

REPLY TO CRITICS OF THE SECOND LECTURE.

BY DR. FRIEDRICH DELITZSCH.

THAT a discussion of these momentous theological or religious historical questions, if they are but treated in the right spirit, could be considered an injury or even an insult to Judaism, least of all to the modern Jewish faith, is in my opinion absolutely excluded. Dispassionate, strictly objective inquiry into the origin of the Sabbath, of the position of woman in Israel as well as in Babylonia, and of kindred questions, can only sharpen our judgment and promote the truth. In the same way we shall gradually witness in Jewish circles a unanimity regarding the worth of Old Testament monotheism, which at present is not yet attained. In contradiction to the universalism of the belief in God which several Jewish writers of open letters assume to prevail in the Old Testament (and they imagine they prove their case by quotations of Scriptural passages), the opinion of other Israelites, authorities both for their general knowledge and Biblical scholarship, has been voiced, the purport of which appears in the following private letter of January 14, 1903:

“Irrefutable is your assertion that Jewish monotheism is egotistic, particularistic, and exclusive; equally irrefutable, however, in my opinion, is the fact that this rigorously particularistic monotheism alone could preserve Judaism for thousands of years in the midst of all kinds of persecution and hostility. From the Jewish standpoint, the national theism is brilliantly justified; to give it up means to give up Judaism; and though much can be said in favor of such a surrender, there are many points that militate against it.”

The divine character of the Torah, of course, will have to be excluded from scientific discussion, at least so long as a complete neglect of the results of Pentateuch-criticism on the Jewish side can be regarded as “exact science,” and so long as reviews of *Babel and Bible* based on such a neglect are looked upon as “scientific criticism.”

A deep pain seizes me, who myself am sprung from a strictly orthodox Lutheran house, when I consider the abyss of obscurantism, confusion, halfheartedness, contradiction, let alone worse features, of the evangelical orthodoxy displayed towards the questions raised by *Babel and Bible*. From all quarters and corners the cry is raised that I have said "nothing essentially new": but, if that be so, why this extraordinary excitement?

On the one hand, a deep lamentation and bitter accusation of Assyriology comes from Aix-la-Chapelle, because the Old Testament traditions, e. g., Nebuchadnezzar's madness, are arbitrarily assumed to be borrowed from Babylonian myths; on the other hand, an "orthodox pastor" exclaims in the columns of a journal of central Germany that I am fighting windmills, because the story of Balaam's ass, of the sun standing still, of the fall of the walls of Jericho, of the fish which swallows Jonah, of Nebuchadnezzar's madness, are not contained in the historical books of the Bible. "They are accounts," he says, "whose historical trustworthiness may be contested even according to orthodox views."

Accordingly even evangelical orthodoxy set aside "revelations" which are no longer deemed in accord with the spirit of the age: will not the orthodoxy once for all condescend to an open confession, and explain unequivocally which books and narratives of "Holly Scripture" they think proper to surrender?

Professor Ernst Sellin of Vienna, one of the first and most meritorious among the positive Old Testament investigators, gladly acknowledges in his glosses on *Babel and Bible* (*Neue Freie Presse*, January 25, 1903) "the innumerable helps, elucidations, and corrections which in grammatical and lexicographical questions as well as in the field of the history of civilisation and general history Old Testament investigation owes to the decipherment of the Babylonian inscriptions. Yet, on the other, he is of opinion that if I dispose of the fact of a divine revelation in the Bible on account of the Songs of Songs and the amalgamation of tradition out of heterogeneous sources, I appear on the scene a hundred years too late. This is, to say the least, a gross exaggeration. When my dear father, Franz Delitzsch, towards the end of his life, found himself compelled by the weight of the facts of the Old Testament text criticism to make some, and indeed the smallest possible, concessions for the book of Genesis, he was persecuted, even on his deathbed (1890), by the denunciation of whole synods. And the great commotion excited by my Second Lecture serves to show convincingly enough that the circles which govern Church and

school cherish a different conviction from that of my highly-esteemed critic.

The several clergymen who have not wasted their time at the university adhere to freer views, but Church and School—especially the public schools—have remained unaffected, and this inconsistency is no longer endurable, as stated in my First Lecture and also freely granted by Harnack.

And this inconsistency produces an increasingly widening gulf. When, e. g., a theologian of no less authority writes (26th January, 1903): "You criticise a conception of Revelation that sensible Protestants no longer share; it is that of the antiquated Lutheran Dogmatists. . . . All divine revelation is, of course, affected by the human medium, and must therefore have historically developed;" he describes exactly the standpoint that I myself advocate, only I regard the conceptions of "divine revelation" as held by the Church and as a historical, i. e., human, development to be irreconcilable contradictions. Either we take the one or the other. *Tertium non datur.*

I hold the view that in the Old Testament we have to deal with a development effected or permitted by God like any other product of this world, but, for the rest, of a purely human and historical character, in which God has not intervened through a "special, supernatural revelation."

The Old Testament monotheism plainly shows itself to be such a process marked by an advance from the imperfect to the perfect, from the false to the true, here and there indeed by occasional retrogression. The modification of the original conception of revelation, deeply rooted in ancient Orientalism, by a surrender of the verbal inspiration, made by both, evangelical and Catholic theology, and even by the Church, irretrievably divests the Old Testament of its character as the "Word of God," ushering in, as it seems to me, the end of the theological and the beginning of the religio-historical treatment of the Old Testament.

The present resurrection of the Babylonio-Assyrian literature has certainly not been accomplished without God's will. It has suddenly taken its place by the side of the ancient Hebrew literature, the only one of Hither-Asia heretofore known to us, and compels to revise our conception of revelation bound up with the Old Testament. Would that we might more and more become convinced that only by a dispassionate reinvestigation of the documents we can reach our aim, and that in this controversy, neither

now nor when its solution has been approached, our piety and the communion of our hearts with God can suffer the least.

CONCLUSION.

I shall endeavor to reply only to scientific criticisms, but I fear that, if I adhere to this maxim, I shall have little opportunity, if matters continue as heretofore, to concern myself with Evangelical Orthodoxy. Their method of warfare, especially that of the Evangelical Orthodox Press, fills me with profound disgust. In the *Evangelische Kirchenzeitung*, founded by the venerable Hengstenburg, Pastor P. Wolff, of Friedensdorf, Seelow, one of its regular contributors, writes (No. 4, January 25, 1903) as follows:

"Judging from the proofs given by Delitzsch, we must expect him in his next Lecture to point out, how much lower the views of Christianity regarding marriage are than those of the Babylonians by a reference to the elopment of the Saxon Crown-Princess. No Babylonian princess ever ran away with the tutor of her children."

And again:

"Delitzsch intends to deliver another lecture on Babylon and the New Testament; perhaps he will also treat the subject 'Babel and Berlin': and therein will discover many points of contact. A small contribution I could offer myself. By the latest discoveries it has been proved that even the Prussian decorations are derived from Babylon. On a monolith preserved in the British Museum, King Sams-Rammán IV., is represented wearing upon his breast, on a ribbon round the neck, a cross, which appears to be exactly like a modern cross such as is used for orders. What a new light is shed by this last discovery upon our comprehension of the real meaning of orders! Even in Babylon the order of the Red Eagle of the fourth class was already bestowed! Since our orders are unquestionably derived from Babel, it is evident that our modern civilisation is steeped through and through with Babylonian ideas."

What a slough of mental and moral depravity in a German clergyman these words bespeak! And samples like this could be multiplied tenfold!

In contrast to this, I, as an Evangelical Christian, greet with gratitude Rev. Dr. Friedrich Jeremias of Dresden, whose discussion of my lecture (*Dresdner Journal*, February 4, 1903), though according to his standpoint he naturally rejects my position, is truly noble both in diction and substance.

A third lecture on "Babel and Bible" will be delivered as as soon as the views on these two lectures shall have become clear and settled.