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## THE BEARING OF CRITICISM ON EDIFICATION :

ILLUSTRATED BY A STUDY OF I SAM. XXII. 22-23.

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The practical value of the newer criticism of the Old Testament has not yet perhaps been sufficiently dwelt upon by those who are at the same time students and ministers of Christ. And yet it requires but a very slight acquaintance with thoughtful artisans to be aware that objections to the Old Testament may to a large extent be made by supplying the deficiencies in their early education, so far as it relates to the Old Testament. I am entirely ignorant of attacks directed against this part of the Bible by American objectors (except an able but, as it seems to me, uncritical pamphlet by Colonel Ingersoll), but I venture to assume that there is a family likeness brought forward by sincere sceptics of the Anglo-Saxon race, whether on one side of the Atlantic or the other.<sup>1</sup> One way of meeting these attacks, as I have remarked, is to give intelligent artisans, or at least their leaders, some acquaintance with that critical view which is, as many think, slowly but surely revolutionizing the study of the Old Testament. And it seems best to begin with communicating the elements of such a view to those who, though not of the artisan class themselves, are yet connected by nearness of residence or otherwise with those excellent and at present somewhat dangerous persons to whom I have referred. Scholars have, it is true, enough to do in their own workshops and lecture-rooms, but if they are also ministers, or at least ardent adherents of some branch of the Christian church, it may perhaps befit them to

<sup>1</sup> It may be best to refer to a layman's evidence on the relation of the English artisans to the official teachers of the Bible. Mr. W. Rossiter (a well-known popular lecturer, kindled to the "Enthusiasm of Humanity" by the famous F. D. Maurice) contributed, about 1885, an important article on the subject to the *Contemporary Review*.

come out of their comparative seclusion and do their best, however inadequate this may be, to relieve the present distress. This has not, at least in my own country, been often attempted; perhaps we in England are lacking in that spirit of unquenchable hope, which nevertheless we admire, and which my Anglican brethren specially noticed in the lamented Bishop Phillips Brooks. I have before me two brightly written and much eulogized volumes, one relating to the Book of Genesis, the other to narratives and to prophetic portions of the Old Testament, and with all their brilliance and popularity of manner, I notice with surprise how unfaithful the respected writers are to the critical principles with which they are supposed to be, at least to some extent, identified. And while fully appreciating the terse, sometimes poetic, and always sympathetic style, I marvel at the indiscriminate praise lavished on writers, who through timidity have folded their hands in the presence of a difficulty which has year by year increased till, except to faith and hope, it may well appear insurmountable, viz., the repugnance to what is thought the barbarous and outgrown narratives and teachings of the Old Testament. Now it may well be thought that first attempts to supply a practical need are of necessity poor or inadequate, but no one need hesitate to receive a stimulus from them on that ground. And so I will venture to refer to a work published last year, and entitled "Aids to the Devout Study of Criticism," which has, of course, the faults of all first attempts, added to the pardonable weakness of offering some old and some half-buried new matter to the more aspiring class of students.

In the first part of this book the Book of Samuel is presented as a subject of study for laymen who are not themselves artisans, but more or less interested in that important class of the community. It being assumed that analytic criticism must precede a *genuinely* historical study of the Old Testament narratives, the results of Kittel's analysis, as given in Professor Kautzsch's admirable new translation of the Old Testament, are quoted in full, since beyond them it would have been difficult to go when the book was written. Then the character of David as affected

by these results and by the historical study of the Eastern races is considered at length, and lastly the typical narrative of David and Goliath is presented, first with a view to the enjoyment of the story, and then, so far as seemed possible or at least expedient, with an eye to edification. An unfriendly reviewer has remarked that the story of Odysseus could be treated in the same way. So it could, provided that the preachers or lecturers believed that there was a genuine, however small, kernel of fact in the story, and also that Odysseus held a prominent place in the period of preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. In this case, the story of Odysseus can, it is clear, only have been omitted by accident from the volume of Christian Scriptures.

The object of the doubtless feeble first attempts which I am making, under difficulties peculiar to the services in a provincial cathedral, is "to apply modern methods of study to the Old Testament with just sufficient precision to bring out the gradualness of divine revelation, to emphasize and illustrate the essential facts and truths of the Scriptures, and to solve the difficulties and correct the misapprehensions of infidel objectors," and this work has to be done in sections of at most half an hour's duration. The following pages are extracted from one of these sections (or sermons), which forms a supplement to those already printed in the "Aids" on parts of the Books of Samuel.

It has been pointed out in the "Aids" (pp. 7-13) that there existed side by side in parts of Samuel different accounts of one and the same fact, which may either be variants of the same tradition or represent almost or entirely different views of what actually took place. Among these different accounts, some have reference to the regal career of Saul; we have what may be called a secular view, and we have also what must undoubtedly be described as the religious view current three centuries after the facts. The following pages are concerned with this religious view, which is evidently different from, though more or less plausibly harmonizable with, the secular view. The religious view will be found in 1 Sam. 8; 10:17-27a; 12; 13:7b-15a (cf. 10:8), and chap. 15, and it is more particularly of chap. 15 that I

am speaking. The secular view is clearly traceable in 1 Sam. 9:1-10:16, 27b (following the LXX. with Revised Version margin), 11:1-11, 15. This is in accordance with Kittel's analysis, though it is for critics to consider whether L. A. Bähler's suggestion is not worthy of adoption, according to which 10:26b and 27a ought to stand where we now read 11:7b and 8.<sup>1</sup>

Let us start from 1 Sam. 15:22-23: "And Samuel said, Hath Jehovah as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of Jehovah? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim. Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, he hath also rejected thee from being king." The words of verse 22 are a very early attestation of the truth that God is spirit (*i. e.* of a spiritual nature), and that those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. It is impossible, however, for anyone who has absorbed the idea of historical development to believe that these words were actually spoken in the semi-barbarous age to which Saul belongs. All who open their eyes to facts must be well aware that the religion of David, though it had in it some germs of progress, was widely different from that of Isaiah, not to say of the Book of Psalms, and will admit that, even taking the narratives as they stand, the religion of Saul was at any rate not superior to that of David. And if the critical facts on which the best scholars are agreed be

<sup>1</sup> To show the effect of this critical change I will give here the verses which are affected by it. Saul, it will be remembered, was a plain citizen when Nahash, king of Ammon, threatened a grievous insult to the men of Jabesh-Gilead.

"And, behold, Saul came following the oxen out of the field; and Saul said, What aileth the people that they weep? And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh. And the Spirit of God (*i. e.* a martial enthusiasm) came mightily upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was kindled greatly. And he took a yoke of oxen, and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the borders of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul (and after Samuel), so shall it be done unto his oxen. And there went with him the men of valor whose hearts God had touched. But certain base fellows said, How shall this man save us? And they (*i. e.* Saul's valiant followers) said unto the messengers that came, Thus shall ye say unto the men of Jabesh-Gilead, Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, ye shall have deliverance. . . . And the people said unto Saul, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men that we may put them to death."

accepted, it will be clear that neither Saul nor Samuel can have held the views expressed in the above passage. Tradition tells us that the God whom the Israelites of Saul's time worshiped had such great delight in sacrifices that when the people had forsaken Jehovah, and consequently, as we are told, were subjugated by the Philistines, Samuel had to offer up a lamb in order to appease Jehovah (1 Sam. 7:9), and bring victory to the Israelites. Samuel, too, as tradition said, was in the habit of going about in the land and blessing the periodical sacrifices of the different civic communities (1 Sam. 9:2-5), and though no doubt he delivered oracles to the people, yet there is no evidence that the people regarded these oracles as in the least degree more sacred than their sacrificial rites. Religiously, then, it is incredible that Samuel should have uttered the words of the text. Nor are they, from a moral point of view, at all more credible. It is impossible that Samuel the prophet should in moral influence have been behind the rude warrior Saul. The savage custom, prevalent among barbarous races, of devoting both human beings and dumb animals taken in war to the national god by slaying them, was, it would appear, beginning to go out among the Israelites. Saul, therefore, and the people "spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them." This is what we find in 1 Sam. 15:9; the statement of Saul in vss. 15 and 21, that Saul and the people took a part of the spoil to sacrifice to Jehovah, seems to be a mere fiction, put suitably enough into the mouth of the terrified Saul by the narrator. Or, if this supposition be rejected, Saul had at any rate no intention of slaying Agag, whereas Samuel "hewed Agag in pieces before Jehovah" (vs. 33). Nevertheless, though elements in the narrative may not be historical, it is difficult to accept it as a whole. It is even difficult to see where the impiety of Saul consisted, even from the point of view of the narrator. There seems to have been no intentional disobedience on Saul's part, and Jehovah, as we learn from the next chapter, "looketh not on the outward appearance, but on the heart" (16:7).

If I were to stop here, I should be like those who would feed the hungry with stones instead of bread. Mere negative criticism is always unsatisfactory; nor is it charitable to pull down if you cannot re-build the edifice better. Criticism tells us that chapter 15 belongs to an independent account of Samuel and Saul, composed probably in northern Israel and at earliest contemporary with Hosea. The account doubtless embodies valuable traditional elements, but these have been combined and modified in accordance with the religious ideas of the noblest and best Israelites of the time of that prophet. The picture of Saul and Samuel which it gives is, therefore, not completely accurate, and chapter 15 in part is rather a sermon addressed to the contemporaries of Hosea than an historical description of a long past age. It may be and probably is an historical fact that Saul fought with and overcame the Amalekites, also that he was less ruthless in the hour of victory than the Judges, his predecessors, also that he quarreled with the seer Samuel; but more than this must be left entirely uncertain. The narrator had no thought of us his modern readers; his mind was concentrated on the work of extracting edification for his own times from some of the many traditions current respecting the dim heroic age.

The writer of whom I speak was probably, as we have seen, a northern Israelite. There is nothing to indicate a connection with Judah, and he presents affinities in language and in ideas to two great writers, one of whom certainly and the other almost certainly belonged to the northern kingdom. The best known of these two writers is Hosea, who confined his ministry almost entirely to the northern kingdom. Hosea is a tender-hearted prophet. He has some great ideas, but they are suffused with emotion, and though he is faithful to his message it costs him repeated struggles to be so. In this he is not so very unlike the prophetically-minded writer whom criticism reveals to us in 1 Samuel 15, and the other passages which describe the prophetic view of the career of Saul. For there cannot be the shadow of a doubt that he paints Samuel after his own likeness, and that those two finely contrasted passages, 1 Samuel 10:24

and 15:35,<sup>1</sup> were dictated by his own sympathies. The motto, "Look in thine heart and write," was by none more fully carried out than by the prophetic narrators of the history of Israel. Here is another point of resemblance between Hosea and our narrator. Hosea is no great lover of the institution of kingship; his experience of royalty in northern Israel was so unfavorable that it would seem as if he almost doubted the possibility of a good king, and this may be the reason why this book contains no prophecy of the Messiah. In 13:11 he even says, "I give thee a king in mine anger, and take him away in my wrath;" which is exactly parallel to what our unknown narrator says with reference to Saul in the eighth and fifteenth chapters of 1 Samuel.

There are some other important respects in which our narrator is akin not only to Hosea but to Isaiah. Isaiah is loud in his complaint of those who in the management of the state neglect the prophetic counsel. "Woe to the rebellious children," he says in chapter 30, "that take counsel, but not of me, and make a league, but without my spirit, that they may add sin to sin." And the unknown narrator of the life of Saul seeks to enforce the same lesson by the supposed banishment of that ancient king who ventured to deviate from the letter of the command of Samuel.

Again, Isaiah addressing the rulers of Jerusalem exclaims indignantly in the name of Jehovah, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed-beasts; and I delight not in blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats" (Isaiah 1:11). And Hosea declaims in similar language speaking for his God, "I delight in mercy, and not in sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God more than in burnt offering" (Hosea 6:6).

These three passages and these alone fully explain the meaning of the text. Such words could not have been uttered in the days of Saul and Samuel, for they presupposed a conception of

<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 10:24, "And Samuel said, See ye him whom Jehovah hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted and said, Long live the king."

1 Samuel 15:35, "And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death, for Samuel inwardly mourned for Saul."

prophecy and a respect on the part of kings for the prophetic order, also a view of the spiritual nature of God, and of the immense relative insignificance of sacrifice such as neither Samuel or Saul possessed.

And now consider how important the disciples of Hosea and Isaiah must have regarded these ideas, that one of them actually transformed an episode in the heroic age of Israel in order to throw them into bolder relief. He spoke of Saul and Samuel, but he thought of Jeroboam II. and Hosea. We need not, therefore, trouble ourselves about the psychological or historical impossibilities of the story. The essential point to remember is that whereas in the eleventh century B.C. the Israelites were still in morality and religion semi-barbarous, only three centuries later they produced a few such men as Hosea and Isaiah, men who were as clear sighted on the fundamentally moral character of true religion and on the all-importance of sound religious principle to the the rulers of a people as any Christian thinker can be.

To me, I confess, this appears a marvel of the first order, and one of the greatest proofs of the supreme position of the biblical religion that in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., when non-conformity was vastly more difficult and more dangerous than it is now, men could be found to say that from the highest point of view sacrifices were of little or no moment. The most striking passage in which this truth is affirmed is in the Book of Jeremiah, where we read in unconscious opposition to the later belief of the Mosaic origin of the Levitical Law, " Thus saith Jehovah (God) of Hosts, the God of Israel : Add your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices and eat the flesh (*i. e.*, go on offering sacrifices ; they are no better than so much unconsecrated flesh meat). For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the Land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices : But this thing I commanded them, saying, Harken unto my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people : and walk ye in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you " (Jeremiah 7 : 21-23). In the Psalms we find the same idea expressed in a more positive form. " Offer

right sacrifices," we read in Psalm 4 : 5, "and put your trust in Jehovah." The best sacrifice is obedience in those matters which formalists are tempted to omit, or if there be a second sacrifice it is like unto the first. Open lips are the necessary adjuncts of open hearts. Obedience and thanksgiving are the true divine service.

I said that such words as those of Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah are marvellous in the eighth and seventh centuries ; they are still more so when repeated in the fifth and sixth centuries after the return of the Jews from Babylon, from which period our present Psalter comes to us. How, we ask in perplexity, could such words have been written, or at any rate sung, in the age of those founders of legalism—Ezra and Nehemiah ? The true answer probably is that there were already different schools of thought in the same church. There were those who inclined toward a purely spiritual religion and those who preferred a religion of elaborate forms ; both sorts of churchmen lived together in peace. Let us follow their example and suffer schools of thought to exist undisturbed in our midst. We have all of us at least one point in common in addition to our Christian character and our reverence for the past history of our church, namely, that we believe in the essential spirituality of religion. In forms as forms none of my readers I hope believes. Some of us may value symbols more, some less ; but for symbols apart from the thing symbolized, no member of any of the reformation churches can have the least reverence. Let us be content with this agreement, and let us bear to have different views respecting the symbols (whether these symbols be the sacrament, or the written forms of prayer, or the Bible) expressed from time to time. And if, when the natural tendency to over-value symbols threatens to become dangerous, a reformer should arise, calling us back to the spirituality of the prophets, let us not be impatient with him, but remember the attitude of the Master himself toward the law. "The Sabbath was made for man," he said, "not man for the Sabbath," *i. e.*, there are times when seeming irreverence is according to the will of God. And when denounced for transgressing the law for holding intercourse with publicans and

sinners, he replied, referring to the prophet Hosea, "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice ; for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9 : 13).

Thus the great saying of 1 Samuel 15 : 22 was in substance reaffirmed by Christ eight hundred years after it was first uttered. Our Lord did not mean precisely the same thing as either Hosea or Hosea's disciple. All three agreed in preferring moral to material sacrifices, but while Hosea specified as an example of such sacrifice the civic virtues of brotherly love or helpfulness, and Hosea's disciple the royal virtue of obedience to the prophetic counsels, our Lord put forward the necessity (which we ourselves are just beginning to feel more strongly) of personal friendly intercourse with those whom we desire to raise in the moral scale. The varieties of moral sacrifice are indeed too numerous to catalogue, and one person cannot be a rule for another. The all-important thing is to maintain the spirit from which all true sacrifice flows. That spirit is a spirit of universal love—a spirit which, among the Israelites, could only arise when the old intense but narrow class-policy had given place to a common feeling of nationality, and when to this feeling had been added the consciousness that the privileges of Israel were not merely for herself but for the good of humanity. The saying in Hosea 6 : 6 may be great, but that in Isaiah 19 : 24-25 is greater. And now may I ask, in conclusion, does not this latter saying presuppose the great prophecy of the servant of Jehovah in Isaiah 42 : 1-4 ? Much more might be urged in behalf of this view than the ordinary commentators have yet said.