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THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

ARTICLE I.

A STUDY IN BIBLICAL HISTORY.

BY THE REV. GEORGE F. HERRICK, D. D., CONSTANTINOPLE.

IN again revising and reprinting the Bible in Turkish, the writer has recently been called to the duty of reading over repeatedly, and with minute care, the historical portions of the Old Testament Scriptures. In the process, he has been somewhat forcibly impressed with the reflection that the discharge of a duty so exceptional ought to yield not only the result immediately aimed at, but also some contribution toward clearing up the dark corners of Old Testament history. The necessity of scanning, for perhaps the twentieth time, in the course of half as many years, the sentences and the syllables, the letters and the dots of records like those, *e. g.*, of Gen. ix.20 and foll., Gen. xix.30 and foll., Gen. xxxviii., the last five chapters of the book of Judges, and many others, not to mention the details of the Levitical law and the extermination of the races of Canaan,—ought to offer, one would think, some stone of help, to rest the weary foot upon, or some oil of consolation to those who more cursorily review, or perchance sadly grope among these perplexing records.

That these records *are* perplexing the experience of many will abundantly testify. The records are more than perplexing; they are revolting. They are sometimes ghastly.

Some seek to *apologize* for these portions of Old Testament history, and do so with more or less of success. Others cover them up or pass them by, after the example of the two dutiful sons of Noah. Others, and a vast number, if one glances broadly over the field of human history, it must be confessed with sadness, derive from them false principles of morals, and complacently wear them as a mantle to hide their own deformity. All these alike accept these records as a part of God's book of Revelation. In our day we find another and a growing class, a class too of highly respectable and thoughtful men, who from the accepted doctrine of a human element mingled with the divine element in the Bible, infer that *these* records are the purely human crust and dross of the Book, to be deliberately thrown aside as belonging not only to the externals and accidents of Revelation, but as, even in this view, records which are now wholly antiquated. The total impression of large portions of the Old Testament is, by these critics, put down to the imperfect enlightenment, the low morality, the false ethics of a rude and barbarous age; and then these records are virtually eliminated from the Bible, as human clothing, which, as concerns the intent of Revelation for succeeding and advanced ages, is outgrown, worn out, and to be cast away. Now this is manifestly the easiest and shortest road out of our difficulties. But the easiest and the shortest is often not the right or the safe road. We would *like* to extend our sympathy to this "heroic treatment" of certain biblical records, but we cannot. The methods of the so-called Higher Criticism are unscientific; its premises are vicious; it is lured on by a mirage: it lands us in a desert. Its fundamental mistake is in rejecting *all authority*, and claiming for finite thought an absolute and unconditioned scope which belongs only to the Infinite Mind. Not only many devotees of material science and so-called philosophers in our day, but some who claim to be expounders of the Bible also, start with assumptions which are *disloyal* to

him who, as the Author of mind and will, and the Fountain of knowledge and wisdom, has so made finite mind that it can act normally and successfully only in recognition of the central truths of God, of conscience, and of responsibility, as axiomatic and authoritative truths in all human thinking, in all search after truth.

It is, however, no part of our present purpose to enter the broad field of discussion which here lies open. Let us rather define the *principles* which will guide us in an attempt to give some degree of aid in the proper understanding of the dark corners of Old Testament history, particularly those which appear to be an offence against morality, those which, to many, seem to wink at falsehood, sensuality, and cruelty. We may remark, in passing, that, in view of the state and wants of races of men as yet unevangelized, it is of almost infinitely greater moment to defend the Bible against charges of false moral impression than to settle the vexed question whether there may be found scientific errors or chronological or even "historical" errors in its pages.

The principles which we *accept*—without at this time entering into the argument to establish them—are these :

1. The books of the Old and New Testaments, regarded as canonical by all Christians, are sufficiently attested as genuine, authentic, and divinely inspired.

2. By *inspiration*, as touching biblical history, we mean "such divine influence upon the mind of the writer as kept him from such a representation of facts as, legitimately and rightly understood, is opposed to truth, or is calculated to make any false moral impression upon the reader ;" or positively expressed, "such divine influence upon the mind of the writer as secured the record of such facts and in such a way as, legitimately and rightly understood, are calculated to make only true and needful moral impressions upon the reader."

3. Reverent exegesis, not outside criticism, is the proper and the only successful key for unlocking the diffi-

culties of Sacred Scripture. The expositor, the patient student *within* the temple, not the self-reliant and iconoclastic critic *without*, however learned, is he who will discover "the truths yet to break forth from God's Holy Word."

4. By "legitimately and rightly understood," we mean to point to certain facts, often but slightly regarded, such as these, (a) that the Bible was written at very different times, by men of different stages of culture and civilization, times extending over a period of more than fifteen hundred years. (b) That the Old Testament was written in a language and amid customs and a state of society which, while they must color any records intelligible to those men for whom they were primarily prepared, it is to-day possible to know only approximately, and that only after prolonged and patient study. Both these points are endorsed and emphasized by the "Higher Criticism" also. (c) That it is a pure assumption and withal unscientific, either on the one hand to treat the Old Testament as though its merits were to be weighed simply by its fitness to the moral development of our own age, *or*, on the other hand, to throw large portions of it aside as alone adapted to the stage of moral development of a long past age, and of Oriental races.

What we specifically propose to ourselves is, on the basis of these principles, *to present some reasons for the perpetuation, in the Book of God, for all time, and in all languages, and for all races of men, of the most revolting records contained in Old Testament history.*

FIRST REASON. *To show the frightful capabilities of the human soul in the direction of moral evil.*

The biblical record, as it stands, alone of all writings, presents without gloss, concealment or exaggeration, the complete and eternal truth concerning moral character.

There is a popular idea about the patriarchs and the noted men of Old Testament history, which has no ground in the Bible itself, viz., that they were very holy men, patterns of all excellence; as examples, only second to the

one great example of Christ himself. This idea is incorrect and harmful. Many of those men were examples of some one great virtue. Some of them do not appear to be, and notice that the Bible does not represent them as examples of any virtue at all. This is true of nearly all the twelve patriarchs. *Men* have canonized them: the Bible does not. See Gen. xlix.3 ff. Reuben is unstable as water and shall not excel. Instruments of cruelty are in the habitation of Simeon and Levi. "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be thou not united. . . . Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel." "Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens." "Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path"; and compare Judges, 18th chapter. No wonder that Israel should interrupt the sad record by "I have *waited* for thy salvation, O Lord." (Gen. xlix.18.)

Noah is, for all time, an example of trusting God's word and doing what God bid him, not only when he could not see, but in opposition to what he saw, and *alone*, when all men treated him with scorn. This is high virtue indeed; but Noah was no demi-god, to be worshipped. He lacked control over his lower nature which a man making no profession of *Christian* virtue *now* would be ashamed of, and the Bible frankly tells us of this, that we may not mistake in regard to moral evil, and suppose we have overcome when we have but just girded on our armor, or think we have taken all our enemy's strongholds when we have seized but one. Abraham is, all the world over, a signal example of faith and obedience, but he prevaricated in a way which justly brought down upon him twice, for the same fault, the sharp rebuke of heathen princes. Abraham was an example of *faith* and of *obedience*, not of *perfect character*. Those "saints" of the Old Testament history, who controlled themselves in a way *worthy* of man created in the image of God, created with a spiritual nature made to *dominate* his sensuous nature, are

very few. Joseph and Daniel are the marked exceptions, and certainly the record does not present Joseph as an example to be imitated in some of the important incidents of his conduct. David committed adultery and murder under circumstances singularly inexcusable. Acts of folly and of cruelty also blot his record. Is it *possible* that a "man after God's own heart" could commit such acts? And if it be possible and a fact, *why* should the divine record preserve and perpetuate them? Just for this reason, viz., that men everywhere and to the end of time, may learn the gangrenous power of evil, and not shrink from the surgery of the Almighty but most merciful Father, when used for its removal from the soul, or from the human race. It is in the light of this fact that we are to read the whole record of the settlement of the Jews in Canaan. Who that is somewhat familiar with human history, with the indescribable degradation and unnamable vices and beastliness of Oriental heathen races,—the great mass of humanity in all time,—can deny that the decimation of tribes and even the extermination of races has left the moral air of this world less mephitic and poisonous, if not positively sweeter? The records of Joshua and Judges are sad records, no doubt, but the stagnation and moral decay of a people "settled on their lees" is sadder still.

There are specific forms of vice prohibited by express enactments in the Mosaic law which to many of my readers probably are simply inconceivable. Such was the case with the writer till assured by one who knew, and whose word was to be trusted, that the grossest and most beastly of all is an actual, well-known and wide-spread *fact* of human life in the heart of Asia to this day. And to an angel's eye are the gilded, sugared, ornamented vices of a high civilization, at its most populous centres in our own day, any less revolting?

Or study human history to find what are the capabilities of the human soul in moral evil, in the direction of

more than wild beast cruelty. Read the record of the conquests of Zenghis Khan or Tamerlane,—helpless victims, prisoners and unarmed, ruthlessly slaughtered not merely in hecatombs, but in myriads. Examine the records of the Aztecs of Mexico, and you must throw up the window to get your breath.

Nay, we are wandering. We have need only to keep to the purpose we have laid down, and in so doing, we will pass in review, in outline, the narrative of the last three chapters of the book of Judges. In a little town belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, a shocking crime against chastity and human life is committed. The husband of the victim adopts a most ghastly and horrible method of arousing the tribes to take vengeance on the perpetrators of the crime. Contrary to all expectation, the whole tribe of Benjamin shows a clannish spirit so strong as to defend the criminals. War ensues. The one tribe, in two successive battles, is victorious over the eleven tribes. The first day they slay 22,000 men, and the second day 18,000. Then numbers tell; the tide of battle turns. The warriors of the tribe of Benjamin, not only, but the whole tribe, women and innocent children, are ruthlessly massacred. In all, more than 100,000 souls have perished. Six hundred men alone escape to a stronghold in the rocks. Now the people of the other tribes are seized with remorse. "We have exterminated one of the tribes of Israel," they say. "But no, there is still a ray of hope. There remain six hundred men. But their wives are all slain, and we have sworn not to give our daughters to a Benjamite." On examination it was found that there was one town unrepresented when the abominable oath was taken. They do not *think* of *persuading* the people of Jabesh to give their daughters to the survivors, as *they* might do without violating their oath. No! with their hands reeking with the blood, for shedding which the people are remorsefully weeping, they resolve to slay all but the virgins of the city in question,

and give these virgins, thus orphaned and untribed, to the surviving Benjamites; and *they execute their resolve!* And thus the curtain falls upon the history of the times of the Judges.

Now let us suppose that this and all such records had been omitted from the biblical history. Men would immediately say of the record, "These are unnatural characters. Human character now is formed under different conditions. Those men were without many of the temptations to which we are subject." Men sometimes sink in discouragement when they hold before them the absolutely perfect example of Jesus only. They aspire toward that exaltation of character, but it is high and far away, till they read the record of the imperfect men who, notwithstanding, *were* saints of God in the ancient time.

Or suppose it were left for the human imagination to portray the moral character of men, and the moral conflicts of human life. Even *with* the light which the Bible sheds on the problem of moral evil, uninspired men have, with very few exceptions, drawn only caricatures of men, either for good or evil; and where the portrayal of moral character has verisimilitude, as in the writings of Shakespeare, the truthful sketching has resulted from the infiltration into literature of biblical ideas. Otherwise the patterns both of virtue and of vice are unnatural and false. Take uninspired historians. With very few exceptions the total moral impression of the characters and acts delineated is warped to actual falsity. What colossal prejudices; what distorted models; what bitter partisanship; what vivid cursing of the bad; what blind laudation of the good; what partial reading of motives is displayed on the historic page. For example, Napoleon is to one a selfish, cruel despot; to another he is the noblest, as well as ablest, man of his generation. But biblical history is written on a plan wholly different from this. Here character appears as it is. Balaam is painted no worse than he was. David is exhibited no better than he was. The

low faults and follies of Samson are neither concealed nor extenuated. We are not told that while the races of Canaan were vile heathen, the children of Israel were very excellent people. Facts are told, and *truth* concerning *chara ter* is the impression made. No reader can fail to see that races of men, that individual men, have appointed to them in this world a moral conflict with a gigantic presence and power of evil, which, in its myriad forms, is well nigh omnipresent, and that victory is purchased only at the price of sleepless vigilance, of resisting unto blood, of enduring hardness as good soldiers, and that till life shall end.

It is one of the fundamental conditions of any true moral uplifting of the human race, be it by human or by divine power, that men should know—what they dislike to know and what they very much desire to forget—that all sin, every form of evil, has a terrible power of reproduction and expansion. This is the first great, omnipresent fact that confronts us, in all *thorough* study of human experience or of human history. But if you set aside the most vivid biblical illustrations of this fact, you will, almost certainly, in your desire to disbelieve it, be led into the folly of the ancient Dualists, who made an evil god or demiurge responsible for moral evil, or with a school of shallow philosophers in modern times, attempt to cure the sores of human nature by sweet-scented ointments and finely wrought bandages, by culture and refinement. And after all, the result will be much like the flower of a certain species of cactus, of exquisite beauty, but when you get close to it, emitting an odor like the vilest carrion. The permanent and repulsive bottom truth of moral character as experienced in human life, as seen in human history, demands the records of the Old Testament history, *as they stand*.

SECOND REASON for the perpetuation, in the Bible, of the revolting records of Old Testament history.

To show that the development of moral beings, or of a race

of moral beings, in good is, even for Omnipotence and infinite Love, a long process.

One of the most common devices lying at the basis of a certain class of popular moral stories is to place character under one great trial, and make the person learn a lesson from that which avails for all time: the wrong bent is wholly corrected; the fault is wholly cured. This is singularly opposed to all experience of moral growth and development in this world, whether of *natural* development, or that which takes place under the special intervention of divine grace. On the actual arena of life, men learn lessons and forget them; they meet discipline, and derive little apparent benefit from it; they learn and unlearn and relearn lessons in practical wisdom; they overcome and are overcome; they are elated and again in despair; they show a foolish self-reliance, and again they seek, with all humility and diligence, the help that God offers. You may have to take long periods under review, in order to discover any substantial and lasting progress. To one who has gained an impressive sense of what moral progress means, what is the condition of a true and lasting success, the doctrine and claim of perfectionism must appear the *ideal folly* of good men. Perfect in character! You may aspire toward it, but *as yet* we have no evidence that the goal has been fully reached by a single finite being. Perhaps the progress will be eternal.

But, as revealed before our eyes, moral progress is more easily traceable in races than in individuals. The life of races is longer than that of single men. And we turn to examine the record which we have once already passed under review, viz.: the record of the last chapters of the book of Judges, taken in connection with the whole moral growth and training of the Jewish race. Biblical scholars are agreed that the last five chapters of this book are to be considered, not as the continuation of the narrative of the preceding chapters, but as, in some sort, an appendix to it. The time of the occurrence of these events was

just *that* time in the history of the Jewish people when such fearful crimes against humanity were possible. These events immediately follow the conquest. Only two generations back the whole Jewish people were the slaves of a heathen race of men. They had but just escaped from ~~the debasing~~ influence of generations of slavery in Egypt. The moral discipline of the Jewish race began at the bottom. They were rude barbarians and enslaved to heathens when their real discipline as a race began. We are very apt to carry our conception of the character of Abraham and of Jacob and of Joseph along with us, as we read the history of the life of their posterity. But this is untrue to fact. The people that Moses led out of Egypt were little better than heathen themselves. How very little they knew of God and His attributes, of moral truth, of an immortal life for the human soul. Why, it may be asked, did God choose such a people and bring them under His special moral discipline, rather than the cultured Egyptians or the learned Chaldeans? Because they furnished better *material* for moral discipline to work upon than the more civilized races of the ancient world. They lacked culture and refinement: they also lacked, happily, the corroding vices of a refined but godless civilization. They had not learned the meaning of holiness, of purity, of love and mercy. But neither had they learned to mingle right and wrong, good and evil, unconcernedly together. At the time of the events recorded in the last chapters of the book of Judges, the wars of Canaan had indeed put them in possession of a country, *their country*, the *promised land*; but war, especially a war of extermination, is a sad moral trial to the conquering race. Unrelenting war had dulled their tenderer sentiments; had cheapened human life almost to nothing in their regard. They had been God's instrument in destroying the vile heathen who had inhabited the land before them,—viler heathen than those of Egypt. It had become the easiest thing in the world to strike down a man, to thrust him

through, to spill his blood, to look, without emotion, upon his glazing eye, to see a human life go out. The idea of man as a soul, especially a soul made after the likeness of God, hardly existed at all, even in outline, in their minds. The virtues of courage and fearlessness in the presence of danger—if we can call virtues those qualities that man shares with the nobler animals—they doubtless had; but of the virtues of self-control, patience under injustice, charity, they had hardly an idea. Among religious motives that of fear was, by far, the strongest; and fear is doubtless one of the *lowest* of motives to right action. Once settled in the promised land, they became presumptuous and proud. The personal influence of Moses and of Joshua had been immense, while they lived, both for restraint and for guidance. But Moses and Joshua were dead. When a horrid stimulus to revenge for a horrid crime committed is put before the people, all the fiercer passions are set aflame. Self-will runs riot. A tribe is all cut to pieces. The remorse which sets in is also fierce and uncontrollable. To destroy a city, to kill the men and the women and the children, is the device which naturally suggests itself to such men in their frantic grief and desire to reëstablish the almost exterminated tribe. Is it not strange that men will imagine that God set his approbation on such conduct? Is it not strange, with such examples before us, that men will even now affirm that the moral character of men is growing worse as the ages pass?

God did tolerate the conduct recorded, and moreover he provided that the conduct should be recorded and preserved, in order that we might impressively learn what a long and difficult and devious path the moral discipline of a race, once fallen into sin, necessarily is, and that, seeing this, we, in our day also, laboring for the moral elevation of man, "may take heart again."

Suppose it be true that God could see in the Israelites, in the time of the Judges, but one little spark of truth,

purity, unselfish love; and that he could not, consistently with the laws of a free though finite moral nature in man, work out the problem of the elevation of our race in moral character any more rapidly than he did in the case of the Jews. Geologists tell us that the physical structure of our globe and what is on it is the result of thousands and perhaps millions of years of progressive and successive development; will it seem strange that a form of development infinitely higher than that of any and all portions of the physical world, viz., the development and growth of a free, moral, responsible being, made like God and with capacity of knowing Him, should require ages, more in number, and influences greater, more various and with wider scope and longer reach, in order to bring this moral character to perfection?

Old Testament history was not written as offering examples for imitation, rather warnings against conduct to be avoided; and still more as affording lessons in the plan and method of God's moral discipline of man, "profitable"—not as models—but "for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

If we turn from the Jewish to African races, we shall find, *near at hand*, a striking illustration of the point we are endeavoring to establish. Look at God's plan, as we see it unfolding, for the moral elevation of those races. The blacks of our own country go from one form of gross wrong, from degradation and darkness in their African homes, into another form of wrong,—deeper and more damning wrong adhering to the race that enslaves and holds them,—but through and out of this second stage they go slowly on and up into freedom and light and moral elevation and a knowledge and acceptance of saving Christian truth. Their advance seems slow, but it is perhaps as rapid now as the product of *character*, the goal of all moral discipline, renders practicable. Moral progress upward *may*, like other ascending, be so rapid as to cause dizziness, and thus "go before a fall."

But it is persistently asked, Why, if God has all power and all wisdom, is it necessary that the moral elevation of man should be so tortuous and slow? Why must a man succeed in self-conquest on the side of his lower nature, only to find the conquest of his ambition or his pride, of his imaginations or high thoughts all a thing to be yet achieved? Why must the most elevated nation yet, of human history, go through the throes and rendings, the blood and torture of four years of internecine strife, in order to secure to four millions of men the acknowledged right *not* to be treated as cattle? Why must purity and justice of governmental and judicial and municipal administration continually elude the desire and effort of the vast majority of the citizens of our Republic?

To these questions we propose some counter-questions. What is our conception of the value of the product which *all* moral discipline is working out? That product is high and broad intelligence in a sphere above what is material, coupled with *character* proved and firm, but wholly free, in all highest virtue. Do we wish God to make the process easier and consequently leave the product inferior? Would we prefer to accept materialistic ideas, and so escape the long, hard training of the *soul*? Are we willing to struggle less, and, on the battle-field of life, have our shields "vilely cast away?" As a nation are we ready to leave the arena to those whose moral principle belongs to ages three thousand years ago, and let the ages roll back upon the history of a country and a people born and nursed and trained for freedom and virtue, for truth and righteousness?

Infinite Power cannot shorten the process through which men must sweat and watch and fight for those moral ends which are the highest, for that life which is nearest the Son of God. Let us not forget to give "humble and hearty thanks" that the victory already won, and the help ever offered us by the man of Nazareth and of Calvary, who before the world began was declared Vic-

tor in the fight against all evil, may make the darkest passages of the moral progress of men toward holiness and freedom in purity and obedience to God, relieved and even radiant with the assured promise of success and victory in the end. Strictly speaking, there is no doubt that *moral* growth—growth of character—is slower, the development more difficult, than religious development. A man or a race of men may be—often has been—very religious while still in a low state of moral character. The history of Oriental races, mediæval European history, the history of the African race in the United States, *all* human history,—is *full* of impressive illustrations of this fact.

Development and progress of a single race, in one group of virtues, as is often witnessed in the case of individuals, may be rapid *and* to a high degree, or, as the phrase is, a development *per saltum*. History affords many examples of this, *e. g.*, the South Sea islanders, under Christian teaching within the last two generations. But in such cases the most subtle dangers are faced later, and then the moral elevation reached proves to be but one sided, a hill with the Palace Beautiful, but the valley of Humiliation and the valley of the Shadow of Death beyond. All such sudden but partial and untried progress in the finest elements of character adds force to the general principle that full, complete moral growth is a very rare and late product.

A character like that of Enoch is to be taken as wholly exceptional, resulting from a very exceptional exercise of divine influence upon a human soul, in a very dark age,—a record which goes far toward illustrating the real significance of the miraculous in God's moral government of men.

Follow the rule instead of too closely marking the exceptions, and we see that *moral character* is not a product resulting from the factors of infinite Power and finite being, but a product resulting from the factors of divine

influence, instruction and discipline on the one hand, and the free play and exercise of finite mind and will, struggling,—almost blindly at the first,—toward light and liberty, on the other. The process is long; the progress slow; the halts are many; the wanderings are frequent; seeming and perhaps real retrogression are not wanting; but the goal *is reached*. “The mills of the gods grind slowly,” and forever, but they *do grind their grist of moral grain*; and the value and eternal duration of the product infinitely overbalance all the expenditure of time and precious resources in the long process.

THIRD REASON for perpetuating in the Bible the revolting narratives of Old Testament history.

They give a most impressive lesson in the divine patience.

The lesson in patience is one of the latest learned, also one of the most essential to perfect character. Now look into Old Testament history and see if we may not discover, not only how wonderfully patient God has ever been with men, in their moral training, but also say, speaking after a human fashion, yet without irreverence, that human sin has been a hard trial even for the infinite divine patience. The man whom God created in his own image, for freedom, holiness and light, enslaved himself to sin and turned away into darkness, at the very dawn of his life on the earth. The sin and wickedness of men grew and spread, in intensity and in the scope of its dominion, even faster than the rapid multiplication of mankind on the earth. Yet God bore with the men of the antediluvian world for a period equal to that from the days when the old Roman empire was in its glory to this day. Here is the *entire record, the whole of the life* of a man who lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years. “Methuselah lived a hundred and eighty and seven years and begat Lamech. And Methuselah lived after he begat Lamech seven hundred and eighty and two years, and begat sons and daughters. And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty and nine years and he died.” For a moral being

who lived almost a thousand years, how pathetically sad the record. Would that we could believe in the existence *somewhere*, in God's unwritten records, of a story of a truly noble and progressive moral growth in such a life. But we cannot. We know too well that the history of the race, before the flood, was a history of earthly life grown rank in sin, till infinite patience could endure it no longer, and God purposed, and executed His purpose, to destroy the human race, all but the one righteous man, with his family, and make a new beginning. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created, from the face of the earth, both man and beast and the creeping thing and the fowls of the air, for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord."

Now witness an illustration of the divine patience. Even after the announcement of the decision to destroy the guilty human race—and who can measure the degree of revulsion from the sin of men felt by infinite holiness?—the Lord waits a hundred and twenty years before bringing over the inhabited world the destroying flood! And when we follow the record of Old Testament history down through its earlier and its later stages, we ask, but we cannot answer, the question, How *could* infinite knowledge and holiness *so bear* with persistence in rebellion and in guilt? God had the purpose and announced the purpose, from the beginning, to send a Saviour, a Redeemer to the human race. But what generations of men were born, grew old in sin, and went out of life into the retributions of the future, while, age after age, to a single race, were sent intimations, at first few and dim, and afterwards more numerous and clear, that the Saviour, the Anointed One, was on his way. We recoil from many

things in the records of the Jewish people. What should we say, what should we feel and think, if the actual life, the unwritten history of races and tribes of men, much more morally corrupt than the Jews, were spread out before our own eyes as they ever are before the eye of the Omniscient? And yet, for four thousand years, the divine compassion waited, before sending the Saviour to become one of the human race, that He might redeem and save men. Is this indifference? Is it mystery? No! it is patience. The antediluvian world could not have appreciated the fact, or the meaning of the fact, of the incarnation of the Son of God. God could not safely cast his Pearl among the low grovellers of earth an hour sooner than he did. Not only would an earlier age have rejected Jesus, but, till the time of his advent, man's moral nature had not advanced far enough—except in a few shining and exceptional examples, men not representative of their age but standing far above it—even to ensure the flow of penitential tears over the rejection of the gift of atoning love through the voluntary sacrifice of the God-man. When Jesus lived, the most enlightened men of earth's most enlightened race rejected and crucified him. But then and in the years and ages that followed, the guilt of rejecting and crucifying the Saviour could awaken and did awaken penitence. The Great Love did enkindle human love. The wonderful sacrifice begot faith: and God's purposes of mercy were unfolded to the adoring wonder of mankind. And *these* have been the formative forces, the conserving influences in human life, from that day onward.

And through all these thousands of years the divine patience has kept even pace with the divine love and wisdom, in working out the moral elevation of men. And now, in these latest generations, with all races of men so closely related and connected together as modern science and art have caused them to be—rather as God's blessed purposes of mercy have caused them to be—is it enthusi-

asm, is it not rather a sober tracing of the indications which the Almighty finger points out, when we *expect* the near future to reveal to our eyes a much more rapid realization of what divine Love has been so long patiently working out for the salvation of men? The restored human character is to be molded on that of God. And what one attribute of God is offered for human imitation more than his patience? The Apostle James fitly sets it as the very crown of character. "Perfect in patience is altogether perfect." And certainly patience coupled with knowledge; patience which has its root in love and charity; patience which grows strong with exercise, both to bear and to do; patience which makes the soul more truly humble the longer it lives, and more intensely active also; patience which steadily but surely eliminates out of the character and the life all low aims and loves—all self-seeking, and leads other men to God while aspiring towards him,—this flower and mellow fruit of character *is* like the character of God. The *element* of the divine patience woven into the moral growth and upward progress of mankind is one of the most potential elements. And there is no record accessible to us which reveals in such clear light the patience of God as the record of Old Testament history: and it is just the most revolting portions of this historic record, which most impressively show and illustrate God's patience in working out the slow process of man's moral elevation.

Let us now return to consider further the relation of our subject to

Biblical Interpretation as contradistinguished from the assumptions of Biblical Criticism.

The friendly critic has, very probably, kept his hand on the narrative we have twice passed in review, and is waiting his opportunity, as soon as we pause, to direct our eye to Judges xx.18, 23, and 26-28. The texts are largely repetitions of each other, and we will quote only the last and most emphatic. "Then all the children of Israel, and all

the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the LORD, and fasted that day until even; and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD. And the children of Israel inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother, or shall I cease? And the LORD said, Go up; for to-morrow I will deliver them into thine hand." The interpretation that the people misinterpreted the oracle, that they *thought* God bade them "go up" when he did not, is wholly inadmissible. It will not do to cut the knot of difficulty by impeaching the veracity of the inspired record. It is much better to impeach our own wisdom. Such liberty of interpretation would allow us a range as wide as that claimed by the "Higher Criticism." We must not, on the other hand, suppose that the reference of such a people to the divine oracle had any such significance as we now attach to the coming of a Christian soul before God,—all personal will and desire held in abeyance, the inner ear attent to hear and the soul all ready to obey the clear indications of the Father's will.

Israel was mad with anger against Benjamin. There was cause for anger; there was need of administering punishment. The instrument at hand for the administration of the punishment was the wild, coarse, crass, human anger of well-nigh savage tribes. So God chooses to give this anger scope. The eleven tribes went, not at God's *command*,—certainly not as regards the color and quality of the execution of the command,—but rather with his *permission*.

Go and fall, forty thousand of you, before the faces of your guilty brethren; find your own passion checked: be humbled first yourselves, and then let the proud, the obstinate, the guilty, perish at your hand. You and they are—almost—alike guilty, in my sight.¹ Not for criticism.

¹ The imperative form often expresses permission in contradistinction to command, especially in Oriental languages. In Turkish, "to let fall,"

repeat, but for interpretation, it is necessary for us to note the fact that then the Israelites were very low down in the range of God's moral discipline of men.

The narrative of Balaam in Numbers, 22d chapter, is a commentary on the passage before us, almost its counterpart in form. We *know* that God disapproved of the conduct and especially of the motives and spirit and desire of Balaam. Yet he twice bids him, *i. e.*, suffers him, to go the way he chooses. Num. xxxi.1 and 17-19 is another passage of similar difficulty of interpretation. But happily we are here brought nearer to a greater Light, even that of an interpreter of divine and unimpeachable authority; and if we will not take our Lord's own words of explanation of God's law back with us into the study of the Old Testament records, we show ourselves mere carping critics, not docile learners, not even thorough and ingenuous students of the revealed word. The Pharisees asked Jesus (Matt. xix.7.) "Why did Moses, then, command to give a writing of divorcement and to put her away?" Mark the reply. "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, *suffered* you to put away your wives." As if he had said, "You argue from God's infinite long suffering and forbearance with the low plane of the moral character of men in the ages past, that the infinite holiness and purity commanded and approved of your conduct. But any careful and honest reading of the passages you falsely interpret, would show you that they mean no more than an unwilling permission, a mere toleration of what was the best which could then be expected of the wayward childishness of the race God had taken under discipline."

Permission, not commandment, is our Lord's exegesis of such passages as those we are now passing under review. We should have some reason to be ashamed of ourselves, if, with the accumulated treasures of moral teaching of thirty-five centuries, if with the glorious instructions and "to cause to fall" are the same. "I missed my steamer" is literally "I caused my steamer to run away."

example of Jesus himself, we had not reached a higher plane of morals than the Israelites in their darkest age. And I do not see why we should not be equally ashamed of ourselves if we are either unable or unwilling to be truly fair in our efforts to interpret the meaning of the records which tell us of God's forbearance with the infantile stage of the training of men in moral character.

Examples are not wanting in every day life, of words which are, in form, commands, but which are understood and are meant to be understood, as unwilling permissions. A young man has just come into partnership in business with his father. The father has a long, rich, and wide experience. The son has hope, zeal, enthusiasm, daring. He desires to embark in a certain speculation: his father says, No. The young man is not satisfied: he persuades and entreats and assures. Again his father says, No. The son becomes morose, excited, sullen. He thinks hard thoughts of his father; he regards himself abused. The tension of the leash that holds him is too strained for safety. The father calls the son and bids him take the funds needed for his venture: he draws his checks for the amount, and so endorses the scheme which from first to last he disapproves. Why? He can afford to lose ten thousand dollars, but he cannot afford to lose his son's love and confidence, to imperil his future, nay the very safety of his soul.

The only son of his mother, and she a widow, has somehow acquired an insane desire to "go to sea." His mother's loving persuasions avail nothing to change the bent of his desire. They are but oil to feed the flame, not water to put it out. Her watchful eye sees, with indescribable pain, that her beloved *is going away from her* in spirit, and she dare no longer hold back his body. Through her tears she gives a smiling consent to her boy's desire. She seeks a place on shipboard for him: she prepares his wardrobe; she saves all her earnings for his outfit, folds him in her arms and gives him a cheerful

“good-bye,”—and then turns back to her lonely home, to that life of prayers and tears which will prove the boy's strong anchor till, after years have given him bitter experience, he comes back, a sadder and a wiser man, to the love and the wisdom that he could not understand in the hot blood and the blind conceit of his boyhood.

Is there no analogue here to the yearning love, the patient-waiting, the infinite forbearance of the Heavenly Father; the commandment which is but reluctant permission, of which the vision, clarified under the teaching of Him who taught with authority, may find so many examples in the reading of the Old Testament narrative? “He suffered their manners in the wilderness,” might be written over the record of God's moral discipline of men all along the path of their slow and tortuous progress upward in virtue and in character.

In order that we may further indicate the style of criticism that we reject, as well as commend that which we adopt, let us take another illustration. And the illustration we now propose to take is not from the historical *portion* of the Old Testament, although it refers to history. So that if our principles will apply to the interpretation of this passage, *a fortiori* they will apply to purely historical narrative.¹

In Ps. cxxxvii. 8, 9, we read: “O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be who rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.”

It is claimed that this is defective moral teaching and that we must deny inspiration to such an utterance. Now what we claim is that all the difficulties of this passage are met by a proper exposition of its purport and meaning; that we are not by it forced into any such dilemma as to approve the act of dashing out the brains of little

¹ The valuable “Boyle” lectures for 1871—2 and 3 by Archdeacon Hessey met my eye after this “study” was written.

children against the stones, *or else* deny the divine inspiration of the record.

The writer of the Psalm pronounces the divine judgment against Babylon, the enemy and oppressor of God's people. But the *language* is the pictorial, poetic language which that age used, and which alone was then intelligible. In war, peoples were exterminated, and even little children were dashed to pieces and destroyed. Does the Bible then, it is asked, set the seal of its approbation upon the ruthless destruction of little children? We do not *need to give* the negative answer to this question. It gives itself. Of course we are to deny, as God denies, approval to such conduct. "How then can the prophet-psalmist call men who do such things blessed?" This is our answer. Blessed are they who fulfil the command of God, even in the destruction of those whom He has appointed to destruction. Blessed are they, even though they live in an age of darkness and cruelty, even though their *way* of doing what God commands be coarse and revolting to the Christian conscience of men to-day. We may be sure it is, and ever was, more coarse and revolting to God. The passage before us is no part of an ethical discourse. Indeed the amount of purely moral teaching, *direct* moral teaching, any where in the Old Testament is small, compared with the light and power of the authoritative teaching of Jesus. And what moral teaching there is, is diffused and indirect. But this is no reason why we should doubt the divine inspiration of the history, or of the historical references in poetry and prophecy, or be hasty to denounce ethical error which we think we have discovered.

"What is the meaning of inspiration as related to the records, in the Bible, of the facts of the life and conduct of a barbarous people, newly taken under the discipline of a God of absolute moral perfection?" Our answer is that inspiration here means the influence or guidance which secures a *truthful* and *useful* record; a true picture

which shows no false lights, which covers no faults of good men, which damns no wicked men for crimes beyond those they actually committed. In short, inspiration means an influence which secures a result true to the fundamental laws of a moral discipline of men under divine justice and patience and mercy, a moral discipline which involves a process almost infinitely long ; a result which, if we will be honest with it, will lead us, not to love but to hate cruelty, oppression, idolatry, greed, hypocrisy, lust, and every form of sin ; and to love, and not to hate, men in whom the image of God is, however feebly and slowly, being restored and re-established.¹

The above may or may not be regarded as a satisfactory explanation of one difficult passage of the Old Testament. But this much is certain, viz., that as the Book of divine revelation has been communicated through human media, often very imperfect human media, for our moral and spiritual guidance, the only safe, the only scientific, path is the path of docile, reverent study of the media, and of what is communicated through them, not the attempt to find some outside and superior standing place from which to pass judgment on the communication itself.

The only way to aspire and to rise to the true knowledge of God and of spiritual truth, is to make God, and

¹ It would be somewhat surprising if the watchful critic should not interrupt with a reference to 1 Sam. xv.3, where the destruction of infants is expressly commanded. To such a critic we would reply, 1. That the present essay is a *study* and claims to nothing more. 2. That an adequate discussion of the very grave questions which this passage brings forward, viz., of God's sovereignty and of the intimate and vital relations of men to their posterity, is manifestly a task of greater breadth and weight than our present undertaking gives scope for. 3. That if there be cogency in what has been already presented in this essay, the difficulties with which this passage is confessedly weighted will be seen to be considerably lightened. 4. That if patient and docile study does yield the result of throwing light upon the interpretation of the dark and mysterious records of the Old Testament, may we, must we, not believe and expect that as such study is pursued, the light will increase, and that *in due time* that which we now know "in part" will be brought within the luminous circle of certain knowledge ?

not man, the centre of truth and of light. Revelation, itself, is something objective and not merely subjective, something finished and complete, not merely an inchoate and variable something, different for every independent investigator. There does exist an historical and authoritative Bible, through which the human soul may truly *aspire toward God*, instead of being left to the poor resource of subjectively recompiling the Bible and aspiring evermore, but in vain, to its more learned self. There is all the difference in the world in the result we reach, in the attempt to settle questions of biblical interpretation, whether we accept the Bible as God's book conveyed to men through human media, *or* as a book of human origin under divine influence. The point of departure will fix the goal. You may say; "We all alike accept a divine and also a human element in the Bible." Yes; but which is your *first* postulate, your *major* premise? That is the vital and decisive question.

It is not necessary that every portion of the Bible should be treated as "devotional reading" by men in every age; indeed we should be far from commending the wisdom of those among us who read, "in course," the entire Old Testament history, around their home firesides. There is a place for *all* these historical portions of the Bible, but *that* is not the place. But a man who is familiar with the social and moral condition of certain races of men to-day, might profitably turn to portions of Old Testament history which would furnish poor moral nutriment to "babes" within the circle of refined Christian homes in our own land, but which, read and explained "with great plainness of speech" to some full grown Africans, might be as "sincere milk" as those men are yet able to digest; quite on the level of their intelligence, sadly suited to the low plane of their experience.

There are doubtless other reasons, easy to be discovered, for the perpetuation in the Book of God, of records revolting to a refined sense, and the occasion of

stumbling to some: and there may be reasons in the divine mind, which we, who see all things that concern moral government and discipline "as through a glass darkly," and as yet know but "in part," still fail to discover. But are not the reasons we have presented amply sufficient for a justification of the ways of God? Are they not sufficient to secure that respectful and well-timed attention to these sad records, that the records themselves, taken with their *setting* in the history of which they form a part, justly challenge?

It was no divine guidance that led Ulphilas to leave out of the Bible that he translated for the warlike Goths the records of the wars of the Jewish people. It was narrow human judgment. Even good men, with only human reason to guide them, might temporarily avoid many an embarrassment of explanation, might be rid of many a troublesome controversy, might seem to be taking away occasion for evil thoughts, by declining to translate into the languages of Mohammedan races many a passage of Old Testament history, and some things also in the prophetic and poetical books. And the so-called Higher Criticism seems nearly ready to offer us an emasculated and expurgated Bible.

But hitherto it is the whole book of God's revelation, with no glossing, no subtractions or additions, that has, line for line, word for word, been transferred into the languages and dialects of the children of men; as Christian preachers and scholars and teachers have gone to, and made their home among the nations and the tribes of Asia and of Africa and of the isles of the sea. *So it will be*, till the "kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." So it will be, till the wonderful teachings of Jesus, and the inimitable story of his most wonderful life shall have completed, for all men, the rudiments, the rough outline of divine instruction, contained in the Old Testament narratives,—till the light and beauty, the purity and the glory, of His life,

translated into less shining and less perfect human examples, all the world over, shall attract and win men, more and more, from folly, sense, and superstition, from selfish and earthly aims; so that, as the ages pass, we shall see illustrated in human history, the attractive moral power of the Redeemer of mankind.

NOTE.—The writer would deprecate the inference, from some expressions in this "study," that he holds the "moral influence *theory*" of the atonement. He does hold this, no doubt, but he holds much more also, viz., that the atonement of Christ has a very definite relation to the demands of divine justice—that the blood of the Infinite Sacrifice has significance as related both to God and man, which Biblical utterances have made clearer and more impressive than any *theory* has done.

Any inferences touching a future life are left to the reader. We venture simply this remark, that the more patient and profound philosophical or theological study becomes, the more modest and diffident it becomes; the more profoundly is the learner impressed with the infinitude of the divine knowledge and wisdom, and the more patiently and trustfully will he wait for the revelations of eternal righteousness in the life beyond this life.