

fibre with his inexhaustible life. The poet in all ages has had a horror of "science, falsely so called"—I mean of a dead mechanical science, which fastens its short-sighted microscopic vision upon the mere body of the universe, and ignores the living Soul by which that body is shaped and animated.

What I mean to suggest, then, is, that Biblical Criticism can never be ultimately satisfactory, unless it follows the lead of ideas. The end of all literary criticism, I take it, is to remove the obstructions which prevent the mind of the reader and the mind of the author from coming into immediate contact. Every classical student knows to how much patient mechanical work he must submit before he can feel at home with a Greek or Roman author. Not to speak of the difficulties of a foreign tongue, he must by a slow and laborious process gradually "orient himself," as the Germans say, in the manners and customs of a given age, and in the habits of thought and mode of expression of a particular author; and even when he has done all this to the best of his ability, he may still feel that there is something wanting of that full and lucid vision which comes only to him who has learned to see with the eyes of a master. Now it is of course the same in the critical study of the sacred writers. Here we have not only the difficulty of getting to feel at home with a past more or less remote, but we have the very real difficulty of bringing our clear and logical Western intellect to follow the subtle links of thought and feeling along which a mind of the oriental type moves with ease, especially when that mind, as in the case of the prophetic writers, dwells almost habitually in the high region where time and space are dissolved in the vision of God. How is this difficulty to be overcome? To some extent, as I have already suggested, it is overcome without effort by every simple pious man, who trusts his intuitions, and knows the truth; for, there is this in common with all men, simple or learned, inspired or uninspired, that, being children of one Father, in the centre of their being they are of kin with one another. Hence it is that even the unlettered man, who has passed through some of those profound experiences which reveal the relative fitness of all finite aims, is entirely at home with the visions of an Isaiah, and will fasten instinctively upon the genuine sayings of our Lord, while the mechanical critic, in his slow and labored way, is still groping about for the truth, and not seldom seeking for it in a wrong direction. Yet it would be a very great mistake, especially for students of Divinity, to suppose that even the lower problems of Biblical Criticism are unimportant; and, as I may seem to have unduly depreciated them so far, I will ask your indulgence for a little longer, while I try to say a word in their favor.

We are all familiar more or less with the unfortunate and sometimes disastrous consequences of jumping too hastily to conclusions. In practical life a single error of this kind may cost a man his life. Now the same thing holds in things of the mind. To these who aspire to be teachers of others nothing is so disastrous as hasty, superficial and indolent views. I pray you to remember, that however infinitesimal any single man's direct influence may be, it may have infinite consequences both to himself and to others. And hence, in these days when we are all eager to have clear and definite conceptions about this marvellous world in which we live, and about our own marvellous nature and its relation to the divine, no pains can be too great which will enable us to be more worthy of the noble function of a teacher of others. Therefore, I take it for granted that all who hear me, and who aspire to the sacred office, are willing to put forth their best efforts to be worthy of their high vocation. Now, remember that the whole race is much wiser than any single man, and that by the natural progress of the race the men who not only feel but think—and these two things do not always go together—are convinced that the sacred books exhibit an ever-increasing measure of insight into the Divine mind. How are we to be sure of this? That is a very wide question, and one can only answer, summarily, that it is a conclusion certified by so many converging lines of thought that it is practically demonstrated. Assume then, that it is so, and obviously it is a duty, or as I should prefer to say, it is a privilege, to follow with careful steps the process by which scholars have been enabled to fix the historical perspective of Hebrew thought. Do not imagine for a moment that what in themselves are unimportant investigations into dates and ways of thought and peculiarities of style are really unimportant. All language is but a hint of ideas, and ideas cannot be apprehended without a transformation of one's own mind. Remember, also, that a sentence which, in the mouth of one person and divorced from its context, may appear insignificant, may be seen to have a profound meaning when uttered by another. "He that saveth his life shall lose it." The force of these words lies, not in themselves, but in the significance they receive as coming from One who had so abolished self that he became identical with the whole of humanity.

Hence, as I say, we must not despise even minute and apparently trivial enquiries into dates and authorship, so long as these are guided by an earnest desire to realize with vividness and clearness from what manner of man and what manner of age a given literary product proceeded. We should in this matter learn from the example of men whom the world has agreed to call men of "genius." I