even incorporated in the Helvetic confession. But the historic fact is that these points were inserted at a comparatively late date. There are many facts in the Bible which this theory cannot cover. Be careful, therefore, you do not postulate a theory that facts will compel you to disclaim. It is dangerous to postulate necessary inerrancy in regard to minor matters of history, science, etc."

These men, and they constitute perhaps the majority of learned divines to-day, hold a theory of inspiration giving more freedom to the human element. The divine inspiration and superintendence do not extend to the point of securing inerrancy in every particular. Or, as one states the position, they hold inerrancy of revelation but not inerrancy of inspiration. I am including here only those who with admitted candour and piety seek to maintain the Bible as the authoritative, divinely inspired word of God. So over against the views that most of us were grounded in as students, the view of which Hodge and Warfield are the modern champions, you have this one held by German theologians (evangelical), by most English theologians, by the Scotch theologians, Bruce, Dods, Davidson, Denny, Lindsay, etc., a view held by the reformers, Calvin and Luther, although both sides claim these.

Time would not permit, nor would it be expected that I should discuss in this lecture the merits of these two theories.

But the question is: What should be the position of the Christian minister with regard to this vexed question? Which view shall he hold? He cannot hold both. But it is, I think, evident that he must be allowed to hold either. To one man the former view seems dangerous, intolerable, impossible. To another the latter seems the giving up of revelation altogether. It will be admitted by all that the trend of modern thought, the very atmosphere of modern thinking, is favorable to the freer view. Both views I presume must be tolerated—are tolerated—within the Church. True believers and good thinkers may hold different views. Our Church does not define and demand any particular view of inspiration. On one point only she insists, an inspiration that will maintain the integrity and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures. The point to be carefully determined is what a man must necessarily hold in order really to believe in an inspired, authoritative revelation from God.

It may not be necessary for the minister to expound views of inspiration. It seems to me that the wisest course to pursue is to follow the lines of our article in the Confession of Faith which declares the Scriptures inspired, expounds no theory of inspiration, but after declaring that the Scriptures are "inspired to be the rule of faith and life," proceeds to give most cogent reasons for their authority. I conceive our best service to the Bible will be rendered, not in discussing theories of inspiration, but in setting the Scriptures forward in their "incomparable excellencies," so that they shall vindicate for themselves their inspiration and their divine authority.

The discussion is not completed. No definition of inspiration has yet been given that relieves all the difficulties of the case. The time for this is not yet come, if it ever comes. It is evident that it has not pleased God to give us a canon of Scriptures so defined and inspired that there shall be no difficulty or dispute. Rather, it has pleased

Him that from time to time the Scriptures should be thrown into the crucible of controversy that they may live more fully in men's minds, and that the adhering dross of human misconception may be purged away. The present breeze of criticism will only blow away the chaff, not the wheat. Let us then keep bright and clear before our people the proofs of the divine origin of the Scriptures. Let us teach them as revealing God in Christ Jesus. Let us so unfold them that the manifest presence of God shall be felt in them, and we shall have done our best both to meet the wants of inquiring doubters, and to freshen the faith of believers who have already found in them spirit, and light, and life.

Modern Criticism as might be expected is exerting a considerable influence on the Theology of to-day. Let no one suppose that any of the great accepted doctrines of the Church will be seriously affected thereby. To-day Biblical Theology, not dogmatical, is in the ascendant. It is receiving attention from the highest minds. Another fact of significance is that at present the only recognized school of Theology in Germany is the Ritschlian, which, while treating Scripture from the critical standpoint, and looking especially to the mind and teaching of Christ as the source of doctrine, gives great prominence to the Christian consciousness, and professes to set aside all philosophizing and scholasticism or systematizing in theology.

We hear much to-day of the decay of Dogmatics. We are told "Systematic Theology is dead." Surely this is shortsighted. The great *scientia scientiarum* cannot die. In past forms and in present forms it may have many defects. Great truths are being thrown into the sunlight. Changes of form will take place. But there is a grand time coming for the Systematic Theologian. Criticism will have its day and cease to reign. In the providence of God some great theologic mind will be born in the Church who will take a deeper, wider view than any heretofore, who will relate the new to the old and harmonize and revivify the whole.

It is only in the briefest manner possible that I can refer to another important subject which I have indicated as connected with my theme—the relation of Biblical Criticism to Comparative Religion.

It is not merely that it tends to place the Christian religion on a level with other religions by the application of the principle of natural development. The Bible must be placed on a level with other sacred books. Christianity becomes one of many religions. We have had a Parliament of Religions not long ago which has done much to give prominence to this subject. No one will deny that great advantages must flow from the study of the religions of the world. It tends to bring into prominence the universal religious nature of man, and makes clear the world's need of the religion of Christ. But the Christian minister must exercise great judgment, must not be led aside by illusion on this somewhat fascinating study, and must see clearly the points at issue when comparison is made between ethnic religions and Christianity, between the Bible and other sacred books. Christianity must not be asked to take her seat as one of many religions.

We have had lectures in eloquent terms setting forth the praises of Hinduism. We have choice quotations from the Eastern sacred books presented to us with the query: Are not these as good as your Bible? I was once tempted by these quotations to purchase a set of the translations of the Sacred Books of the East, but was sorely disappointed, finding that quotations made were but a few grains of wheat out of heaps of chaff and worse. One text then I would propose to you as students. Go into a library; spend even two days looking through these Sacred Books of the East, and you will never after think them worthy to be named with the Bible—and the worst parts are not translated. I believe in this comparative study of religions; but the man who will consent to put Christianity on a level with other religions even in thought has dethroned and degraded her. Christianity in its very spirit is charity. But here she must be intolerant. Christ is not to sit side by side with Buddha or any other religious reformer. For Him the place is supremacy. Is Jesus Christ Divine? Is He the only-begotten Son of God? Is He the one Saviour of the world? Is the religion He founded the one true religion? Or, is He one of many Saviours? and Christianity one of many tolerated religions? I ask this question simply because it indicates, it seems to me, where only we can stand as Christians, and warns us against a false liberalism.

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THE ELDER IN HIS RELATION TO PASTOR AND CONGREGATION.

BY JOHN CAMERON.

The ideal elder naturally strives to promote useful relations between minister and congregation. The elder knows, or ought to know, how the congregation feel towards their pastor, and their opinions on various matters. With such knowledge, he may sometimes help the pastor to avoid things which, though touching no matter of principle, might prove stumbling-blocks.

A wise pastor will remember the advice of Lord Bacon, and, instead of reducing consultation with the Session to a minimum, will sometimes consult his associates when there could be no valid ground of censure if he did not do so; for it is remarkable how often a free discussion, from varying points of view, presently makes that clear which before was doubtful. It is desirable that the Session on all matters should be unanimous, the elders thus fully sharing with the minister the responsibility for the course adopted.

The elders can often stand between the minister and too frequent calls for outside service. In the matter of absence from one's own pulpit there is a golden mean. To the right extent, it is useful and refreshing for the minister occasionally to go away, not to speak of benefits that may be carried to those to whom he goes. But there are ministers who cannot say "No," and whose time and services need to be protected by the friendly reluctance of his fellow-members of the Session.

Elders have opportunities to be useful to the minister in apprising him of signs of interest in divine things in individual cases. The minister may be the man to clinch the impression.

One of the elder's clear duties is to encourage the minister. That minister who plods along, week in, week out, preaching, let us say, helpful sermons, and yet never encouraged by being informed by an elder that his sermons have been helpful, is defrauded of his due. The minister no less than others—no less than our Lord when upon earth—craves human sympathy. I should put it that sympathy is as necessary to the minister as light is to the plant. A minister is subjected to many solitudes, and a constant drain upon his own sympathies. How shall the right balance in the minister's life be kept up unless by the manifested sympathy of his people, and particularly of his associates at the Session board? In what I have said I am not suggesting anything that savors of flattery. Flattery is not merely false, but also foolish, in that it deceives no one. I plead not for flattery, but for honest praise and encouragement.

In his relations to the congregation, the elder is apt to hear what the people are saying, and can sometimes surmise what they are thinking before they say anything. Sometimes they think appeals for money are too many and too strenuous. Sometimes they think the minister does not visit enough. Sometimes they think he scolds too much—particularly those present for the sins of those absent. Sometimes, if he is working out a course of sermons, they may be ready for a little variety before he is. In all these things, judicious elders could often oil the bearings, and, with efforts scarcely beyond those afforded by good will and casual opportunity, make crooked paths straight, and reduce friction to a minimum.

Elders and managers alike should regard the general acceptability of the minister as part of the congregation's working stock-in-trade, and therefore as something to be promoted and increased. From this point of view, let us suppose something that is a little disagreeable needs to be done or set forth—necessary, but disagreeable. The elders, or the elders and managers jointly, might chivalrously and wisely take the disagreeable duty, so far as it is possible, off the minister's shoulders altogether, assuming the responsibility themselves; for, let me repeat in closing, the wise congregation, the wise elder, the wise manager, will regard the general acceptability of the minister as a vital part of the congregation's working stock-in-trade.—*Knox College Monthly*
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