

**MODERN CRITICISM; OR,  
THE NEW THEOLOGY. THE  
BATTLE OF THE CRITICS**

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Modern Criticism; Or, The New Theology. The Battle of the Critics by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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# MODERN CRITICISM;

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### THE BATTLE OF THE CRITICS.

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"Why is this religious teaching rightly called new? Not because it is new in the sense of being different from the old; for, in fact, it is only a renewing of the old—a return to primitive truth—a renovation of that which has been corrupted and deformed by age—a fresh breaking forth of the spring of living water, which had been choked up and covered over with rubbish and decaying matter."

DR. COLLIER, *Natal Sermons*, page 13.



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## MODERN CRITICISM:

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Of late years many eminent writers have so questioned the accuracy of the literal sense of Scripture, upon critical and scientific grounds, as to weaken the faith of many in its divine authority, and to lead them to view a large portion thereof as a Jewish, and therefore now a bygone, superstition.

The necessity for this criticism has been thus urged upon us. "It is certain," says Dr. Colenso, "that in this age of ours every part of the New Testament as well as the Old, will be subject to a close and searching criticism. We cannot, if we would, escape this trial of our faith; for God, our God and Father, has called us to it. As plainly as in the days of the Reformation men were called to brace up their minds for a mighty struggle between the powers of light and the powers of darkness, so surely, if we read the signs of the times, the like struggle is coming now, nay, rather, is come upon us." (Natal Sermons, p. 191.)

And what is this close and searching criticism said

to reveal? It is said to reveal that "so far from being  
" in every line and letter infallibly true, the Bible,  
" with all its divine lessons, is yet a human book, a  
" collection of ancient writings by fallible men, and  
" full of human errors, mistakes, contradictions, and  
" inconsistencies;"—that "a more hopeless, carnal,  
" and eventually sceptical position it is impossible to  
" conceive" than that "which identifies the written  
" Word with God's Revelation" of Himself to man  
(Natal Sermons, pp. 38, 56),—that "a great part of  
" the events related in the Old Testament has no  
" more apparent connection with our religion than  
" those of Greek and Roman history. . . The num-  
" bers, migrations, wars, battles, conquests, and re-  
" verses of Israel have nothing in common with the  
" teaching of Christ, with the way of salvation, with  
" the fruits of the Spirit : they belong to a totally  
" different order of subjects" (Ibid. p. 40. From  
Bp. S. David's Charge, 1863, p. 123);—"that the  
" Bible is only a miscellaneous collection of treatises  
" or tracts, each of which has or had a history of its  
" own, an authorship, occasion, date, structure, trans-  
" mission, and difficulties of its own" (Ibid. p. 55.  
From "The Bible and its Interpreters," Dr. Irons)—  
that "in many cases they cannot possibly have been  
" written by the authors whose names they bear, and  
" to whom we have supposed them to belong; that  
" most of the books of the Old Testament have  
" manifestly been retouched by the different authors;  
" that very frequently the statements of one book  
" are contradicted by another book, or even by itself.

“ At once the miserable cloud of scepticism rises up  
“ to dim the brightness of our hope, if it does not  
“ altogether darken it; and we close the book, shud-  
“ dering with a painful misgiving, and feeling that  
“ the iron of unbelief has entered into the soul.”  
(Natal Sermons, p. 66.) Certainly, if the Church be  
founded upon the Bible, Dr. Colenso does not ex-  
aggerate the anticipated changes in the theological  
world resulting from a close and searching criticism,  
when he says they will be often “ most painful and  
“ distressing ;”—“ it will seem as if the foundations  
“ of the universe were shaken, the sun and moon  
“ darkened out of heaven, the earth reeling, the  
“ stars falling.” (Natal Sermons, p. 38.) What an  
achievement of Modern Criticism, that the critical  
scholar should of his knowledge maintain that for  
the most part the Scriptures are *not* divinely in-  
spired, and that our Lord himself fell into errors,  
upon which our Modern Critics—clergy among  
the number—are better informed !

True it is, that we are told by some of them that,  
notwithstanding all appearances, there is no real  
ground for alarm ; that we have only to be patient,  
and in God’s light we shall see light. (Natal Ser-  
mons, p. 38.) But what, according to them, is the  
light we are to see ? In God’s light we are to see that  
the first eleven chapters of Genesis are purely le-  
gendary : in God’s light we are to see that the  
narrative in Exodus detailing the construction of the  
tabernacle, the minute directions for sacrifice in  
Leviticus, the records in the Book of Numbers of the



numberings and marches of the people of Israel, the wars and conflicts in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, are no part of the word of God (Ibid. p. 64); and having seen all this, and much more than this, our faith in the rest, whatever that may be, is to stand the more sure. Will it do so? Modern Criticism, as we shall have to show, may create difficulties, but cannot remove them, except by removing the document in which they occur: its office is to destroy and not to save; to shake the heavens and the earth, and, as to what then remains, to shake that also, if it could.

One critic lays down certain so-called incontrovertible principles, invalidating the Divine Authority of Scripture only to a certain extent, and excusing himself from going further. Another approves of the principles, but shows how they must necessarily be further extended. There, however, he thinks it prudent to pause. Another tells you it is impossible to pause there; that the truth must now be told; that Criticism must be bold to tell it; and so the progress of Criticism has been continuous, till there is little, if anything, left to criticise.

Not that Criticism is to be disparaged in its proper place; but it has usurped an office which does not belong to it. Criticism is only a servant: it has aimed to be master; to dictate to us what is Divine Wisdom, and what is not; what the Holy Spirit says, and what he does not; what is Divinely inspired, and what is not; as if Grammars and Dictionaries were to determine the limit of man's spiritual vision, or to lay down the law for the Spirit of Truth.

How, then, shall we meet the difficulties raised by these scientific Theologians? To answer them in detail would require volumes; and, accordingly, volumes have been written upon the subject. But we shall have to shew that, however excellent in themselves, the replies have not laid the axe to the root of the evil.

Accordingly, in these remarks, our concern is not with details, but with first principles. We shall bring before you, *first* of all, the great principles upon which Modern Criticism has been founded, and the results to which they lead: we would show you that those principles are false, and therefore that no Criticism founded upon them, however learned, can be true. Our *second* object will be to show the mutual relation between the literal and the spiritual senses of Scripture; our *third* and last, the relation of both to the Reformation of the Church.

First, then, with regard to the leading *principles* of Modern Criticism.

Our Modern Critics tell us that it is only a principle of common sense that, in order to interpret a document, we should first ascertain what the document is; and accordingly that the first thing to be done is to settle the text (Biblical Criticism, Dr. Davidson, p. 2); that, after this, we may proceed with confidence to interpretation. The consequence of giving this precedence to the study of the letter, is to give precedence to literal interpretation; and this being done, to make the literal sense of Scripture the criterion of the spiritual sense; so that if,

apart from the spiritual sense, the Critic be persuaded that the literal sense must be rejected, the spiritual sense is rejected also, as having no foundation on which to rest.

Take, for one example, the first eleven chapters of Genesis. The scientific theologian undertakes to show that the entire natural sense has no historical truth in it ; and, therefore, that to build up a spiritual sense upon a literal, is only to build up a spiritual sense upon what is untrue. "I assert," says Dr. Colenso, "without fear of contradiction, that "there are multitudes now of the more intelligent "clergy who do not believe in the historical truth "of the Noachian Deluge, as recorded in the Book "of Genesis." (Pentateuch and Book of Joshua Examined. Pref. : part 2, p. 84.) "To build the "authority of Revelation," says Dr. Davidson, "on "the *untrue* can answer no good purpose. It is "therefore incumbent on the enemies of historical "criticism, who dislike its decision regarding the "Pentateuch, to refute it on historical grounds." (Int. to Old Testament, vol i, p. 131.)

Now, untruth cannot, it is presumed, serve as a foundation for truth ; and, therefore, to build up a true spiritual sense upon an untrue literal sense is only to build up one delusion upon another ; in other words, to elicit a spiritual sense from out of a mere legend.

But in considering a revelation made from God to man, from the divine to the human, it may rationally be seen that such a document would be an accommo-