

Professor Orr and Higher Criticism

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## CRITICAL NOTES

### PROFESSOR ORR AND HIGHER CRITICISM

Professor James Orr's attack on biblical higher criticism deserves, and we believe is getting, careful consideration.<sup>1</sup> With regard to the Old Testament religion he asks, "Is it a *natural* product of the development of the human spirit, as scholars of the distinctively 'modern' way of thinking allege; or is it something more—a result of special, *supernatural* revelation to Israel, such as other nations did not possess?" (p. 4; italics ours). According to the extreme criticism which Orr assaults, the system connected with Moses in the Pentateuch does not stand at the beginning of Israel's national history, but along toward the close of its career; and even the idea of Jehovah as the creator of the world and the one, true God is a late feature, being introduced at the earliest by the eighth-century prophets. The larger part of Orr's book is devoted to showing that the radical criticism is wrong, and that the older view is right.

Dr. Orr admits, for purposes of argument (chap. iii), that the critics rightly assume two separate histories, "J" and "E," which were combined by later editors. Holding thus to the critical hypothesis, he asks what follows from it, and answers that the publication of the same cycle of stories in the same general way by two different writers proves the fixed character of the tradition at a period not later than the ninth century. He then deduces that a tradition common to both kingdoms in the ninth century must have had a settled form a long while before that period. Carrying the argument farther, Orr pushes back to the conclusion that much first-hand Mosaic material is preserved in the books dealing with the Mosaic period (p. 81).

For the purposes of argument, we are willing to grant his claim that the narratives are much older and more trustworthy than the "radicals" have supposed, and that the main outlines of the Mosaic system were present in Israel—at least in ideal fashion—a long time before the Exile. We cannot grant, however, that he has proved any definite pre-exilic *dates*. On this point he sees but two possibilities: either the critics are right, or the entire cycle of religious ideas and institutions distinctive of Israel goes back to Moses. There is no evidence that we are in such a dilemma. As we see the situation, the deadlock between adherents of the contrasting

<sup>1</sup> *The Problem of the Old Testament*, New York: Scribner, 1906.

views arises from the fact that both sides are in possession of truths which they have not succeeded in separating from the error common to both. The old theology, to which Orr adheres, confessedly makes the history of Israel proceed upon the basis of *motives* which do not control society elsewhere. In other words, from the standpoint of experience outside the biblical realm, the old view is *unreal* or *unnatural*. On the other hand, criticism has paved the way toward a scientific account of Israel; but it has not yet placed the history squarely within the category of real life. It is a fact which the radical critics do not seem to see, and which Orr certainly overlooks, that the phrase "natural development," in the critical use of it thus far, is a term *without concrete content*. In spite of its "naturalism," the higher criticism lacks *naturalness*; and in this the old and the new views are alike. The former really explains nothing; the latter does not explain enough. It is not because the higher criticism is wrong, but rather because it is incomplete, that there is room for attacks like those of Orr and Robertson.

In the view of Orr the antagonism between the worship of Jehovah and the worship of the Baalim was due to a moral character supernaturally impressed upon the former worship at the beginning of the national history by Jehovah, the God of the universe and the Redeemer of Israel. The critics, on the other hand, regard this antagonism as due primarily to the ethical perceptions of the great *prophets*. Orr, again, regards the priestly system as communicated by deity to Moses. The critics, on the other hand, contend that the priestly side of the religion is due to the *priests*. It is the task of a scientific exegesis to account for the phenomena of this religion as exhibited in the struggle and accommodation of these two elements.

Dr. Orr passes over all those facts in the text which indicate that the great Jehovah-Baal struggle did not begin till the ninth century. He absolutely ignores the fact that the life-work of every character in Israel's history before this late period is to be described in terms of *other* activity than that of struggle against the Baalim. On the basis of the biblical writings, which Orr on his own premises must accept, there was as much work for Elijah and succeeding prophets *before* the ninth century as there was in and after that time. Why, then, did the succession of men devoted heart and soul to Jehovah versus Baal have such a tardy beginning?

To this question, Dr. Orr would inevitably retort that there *were* prophets before Elijah, and that the history before the ninth century *was* marked by protest against the Baalim. But he would fail to note (as he has actually failed to note in his bulky treatise) that the inauguration of the new prophecy

in the ninth century was merely an *incident* of a larger movement which then first affects the history. In that remarkable period the names of Israelitish political heads first begin to be compounded with that of Jehovah; Baal-worshipping monarchs are driven from the thrones of both kingdoms, and replaced by sovereigns who were zealous for Jehovah; a sect known as the Rechabites is founded which supported these revolutions; and more miracles are alleged to have occurred than at any time except the Exodus. The general movement of the ninth century, thus variously displayed, is bound up with other phenomena running through the entire history, from the invasion to the Exile, which likewise find no mention between the covers of Orr's book.

In ignoring the so-called "conquest" of Canaan, Dr. Orr makes an omission that throws his whole historical treatment out of focus. In the Book of Judges the Israelites come pouring into the country districts, but are unable to take the many *walled cities* of the Canaanites. A good example of the situation is furnished by the fortified city Jerusalem. Many years after the invasion we find it still in the hands of strangers that were not of the children of Israel (Judg. 19:10-13). Later in the history, David occupies the city (II Sam., chap. 5). The older inhabitants are not exterminated, for David merely reaches an accommodation with them whereby he lives in the fort of Zion, and builds on an "addition" to the municipality (cf. Josh. 15:63). He not only established his capital here; he married the daughters of the older inhabitants (II Sam. 5:13). All the Israelitish characters in the Judges period were country folk. Saul, the predecessor of David, never had a capital city. David, also, at first, was a rustic Israelite, beginning life as a shepherd boy. But where Saul failed to establish a stable government, David succeeded in uniting country and city—the newer and the older inhabitants—in a single political body. In the time of his successor, Solomon, the rest of the strong Canaanite cities began to come into the biblical narrative as Israelitish cities, after having been absent from the history all through Judges and First and Second Samuel (I Kings 4:9-12). These are most interesting and significant facts, fundamental in importance; but Orr's book, from first to last, has no place for the history from this point of approach. David marks the transition of the government from country to city. After his time Israel was always ruled from the walled cities.

Along with this political evolution there went an economic development which brought the peasantry still further under control of the cities. The frequent wars and the inroads of desert clans reduced the condition of the peasantry as compared with the walled cities. The cities escaped, while

the rural districts were depleted. The farmer would have to go to war and neglect his work; and oftentimes the crops of the peasantry were destroyed by the enemy. In addition to this, the pressure of taxation always bears harder upon the farmer than it does upon the wealthy city class. Under these conditions it was the custom in ancient Israel for the smaller and less fortunate property holders to apply for loans on real security. They were accommodated by the wealthier classes, most of whom had their headquarters in the walled cities. Such loans are always obtained with great ease under a stable government; but the very situation that forces borrowing makes repayment a matter of difficulty. Property and financial power always tend to concentrate in the larger cities of every nation; and all the biblical evidence indicates that the rustic descendants of the Israelites who had originally acquired freehold estates by right of conquest were compelled to see a larger and larger share of the proceeds of their toil, and finally the ancestral property itself, pass gradually into the hands of the wealthy city class. The cities, indeed, were wealthy long before the Israeli-tish invasion; and they probably were not much affected by that event. On the other hand, the Israelitish clans naturally brought no considerable wealth with them from the desert.

The inevitable protest of the peasant class against the wealthy city classes came to a head in the ninth century. Its exponents were Elijah and Elisha, the first of the new prophetic line. Elijah is introduced abruptly as one of the inhabitants of Gilead (I Kings, chap. 17). This was one of the outlying and most primitive sections of Israel—"a place for cattle" (Num. 32:1). Elisha was also a man from outside the walled cities. His home was in the little Ephraimitish village of Abelmeholah (I Kings 19:16, 19). On a certain occasion the widow of one of the "sons of the prophets" came to Elisha saying, "My husband is dead; and thou knowest that he feared Jehovah; and the creditor is come to take unto him my two children to be bondmen" (II Kings 4:1). Elijah himself came forward in the name of Jehovah to rebuke with an awful curse a wealthy city man, Ahab of Samaria, who had seized land belonging to one of the smaller Israelite proprietors (I Kings, chap. 21). The facts here set in order carry the suggestion that the great struggle between Jehovism and Baalism was, *at first*, a struggle of the small country proprietors against the wealthy city classes. This is not to say that all creditors were in the walled cities and all debtors were in the country villages; it merely formulates the situation as a whole. The prophet Jeremiah, who was born in the rustic village named Anathoth, declares plainly that the Baalism of the cities has drained the life blood of the peasantry. "The Shame [i. e., *Baal*, as in 11:13] hath

devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds; their sons and their daughters" (Jer. 3:24).

The worship of Jehovah had been brought into Canaan by the tribes who took possession of the country districts; while the worship of the ancient Canaanite Baalim had been, for many centuries, mostly connected with the shrines that were located in the walled cities where the markets were held. The tendency of city temples and altars to concentrate devotion upon themselves is visible throughout the entire field of ancient civilization. At a *later* period the organized ritual of Jehovah obeyed this law. But for a long while after the invasion the worshipers of Jehovah were stronger in the country; while the worshipers of the old Canaanite Baalim were strongest in the walled cities that survived the invasion. Thus we see how the two cults were set in a kind of contrast in different sections of the same political body. As late as the time of Elijah, Jehovah was regarded more in his old character as a god of war and a patron of desert clans than as a god of the cultivated soil, as witness Elijah's trip to Horeb. Even Hosea, in the following century, labored hard to convince the people that it was Jehovah's power that blessed the soil.

The Jehovah movement was crystallized into definite form by the policy of King Ahab, who married a daughter of the king of Tyre, and built for her a chapel in Samaria to Melkart the Baal of the Tyrians (I Kings 16:31). As Professor A. B. Davidson remarks, "it was the act of Ahab . . . that brought the movement to a head, raising, if one may say so, *the whole question of the Baals*."<sup>2</sup> The aim of the Jehovah party is clearly stated in the biblical text (I Kings 19:16). The prophet Elijah was sitting on a mountain, far away from the sound of human strife, when the conviction was forced upon him that the peasantry must regain control of Israel's government, which had now for over a century been in the hands of the wealthy city class. Accordingly, Elisha, the farmer prophet, incited the army officer Jehu to exterminate the house of Ahab and seize the reins of power (II Kings, chap. 9). The usurper was upheld by the forces that lay behind the rustic prophets Elijah and Elisha. Prominent among these forces was the country sect of the Rechabites, whose leader Jehonadab now came forward publicly to support the revolution of Jehu and the prophets (II Kings 10:23; Jer. 35; I Chron. 2:55). This movement in the northern kingdom was matched by a like revolution in the southern kingdom. Here, the country people (the *am-ha'arets*, as the Hebrew text calls them) arose and supported the assassination of the queen and the priest of Baal, placing their own candidate on the throne in the person of Jehoash.

<sup>2</sup> *Old Testament Prophecy*, New York, 1903, p. 69; italics ours.

We are told that after all these things the country people rejoiced; but that the *city*,<sup>3</sup> whose population was largely descended from ancient Canaanite Baal worshipers, was merely *quiet* (II Kings 11:20).

These revolutions of course had no effect in curbing the concentration of property; and the Jehovah movement now entered a broader stage. At first Jehovah represented the demand of the peasantry for justice; while the Baalim stood for the injustice which the farmers and their prophetic spokesmen identified with the wealthy city classes. But the logic of the situation forced the movement into a stage in which Jehovah was dramatized on the side of the principle of righteousness and the Baalim on the side of iniquity in the struggle which is always going forward in all parts of human society. Although the earlier and cruder stage of the movement was necessary as a beginning, the later stage adapted it to make converts among the lower, oppressed class in the cities as well as among the farmers. Nevertheless, the Jehovah movement still found its principal support among the peasantry. Amos, the next prophet after Elisha, was also a countryman. He identified Jehovah with universal justice; but the animus of the prophet against the wealthy city class is evident. We do not know the home of Hosea, contemporary with Amos; but his book shows that he sides with the peasantry. Micah, the next prophet, was a countryman; and his book, as Professor W. R. Smith has observed, reveals clearly "the old prejudice of the country folk against the capital."<sup>3</sup> The eighth century is a chronological pivot on which the leadership of the Jehovah movement swings round from rustics to city men. The next great prophets (Isaiah, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah) did their work in Jerusalem; but they stood on the platform built by the peasantry.

In the time of the prophet last named we reach a momentous period. There had been a great reaction against the Jehovah party during the long reign of Manasseh; but at last the pendulum swung back. In the country village of Bozkath lived a Jehovah worshiper named Adaiah (II Kings 22:1). His daughter married into the royal house of David, and gave birth to a son. At the age of eight this child, Josiah, was chosen king and placed on the throne by the *am-ha'arets*, or "party of the country people," as they are called by the critical historian Kittel (II Kings 21:24). But after Josiah had been king for about ten years the wealthy urban class had rallied sufficiently to force a compromise. Up to this late period Jehovah had been worshiped at simple altars "on every high hill and under every green tree." But the country altars were now suddenly abolished; and the ritual of Jehovah was concentrated at the capital city. The Deuteronomic reforma-

<sup>3</sup> *Prophets of Israel*, New York, 1895, p. 364.

tion is to be interpreted, in view of the political origin of Josiah, as a compromise between two parties. Josiah, the figurehead of the *am-ha'arets*, remained on the throne; Jehovah was acknowledged as the sole god, in accordance with the platform of the country prophets; but the religious life of the people, which was closely involved with their civil business, was organized under control of the city class. The logic of the Deuteronomic reformation is clearly perceived when that movement is viewed in relation to the completed system of Judaism, which is in the hands of the very class to which the earlier prophets were opposed. With regard to the Deuteronomic revolution, Dr. Orr says that "investigation naturally begins with the finding of the 'book of the law' in the eighteenth year of Josiah" (p. 256). But this is precisely where it ought *not* to begin. We are glad to see that Cornill perceives the double nature of the reformation, even though he sounds no clear note on the controlling forces. "Deuteronomy," he writes, "represents a compromise and alliance between prophecy and priesthood, *which resulted, however, in benefiting the latter only.*"<sup>4</sup>

The development of this great religion enlisted, *first*, the struggles of a debt-burdened peasantry, in order to get its ethical monotheism; and it *then* made requisition upon the wealthy urban classes in order to get the organization and machinery necessary to propagate it forward in history. All the elements of the final system were clearly set in their characteristic order before the Exile; and the post-exilic history stereotyped the results. All the interests in Israelite society were necessary to the Jehovah religion as a factor in world-history—prophet and priest, rich and poor, city and country. The great spiritual good of the religion of Israel for mankind could not have been secured if there had not been an intractable social problem at the heart of the national history. This problem was not solved by the people of the Bible, nor by any other ancient nation. It has not been solved yet. But its first function is to enforce the lesson of the Josian law book, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that cometh out of the mouth of God." The higher criticism, we believe, will go forward into a distinctively sociological stage. If analysis of social conditions indicates the presence in Israel's history of powerful forces tending to moralize the idea of God, why assume that the Jehovah religion got its character in such an artificial, objective way as Dr. Orr and the editors of the Bible claim?

When a biblical writer or prophet announces that Jehovah said or did certain things, we are bound to take such an assertion, to begin with, in the same way that we take the statement of King Mesha on the Moabite stone,

<sup>4</sup> *Introduction to the Old Testament*, New York, 1907, p. 62; italics ours.

for example, where he declares that the god Chemosh did and said certain things. But Dr. Orr says that the religion of Chemosh cannot be compared with the religion of Jehovah; and that the religion of Moab has not won for itself the place in the world that the religion of Israel has. We reply that the sociology of Moab cannot be compared with the interesting and complicated sociology of Israel. The social situation of Israel, from the time of the covenant at Sinai down to the exile, differentiated it from all other history. Nevertheless, intricate as are the phenomena of Old Testament evolution, they lend themselves to scientific interpretation. The origin of the Jehovah cult makes no more difference to this principle than the origin of the Chemosh cult. Enough that the *idea* of Jehovah, like the idea of Chemosh, arose in the ancient Semitic world, and that it was a primary fact in Israel's life. This idea of a local god, together with the common theological usages and conceptions of antiquity, are all that we need to assume at the outset. We have a right to assume these without inquiring very closely where or how they came into existence. But granted these primary data in connection with the peculiar sociology of Israel; and we maintain that purified Jehovahism and the Old Testament as it now stands would inevitably result.

All this is aside from the doctrine that the universe is grounded in a personal God. Interpretation of the phenomena of the Jehovah movement in Israel is a problem for pure science. On the other hand, the doctrine of theism is a problem for philosophical theology. Dr. Orr does not seem to be able to keep the two standpoints apart. To him, "naturalism" is a bugaboo that drives God out of the biblical field. But there is ample room for faith in the working of a redemptive personal Providence through the purely "natural" process of Israel's history, as through the course of universal history. We go farther, and assert that science cannot gainsay confidence that God was working in a special way through Israel's history—perhaps no differently, but more intensely than elsewhere; and that he was using the development of the Jehovah cult to lift men's minds and hearts gradually up to himself until, in the fulness of time, the implicit Christianity of the great prophets attained complete expression in the life of the Son. But this, as just observed, is a matter apart from the problem of interpreting the phenomenal coexistences and sequences of Israel's history. Dr. Orr has written a large book on the problem of the Old Testament, in which he begins by confusing the fundamental categories of the subject. It will be useless for him to plead that it ought to be judged from its own special point of view. He has chosen to enter a broad field with a big book in which (we believe) he might profitably have said much that has been omitted, and

have left out much that has been said; and his book will, in the long run, be appraised, not on its own grounds, but from the standpoint of an interpretation whose terms are valid at once for modern science, philosophy, and theology.

We feel quite confident in predicting that Dr. Orr's book will not evoke a library of controversial volumes in defense of the extreme criticism which he attacks; for we believe that the biblical scholarship of today is about to enter new territory. We are far from expecting that what we have said here will change the opinions of the able author of *The Problem of the Old Testament*. But if we succeed in convincing him that the biblical material can be handled from a standpoint of which his book takes no account, we shall not, perhaps, have spoken in vain.

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THE SYNTAX OF I COR. 7:18, 27

The crisp interrogatives used by Paul in I Cor. 7:27, "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife"—are obviously vigorous substitutes for conditional clauses which would have been more formal and doubtless less effective. A similar form of sentence occurs in 7:18 and in James 5:3, while I Cor. 7:21 exhibits one element of the construction. Professor Blass has found parallel sentences in the practical writings of the Greek orators, and properly questions whether it is necessary to treat the first clauses as really interrogative, save perhaps in origin.<sup>1</sup>

The informal, perhaps even colloquial, character of these constructions is freshly evidenced by a third-century letter from Tebtunis recently published. This letter is an urgent message to a certain Didymus, informing him that his sister is ill and bidding him come without delay. In the course of a dozen short lines, the writer, Apion, directs Didymus to dispose of a certain turquoise tunic, in language precisely parallel in syntax to Paul's. The context will show the hasty tone of the letter.

Ἀπίων Διδύμῳ χαίρειν. πάντα  
ὑπερθέμενος ἐξαντῆς ἅμα τῷ  
λαβεῖν σε ταῦτα μου τὰ γράμματα  
γένου πρὸς ἐμὲ ἐπεὶ ἡ ἀδελφή σου  
νωθρεύεται. καὶ τὸ κιτάνιον  
αὐτῆς τὸ λευκὸν τὸ παρά σοι ἐνι-  
γοῦ ἔρχ[ό]μενος τὸ δὲ καλλαῖνον

<sup>1</sup> Blass, *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, p. 302.

<sup>2</sup> *Tebtunis Papyri*, II, No. 421.