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THE CRITIC'S CORNER. XI.

Bible Criticism and the Average Man.*

Surely this is an important subject, in these days, when we hear so much from the pulpit and the press about the newer forms of Biblical study. The writer of this book tells us that "A popular hand book on the subject of Biblical Criticism is a wide spread need," and in "a constructive summary" of 275 pages he attempts to supply that need, and presents a review of the state of criticism regarding all the books of the Bible. The advertisement informs us that Dr. Johnston "knows how to handle "the average man." A young man himself, his attainments have already been recognized in the offer of presidencies and professorships which however, he has declined in favor of a continuance in the pastoral work. His present charge is the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church of New York city to which he was called from a successful pastorate in Chicago." We can readily accept this statement of the case as being quite correct although our knowledge of Dr. Johnston is gained altogether from a perusal of this volume. But the task he has undertaken has two sides; it requires an intimate knowledge of critical process, and close acquaintance with the history of criticism as well as sympathy with the needs of the "average man." It is difficult to say what is meant exactly by the "average man." This volume opens with the statement that "the average man is the large factor in any problem which involves the human race. Any theory must find acceptance with him before it can have a permanent place in the general thought of men." The first statement is true but it is very general, the second needs explanation and qualification. For example what does the average man know of the processes of investigation conducted by Edison and Marconi? Very little, but he can see that the laws of nature are understood and made to serve practical purposes. How much can we ever expect the average man to know

*Bible Criticism and the Average Man by Howard Agnes Johnston Ph. D., D. D., Fleming H. Revell Company (9, 100 net.)

concerning the "Documentary Theory" of the Pentateuch which has grown to its present form through a technical discussion extending over a hundred and fifty years? Very little, indeed the average minister does not yet know much about it, not to speak of the average man. In fact unless a man can give considerable time and strength to this study he cannot form an independent opinion, as to the validity of this theory but he may learn that it is accepted by a great body of experts, and he may without entering deeply into the processes be taught that it does important work in giving a clearer more intelligible view of the course of Hebrew history. We do not know what the average man will say about this book but we do know that the Old Testament critic will say that the problems are treated in an easy superficial style. Three points may be mentioned upon which the great majority of critical workers, in this field, are agreed; viz, that the Pentateuch is made up of different literary strata belonging to different periods, that the book of Isaiah is composite and that the book of Daniel is late. Our author dismisses all these positions with slight discussion; that may suit the average man but the critic will have something to say. The first question is too big to be discussed now. Take then, the second, the book of Isaiah receives six pages of discussion which consists largely in setting up Prof. Margoliouth against Dr. Driver; a very unsatisfactory treatment of a great subject. The study of the book of Isaiah has an extensive history, and the result of a century's work is presented to the general reader in the "Temple Isaiah" by the late Dr. A. B. Davidson. Eighty years ago Gesenius regarded the exilic origin of chapters XLV., as proved, though he resisted the extreme fragment theory. The work done since then seems to most scholars to have settled that point and Prof Margoliouth is not likely to unsettle it. Passing to the third question, we find Daniel dealt with in two pages, and the average man will not gain much light upon the real nature of the literary and historical problem. The critic will not value very highly this argument. "The Book of Baruch is clearly borrowed from Daniel, and Ewald puts that in the Persian period. Hence Daniel must be early." Dr. Johnston's book is just out but Ewald died in 1873 and much has been learned since then. The 1863 edition of Smith's Bible Dictionary is surely conservative enough; it tells us that Ewald's position "may be true so far as the Hebrew portion is concerned; but the present book must be placed considerably later" probably about 160 B. C.; Schuerer who is much more of a specialist in this region than Dr. W. Scott brings it down to the first century A. D., while admitting that the problem is not settled.

The scholar who is convinced by a great variety of reasons that the book of Daniel belongs to the Maccabean period might argue in just the opposite way that the book of Baruch because it is dependent on Daniel must be late. The average man troubles himself very little with such point but he can appreciate a living exposition of Hebrew history and a noble presentation of the truth sought in the Old Testament.

In fact the whole treatment of the Old Testament question by Dr. Johnston is behind the times. It is only fair to say that the New Testament section seems to be more up to date, and contains many helpful suggestions.

The book however has a living interest and will serve a good purpose. It may be regarded as a gentle introduction to this important subject for those who are new to such matters. Its spirit is on the whole admirable, it avoids the harsh dogmatic temper, it admits that on many points, e. g., the book of Jonah, there is room for difference of opinion. Further Dr. Johnston admits that the critics have a right to live, and that their work may possibly do some good. These may seem to be small meagre mercies, but in the American Presbyterian church they are blessings for which one ought to be devoutly thankful. To the present writer the book has been very interesting and instructive as showing the attitude towards critical questions taken by a prominent Presbyterian clergyman who evidently is endowed with great popular gifts and moved by broad sympathies. There is a candour and freedom about this treatment of such questions "Inspiration" and "Christ and the Critics" which is both hopeful and helpful. There is a recognition of the important fact that through courageous and reverent discussion the Scriptures will manifest their power and come to a larger influence.

VERAX.

Literary Notes.

Under Calvin's Spell, A Tale of Heroic Times in Old Geneva. By Deborah Alcock. This is an historical novel of the time of Calvin and the Huguenots, the scene centering in Geneva but shifting at times into Savoy and France. As a story the plot is vigorous with action, suspense, surprise and critical situations. Moreover its tone is wholesome and its heroism inspiring. As history, it vividly portrays the social, political and religious conditions of the time with the factional dissensions, the indifference of the non-religious, the heroic devotions of the Protestants and their toleration of the Catholics. There are several good illustrations and the book is neatly bound in gray linen. Price, \$1.25. Fleming H. Revell Company, Toronto.

The Nineteenth Century and After close the year with a strong number it contains fifteen important articles. The Duke of Northumberland closes a contribution on "Religion and Science," with these wise words: "Whether the theologian and the natural philosopher will ever see perfectly eye to eye until both stand face to face with Him whose actings they alike study, and know even as they are known," may well be doubted. But every true advance achieved by either must necessarily tend to bring them to some goal, however temporarily divergent the winding and intricate paths leading thereto may appear to be. Theology no less than natural science (to quote after Professor Dewar the noble words of Lord Kelvin) is bound by the everlasting law of honour to face fearlessly every problem that can fairly be presented to it, and to assert its right to range over every domain of theory with absolute freedom. It is not by elbowing out her sister that either will promote her own true interests, but by patient and bold pursuit of the common truth which they