

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

QUEEN'S ALUMNI CONFERENCE.

The closing session of the Alumni Conference very fully exemplified the broad, cultured spirit of the whole week's sessions, illuminated by practical piety and a devotion to Christian ideals as inspiring to the young as invigorating to the more mature. In passages read in opening by Rev. Dr. McTavish from II. Corinthians iii., there was the key of the subsequent discussion. "For as much as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tablets of the heart."

Professor Jordan spoke first on the subject, "Biblical Criticism and the Work of the Preacher." He began by contrasting the different attitudes of the late Rev. Dr. A. B. McKay, as shown in a sermon preached before the Synod, and that of the late Rev. Dr. A. B. Davidson, the great master who had spent the whole of a long and arduous life in the study of Scripture. He had summed up the matter, thought Professor Jordan, in a few words. Criticism was a part of historical exegesis. The effort could never be more than partially successful, the effort of historical exegesis was to see the living God through historical movements. Scholars had been working for 400 years, preceded Professor Jordan, and he did not see why preachers should ask an easier position than the man of science or the physician. Why not take the Bible as it was? said some, and they had been doing so in family prayer and private study (themselves silently selecting and reading the parts they liked). Dr. Davidson's kind of criticism was not possible without piety and sympathy with living souls. These were part of the equipment of the exegete.

Doctrines Fundamentally Affected.

Young men with thirty or forty years of work ahead of them, with the Bible as their daily companion, must get into it, behind it, and all around it, and study it scientifically. One reason was that the new criticism fundamentally affected the theological doctrines related to the Bible. The first thing to give way was literal verbal inspiration. Revelation was a second point. Professor McCadyen, writing on the great gulf, showed they were not so far apart, and Professor McCurdy had remarked that revelation did not deal with facts, nor mean that God had revealed facts of science. Authority was another point. Formerly they used to knock a man down with a text. Now the authority of a doctrine was its growth through long ages. The cry that to give up one thing was to give up all he had himself met, and it ceased to have any terror for him. He gave up nothing. If they were forced to give up Genesis as history they got it back in another way. They had work to do. They must meet their teachers week by week. They had to instruct their young people. Would it be right to allow young men to go out into the world while they were competent to inform them and not to do it? He would emphasize Rev. D. W. Best's remark that if students got in the habit of accepting results without verification this was just as bad as traditionalism. The work itself was a benefit. There were whole tracts in the Old Testament which had been of very little use to him until he tried to place each piece of literature in relation to its own time, and through that apply it to the present day. The preacher that worked only for next Sunday was doomed to wither and grow stale. He must work on some undertaking, and not merely from hand to mouth.

If he worked hard the result would ultimately blossom out in his sermons like the rose in the wilderness.

Must Have Critical Basis.

As an illustration Prof. Jordan selected what he called the most beautiful passage in Elohistic writing, Genesis xxii., the story of Abraham's offering of Isaac. They must get a critical basis to deal with it, and from their knowledge of Hebrew literature they could not now take it as a literal story. In the most radical view it was an account of how animals came to be offered instead of children, child sacrifice being a feature of Semitic religion. What the Hebrew poets took from earlier sources they gave back in higher form. The Elohistic preacher probably took this story and gave it back as a polemic against sacrifice, even as Micah asked would he give the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul. He thought surely the lesson that they should give not the poorest but the dearest thing they had, with the possession of an ancestor like Abraham, must have been an inspiring thing to the Hebrew people. Nothing was lost. They could take the material which last century was flung on the dust-heap and show it to have an everlasting meaning.

A New Relation to God.

Rev. Dr. Milligan followed in an address which, he said, was of the nature of an experience. Ministers were not so critical as professors, but if they gave good stuff from the pulpit the congregation would help them. If they fooled with the people on Sunday the people would fool with them the rest of the week. What they got from the new criticism was a new relation to God, which made all things new. Men were raised up to interpret texts as well as to do them. But he advised young men for the first ten years of their ministry to preach what the Scriptures principally teach. They should always have a line of work. Seeking hither and thither for texts was a dreadful business and was losing him his self-respect till he began a course of expository sermons. He had no doubt there were plenty of people who could not sleep in their beds when they first heard that the world turned round; but it did not change anything essential.

Principal Gordon advocated spending Tuesday mornings in study. There would always be disturbing elements for those who would dwell at ease in Zion. Thirty or forty years ago they found the problems of that time very difficult.

Rev. Dr. Eby regretted that the missionaries in Japan could say nothing to inquirers there but that the Bible was traditionally true. Men left the Church because the pulpit did not meet the philosophy of the day.

Traitors to the New Spirit.

Prof. Jordan declared any young man who assailed the old men for their views was a traitor to the spirit of historical criticism. If Jonah were not a literally true story it contained other truth of value.

Rev. Dr. MacGillivray suggested Prof. Newton Clark's "Influence of Scriptures on Theology" as a basis for discussion next year. The value of the Shorter Catechism became the subject of discussion, and Principal Gordon said he knew nothing in theological literature equal to it. It was singular how little in it had to be recast in the light of later criticism. Dr. Milligan commended Matthew Henry's commentary not as higher, but as spiritual criticism. Prof. Jordan also spoke of its splendidly devotional and real literary quality. He recommended Driver's book on Genesis.

THE CHILD-SOUL.

(By Rev. Professor E. A. Mackenzie, B.D.)

There is a charming story that deserves to be told over and over again, of how a little girl, having received some dim impression regarding the soul, was asking her mother what it was "Can you feel the soul, mother? Can you hear it?" she asked; and, "Can you see it?"

The mother answered that the soul could not be felt nor heard, but that sometimes it seemed as if it could be seen in one's eyes "Let me look into your eyes," said the little one, and gazing into her mother's dear eyes, she saw there the tiny image of herself, and exclaimed, "O mother, your soul is a little child!"

This unconscious parable lays bare one unflinching secret of successful teaching. The years will rob us of youth, and time may write wrinkles on the brow and efface every line of youthful beauty, but the soul need not grow old. How often one has known persons who, as they grew older, grew harder, more conventional, more artificial. They lost the child-soul. And there are those whom one has known in youth, and whose acquaintance has been renewed after a long interval of years, only to find them as frank, as sincere, as full of enthusiasm, and as unspoiled as in the days of childhood.

We do not often read that Jesus was displeased, but it is once written that He was "much displeased"—the disciples were discovered driving away from His presence a group of little children. When He called them back and put his hands on their heads and prayed, they were not afraid. With the unerring instinct of childhood, they saw the child-soul in His eyes and were drawn to Him. On another occasion He frankly told the disciples that unless they abandoned all assumption of greatness and became as little children, they could not set their feet upon the threshold of the kingdom.

Does any one wonder how Sunday schools were held together before the days of conventions and pedagogics? It was done then, as indeed it is best done now, by an elect number of men and women with the child-soul. They loved the child, they understood the child, they sympathized with the child; and they were led unconsciously into the best methods of teaching. Teacher, is your soul "a little child?"

Presbyterian College, Montreal.

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Christian Guardian: Those who object to the minister's saying anything about giving, forget that Christ, who gave words of comfort and who spoke about happiness and heaven as no man ever did or ever can speak, also "beheld how people cast money into the treasury."