

Pm200
W641c
#19
1932

THE BIBLE.

ORIGIN.

THE results of all sound scholarship are welcomed by Latter-day Saints. Higher criticism is not excluded. To us, however, the most certain fact, the best authenticated and the most demonstrable, is the existence of God. This knowledge can not be laid aside in any human research, especially in Biblical investigation.

From the beginning of the human race the Lord has spoken to and inspired His children on earth. Truth has been among men from the first day. He thus speaks and inspires men to-day. At various times men have been moved upon to commit to writing the eternal truths revealed to them pertaining to man's existence. Thus have come the Holy Scriptures.

THE TEXT.

The Scriptures have been given by God and under His direction ; but in the language of man. It has always been so. In this day, the Lord speaking to Joseph Smith said, " These commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding." That is, the Lord does His work in our behalf through earthly instruments. Naturally, therefore, in outside form there may be many errors, but in inner substance the eternal truth is preserved for those who can read the language understandingly. This doctrine has been stated in unusual beauty by Moroni, one of the Prophets of the Book of Mormon. " Thou hast also made our words powerful and great even that we cannot write them ; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words ; and I fear lest the Gentiles shall mock at our words." In such manner has come the text of the Scriptures.

As these early manuscripts, before the days of printing, were copied by hand, often by unbelievers who did not respect the text, errors and changes crept in. When we believe the Bible to be the Word of God as far as it has been translated correctly, we refer to all changes, in all transcriptions and translations, back to the very original manuscripts. The Church, therefore, is in full harmony with the avowed purpose of the higher critics.

PRESERVATION.

The Scriptures contain the most precious truths of humanity. They give the most complete exposition of God's law for human conduct and destiny. Without them, the earth would be poor indeed.

It was part of the purpose under which man dwells on earth that the plan of salvation, with its included principles, should be revealed to men from the beginning. The Scriptures are as a gift from God. They not only contain the story of man's own devices ; but of the dealings of the Lord with His earthly children. Thus our Father in Heaven is better understood.

Accepting the existence of God, and the doctrine that the Gospel truths were deliberately taught to men, it can not be believed that the Lord would allow these precious gifts to be wholly lost, and thus leave the children of men at any time without a witness for Him.

Throughout the ages, therefore, amidst all the vicissitudes of time, the Holy Scriptures have been preserved, and though mutilated by careless men, they yet bear amid their human imperfections and errors, the message of God's nature and of man's relationship to deity, and of the eternal and glorious destiny of mankind.

The Scriptures have never been wholly at the mercy of man.

MAKING AND CONTENTS.

The Bible story represents long periods of time. It is made up of many books written by many hands. In these respects it is like the Book of Mormon. We do not always know with certainty the authorship of the books. It may be that through the years the authorship of collections of writings may have been credited erroneously, or in default of knowledge, to the outstanding writer of the day.

It tells the history of a people which by its own actions passed through periods of progress and degeneracy. The manner in which the Lord dealt with these people is everywhere set forth. Its teachings are universal, and may be applied to any people in any land in any time.

The Bible is not a treatise on science. Naturally, the knowledge of the day is reflected in the telling of the story; but the events recorded deal primarily with principles of conduct before the Lord and before man, which are independent of mere secular knowledge. The Bible is not read well, unless the manner and the purpose of its making are kept in mind.

LITERARY FORM.

As in all good books every literary device is used in the Bible that will drive the lesson home. It contains history, poetry and allegory. These are not always distinguishable, now that the centuries have passed away since the original writing. The ideas in the Bible, the fundamental, constant ones, are true; the vehicle is human and often confusing. Much needless discussion has come about because critics would not separate the message from its form of presentation. Latter-day Saints strive to read the Bible intelligently. Brigham Young asked the pertinent question: "Do you read the Scriptures, my brethren and sisters, as though you were writing them, a thousand, two thousand or five thousand years ago? Do you read them as though you stood in the place of the men who wrote them?" That is the only way by which the variety of the Biblical style and form may be understood; but the essential moral doctrines presented are clear without such scholarship, to every reader.

THE GOD OF THE BIBLE.

A vast amount of unnecessary quibbling has been indulged in concerning the God of the Bible. The Divine Being who was in the beginning, who is our Father, is the God throughout the Bible. But, He deals with this earth through His Son Jesus Christ, known to ancient Israel as Jehovah. The Book in its present form does not always make this distinction clear, and interminable arguments have developed concerning the divine names used in Holy Writ.

The Lord revealed Himself to Adam, to Abraham and to others. Full knowledge of the Lord was had by these ancient worthies. The written word of necessity is less complete than was the spoken word. Then there were times of comparative darkness, when the understanding of the character of the Lord waned, as in the days of the Egyptian captivity. There was also, clearly, an increasing understanding of God, His attributes and relationship to man, as the centuries rolled on. Under the law, righteous mankind increased in knowledge.

All this stands revealed on the pages of the Bible. Many students having observed the increasing understanding of the one God among Israel, have concluded that Jehovah was but an outgrowth of the man-made gods of the pagan people of the early days of Israel. It is an hypothesis of no certainty.

MIRACLES.

Higher criticism, especially by unbelievers, has much to say about the miracles recorded in the Bible. Not so much is said now, for this age is one of miracles, surpassing many of those recorded in the Scriptures. In an age of radio, it is scarcely becoming to rail at the still small voice that spoke to Elijah.

The acceptance of God as an active director of human affairs, within the limitation of man's free agency, explains miracles. The Maker of the heavens and the earth should find it simple so to utilize existing forces as to make events seem miraculous. That which we do not understand is a miracle to us. When the principles involved are explained its miraculous nature vanishes.

Yet there is no reason why the so-called miracles in the Bible should not be weighed by human intelligence. Is the recorded miracle a real event, or a literary device of teaching, as an allegory or a parable? In some cases that may not be susceptible of determination. The whole of Holy Writ, miracles included, is susceptible of interpretation. Of one thing we may remain certain, that none of the miracles of the Bible are beyond explanation. The increased knowledge of our day is making the miracles of old seem as the commonplaces of to-day.

EVENTS.

The events recorded in the Bible must be read in the same intelligent manner. Every recorded event should be read and interpreted in the light of the times when it occurred. In every age man accepts inspiration according to his understanding. The Lord commands and man obeys as he understands the request. Man's free agency is never forgotten by the Lord. Thereby hang many explanations of human conduct throughout the long history of mankind.

THE SPIRIT OF CRITICISM.

Higher criticism is not feared by Latter-day Saints. New facts with regard to the Bible are eagerly sought. Suggested inferences are respectfully considered and accepted or rejected, as they merit. Least of all do Latter-day Saints accept every new hypothesis of Biblical origin or history. We distinguish carefully between facts and inferences and claim the right with other intelligent people to determine for ourselves the weight of probability of the truth of any presented opinion.

The only worthy criticism, whether of the Bible or of any other human possession, is one that seeks for truth. There is a class of students who always seek for the errors in things. Such negative critics became menaces, for they find the errors inherent in all human works, and fail to note the truths. The positive critic searches for the truth in the book or science or man he studies; naturally, he discovers the errors as he moves along; but, out of his search comes a balanced judgment. It is by our strength, not by our weakness, that we are to be judged. We are not concerned with "the mistakes of Moses;" we need to understand his successes, if we are to know how and why Israel entered the Holy Land.

Destructive Biblical criticism leads nowhere. Constructive Biblical criticism enhances greatly the joy of reading and studying the Book of Books.

All knowledge should be applied in the study of the Bible, but the labour should be approached as a search for truth, and with prayer for truth. Thus bidden, truth always arrives.

THE BIBLE NOT MAN-MADE.

The attempt to ascribe to the Bible a purely human origin has not been successful. The multitude of men have not been convinced that the facts gathered by higher criticism are sufficient to destroy faith in the divine source of the Holy Scriptures. Note the statement (in 1928) of an eminent thinker, Dr. J. A. Fleming, F.R.S.:

"Superhuman origin and Divine authority (of the Bible) are supported by four great lines of argument which cannot be refuted. There is first the unity and uniqueness of this literature. There is no other literature of any ancient people, the production of which was spread over 100 to 1500 years, and coming from the pens of more than three-score human authors, which has the peculiar character that when put together it seems to make one book and not many, and that all the parts elucidate and explain each other.

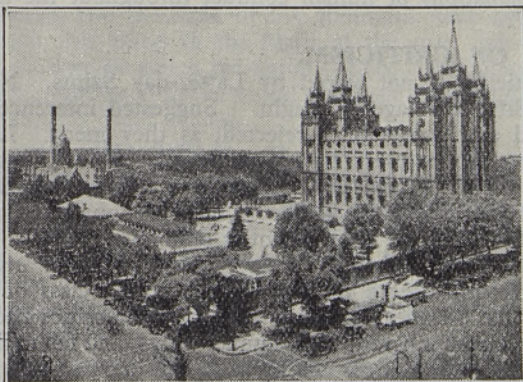
"Then, in the next place, this literature has a singular tone of authority. It does not argue nor demonstrate; it simply states or asserts.

"The third great evidence is in the predictive element of it. No efforts of the higher criticism have been able altogether to disguise the fact that there are predictions of events in it, and fulfilments of them at later dates. The history of the race, the Hebrews and Jews, with whom this literature originated, is the ever-enduring witness to the inspiration of the Scriptures.

"Then, lastly, there is a peculiar and supernatural force or power about its words. A simple verse of it seems to carry more appeal to, and food for, the human spirit than libraries full of merely human words.

"What astounding power it possesses to arrest attention, convict of sin, bring assurance of forgiveness, create hunger and thirst after righteousness, and rob death itself of its terrors.

"There is no man-made literature which possesses the smallest fragment of this power."



TEMPLE AT SALT LAKE CITY—COST £800,000

JOHN A. WIDTSON,
Centennial Series No. 19.

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,
British Mission Office, 43 Tavistock Square, London, W.C.1.