

DR. GORE'S BIBLE COMMENTARY¹

I

INCLUDING the Editors, some fifty-six writers have contributed to this bulky volume. Their object is thus stated: 'Though the historical and archaeological importance of the books is immense, it is the spiritual use of them which is their proper use, and it is principally to this spiritual use of the Bible that we intend our Commentary to minister.'

The commentary itself is, in general, brief and to the point. But the prime feature of the work lies in the various Prefaces, beginning with Dr. Gore's opening chapter on The Bible in the Church. Needless to say that in the space of a brief review we can but single out certain points for consideration, and we shall confine ourselves to the Old Testament.

First of all let us take at random some of the pronouncements formulated in these pages: 'Chronicles is very bad evidence for the truth of what happened in the reign of David, but it is excellent evidence for the opinions held in priestly circles at the beginning of the third century B.C.' (p. 19). Again, Chronicles is described by Wellhausen—and his words are endorsed in the Commentary—as 'a transparent mutilation of the original narratives as preserved for us in the Books of Samuel.' And the Commentary adds: 'He (the chronicler) gained his objective at the cost of historic truth, and Nemesis followed on his success. Certainly we do not find here the gift of inspiration at its highest,' but, 'in spite of his lack of the sense of historical

¹ *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture, including the Apocrypha*, edited by Charles Gore, Henry Leighton Goudge, and Alfred Guillaume. (S.P.C.K., 1928; pp. 1,598; cloth 16/-, buckram 25/-.)

veracity (he), must be recognised as really inspired to write ' (p. 275).

' Esther and Daniel are not properly history at all, but edifying stories on a remote basis of tradition ' (p. 187).

' Joshua does not contain an historically accurate account of the Hebrew settlement in Canaan ' (p. 191). Ch. vi (the capture of Jericho) ' describes in dramatic metaphor the ease with which the tribes under Joshua took Jericho by assault ' (p. 194). The story of the sun standing still ' is, of course, poetic imagery ' (p. 196). Lastly, ' the Hebrew historian was very prone to anachronism. That is to say, he read back into past history the developed conditions of the period in which he himself lived ' (p. 190).

These are chance statements not especially selected. But they rest on certain principles—namely, the hypotheses of the Higher Criticism which are accepted by the Editors and contributors with a simple faith which would be almost comic were it not so tragic. Here are some samples: ' For the Jews who returned to Jerusalem the threatened breach between prophet and priest, or (more truly) between the law and the cultus, had been quite healed.' This is one of the *clichés* of the critics, and since they say such a breach was threatened, presumably it must be true. Yet is there a vestige of proof of it? Here is another principle, it follows immediately upon the foregoing: ' The instruments of this reconciliation '—the quarrel, be it remembered, only exists in the critical brain—' are to be found specially in the Book of Deuteronomy and Ezekiel ' ; in other words, the critical view of Deuteronomy—namely, that it dates from the seventh century, B.C. instead of the fifteenth—is accepted as a matter of course. Has it been proved? Not in the slightest. There are arguments for it, of course, but no proofs. Enough has been said to show that the

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Commentary is based on critical principles which, while very intriguing, indeed fascinating, are merely hypotheses, they remain in the realm of the possible, they have certainly no claim to be probable, they are certainly uncertain. And this is our main quarrel with the Commentary. The Editors do not say: 'If the critical principles should prove to be true, this commentary will help the "ordinary reader" to read his Bible sanely,' which would be an intelligible position; but no, they take for granted that these ideas are true, and then have the effrontery—no milder word is possible to label their Commentary 'Catholic'² and maintain that they 'have not found the results of legitimate criticism to conflict with the Catholic faith,' regardless of the fact that the Commentary does its best to destroy the credibility of the very foundation of the Catholic faith. We have long been accustomed to misuse of the term 'Catholic,' and we cannot dilate on the subject here. But two things are certain: 'Catholic' means 'universal,' and the views here set forth are certainly not held by the Universal Church; rather has the Catholic Church repudiated them in the strongest imaginable terms—for example, in the Encyclicals *Providentissimus Deus* and *Pascendi*, as well as in the Decree *Lamentabili sane* of 1907.

² The Rev. Arnold Pinchard, writing on behalf of the English Church Union in *The Church Times* of February 1st, 1929, speaks of this 'Commentary on Catholic lines,' and regards it as the work of 'the most learned and expert Catholic scholars in this country.' He even claims that 'the great fundamental truths of the Incarnation, the Virgin Birth, the Physical Resurrection, as also of the Personality of our Lord, upon which the edifice of Catholic doctrine and worship stands based, under the scrutiny of the best modern scholarship, emerge even more clearly defined and more firmly established than ever on the basis of historic veracity.' Truly we live and learn! For we had always thought that these doctrines were themselves based on the truth of Scripture—at least St. Paul thought so, I Cor. xv, 3-4.

II.

The argument of the prefatory chapter by Dr. Gore on the Bible in the Church seems to be that since Christ condemned the Scribal interpretations of the Law, He thereby condemned the view that the Old Testament was inerrant. There seems to be in his mind the most astounding confusion between the custodians of the Old Testament and its writers. And when faced with such apparently positive statements as those about Jonas in Mt. xii, 40, and about the Davidic authorship of Ps. cix, 'Dixit Dominus,' he asserts that the former is 'a misleading gloss,' while of the Psalm he is content to say that 'to us David's authorship seems utterly improbable'; so, too, Christ's reference to Moses and the Pentateuch in Jn. v, 46-47, is ruled out by the statement that 'especially in the case of the fourth Gospel we cannot rely on having His actual words.' He concludes that according to the mind of Christ 'the Old Testament messages (were) destined in all their great anticipations to find fulfilment,' where note the ominous word 'great'; further 'that He would have us regard the Old Testament as in all respects imperfect and destined to be superseded,' which can only mean that because the Old Testament message is incomplete and the revelation only to be finally fulfilled in Christ, its record of that incomplete message is unreliable. Further, amongst other aberrations attributed to the repudiated Scribes was their notion that the Scriptures were 'infallible'; but 'the Church has often done the like, and pressed upon its members the infallibility of the book in all respects.'

When he passes to the question of the Canon of the Old Testament Dr. Gore becomes positively fantastic. What are we to make of a statement like this: 'With the Church generally the influence of St. Augustine, who on the whole, supported the larger

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popular Bible, prevailed'? What influence had St. Augustine on the Canon of the Church? Reference is generally made—though Dr. Gore does not himself formulate the error—to the Council of Hippo, A.D. 393, or three years previous to Augustine's elevation to the episcopate. Has Dr. Gore never read the letter of Innocent I to Exuperius in 401 on the subject of the Canon? Jerome, Exuperius, and Innocent were three friends. The two last were perfectly well acquainted with Jerome's speculative views about the Canon; but in his reply Innocent ignores Jerome's views and is content to state the then traditional Canon. Again, Dr. Gore surely knows that in the Donatist controversy Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, and Maccabees are perhaps more often quoted than others, at least two of the main contentions of the Donatists, the right to re-baptise and to commit suicide, were supported by passages from Ecclesiasticus and Maccabees, and though the Pelagians in Gaul pretended to reject some of Augustine's arguments on the ground that he based them on Wisdom, 'which was not in the Canon,' Augustine paid no heed to the taunt. But the Donatist schism was some eighty years old when Augustine came on the scene. In other words, 'the larger popular Bible' had been in use for a hundred years before Augustine's time, and, judging by St. Cyprian and Tertullian, the African Church had been using it as far back as 200 A.D.

Then again, the qualification 'on the whole.' What does it mean? The 'ordinary reader,' for whom this Commentary is designed, would certainly gather that Augustine was not wholly consistent in his views on the contents of the Canon. Yet such a notion would be wholly unfounded. Can Dr. Gore cite a single passage in St. Augustine where he betrays the slightest hesitation on the point? We defy him to find one. Then why make this wholly unworthy suggestion?

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Dr. Gore continues: 'The Anglican Church followed the tradition of scholars in drawing the distinction between canonical and apocryphal or ecclesiastical books, the Roman Church at Trent (1546) officially abolished it for the first time' and imposed the canon 'in the Old Latin Vulgate edition (*i.e.*, Jerome's Bible with the apocryphal books added).' One is driven to ask what Dr. Gore reads—or rather, how he reads. Was 'the Old Latin Bible' referred to in the Tridentine decree on the contents of the Canon 'Jerome's'? A common mistake, but unworthy of a scholar like Dr. Gore. Then 'for the first time'! Has he never heard of the Council of Florence—to name but one decision? And 'the scholars'? Who were they? There had always been men, even such Fathers as St. Athanasius and St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in addition to St. Jerome, who had taken for granted that there was some distinction in value between the Books only vouched for by the Alexandrians and those which were only in the Hebrew Bible. But that notion had died a natural death centuries before the Reformation. It had been revived, it is true, by such great men as St. Antoninus and Cardinal Cajetan, and their views were mentioned at Trent. But to speak of the action of the Tridentine Fathers as an 'abolishing for the first time' of such a distinction is a misuse of language. Anyone reading Dr. Gore's words would imagine that the Fathers made up their minds to relinquish a view that had hitherto had full currency in the Church, but which—presumably for want of 'scholarship'—they now repudiated as inconvenient. A further implication—at least for the uninitiated reader—is that the Reformers were scholars, and were motivated by a zeal for scholarship in the changes they perpetrated. But, of course, Dr. Gore could not have meant to suggest that.

III.

We have the authority of St. Paul for saying that God gave us the Bible to show us the way to heaven. The object, then, of a commentary on the Bible must be to make the teaching of the Bible on this one essential point clearer by showing us how to read the Bible. Of course, commentaries may be of various kinds, philological, historical, etc. But these are only handmaids in the elucidation of the unchanging truth of God; by them our minds have to be formed if we would gain the Kingdom. And while we can only see those eternal truths 'through a glass and in a dark manner,' it yet remains that it is solely by our growing conformity with those truths, and not by puny human attempts to refashion them in accordance with our ideas, that we shall read the Bible with profit.

Does this New Commentary fulfil the above requirements? In other words: does it serve to knit us closer to God? Does it, once more, help us to love God and His 'letter to us men,' as St. Augustine calls it, more? Does the Commentary leave us with a stronger conviction than ever that the Bible is true, and that in it we have the way of eternal salvation mapped out for us with no uncertain hand?

To begin with, the Commentary has done two things: it has absolutely jettisoned the traditional teaching of the Church and the Fathers on the Bible, and it has taken over boldly and made its own the main modern critical conclusions touching the origins of the individual books of the Bible. The breach thus made can only be compared with that wrought at the Reformation; indeed, it is but the inevitable sequel to that tragic happening. This has been done in the name of Reason; in fact, the Commentary may be not unfairly described as a glorification of Reason. Now in a true sense we are all rationalists; we must be so, since

we are rational beings. When, then, I am told that the Bible is 'the word of God,' and that I can learn from it the certain path to Heaven, my reason at once demands proof. That is forthcoming in the miracles wrought by God in confirmation of the claim as well as in the series of prophecies which have found their fulfilment. But what does this prove? That God made His revelation to the Biblical writers; in other words, that there has been a revelation. But it proves no more than that. It does not afford us the slightest proof that the Bible, the written record of that revelation, is a trustworthy account of it, is, in other words, inspired.

Yet therein lies the crux of the whole problem. A man believes in revelation on the authority of the Bible, its written record. But what proof has he that God was as present to those penmen as He was present to them when He spoke to them? Proof he must have if his acceptance of their message and his shaping of his life in accordance with it in the hope of an eternal reward is to be a rational act. He must surely be able to say: I have proved by my God-given reason that God revealed Himself to certain men 'for us men and our salvation'; I am also absolutely certain that the Bible or the written record of that revelation is perfectly trustworthy; therefore, I believe without questioning the doctrines taught in the Bible. The whole crux—to repeat—lies in the second proposition: whence that absolute certitude concerning the reliability of the written record? Can human reason supply it? If so, then the whole approach to belief in revealed doctrines is pure reason, and therefore fallible, with the result that on the essential doctrines of Christian faith we have no more than probabilities. Clearly, there is a gap somewhere; and equally clearly the Bible itself can never fill that gap; for nowhere does it tell us which are the books of the Bible, which, in

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other words, are the inspired books, and, therefore, the divinely credible guarantees of our beliefs.

It is this that makes the jettisoning of the Fathers and all tradition so terrible a feature of the new Commentary. For the editors and contributors have endeavoured to fill the gap created by the Reformers by appeal to literary criticism, and this—with a blindness which is well nigh incredible—not as serving to prove that the written records are reliable, but precisely that they are most unreliable. Yet the responsible editors betray at times an uneasy consciousness that literary criticism is far from filling the gap. What more pathetic than Dr. Gore's note (p. 188) *apropos* of the story of Balaam: 'It would seem fairly certain that the inspiring Spirit of God was at work in the mind of the final compiler, as really as in that of the earlier writers, whether the compiler was conscious of it or not.' And if Dr. Gore's note is pathetic, what are we to say of the section entitled 'Advice to the ordinary reader of the Historical Books'? For after a series of statements calculated to distress 'the ordinary reader,' such as that much of Genesis is 'folk-lore not transformed into history,' that Moses is an 'historical figure, but we see him with a legendary halo,' that in Judges 'we get real history, but it is fitted into a non-historical framework,' that 'the stories in Esther and Daniel are not properly history at all, but edifying stories on a remote basis of tradition,' and finally that 'substantially it must be acknowledged that the old estimate of the historical character of all the books has become impossible for reasonable men and women,' the reader not unnaturally asks what am I to do with the Bible now? Here is the answer: 'Finally, we would say the Bible has been given you, in the providence of God, as it stands In proportion as you are a student, you will want to master the historical origin and literary character of its several parts.

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But when you have done that you will go back to the Bible as it stands. You will remember that the prophetic spirit was at work in the whole literature more or less fully, in later editors as well as earlier recorders.' It is said that at a meeting of some village parochial council there was a lengthy discussion as to the advisability of erecting a street lamp at a particularly dark corner. Owing to divergencies of opinion, the meeting was adjourned. The result of the next meeting was thus entered by the Clerk: 'Decided unan. that we be as we be.'

HUGH POPE, O.P.

EVENING MUSIC IN ANOTHER ROOM

NOW they are sitting by the fire, figures three;
flames flare, and light is flickering upon their
faces;
but you and I have left our warm and drowsy places,
and gone to finger out some tinkling melody.
Your fingers move, first slow, and then more speedily.
I watch your flying hands as each one runs and races
over the keys, and a melodious path each traces,
and cracked old notes break into waves of harmony.

But time is running, and your fingers numb with cold.
You hush the riot of the echoes manifold,
and the last chord is played and into silence strays.
And back we go to find them in the firelight,
lazily blinking at our lamp, with faces white
and tired, like wakened sleepers whom a sun doth
daze.

R.H.