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The Importance of the Study of Hebrew.

By H. W. SHEPPARD.

THE need of the awakening of Church people, of the laity as well as the clergy, to the importance of the study of Hebrew is at the present time one of the utmost urgency.

Just as the words of the Bible are of far more importance than the words of the innumerable commentaries on the Bible, so it is far better for a man to give himself to these things, to throw himself with all his powers into the study of the Bible in the originals, than to give himself to the catch-words of a party and waste his life in disputings which cannot profit.

The danger which is imminent now to the English Church and to the English nation is one which can hardly be likened to any dangers which beset our forefathers. It is a danger of a new kind. A band of learned men, who assume (and with too much reason) that they include in their ranks whatever of weight in Biblical scholarship there is in England, has arisen. They say to clergy and laity alike: "Your Bible—you do not understand it; you are not qualified to do so. Hand it over to us. Do not be in the least alarmed if you see us altering its structure. We will put it together again, and give it back to you much improved. English scholarship will never go back from the positions occupied by us. When we finally hand you back the Book, after our treatment, you will find that almost all the old difficulties have been done away with." This is what the Higher Critics virtually say; and from their own point of view, and from the point of view of a great host of men and women whose one desire is to be "up-to-date," they make their position impregnable by refusing to accept criticism either of themselves or their methods. And in this refusal they are up to the present time to a large extent fully justified. For the bulk of the criticism and opposition offered to them has been largely wanting in the necessary knowledge of the subject-matter. This is especially the case as regards that considerable section of the

Higher Critics which is occupied with the Old Testament and its problems. The reason for this is soon stated: there are still many good Greek scholars in the Church; there are very few good Hebrew scholars. But a competent opponent of these Higher Critics must of necessity be a thorough-going Hebrew scholar.

A very common mistake made by many speakers in defence of the Bible is to condemn the methods of the Higher Critics as radically wrong. No careful student of the Hebrew can agree to this. Once it has been granted that there are corruptions in the Text, and later accretions to the contents of various books, it becomes imperative that there should be the closest scrutiny of the Text, and that every available source for knowledge of history of the words and of the men that used them should be drained to the uttermost. The appearance of the Higher Critics was a fact to be welcomed by every honest student of the Bible. Their methods, in so far as these consisted in the application of the highest faculties of scientific criticism to the study of the Hebrew words, history, literature, and people, were right. Right, too, was their refusal to let preconceived opinions or beliefs stand in the way of results of such scientific criticism. But it was with them as with so many schools of thought and parties in politics. With the first successes of the party there came into evidence the first faults in the party system. We hear much just now of the title "Higher Critics," little of any "Lower Critics." But the one title presupposes the other. And most of the leaders of the Higher Critics to-day have themselves passed through the stage of being Lower Critics. For Lower Critics of the Bible are scholars who bring all the powers of their learning and critical faculties to bear on the words and subject-matter, with a view to the reproduction of the original Text, together with an adequate translation of the same—working as servants of other scholars, not as their masters. Results of such work can be seen in the Revised Version of the English Bible, and in such commentaries as those of Lightfoot and Westcott. It is just the stage when the scholar-workman passes from the

position of servant to the position of master which marks the dividing-point between "Lower Critic" and "Higher Critic." There must be in this, as in all things, servants and masters. It is not with the name "Higher Critics" that we are at issue; it is with the doings of those to whom the name is at present exclusively (though perhaps wrongly) given, who also accept the title and fight under that banner.

What is, what should be, a Higher Critic? He is a man who from the criticism of lower things passes step by step, each step to the best of his ability made sure for those following him, to the criticism of higher things. The higher criticism includes the lower. As the biologist makes use of his microscopic work, so must the Higher Critic make use of his work at the words. And so much more as the matters involved are important, must each step be cut regularly and tested as secure. Some of the questions involved in the climb upwards for the critic whose path has been through the English, the Greek, the Hebrew languages, are these: "What *is* the Bible as a whole?" "How did God speak in the past, how does He speak now, through it to mankind?" "What were the 'divers portions' and the 'divers manners'?" "How do these correspond and fit into each other in God's scheme?" As in the lower questions, so in these higher. The same means of criticism are to hand and must be used; and these are *all* the means available—every side of every question must be weighed and examined and given its due. And the higher we get the more need of caution and thoroughness in every step, for others are following—must follow. No man liveth to himself in this world, and certainly not the Higher Critic.

Bible study may be likened to the ascent of a mountain. The path has to be found and made. Above us is an as yet inaccessible peak in the range of the everlasting mountains, those mountains which the Creator has fixed for man upon the earth, that whosoever will may climb by them nearer to the glorious heaven far above the highest of them. Far up on this "Bible mountain" men are now standing, and with loud voices

are crying to those still in the plain: "Come up to us! We have found the path!" What is the right answer? Is it, "Oh no; we can see from here, thousands of feet below, that you are altogether wrong"? Is such an answer the right one? Surely not. Yet it is the answer which is being continually given by their opponents to the call of the Higher Critics. What, then, is the right answer? "Yes, we are coming. We are taking the same public road, the beaten track, with which you yourselves began your climb. When we come to the new steps which you have cut for us, we shall go cautiously. Only, do you who are in the front and highest up go all the more cautiously. Make sure of your every step, look well to your compass, mark every feature of the mountain, and turn back if you are wrong. We shall not be surprised to meet you coming down again. We shall greet you; we cannot revile you—how should we?—for you have worked hard at the path-making. We shall greet you, and join with you in searching back upon your tracks until we find the place where the wrong direction was taken. Then, when you and we think we have found it, we will begin to climb upwards again together."

We will not at present concern ourselves with the particular forms which the faults of the party system of the Higher Critics have taken. These are outside the purpose of the present paper. But to those who think there is much in the latest teachings of the Higher Critics which itself calls for criticism and opposition, we would say: The qualification and the power to criticise come, not by intuition, but by work, and hard work too.

We cannot all be critics, much less "higher critics." But we were all in our baptism enrolled as soldiers, for one cause, in the name of one King, against one enemy—even against that terrible spirit who denies that God *so* loved the world. And for those of us who have given our life to the Lord Jesus, to be spent for Him, this is yet another point of time and circumstance when the message comes again to us: "Ye that are men now serve Him!" But the call to Bible study, especially

the call to the study of the words in the original languages, is a call of which many men admit the importance and value, but *not for themselves*. "I have not the time. I will read my Revised Version regularly; now and then I will find time to see what Bishop this or Doctor that says of a passage. Now and then I may dip into my Greek Testament; but as for the Hebrew—it is no good your talking; I have not the time." And yet, listen a moment. Over the head of Christ upon the cross was written, as the title He had taken, as the crime for which He suffered:

זֶה הוּא יֵשׁוּעַ מֶלֶךְ הַיְהוּדִים

Jesus Christ *is* King of the Jews. Upon the Hebrew words of the Jews' Bible He based His claims to be the Jews' King, our Saviour, God's Son. In Him we trust that He will point out to us in what way we can spend each his own life to the best advantage in His service. He calls for work, for whole-heartedness, for thoroughness. To him that is athirst He will give of the fountain of the water of life freely. Can we get too near to the fountain? Through the English words, through the Greek words, into the Hebrew words—there we may hope to be nearest to the mind of the Man Christ Jesus of Nazareth. Bible study should mean, for *every man who has the opportunity*, careful study of the Greek, *and* equally careful study of the Hebrew. In these perilous times, when there is a shaking of traditions old and new, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain, a word may here be of value on this great question of Bible study and its safeguards.

What is the Bible *to us*? And how is it inspired *for us*? A friend said not long ago: "You puzzle me on one point. You admit that there are many corruptions in the Text as we have it; that there are many debatable questions as regards the composition of the various books, the names and dates of their authors. You admit, further, that what stories in the Old Testament are histories of fact, and what are allegorical or poetical rhapsodies, is still a matter where criticism and controversy should be welcomed. What, then, is your view with

regard to the inspiration of the Bible?" I replied: "I base my belief in Christ on a fact in history. God raised up the Man Christ Jesus from the dead. His grave was found empty. And the Bible has this fact, a historical fact, a thing which *did happen*, as its centre. All in the Bible that was written before that event looks forward to it, leads up to it; all in the Bible that was written after that event looks back to it, leads again up to it. The Bible as a whole encircles it. The Old Testament was inspired by God, for it teaches me how the way was prepared for the revelation of the Son of God among men, which revelation was consummated at the moment of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The New Testament was inspired by God, for it teaches me how Jesus Christ was born, how He lived, how He taught and healed and sympathized, how He died and was buried, and how the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures. On that fact I, with St. Paul, base all my belief and all my hope. On that fact also I take my stand when I say that the Bible is, above all other books, standing for ever alone, breathed into by the Spirit of God, and by the power of that same Spirit breathing into the life of mankind the secret glory, even the risen life of Him "who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."

If, then, no longer from without, as a seeker, but from within, as a possessor, a man approaches the question, "How shall I study my Bible?" it is essential that he should consider what are his best means of studying it, both for his own use and also for the use of the Church of Christ and of those without. And surely, as in things of lesser import, so in this, the greatest of all studies, the special need of our times is the need of thoroughness and patient application. For these are times of much "little knowledge," of many things spread thinly over the lives of English people, times of hurry, of a desire to read the latest new thing quickly and to pass on to the next, of that objectionable word "up-to-date," with the apology, "We have no time to be thorough."

What line shall the servant of Christ take in such times? If we look back into the history of the last fifty years to see what kind of men in their lives those were who have left the most abiding mark for good on Church and State, we may learn something for ourselves of the power of thoroughness and of application to the matter next in hand. One such man was Brooke Foss Westcott, Bishop of Durham. And a message from him, given first in the pages of the *CHURCHMAN* in 1899, I wish to repeat here. It is a message which not only offers strong help to those anxious about the difficulties and dangers of "Biblical Criticism," which was the title of his paper, but which points out clearly the path to be taken by the Christian scholar in his own study of the Old Testament; and coming as it does from a prince among New Testament scholars, it carries the weight of the words of a master. Bishop Westcott wrote: "It is not possible for me to doubt that, when the Bible of the old Church has been investigated with the thoroughness and devotion which have brought the Apostolic writings into the fulness of life, it will gain in a corresponding degree both in significance and in power. It is when the books of the Bible are studied as other books, and compared with other books, that their unique character is proved beyond controversy. And two facts must never be forgotten. The Old Testament substantially as we have it was the Bible of the Lord and the Apostles; and the nation of the Jews, of whom is the Christ according to the flesh, implies a history adequate to account for its character."

We have here a clear direction, from a man competent to give it, for the making of our lines of defence against the extreme teachings of up-to-date "Higher Criticism." But more than this: we have a call to individual work as students of the Bible, and a vivid indication as to what form that work should take. How did the men work who by "thoroughness and devotion" helped to bring "the Apostolic writings into the fulness of life"? Was it not by patient, intense application to the Greek language? By such work of many workers the defences on the human side of the New Testament have

been made sufficient for all reasonable men. But what of the similar defences of the Old Testament (and to that side the attack has been diverted)? If Bishop Westcott were still with us, he would still have to speak of the making of these defences as the work of the future. "The Bible of the Lord and the Apostles" is still studied by most of our leaders and by most of the rank and file of Christians in a translation only. I would urge, then, all those who have taken service "in the Name" to give up something—even, it may be, something of work which is most in evidence—and learn Hebrew. Not once nor twice only the answer comes: "It is no good; my work is too heavy; I have no time to read at all." But is this really the case?

More now than when Bishop Westcott's message was written, and increasingly more from year to year as the restless hurry of our modern world increases, is there imperative need that the Church's teaching to the multitudes should be more and more conformed to the teaching of Jesus Himself, who taught simple trust in Our Father and quietness and peace and calm assurance. We have the Bible which He taught from—still the Hebrew Bible—waiting within each man's reach to be studied as Jesus studied it. Those who still have youth and strength, and can (if they will) find the time to study it, I appeal to them—do they believe their life can be used to the full in His name for His glory among men if they refuse to search the Scriptures as devoted scholars and as eager learners, and to study His Bible as He studied it to the uttermost within their power? To refuse to study Hebrew is to lose one great opportunity of witness and service for Him.

