



ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FAMOUS WORLD LITERATURE



EDITED BY:

RICHARD GARNETT

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SELECTIONS FROM THE WORLD'S GREAT WRITERS
ANCIENT, MEDIAEVAL, AND MODERN, WITH BIO-
GRAPHICAL AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

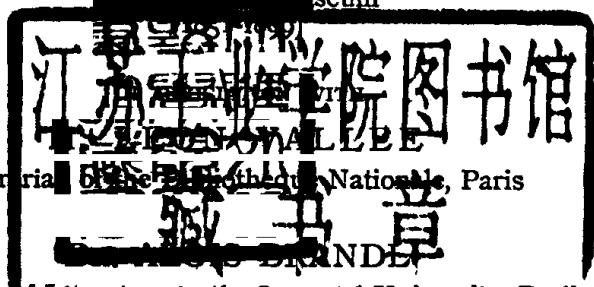
AND
CRITICAL ESSAYS

BY
MANY EMINENT WRITERS.

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~~With Nearly Five Hundred Full-page Illustrations and Plates~~

IN TWENTY VOLUMES

AKASHDEEP PUBLISHING HOUSE
INDIA

Reprinted : 1988

Published by

AKASHDEEP PUBLISHING HOUSE

HN-I/7A, New Govind Pura Extn.

Near Chander Nagar,

Delhi-110 051

Printed in India at :

EFFICIENT OFFSET PRINTERS

B-62/13, Naraina Ind. Area

Phase II N. Delhi-28 Ph : 5714051

THE LITERATURE OF RELIGIOUS CRITICISM

BY DEAN FARRAR

RELIGIOUS criticism has always been active in every age in which there has been any intellectual life at all. Religion—by which, in the broadest sense of the word, we ultimately mean the theory and the practice of duties which result from the relations between God and man—must always be a primary concern of human life. All who believe that the Creator has not remained eternally silent to the creatures of His hands, but that,

E'en in the absolutest drench of dark,
God, stooping, shows sufficient of His light
For those i' the dark to walk by,—

will form their conception of religion from what they regard as His direct revelations to the soul of man. Our view as to what God requires of us is of such infinite importance as to surpass all others. In many ages the Priests of every variety of religion have tried to suppress enquiry by authority. They have claimed to be the *sole* authorised repositories of divine influence—the sole authorised interpreters of God's will; the sole dispensers of His grace. Whenever their views—often emphasised by free resort to torture and the stake—have acquired a tyrannous dominance, the religion of the multitude has usually sunk into a mechanical fetish-worship, which, relying for salvation on outward observances, has admitted of the widest possible divorce between religion and morality. Whatever may be the perils of free enquiry they are infinitely less to be dreaded than those of a stagnant mummery, or of a subservient ignorance which rests content with the most glaring falsities. No

sacerdotal caste, no human being, no Pope of Rome or Llama of Thibet, has the remotest right to claim infallibility. The education of the human race constantly advances. I have just quoted the lines of Robert Browning; but we may adduce the equally emphatic testimony of the other foremost poet of our generation—Lord Tennyson. He wrote—

Our little systems have their day ;
They have their day, and cease to be :
They are but broken lights of thee,
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

and again—

Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.

Through the shadow of the globe we sweep into the younger day :
Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.

The light is constantly shining on amid the darkness, and “God,” says George Eliot, “shows all things in the slow history of their ripening.”

Since then, the views of every progressive age *must* differ, in many particulars, from those which prevailed in the generations which preceded it, it becomes a most pertinent enquiry for us, at the close of another century, whether the incessant and unfettered activity of the human mind in all matters of enquiry has resulted in shaking any of the fundamental conceptions in the religion of those millions—amounting to nearly one-third of the entire human race—“who profess and call themselves Christians.”

Obviously—considering that no century has been more intellectually restless than this, and in no century has education in Europe been more widely disseminated—it would require not one brief paper, but several volumes, to enter in detail into the whole subject; to estimate the religious effect produced by many epoch-making writings during an age in which “of making books there is no end”; and to define the changes of opinion caused by the discoveries of science during times in which—more than at any

other period of the world's history—"many run to and fro, and knowledge is increased." Such a book, written by a student of competent wisdom and learning, and given to the world before the beginning of the year 1900, might be a very precious boon. But to so full an enquiry this paper must only be regarded as an infinitesimal contribution.

I

First, as to the most fundamental of all enquiries—Has the progress of science, or the widening of all sources of enquiry, weakened our *sense of the existence of God*? We are, I think, justified in meeting the question with a most decided negative. Judging by all the data open to us, we may safely assert that Infidelity has *not* increased. It is much less prevalent than it seems to have been in the days of the French Revolution; nor have we in modern society any phenomenon which resembles the state of things in the eighteenth century, when we are told that "wits" and men of the world openly repudiated all religion, and when, as Bishop Butler tells us at the beginning of his "Analogy," the essential truths of Christianity were often scoffed at as though they were exploded absurdities not worth discussion. "It is come," he says, "I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of enquiry, but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious. And accordingly, they treat it as if, in the present age, *this were an agreed point among all people of discernment*; and nothing remained but to set it up as a *principal subject of mirth and ridicule*." No one would say that such broad and coarse infidelity is now at all common. It is sometimes supposed that there are many infidels among our working men. I can only say that when I was the Rector of a London Parish, and was familiar with the condition of a large number of working men of various grades, I found many who were addicted to drink, and many who rarely if ever set foot inside a church, but I cannot recall even one of them who had the smallest leaning towards infidel opinions.

Infidelity is sometimes confused with Agnosticism, but they

are wide as the poles asunder. "Agnosticism" is a word of recent birth. It has as yet hardly found its way into our dictionaries. It does not occur either in Latham's edition of Johnson's Dictionary, or in Littré's French Dictionary.¹ It was, I believe, first suggested by the late Professor Huxley in a meeting of the Metaphysical Society in 1869. But as one who had the privilege of knowing Professor Huxley for many years, and of frequently meeting him, I can say that, so far from being an infidel, he was a man of a reverent and even of a religious mind. Never in his life did he, or Darwin, or Tyndall, dream of denying the existence of God. Their scientific enquiries had no doubt deepened in their minds the sense of the uncertainties of all human belief; the conviction that the limits of truth are vaster and more vague than is allowed for in many systems; the feeling that if the curtain which hangs between us and the unseen world be but "thin as a spider's web," it is yet "dense as midnight." But a *reverent and limited* Agnosticism is by no means an unmitigated evil. Even the ancient Jewish Rabbis, whom none can accuse of a spirit of incredulity, had the apothegm "*Learn to say, I do not know.*" A sense of our human limitations may serve as a counterpoise to the easy familiarity which, as it has been said, talks of God "as though He were a man in the next room," or writes scholastic folios of minute dogmatism which have about as much stability as a pyramid build upon its apex. "Agnosticism" may be no more than a strengthened conviction that "what we know is little, what we are ignorant of is immense." In the most solemn parts of Scripture we are warned of this truth. In Exodus we are told that "the people stood afar off," and only Moses "drew near into the thick darkness, where God was." "Canst thou by searching find out God?" asks Zophar in the Book of Job.

Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?
It is as high as Heaven, what canst thou do?
Deeper than Sheol: what canst thou know?

"Verily thou art a God that hidest Thyself," says Isaiah. "How

¹ It is fully handled in Dr. Murray's New English Dictionary. An Agnostic is one who holds "that God is unknown and unknowable."

unsearchable are God's judgments," says St. Paul, "and His ways past finding out!"¹ For who hath known the mind of the Lord, and who hath been his counsellor? But the greatest and best Agnostic men of science of modern days, even while with the Psalmist they would say of God that "clouds and darkness are round about Him," would nevertheless have been the first to add that "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne." And this gradually became the mental attitude even of J. S. Mill, in spite of the effects of his early training. If he held that we are built around by an impenetrable wall of darkness, and that "*omnia exeunt in mysterium*," his later writings show that he also believed that man has a lamp in his hand, and may walk safely in the little circle of its light. It may, I think, be truly said that many great Agnostics *inclined* to believe and *did* believe, even when they were unable to say that they *knew*. They would have sympathised with the condemned criminal, who, though he had been denying the existence of God, was heard to fling himself on his knees, a moment afterwards, in an agony of prayer; and they would have been inclined to utter, though without its tone of despair, the wild cry which he uttered on the scaffold, "O God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul!" If, with the late Sir James Stephen, they might have compared life to "a mountain pass, in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist, through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive," they would have added with him—in answer to the question "What must we do?"—"Be strong and of a good courage. Act for the best; hope for the best; and take what comes."

Next to the fundamental conviction that there is a God of Love and Righteousness, who cares for the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hands, religious enquiry in our century has mainly turned on three subjects—the nature of Inspiration as regards the Holy Scriptures; the character of future Retribution; and the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

¹ See Rom. xi. 33; Job xi. 7-9; Ps. xxxvi. 6; Col. ii. 2, 3, etc.

II

As to the belief in man's *immortality and the doctrine of a future life*, little need here be said. All that study and criticism have done for us in this direction has resulted in pure gain. The all-but-universal belief in a future life is instinctive in human nature, and has never been shaken. It is a conviction which transcends disproof, and does not depend on logical demonstration. The heart of man cries aloud to God with perfect confidence.

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust ;
 Thou madest man, he knows not why ;
 He thinks he was not made to die ;
 And Thou hast made him :—Thou art just !

As to the belief in the *nature and conditions* of our future life, modern thought has inclined more and more to the view that they can only be described in symbols which cannot be crudely interpreted—that Heaven does not mean a golden city in the far-off blue, but the state of a soul cleansed from the stain of sin, and enjoying the Grace and Presence of God ; and that Hell is not a crude and glaring everlasting bonfire, where those who are the creatures of God's hand writhe in the interminable anguish of torturing flames, but the misery of alienation from all that is pure and holy, which must continue until that alienation has been removed, and God has become all in all.

III

As regards *the Scriptures*, enough books have been written in the nineteenth century alone to stock a very large library. Has the time come in which we can form a true estimate as to their general results ?

1. Unquestionably the theoretic conception of the manner in which Scripture has been given to us has undergone a wide and permanent change. The notion of what is called "Verbal Inspiration" in its narrowest sense, does not seem to have prevailed in the Early Church. The later forms of Judaism, after the days of Ezra, had indeed made a sort of fetish of the Old Testament, much

as the Mussulman makes of his Qu'ran. The Scribes had counted the number of letters which the book contained; they could tell you the middle letter of the whole volume; they could say how many verses began with this or that letter; and that there were only three verses which began with the letter S. They observed that the word *Vau* ("and") occurs fourteen times in Gen. ix. 20-25; and that in the first and last verses of the Old Testament, such and such a letter occurred exactly the same number of times. Yet even in the midst of this stereotyped fetishism, there were occasional gleams of biblical criticism. They did not place the book of Daniel among the prophets, but in the *Kethubim*, or *Hagiographa*. It was a very long time before the book of Esther was admitted into the Canon. Great doubts were felt about Ecclesiastes; the school of Shammai pronounced against it.¹ The final and secure admission of Ezekiel as one of the sacred books was only secured by the elaborate ingenuity of Rabbi Chananiah ben Chiskiyah.² It "would have been suppressed because of its contradictions to the law, but the Rabbi by the help of 300 bottles of oil prolonged his lucubrations till he succeeded in reconciling all the discrepancies." And biblical criticism took the form of "explaining away" all that was felt to be obsolete or undeniable even in the regulations of the Levitic law.

By means of the ingenious shufflings known as "*Erubhin*" or "mixtures," the school of Hillel managed to get rid of limitations as soon as they were found to be disagreeable. In the New Testament we find absolutely nothing to sanction the utterly false, meaningless, and fanatical dogma, that (as Dean Burgon expressed it) "every book, every chapter, every verse, every word—what say I?—*every letter*" of the Holy Book came direct from God! The Apostles had never been encouraged in any such doctrines by their Lord. On the contrary, He freely criticised fundamental positions of the Mosaic law. He told the Jews that Moses had given them divorce because of the hardness of their hearts, but that in the beginning it was not so; and He not only treated as a matter of

¹ *Shabbath*, f. 30. 2; *Mishnah Yadaim*, iii. 5.

Shabbath, f. 13. 2.

indifference, but completely abrogated, so far-reaching a regulation as that of "clean" and "unclean" meats—that law of *Kashar* and *Tamé* which continues valid among Jews to this day. For when He taught that it is only that which cometh from *within* which defileth a man, "this He said, making all meats clean."¹ Many of the early Christians indeed gave up, in great measure, all respect for the authority of Mosaic dispensation. So early and widely popular a book as the Epistle of Barnabas, went so far as to say that circumcision of the flesh had been enacted, not by God, but by an evil Demiurge.² In course of time something of the former Judaic notion of mechanical inspiration was reintroduced. Yet St. Augustine said even of the Evangelists that they wrote "*ut quisque meminerat vel ut cuique cordi erat*"—which is a notion widely different from that of "verbal dictation." St. Jerome was imbued with the spirit of a critic; and when his contemporaries raged against him as a "*corruptor sanctarum scripturarum*," he called them "two-footed asses" (*aselli bipedes*)! There was of course no "biblical criticism" amid the sacerdotal despotism, and during the "deep slumber of decided opinions" which prevailed in the Middle Ages. But with the revival of learning came the New Testament of Erasmus, and—heedless of the outrageous clamour excited by fearless truthfulness, he rightly omitted the spurious text about the "three heavenly witnesses" in St. John's Epistles. Luther was an even audacious critic. He attached supreme authority to his own subjective views; and unable to see the importance and glory of the Epistle of St. James, he called it "A right-down strawy Epistle, which contained no evangelic truth." Like many in the Reformed Churches, he also slighted the Book of Revelation as an insoluble enigma, and scarcely regarded it as a true part of canonical Scripture. Even in the Roman Church, R. Simon, in his *Critical History of the Old Testament*, pointed out the remarkable difference between the Jehovistic and Elohist documents in Genesis. That difference had been noticed as far back as the thirteenth century by the Jew Kalonymus, who wrote these remarkable words: "From the beginning of Genesis up to the passage of the Sabbatic rest (ii. 1-3)

¹ *Mark* vii. 19.

² *Ep. Barn.* c. 9.

only *Elohim* occurs, and not once *Jehovah*. From ii. 4, 5, we find *Jehovah-Elohim*; from v.-vi. 9, only *Jehovah*. This strange use of the names of God cannot be accidental, but gives, according to my opinion, some hidden hints which are too wonderful for me to understand." R. Simon's *Histoire Critique* was suppressed in France by the influence of Bossuet, but his hint was followed up by the physician Astruc (d. 1766), who first developed in his anonymous "Conjectures" the theory of four separate documents (A.B.C.D. and A.B.) which had been already mentioned by Simon, Le Clerc, and Fleury. In spite of the frantic screams of ignorant opposition, the labour and genius of open-minded scholars, such as Mill, Bentley, Bengel, Wetstein, and in this century of Griesbach, Lachmann, Tregelles, and Tischendorf, slowly but inevitably paved the way for the broader, yet deeply reverent views of the nature of inspiration which have been established by the greatest biblical writers of the present day, such as Westcott, Hort, Lightfoot, Driver, and Cheyne; and by hosts of German scholars, of whom it may now be said that there is not one of the smallest fame or distinction who does not believe (as did Bishop Colenso), that in the gift of inspiration there are human elements commingling with the divine.

The labours of several generations of eminent and holy scholars, who have loved Truth more than Tradition, have broken down the ignorant bigotry of mechanical and untenable hypotheses, and have shown that the facts which result from the criticism and history of each book and part of the Old Testament must be carefully considered apart from a supposed orthodoxy, which is often no better than stereotyped unprogressiveness and opinionated infallibility. *God's Orthodoxy*, it has been well said, "is the truth." Hence it is now regarded as a matter of established fact, among all serious and competent scholars, that the Pentateuch is composed of composite documents. Professor Cheyne, in a paper read before the Church Congress in 1883, did not hesitate to make the confident assertion that, if either exegesis or the church's representation of religious truth is to make any decided progress, the results of the literary analysis of the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua into

several documents must be accepted as facts; and that the Book of Deuteronomy was not known as a whole till the age of Josiah; and that some of those Levitic ordinances which are not so much as alluded to in the entire Old Testament, may not have been established till after the days of the prophet Ezekiel. There is a general acceptance among scholars of the opinion that the Books of Isaiah and Zechariah, respectively, were the works of at least *two* writers, one of whom (in each instance) wrote at a considerably later date than the other. It is a view which is becoming daily more widely accepted, that there are "Haggadistic" elements in the Books of Jonah and of Daniel, and that both books are of much later dates than those of the prophets whose name they bear. These opinions have long been regarded as indisputable by leading scholars. Defence after defence has been written of the authenticity of the Book of Daniel, both before and since the elaborate volume of Dr. Pusey; but the defenders differ from each other on the most important questions, and now even the most conservative theologians are beginning to see that the old positions are entirely untenable. Professor Stanton of Cambridge, a cautious student, yet says, in his *Hulsean Lectures* on the Jewish Messiah, that the Book of Daniel is assigned to the Maccabean era even by many orthodox critics; and that "the chief difficulty which the earlier date must have, consists in the fact that the communication of such detailed information about events in a comparatively distant future would not be according to the laws of Divine Revelation which we trace in other cases."

I have used the word "Haggadistic"; and a right appreciation of the meaning of the word is of the utmost importance.

There were among the Jews two schools of ancient commentary—the one called the *Halacha*, which consisted of minute exposition of, and inferences from, the written and oral law; the other called *Haggada*, which dealt more with moral and religious teaching, and gave play to the imagination. The latter method of instruction had practically existed in all ages, and there is nothing whatever derogatory to the sacred majesty of the Bible in the beliefs that divine truths should have been sometimes conveyed in the form of

allegory or Parable. Our Lord's parables convey the divinest lessons which God has ever communicated to man; yet they are confessedly "*Parables*"—*i.e.* they are truths conveyed by imaginary stories. The notion that some of the biblical narratives are of this Haggadistic character goes back even to the days of the Fathers. For instance, St. Gregory of Nyssa, the brother of St. Basil of Cæsarea, and a writer of learning and genius, goes so far as to apply the terms Ἰουδαϊκὴ φλυαρία, "Jewish babble" to a merely *literal* acceptance of the story of Babel; and even as far back as 1782, we find Bishop Horsley (Sermon XVI.) saying of the earliest narratives of Genesis, that they are not necessarily meant to be literally taken. "Divines of the most unimpeachable orthodoxy, says Coleridge, "and most averse to the allegorising of scripture history in general, have held without blame the allegoric explanation. And indeed no unprejudiced man can pretend to doubt that if, in any other book of Eastern origin, he met with trees of life and knowledge, or talking snakes, he would want no other proofs that it was an allegory that he was reading, and intended to be understood as such." Imaginations which are not yet wholly paralysed by the arrogant infallibility of self-satisfied nescience, will soon get to see that the grandeur and value of the uniquely noble lessons conveyed by the Book of Jonah are not in the slightest degree impaired by the supposition that they are conveyed under the form of imaginary incidents. That the book was written, in whole or in part, after the Exile is the view of Kleinert, Ewald, Bleek, Nöldeke, Schrader, Reuss, Orelli, Hitzig, Köhler, and many others. Gesenius, De Wette, Knobel, Orelli, Cheyne, Kuenen, Dean Plumptre, and most modern critics admit the legendary element. Dr. Otto Zöckler says that the book is "didactic, not historic," and it is now generally held that the idea of the sea-monster is derived from the metaphoric language in such passages as Isa. xxvii. 1; Jer. ii. 34.¹

Human language is and must be an imperfect medium for the conveyance of truth. "Language," it has been said, "is but an

¹ For further information I may refer to my little book on *The Minor Prophets* ("Men of the Bible," Nisbet).

asymptote to thought." Ages ago the wisest Rabbis said and taught that "the law speaks in the tongue of the sons of men."

There is nothing which, in the light of history and criticism, we have learnt respecting the Bible which is not involved in the principle that in inspired utterances there is still a human element. At any rate, knowledge is knowledge. The light which comes from heaven—the light which is derived from earnest and truthful study—cannot lead us astray. The grandeur of that which is uttered to us by the voice of God has not been in the smallest degree impaired by any of the certain conclusions which study has revealed. We feel none the less the thrill and splendour of Isaiah's magnificent utterances, if we are convinced that there are two Isaiahs, of whom the second may have lived a century later than the first; nor do we lose the large lessons of toleration, of pity, of the impossibility of flying from God, of God's abounding tenderness, of the shaming into fatuity of man's little hatreds, if advancing knowledge compels us to recognise that the book of Jonah is, as a whole, a Jewish Haggadah.

2. Let us turn to the New Testament. It may now be regarded as indisputable that the Epistle to the Hebrews was not written by St. Paul. No critic worth the name would any longer maintain that it is. It may also be regarded as certain that if St. Peter had any hand at all in the Second Epistle which goes by his name, yet other hands have been at work upon it. There are still unsettled problems about the Apocalypse. But on the whole the assaults of criticism on the stronghold of the New Testament have been defeated all along the line. There are arguments of overwhelming strength to prove that the thirteen Epistles which are attributed to St. Paul are the genuine expressions of his teeming intellect. The authenticity and credibility of the three Synoptists have been fiercely attacked, but have never been shaken. Book after book has been written to prove that the Fourth Gospel was not the work of the Apostle St. John; but those books have not brought conviction to the most learned and open-minded critics. If any one will read the introduction to this Gospel by Bishop Westcott in the *Speaker's Commentary*, he will see how

marvellously strong, how varied, how minute, and in many particulars how unexpected, is the mass of cogent evidence to convince us that in the Gospel we are reading the very words of the "Disciple whom Jesus loved";—and, in any case, we can say with Herder, "That little book is a still, deep sea in which the heavens, with the sun and stars, are mirrored; and if there are eternal truths—and such there are—for the human race, they are to be found in the Gospel of St. John."

It is no longer disputable that the last sixteen verses of St. Mark are a later and dubious appendix to that Gospel; that the narrative of the woman taken in adultery, in John viii. 1-11, —though bearing evidence of its own truth—was no part of the original Gospel: that the text about the three heavenly witnesses (1 John v. 7, 8) is spurious; that the verse about the angel troubling the water of the Pool of Bethesda (John v. 4) should have no place in the genuine text of the Fourth Gospel; that the Eunuch's confession is an interpolation into the text of Acts viii. 37; and that the word "fasting" has been introduced by ascetic scribes into Matt. xvii. 21, Mark ix. 29, 1 Cor. vii. 5, Acts x. 30. But although criticism has, in hundreds of instances, amended the text and elucidated the meaning of almost every page of the New Testament, it has done nothing to shake, but rather much to enhance, our conviction that throughout its treatises the witness of God standeth sure. And, as a general result, we may affirm that the Jewish race possessed an insight respecting the nature of God and His relations to men, which was a special gift to them, for the dissemination of which they were set apart; and that by this inspired mission they have rendered higher and deeper services to mankind than it gained from the æsthetic susceptibilities of Greece, or the strong imperialism of Rome. When we read their sacred books, we are listening to the Prophets of a prophetic race. Nor are these the mere assertions of believers; they have been stated quite as strongly by advanced sceptics. If Cardinal Newman said of the Bible that "its light is like the body of heaven in its clearness, its vastness like the bosom of the sea, its variety like scenes of nature," Renan said with no less strength of con-

viction, "C'est après tout le grand livre consolateur de l'Humanité." Heinrich Heine, after a day spent in the unwonted task of reading it, exclaimed with a burst of enthusiasm, "What a book! vast and wide as the world, rooted in the abysses of creation, and towering up beyond the blue secrets of heaven! Sunrise and sunset, promise and fulfilment, birth and death, the whole drama of humanity are all in this book! Its eclipse would be the return of chaos; its extinction the epitaph of history." And to quote but one more testimony, Professor Huxley, one of the most candid-minded of men, in a speech, delivered, if I remember rightly, before the London School Board, said, "I have been seriously perplexed to know how the religious feeling, which is the essential basis of conduct, can be kept up without the use of the Bible. For three centuries this book has been woven into the life of all that is best and noblest in English history. It forbids the veriest hind who never left his village to be ignorant of the existence of other countries and other civilisations, and of a great past stretching back to the farthest limits of the oldest nations of the world. By the study of what other book could children be so much humanised, and made to feel that each figure in that vast historical procession fills like themselves but a momentary interspace between the two eternities, and earns the blessings or the curses of all time according to its efforts to do good and hate evil, even as they are also earning the payment for their work?"

Let all humble and earnest believers rest assured that biblical criticism, so far as it is reverent, earnest, and well founded, may remove many errors, but cannot rob them of one precious and eternal truth. As Bishop Butler so wisely said a century ago, "the only question concerning the authority of Scripture is whether it be what it claims to be, not whether it be a book of such sort and so promulged as weak men are apt to fancy."¹ He also quotes with approval the remark which Origen deduced from analogical reasoning, that "He who believes the Scripture to have proceeded from Him who is the Author of Nature may well expect to find the same sort of difficulties in it as are found in the

¹ *Analogy*, ii. 3.