

ADDRESS OF PROFESSOR ROBERT DICK WILSON
" Groundless Attacks in the Field of Oriental Scholarship "

As the time allotted to me is limited, I shall speak merely upon the groundlessness of certain of the attacks made upon the Scriptures in the region of paleography and philology.

But before plunging into my subject let me state that in my opinion the only way in which the conservative party can maintain its position in the field of Biblical criticism is by showing that the premises of the radical critics are false; by showing, through a more thorough investigation of the facts, that the foundations upon which the magnificent structures of the radical critics rest are indeed groundless, unscientific and illogical, unproven and often incapable of proof.

The Attack in the Field of Palæography

I. I remark that many of the premises of the radical critics are fallacious, because of assumptions based upon an unjustifiable use of the vowel letters and signs.

It is a point admitted by writers of all schools, that the vowel points of the Massoretic text were not fixed till some centuries after Christ. A study of the variants of the Hebrew MSS. will show further that there is scarcely an internal vowel letter that has been invariably written either fully or defectively. The omission of all internal vowel letters (as well as word signs) is shown conclusively, also, on the inscriptions of the ancient Phenicians, Aramaeans, Moabites and Hebrews. Now, in view of these facts, what do you think of arguments like the following?

Wellhausen says (on page 389 of his History of Israel), that

Za-kar; "male" is in earlier times **Za-kur**; for this is the writing of Ex. xxiii. 17; xxxiv. 23; Deut. xvi. 16; xx. 13; and if it is right in these passages, as we can not doubt it is, it must be introduced in Ex. xxxiv. 19; Deut. xv. 19; i K. xi. 15, seq., as well. In the priestly code, Za-khar occurs with great frequency and elsewhere only in the later literature, Deut. iv. 16; Is. lxvi. 7; Judges xxi. 11, 12, etc."

You all see, that if the vowels did not exist in the original text, that the documents of the original text can not be distinguished by the vowels of that text.

2. The second palæographical assumption arises from wilful changes made in the consonantal text.

By wilful changes, I mean those for which there is no evidence in MSS., or versions, or palæography, or the monuments. The worst sinners in this respect are Professors Klostermann, of Kiel, and Cheyne, of Oxford.

In his latest work, *Biblia Critica*, just coming out, Prof. Cheyne attempts to reconstruct the text of the Old Testament on a theory so incredible, so entirely without any foundation in facts, historical and textual, that it seems to me, to surpass all the groundless theories that have before been proposed.

Did you ever hear of the **Jerahmeelites**? They are mentioned once in the Bible and their progenitor **Jerahmeel** once also. Now could you believe it possible, that a professor in Oxford would attempt to string the whole text of the Prophets and Histories of the Old Testament upon the thread of this word, which he has inserted times almost innumerable in the four parts of his work already published?

One can not but wonder, whether Professor Cheyne ever expected anybody to accept as fact these fanciful reconstructions of his. I can perceive how the radical critics might in despair give up all attempts to reconstruct the original text of the Scriptures; but I can not understand why they do not, one and all,

perceive that any attempt to reconstruct the text out of their own heads, is doomed to failure. One Oxford Professor tried to reconstruct the original Hebrew text of Ecclesiasticus, by re-translating it from the Greek and Syrian versions. When the original Hebrew text was found, his text agreed with the original in only three places out of 100!

Would you like to have a sample of Professor Cheyne's method? On page 135, he asserts that "corruptions based on transpositions are common;" and

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hence he changes the word **tomekh** into **maakhath**. But notice: (1) That there is no MS. nor version, that supports this change; and (2) that such transpositions can not, comparatively speaking, be called **common**. For the past fifteen years I have been making a collection of such transpositions for which there is authority in the MSS., parallel passages, versions, or critical editions (including large parts of the Polychrome Bible), and so far my list counts sixty-four examples in all. When you consider that these examples are collected from the whole Bible, and that the consonant letters in the Bible number about 1,200,000, you will perceive that these changes number about one in 18,000 from all sources whatsoever. But (3), even if the instances of simple transposition were much more numerous, what Professor Cheyne claims in the case before us, is not a simple transposition of two letters; but the 1st is made the 4th, the 3rd the 1st, the 4th the 3rd, and the 2nd is changed from one letter to another, which it resembles in no Semitic alphabet as yet discovered!

3. The third palæographical assumption arises from ignorance of the Hebrew, or from a misunderstanding of some version of it.

Some critics are always on the lookout for variants. When they do not see the connection in meaning between the Hebrew word and its version, they jump at the conclusion that there has either been a change in the original or that the translators have misunderstood their text.

An example of what I mean is to be found in 1 Sam. xiii.6, when the Book renders the Hebrew word by a word meaning "grave." **Ewald**, the great critic of the middle of the last century, asserted that the Hebrew word here used did not mean "grave," but "tower;" and, hence, many critics rejected the Hebrew text, because, they said, people do not hide in **towers**, and generally adopted the Greek version as giving the true meaning. **Klostermann** proceeds to reconstruct the Hebrew text by changing the present Hebrew word to another one which means "sepulchres." Now the fallacy here lies in assuming a variation where there is none. The Greek is right in having the word for "grave." The Hebrew word found in the text also means "grave." If you would look in the Arabic dictionary you would find the exact philological equivalent of the Hebrew used ordinarily in the sense of "grave." The variation is the figment of the critic's imagination. And the persistence in claiming that there is a variation is one evidence among many that there is a **traditional** interpretation among the radical as well as among the conservative critics.

4. But the most groundless of all of the assumptions of the radical critics with regard to the text of the Old Testament Scriptures is that the text, as it emerged into historic times, had already been so changed from its original form as to be utterly unrecognizable by its own composers.

Yet what convincing evidence is there to prove that such radical changes were ever made in the original text of the Old Testament? None whatsoever, except an analogy derived from the Egyptian and Babylonian liturgies and legends. No trace of any such radical changes can be found in the parallel portions of the Old Testament, nor in any statements of the Scriptures, nor in any tradition of the Jews. On the contrary, so far back as we can go with MSS. and versions (i.e., to 200 B. C), the evidence is overwhelming and convincing,

that in general no changes, even in sporadic cases of consonantal letters, have been made in the text of the Old Testament; except such as might occur in the copying or translating of any document, especially one of a long past age. The Egyptian papyri, recently discovered and published, some of them more than 2,000 years old, show that some of the fragments of the Classics differ by not a single letter from the texts of the ordinary text-books now used in the preparatory schools. No evidence has yet been found in support of a tendency theory on the part of either copyists, or translators, of the Old Testament, except, perhaps, in the case of two or three books of the LXX., and in a few changes in the Tar-

gums. Such tendency theories are another creature of the critics' imagination. The only tendency theory that the authors of the Old Testament Scriptures recognize is that which tends from the Paradise of the fall to the Cross of Calvary, and from the Cross of Calvary to the Paradise of the redeemed.

The Attack in the Field of Philology.

In the second place, the groundlessness of the radical attack may be shown in the field of philology.

I. The first of the many false assumptions are those made as to the meaning, the origin, and the use of words.

Time forbids that I should mention more than one or two examples of these kinds of assumptions. Their wide-reaching character can be judged, however, from one as well as from many examples. Let us take the Aramaic word for **King** as an example of a false assumption based on the meaning of a word. Belshazzar, as you know, is said in the Aramaic portion of Daniel to have been king of Babylon. Now, inasmuch as the monuments do not state that Belshazzar was ever king in the sense that Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonaid were; it has been assumed that he could have been king in no sense at all.

To harmonize the monuments with Daniel, it is only necessary to remember that the Aramaic word **mal-kah**, "king," is equivalent to two, or more, words found in the Assyrio-Babylonian or Hebrew. In the Aramaic, the word **mal-kah**, "king," is used, not merely of the emperor of the Greeks, and of the shah-in-shah, the king of kings, the king of Persia; but also of the mayor of a city or of a village, or of the chief of a tribe. Belshazzar may have been king of the city of Babylon, while his father was king of the land.

The second word which I shall mention illustrates the fallacies based upon false assumptions as to the origin and use of words. I shall take the familiar New Testament word **korban**, "a gift." Wellhausen asserts that this word is a late importation into the Hebrew from the Aramaic; that it occurs nowhere in the Pentateuch, except in the Priestly Code; and that its presence there is an evidence of the late date of that work.

Now, inasmuch as both the root and the derivative are found in Arabic and Assyrio-Babylonian, as well as in Hebrew and Aramaic, is it not most probable that both root and derivative were used by the primitive Semites; and, hence, that in their use there is no indication of derivation, or date? Wellhausen, at least, gives no evidence except his mere assertion that the Hebrews derived the word from the Aramaeans.

2. The second philological assumption is that the date of books can be determined from the use of sporadic forms and of once-written words, to many of which the indefinite term "Aramaism" is applied.

But notice, first, that as to the relations existing in early times between the Hebrews and the Aramaean peoples, aside from the statements of the Scriptures, we know absolutely nothing. So far as Aramaisms are concerned, there are no

conclusive grounds for asserting that a book like Ecclesiastes must have been written in the age of the Maccabees rather than in that of Solomon. A large proportion of the words which even conservative critics supposed a few years ago to be Aramaisms, can now be shown not to be necessarily such at all. In Keil's "Introduction to Ecclesiastes," about half of the most important words, which he classes as Aramaisms, are found in Arabic and Assyrian as well. The presumption is that they are all from primitive Semite roots and that they might have occurred in any book which was written at any time in the history of the Hebrews, or of any other Semitic people.

3. The third philological assumption lies in the contention that the employment of certain words rather than others implies a difference of author, or date, rather than a difference of idea to be expressed, or a different way of expressing the ideas.

This assumption lies at the basis of the divisive hypothesis of the Pentateuch. Without going into a discussion of the words for God, about which there is so much that is disputable, let us take the

word "subdue" [Note, **qa-vash**] as an example of the fallacy that diction alone is an indication of a separate document, or a different author. This word is said to be indicative of P. If this were so, if a characteristic of P lies in the word here used, we should expect to find J or E using some other word to express the idea "subdue." As a matter of fact, however, we find no word for "subdue" in either J or E. J, to be sure, uses twice a verb "to bow down." [Note, **ka-ra'**], which in the causative means "to subdue." A third word, the causative of the word "to humble" [Note, **ka-na'**], is used once in P and once in D. The two other words used in Hebrew to denote the idea of subduing [Note, **da-var** and **ra-dad**], do not occur in the Pentateuch. It will thus be seen, that of the five Hebrew words meaning "subdue," P employs two (of which D once uses one); but J and E never use any one of the five. Any difference, therefore, between P and JE is one of idea and not of words to express the idea. Nor could anyone maintain, that either the word or the idea may have been unknown to the writers of J or E. The Hebrew word for "subdue" found in Genesis I. is found, also, in Assyrio-Babylonian, Aramaic and Arabic. Hence, it may be assumed, in the absence of all evidence to the contrary, to have belonged to the primitive Semitic language; and, if it belonged to the primitive language, there is no reason why it may not have been used at any time in the history of any one of its descendants. That the idea expressed by the word "subdue" may have been unknown to the authors of J or E, is a supposition which, in view of the endless subjugations of nature and man revealed by the monuments and languages of ancient nations, is too preposterous for sober discussion.

In the second place, a difference of words, involved in the same general idea, does not necessarily imply a different author, nor a separate document; but may rather imply a fine discrimination of synonyms, or a slightly different way of expressing the same idea. Take, for example, the words for "likeness," "form," etc. P alone used the words "image" (shadow) and "likeness" [Note, **tse-lem** and **d'mooth**]; but only in Gen. I. and V. P and D both use "pattern" (form or build [Note, **tav-neeth**], D and E use the word for "form." [Note, **t'moo-nah** a word of unknown origin and doubtful meaning.] Now, if a difference of words to express the same general idea implies a difference of authorship or document; we would here have three Ps and two Ds, and the assumption would be that no author can ever use a synonym. But, if they express simply a different shade of meaning under the same general idea, their use is no indication of separate documents or different authors. Whichever horn of the dilemma the critic takes, he stands to fall.

4. The fourth and last philological assumption that I shall mention is that made by Frederich Delitzsch and others when they assert, without any sufficient evidence from the vocabulary, that the Hebrews derived their religious ideas from the Babylonians.

Two years ago, I made an exhaustive comparative study of the vocabularies of the four great Semitic languages, especially of the words found in Hebrew and Babylonian, with the following result: I found that while there were many words common to all the Semitic languages; that these words were most common in the lower spheres of life; and that, as you rise from the physical and phenomenal to the mental and religious spheres, the similarities of the vocabularies become less and less; until when you come to the highest sphere of all (the doctrines of God, sin, grace, pardon, salvation, faith, the Messiah, and the kingdom of God), the vocabularies have become largely distinct, and the ideas in great measure dissimilar.

To those who would magnify the influence of the ancient Babylonian upon the ideas of the Israelites, let me emphasize the fact, that the stories of the creation and the flood, the belief in the existence of angels, the observance of a Sabbath, and the use of sacrifices and of the name Jehovah (one or all of which

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are certainly found in the monuments to have prevailed in the age of Abraham), do not invalidate the Scriptures, but rather confirm them. The remarkable thing is, that we find such close resemblances of names and institutions in Genesis and so few in Exodus and Leviticus. While on this part of my subject and in conclusion, I can not refrain from calling the attention of this audience to the long line of opposition between the religions and the policy of the Hebrews and Babylonians, which extends from the time when Abraham was called out of Ur of the Chaldees to leave his country and his kindred, until, in the Apocalypse and the later Jewish literature, Babylon became the height and front of the offending against the kingdom of the God of Israel. All through that extended and extensive literature of the ancient Hebrews, all through those long annals of the Assyrians and Babylonians, wherever the Hebrews and the Assyrio-Babylonians were brought into contact, it was by way of opposition. The only exceptions were in the cases of some weakling, Jehovah-distrusting kings. But with these exceptions, prophets and kings and poets emphasize and reiterate the antagonism, essential and eternal, existing between the worship of Jehovah and the worship of the idols of Babylon. And when the children of Israel had been carried away to the rich plains of Babylon, so beautiful, so vast, was it as a Greek patriot to the Athens of his dreams, or a Scotsman to his "ain countrie?" Not thus. But they wept when they remembered Zion: "How shall we sing the Lord's songs in a strange land?" Not thus does the Catholic pilgrim sing when he treads the streets of papal Rome and stands in awe beneath the dome of St. Peter's. Not thus does the Arab Hadji pray when he bows within the sacred precincts of the Kaaba. But thus has every Jew through-out the ages felt, the record of whose thoughts and feelings has been preserved to us; and thus does every child of Abraham according to the promise feel—that not to Babylon, the golden city, the mother of science and art and commerce, and of idolatry and harlotries and sorceries, do we look for the springs of our religion and the hope of our salvation,—but to Jerusalem the Golden, the city of the great King.