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HIGHER CRITICISM.

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An objection constantly met with, when the aims and methods of higher criticism are advanced, is voiced in the short question:— How shall we know when to stop?

This question is itself misleading. The inference it suggests is that we are going wrong. If this inference is correct, the question is easily answered. Stop at once. If we are on the right track, but danger signals displayed here and there make us uneasy, run slow. If we are on the right track, and the road is clear, why should we stop until the destination is reached?

But this question is asked with especial regard to the Old Testament. Many hesitate to apply to the Old Testament the critical principles which have been applied to the New, and which have led to satisfactory results. For example:— no one would hesitate to admit that the gospels evince a two-fold origin in documentary and traditional sources of information,—the one *viva voce* information, sometimes at first hand from Christ; sometimes through intermediary witnesses, as in the case of the gospel of Luke. The documentary sources of the New Testament are found principally in the writings of the Old Testament. There is nothing unique in this. Later revelation includes the earlier. The later books of scripture depend on the earlier. Later prophets depend on earlier prophets. Christ was like unto Moses. Moses foreshadowed Christ, and Christ fulfilled the law of Moses.

When we reach Genesis, however, there is no earlier record. There was much revelation preceding Moses. If the sources from which the writer of Genesis drew his information were documentary as well as traditional, there would be nothing surprising in the fact. It would be quite analogous with the sources of information on which the writers of the New Testament relied.

The facts of the literary construction of the New Testament from the human side are so well known and recognized, and in their bearings so instructive and useful, that it seems strange that men should stand awe-struck at the possibility of similar facts being brought to light in the literary construction of the Old Testament.

There is a long line of revelation back of Moses. That it was communicated from father to son we know; whether it was preserved in documentary form before the time of Moses is now under discussion.

A prominent theologian once said, in addressing his class, "There is no doubt where you gained your knowledge of God: you were taught it. This holds true of all men back to the time of Adam; and there is no doubt where Adam obtained his knowledge of the divine. He had it direct from God."

Did Moses draw his inspiration direct from God? Certainly he drew the quickening of his own spiritual life from Him. But were the facts of church history in the time of Abraham and the patriarchs specially revealed to him, or did inspiration simply quicken his intellectual powers, so that the pertinent facts of the world's history were at his command when he wrote of them?

The apostles knew what Christ said from their natural power of hearing and the attention with which they listened; but he promised the Holy Spirit who should so quicken their power of memory that all that he said to them would be brought to their remembrance. This promise was fulfilled to such an extent that the words of Christ, as quoted by them, have a literary style of their own, and evince their common origin. This fact alone would prove that the principles and methods of the higher criticism do not invalidate the truth, but serve to corroborate it.

Higher criticism, in its wide sweep, does not invalidate inspiration as coming from God; but it serves to emphasize the fact too often overlooked, that the inspiration of God is given through men inspired and quickened by God,—so that their words, though spoken by men, are yet the words of God. As the apostle says, "As though Christ were speaking by me, I beseech you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

The apostle while yet a man could say this because he had been quickened into life by the spirit of God. He was a partaker of the divine nature. He was filled with the fullness of God. It was no longer he that lived, but Christ lived in him. "The life that I live I live no longer in the flesh, but by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." He no longer lived in the flesh; he lived in the spirit; but the spirit could only manifest itself so far as the nature and limitations of his flesh and blood, his humanity permitted. Like Christ, the Spirit of God within him was shrouded by the earthen vessel. The living word he preached through the almighty power of the living God quickened the souls of them that heard it. Nevertheless, the words of Paul, the language in which he spoke, are of the past. To the great majority of the human race the Hellenistic dialect is a dead language; but the spirit which moved Paul moves among all the nations of the earth. Every man hears the thought of Paul in that language wherein he was born.

And the further the methods and principles of higher criticism are pursued in giving us the exact standpoint of prophets and apostles, the closer are we enabled to approximate their thought as indicated in their words. The higher criticism does not mean less faith, but more faith, because founded on a clearer, more intelligent, more comprehensive understanding of the written word.