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## Current Opinion.

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### **The Old Testament as Historically Understood.**

Bishop H. E. Ryle, D.D., in an article in the *Expository Times* for January, 1904, indicates some of the results of Old Testament study. He makes the following points with regard to the historical view of the Old Testament: (1) As to the theology of the Old Testament, a strictly historical method shows that the Old Testament does not anticipate the New; the bud is not the full flower. But the Old Testament may contain premonitions and supply illustrations of distinctive New Testament teaching. The conception of the nature of God, of sin, of holiness, of the life to come, grow in distinctness with the progress of the revelation. (2) The morality of the Old Testament is seen to present no final or perfect standard. It corresponds to the limitations of the time. But it is progressive, advancing continually toward the higher revelation of God's wisdom and love for men. (3) As regards its messianic teaching, many passages that our forefathers interpreted as predictions of the personal Messiah are now seen to possess a primary reference to contemporary personages or events, and to admit only in a secondary sense application to the expectation of the Messiah. But if less full of personal prediction, the prophets are found to testify more abundantly to the general messianic idea. It embraced the whole nation. The hope of redemption and of the kingdom of God filled the thoughts of the faithful. (4) The belief in a divine revelation through Israel is not shaken by modern research. Naturalistic explanations prove wholly inadequate to account for the phenomena. The history of Israel remains unique and unparalleled. To that history the Scriptures of the Old Testament correspond. The revelation of the divine nature and purpose comes to us through the medium of a unique record in harmony with the actual experience of national life.

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### **Inquiries Concerning the Divinity of Christ.**

Under this title Professor F. C. Porter, of Yale University, contributes to the *American Journal of Theology* for January an article of unusual importance. The effort of the article is to discover what Jesus signifies for us in the twentieth century. With great skill he indicates

what Jesus signified for the first generation of Christians. He then concludes that as for us it is the spirit of apostolic Christology, not the letter of it, that demands our assent. In the region of letter and form there is much that we cannot make our own. The spirit of it was the offering of their best thought to Christ. It was the subjection of their entire being to him. It was a victorious conquest of sin in his name. The greatness of Jesus, his secret, his divinity let us say, is most nearly disclosed in the power that he had to produce in men a faith that was not bound to his earthly presence; that was not contained in the words that he uttered and the life he lived, though it had its first expression there; that did not depend on accurate recollections of all that he had said. He was the one way to God, and yet his way was to set men upon their own way, and divinely further them in it. The freedom of the apostolic age is the wonder of it, its worship of Christ and its freedom from bondage even to him. He was apprehended as one who ruled and yet who set free. The law of his rule was a law of liberty. He set men free. That was his way; that was their experience. He set them free even from himself as a literal example, as a binding law.

Perhaps if he had written a book, he could not have liberated men from subjection to its letter. His religion might then have been a new legalism, and men might not have dared to move forward, to do new things and greater than his, to think new thoughts as the Spirit led them into the truth. It is the eternal that the student of the earthly life of Jesus is searching for, and we surely have no good reason to deny that, in spite of all difficulties, the eager and sympathetic and careful reader of the gospels may come through them into the presence of the Spirit of Christ. On the other hand, the one who looks into the apostolic age and into Christian history for the essence and principles of Christianity does not accept past formulas regarding the person and work of Christ as final and binding upon him. He is not looking for a theology, and identifying Christianity with it. By sinking ourselves in the apostolic writings we can enter into the inner reality and truth of their experience in such a way that in us, too, Christ may become an inner, spiritual power.

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#### **The Western Text and Blass's Theory.**

A searching and valuable discussion of the origin of the Western Text of the Gospels and Acts is contained in an article by W. Ernst in the last number of the *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*. The Blass hypothesis is once more shown to be unsatisfactory

as an explanation of the remarkable series of readings which make up the Western Text. Blass wrote ten years ago, and has written frequently since, to prove that Luke himself prepared two different forms of his gospel and of his Acts of the Apostles, one of which accorded in general with the Received Text of these books, the other accorded in general with what is called the Western Text of them. Mr. Ernst holds that the Western Text is one of popular growth, containing many modifications and additions which came in during the second century.

Origen in the middle of the third century complained that the current text of the New Testament books was marked by many additions and dogmatic modifications. It was probably the Western type of text about which Origen spoke. This text, which derived its form from free handling in circulation and use, was enlarged and adorned in many ways. The book of Acts particularly underwent such changes, because it was not canonized until after the gospels, and because its contents permitted of freer handling than the gospels which contained the life and words of Jesus. The speeches in Acts were less modified in transmission than the narrative portions where the careers of the apostles were described. That the peculiarities of the Western Text are of secondary origin is shown and illustrated in many passages.

But if the Western type of text is not the original one, neither is the Received Text such. Both types which have come down to us have undergone modification in transmission. The Received Text which we read in critical editions of the New Testament text, such as Westcott-Hort's and Tischendorf's eighth edition, is in fact a revision which was made in the fourth century, the effort being to eliminate from the text, as far as possible, the accretions which it had gathered during the second and third centuries. It is difficult to ascertain the principles upon which this revision was made. It is probable that the type of text chosen as the best was one which had become established in the East, and although it is not the autographic text which Luke wrote, it is certainly much more nearly original than the Western text.

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#### **The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia.**

The seven letters to the churches of Asia which are contained in the opening chapters of the book of Revelation were intended to reach a well-marked district embracing more than half the province of Asia, and the epigraphic and monumental evidence proves that this district contained the entire Asian church at the end of the first century, says

Professor Ramsay in the *Expositor* for January. The seven churches named in the letters represent groups, each city serving as the point from which the letter was to be forwarded to surrounding churches.

The seven churches are enumerated in the order in which a messenger from Patmos, where John wrote the Apocalypse, would reach them. He would land at Ephesus, then go north by the direct road to Smyrna and Pergamos. Thence he would go along the great imperial post road to Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, and from Laodicea he would return along the central route of the empire down the Mæander valley to the coast. These seven cities were the most suitable points for distributing the letters to the groups of churches in the easiest way and the shortest time by seven other messengers, who made secondary circuits from the seven representative churches.

Since no postal service was maintained by the state for the use of private individuals or trading companies, "we find ourselves obliged to admit the existence of a large organization" for the transmission of the letters by safe Christian hands. Just as all the great trading companies maintained each its own corps of letter-carriers (*tabellarii*), so the Christians must necessarily have provided for the carrying of their own letters, if they wanted to write; and this necessity must inevitably have resulted, owing to the constructive spirit of that rapidly growing body, in the formation of a letter-carrying system. The routes of the letter-carriers were fixed according to the most convenient circuits, and the provincial messengers did not visit all the cities, but only certain centers, whence a subordinate service distributed the letters or news over the several connected circuits or groups. The trading companies employed their own slaves; but it is clear that the Christians must have employed members of their own communities. The messengers went direct in each congregation to the *episkopos*, who was charged with the duty of hospitality as well as of correspondence.

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### **The Progress of Christian Theology.**

The *Hibbert Journal* for January contains an article from Rev. J. H. Beibitz, entitled "The New Point of View in Theology." The purpose of the article is to show that theology is a progressive science like other branches of human knowledge. The author says: The net results of the marvelous advance of the natural sciences has been to lead us to a new, a deeper and higher theism. And the principle which lies at

the basis of this new thought of God is simply the denial of the position that God is not directly concerned with natural causation. In other words, the higher theism consists in the strongest possible assertion of the divine immanence in nature. To put this thought again in another way: the distinction between the First Cause and secondary causes is a perfectly unreal distinction. The proof of this statement cannot now be entered into—owing to the necessary limitations of our space. But, put briefly, it depends upon a thoroughgoing analysis of causation. It may, I think, be shown that the concept of “cause” itself necessarily involves the existence of a mind which thinks and wills—a mind whose thinking and willing are in some degree analogous to our own thinking and willing. If this be so, then secondary causes are not causes at all. They are simply symbols which serve to foreshadow the uniform action of the Divine Will.

We are not, then, to seek God in the gaps of our knowledge of nature; but we are to seek and find him in nature, in a knowable and rational order. No longer is it true to say that each advance of science, by contracting the sphere of the unknown, narrows the province of religion. We refuse the suggested partition of territory which leaves the known to science, the unknown, and perchance unknowable, to religion. For it is just in nature as known, as an object of experience, and therefore rational, that we see God. Each fresh discovery of natural causes is in effect a fresh revelation of God. The old distinction between “miraculous” and “non-miraculous,” “natural” and “supernatural,” vanishes in the light of the truth that God is at work in each and every case of natural causation. It has been finely said: “The opening of a rosebud and the resurrection of Jesus Christ are facts of the same order, for both alike are revelations of the one Motive Power which is at work in all phenomena.” We no longer think of God as *outside* his universe. He is in it—in the tiniest insect which spreads its wings for a single day to catch the summer sun, in the tender blade as it pushes its way through the soil, in the mind of the child as its powers open up toward manhood’s prime, in the courses of the stars, in the endless changes of organic matter on our planet, the one force which moves all things, the one life which lives in all things, the one thinking principle active in all thinking beings.