

J. W. McGarvey "A Specimen"

A Satire on Biblical Criticism

[May 27, 1893.]



I commend to the consideration of Professor Nordell and his class of critics a specimen of criticism on an English classic, which he has probably never seen, and which may be of service to him in his future efforts at literary criticism. As the document has not yet been copyrighted, I will not disclose the name of the

book from which it is an extract. It is entitled "The Literary Analysis of an Ancient Poem." As the poem is a brief one, we shall quote it in full:

"Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard, to get her poor dog a bone. When she got there, the cupboard was bare, and so the poor dog had none."

In the uncritical ages of the past this poem was believed to be the composition of a single person--a very ancient English woman by the name of Goose. Whether we should style her Mrs. Goose, or Miss Goose, we have no means of deciding with certainty, for the stories which have come down to historical times concerning her are mostly legendary. It might be supposed that the title "mother" would settle this difficult question; but, as in certain convents of our own day, venerable spinsters are styled *Mother*, so may it have been in the days of Goose.

But, leaving this interesting question as one for further historical inquiry, we turn to the poem itself, and by applying to it the scientific process of literary analysis, we find that the document did not originate, as our fathers have supposed, from a single author, but that it is a composite structure, at least two original documents having been combined within it by a Redactor. This appears from the incongruities between the two traditions, which evidently underlie the poem. One of these traditions represents the heroine of the poem, a venerable Mrs. Hubbard, as a benevolent woman, who loved her dog, as appears from the fact that she went to the cupboard to get

him some food. If we had the whole of this story, we should doubtless find that she did this every time the dog was hungry, and as she would surely not go to the cupboard for the dog's food unless she knew there was some in the cupboard, we can easily fill out the story of her benevolence by assuming that she put something away for the dog when she ate her own meals.

Now, in direct conflict with this, the other tradition had it that she kept the dog "poor;" for he is called her "poor dog;" and, in keeping with this fact, instead of giving him meat, she gave him nothing but *bones*. Indeed, so extreme was her stinginess toward the poor dog that, according to this tradition, she actually put away the bones in the cupboard with which to mock the poor dog's hunger.

A woman could scarcely be represented more inconsistently than Mrs. Hubbard was by these two traditions; and consequently none but those who are fettered by tradition, can fail to see that the two must have originated from two different authors. For the sake of distinction, we shall style one of these authors, Goose A, and the other, Goose B. In these two forms, then, the traditions concerning this ancient owner of a dog came down from prehistoric times.

At length there arose a literary age in England, and then R put together in one the accounts written by the two geese, but failed to conceal their incongruities, so that unto this day Mother Hubbard is placed in the ridiculous light of going to the cupboard when there was nothing in it; of going there, notwithstanding her kindness to her dog, to tantalize him by getting him a mere *bone*; and, to cap the climax, of going all the way to the cupboard to get the bone when she knew very well that not a bone was there.

Some people are unscientific enough to think, that in thus analyzing the poem, we are seeking to destroy its value, but every one who has the critical faculty developed, can see that this ancient household lyric is much more precious to our souls since we have come to understand its structure; and that, contradictory as its two source documents were, it is a blessed thing that, in the providence of God, both have been preserved in such a form that critical analysis is capable of separating and restoring them.

SIMPLIFIED LOGIC OF MCGARVEY ON TRINE IMMERSION

[June 11, 1904.]

A brother who has been troubled by some trine immersionist friend, wants to know if the Greek word *baptidzo* means to "dip repeatedly." I answer that it does not, and, if it did, this would not help the doctrine of trine immersion; for in that case, instead of being limited to three dips, as he understands it, it could be as readily understood of five or six dips.

The brother also asks if this word *baptidzo* is the one used by Jesus in the commission. It is, and if it meant to dip repeatedly, then we would have Christ saying, "dipping them repeatedly into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." In Mark the commission would read, "He that believeth and is dipped repeatedly shall be saved." There is no end to the funny conceits into which men may be driven when they are trying to evade the plain teaching of the Scriptures.