

CAUSES AFFECTING CONTRIBUTIONS. I. BIBLE CRITICISM.

BY REV. D. D. McFORD

For the Review.

The contributions of the people to the Service of the Church are influenced by causes which may not be so fully before the mind of the Church as they should be. What ever injures the spiritual life of the people will manifest its influence in diminishing their contributions. Among those causes which have an injurious influence on the religious life is the criticism to which the Scriptures of the Old Testament are being subjected. I do not refer to the Higher Criticism proper only, but to what may justly be called the off-spring of that. A spirit of criticism has been awakened in the Churches as well as outside of them. Those who have no fitness for that work are tempted to indulge in it. The opinions of men upon the statements of Scripture are accepted as facts. The views of writers hostile to the position taken in the Church are accepted without due consideration. Reverence for the Word of God even in the mind of ministers of that Word is shaken. The firm belief in its divine authority which has hitherto characterized our people is weakened. The foolish idea is entertained that by discarding difficult passages or regarding certain portions as mythical men will make a Bible which will more readily commend itself to the unspiritual. The old devices of a hundred years ago are introduced under the abused name of criticism to depreciate the Scriptures. Difficulties that have been met and explained a century ago are paraded as if newly discovered. The testimony of our Lord Himself is regarded as not of any value in comparison with the opinion of modern scholars. Now such a spirit as this manifesting itself in our pulpits, magazines, and other writings, cannot but create an atmosphere in which reverence for the Divine Word will languish, and in which regard for the authority of Scripture will diminish. We have not felt the full effect of it, but unless it is exorcised by a renewal of spiritual life, it will ere long be felt in its baneful influence in our congregations. For an intelligent apprehension of the Divine Word is essential to an intelligent faith, and to a healthy religious life. There is an error prevalent in certain circles on this subject. That is, that it is only modern scholars and writers who have wisely studied and interpreted the Scriptures. The truth taught, for example, by the writers of the age of Jonathan Edwards and by him, that the Bible is in the main the history of Redemption is heralded as if it were a new discovery. The comparatively new word "evolution," is harped upon as if the idea which it expresses had never been known till these modern days. While the truth, that Revelation is the unfolding of the mind of God to man, proceeding from age to age as man was able to bear it, which is the idea involved in evolution, as applied to Scripture, is a truth taught centuries ago. There are several things which should be born in mind by us in this critical age. First, that as scientific criticism proceeds, and after all its flights, the Scriptures remain in the opinion of those most competent to speak, very much as the Church has believed concerning them in the past. The poly-chrome Bible is a picture of human opinion, not of the Word of God as established. In it criticism has reached its zenith so far as our day is concerned, but the poly-chrome Bible is not the Bible upon which the Church has been built, it is not the Bible which has been the means of civilizing and Christianizing heathen nations; it is not the Bible which fed and enlightened the Church in the past, it is not, I believe, the Bible that will survive. Another thing to be remembered is that men must have a "a sure word of prophecy" to build their faith upon, "a more sure word" than is left to us by the critics. When verses of Scripture are divided so that one line is believed to be spoken by Isaiah and another by some unknown scribe who was not inspired, but who has appended his own words, then we are brought face to face with a "word" which is not "sure." It may be said that the word is more sure, the genuine being separated from that which is not genuine. But if the Scripture has come to us thus mingled and marred so that only very learned men can tell what part of it is Scripture, then it ceases to have any practical value for the great bulk of mankind, then it is no longer a "lamp to our feet, for we do not know what it teaches. If mythical matter is so intermingled with facts, as to make it impossible for an ordinary reader to know what is fact, and what is myth, then the Bible is not the infallible guide to common men which we have been accustomed to regard it. We must

look at the practical effect of all this criticism upon the mind of intelligent men who have not opportunity to study these questions, and the practical effect is to diminish respect for the Bible. It is no longer regarded as infallible. It is no longer an authority for human conduct. New critics may arise and take from us what remains with as much apparent reason as the present critics have who have taken from us the part which they have discovered to be a mere human appendage. In short, the practical effect is, say what you will, to undermine the authority of God's Word upon which alone all saving doctrine is built. The unity of the Book also should be born in mind, for it is impossible to invalidate one part of it without affecting the whole. The critics take away or margle one part of it, and would persuade us that it is not at all what it professes to be; that our Lord was mistaken in His apprehension of the writing which spake of Him, and yet, that they leave us a Bible as useful and authoritative to us as it was when we believed it to be a true record of inspired truth, and relied upon the correctness of Christ's interpretation of His Own Word, but this cannot be, the Book is a unity, one part of it proved to be unreliable and of mere human authority affects the view with which we regard the Book as a whole.

The criticism to which the Bible has been subjected, has dissipated in many minds the feelings of confidence with which it was once regarded. It has done harm to the faith of those who have neither sufficient knowledge nor sufficient piety to protect them from its influence. Unless it is counteracted the result of it will ere long be felt in the falling off of the contributions to the work of the Church.

The boastful claim that all scholars agree with the conclusions of the Higher Criticism in its extremest views, is one which cannot be maintained. More than a hundred years ago the world was told there were two or more Isaiahs, and two or more writers of Zachariah's prophecies, and many other things which are now brought forth as quite modern and more than that, the Bible was dissected and its supposed weaknesses and errors displayed and indicated with both learning and wit. To-day criticism is turning up again these objections. This additional claim being made, to-day criticism is based on a scholarship which did not formerly exist. It is curious that the latest scholarship should fix on the same objections that were taken a century ago to the Bible. Modern scholarship has done much to elucidate Scripture, it has also done much to injure the Scriptures because of its occasional hostility to them. We should welcome every increase of learning and knowledge that bears upon the Bible. We should also be sure that every statement which we receive is well founded. For loud pretenders and great admirers of the modern make very confident statements in regard to Scripture which have no foundation in fact. We must then do all in our power to encourage in the people their traditional respect for God's Word. We should assure them that the Bible, like the burning bush, remains substantially unchanged through a fire of modern criticism. The Church is built upon the Word, any knowledge we have of God is through the Word. Christianity is the treasure which the Word brings us, and to think that we can lacerate and break up that Word, so that we will no longer read it with confidence, or find in it an authoritative enlightening, "Thus saith the Lord," and yet remain unimpaired the truth which it reveals is a fatal mistake. It appears to me that there is required at present the hearing of a warm testimony to our people on behalf of the Word of God assuring them that it remains unimpaired and unchanged after all its assailants have spoken that they can trust in it as their fathers did, and that they must still find in it the nourishment of their faith.

MR. MEYER AND HIS MESSAGE.

BY REV. MARCUS SCOTT, B. A., DETROIT.

For the Review.

The churches of this city have gotten a wonderful uplift by the three days mission of Mr. Meyer which is just completed. Mr. Meyer, as everyone knows, is the successor of Newman Hall in London. Some time ago he gathered his office bearers together and told them how God had laid it on his heart to carry his message abroad over the English speaking world. For this purpose he offered to resign his pastorate. This his people would not consent to, but furnished him at once with a colleague, and so set Mr. Meyer free for several months each year for this larger mission. He is at