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978-0-521-09764-2 - Baron Friedrich Von Hügel and the Modernist Crisis in England

Lawrence F. Barmann

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER I

## GROWTH OF AN INQUIRING SPIRIT

TO KNOW the persons and ideas that dominated a man's childhood is to know, to some extent at least, the man himself. For Friedrich von Hügel's earliest years, years which psychologists increasingly emphasize as the crucial years of a person's development, little detailed evidence remains. He never had the advantages – nor the disadvantages – of an institutional education at any period of his life. As the son of an Austrian diplomat, born in Florence while his father was Minister at the Grand Ducal Court of Tuscany, and later residing as an adolescent at the Austrian Embassy in Brussels, his education was entirely in the hands of his family and of a select, and seemingly rather eccentric, group of nurses and tutors. His father's personal influence upon him was apparently very slight, for in later life von Hügel confided to a friend that 'neither my brother nor I ever directly knew him well except as a worn man of 70–75'.<sup>1</sup>

Friedrich's early religious instruction and training was quite as haphazard and disorganized as his general intellectual formation in those first years. His father, until the last years of his life, while 'never denying the Church, stood very much aloof from religion generally'.<sup>2</sup> His mother, although a Scotch Presbyterian at the time of her marriage,

<sup>1</sup> Von Hügel to Norman Kemp Smith, 31 Dec. 1921–3 Jan. 1922, SAUL, MSS. 30420. The letters in this collection were obtained by the author from Professor Kemp Smith's literary executors, and had not yet been deposited at St Andrews when he consulted them. Consequently, they will be referred to only by the *general* manuscript classification which the University has subsequently given them, without the individual designations from 1 to 37 for each separate letter. Baron Carl von Hügel, Friedrich's father, was 56 years old when he married, on 28 June 1851, Elizabeth Farquharson, the nineteen-year-old daughter of General Francis Farquharson and niece of Sir James Outram. Friedrich was born on 5 May 1852. See, Anatole von Hügel (ed.), *Charles von Hügel, April 25, 1795–June 2, 1870*, Cambridge (privately printed), 1903, pp. xv, xvii, 6, 10, 33, and 73.

<sup>2</sup> Von Hügel to Edmund Bishop, 23 May 1906, *Dublin Review*, vol. 227, no. 461, July 1953, p. 289. All of the von Hügel letters to Edmund Bishop were with the Bishop Collection of manuscripts at Downside Abbey at the time when Mr Nigel Abercrombie was preparing his *The Life and Work of Edmund Bishop*, London, 1959. In 1953 Mr Abercrombie published the entire collection of Baron von Hügel's letters in the *Dublin Review*, vol. 227, nos. 459–62, Jan.–Oct. 1953, and sometime before the author's own researches in the Downside archives in July 1967 the original letters seem to have been misplaced or lost. Mr Abercrombie has assured the author, however, that *all* of von Hügel's letters to Bishop have been published by him in the *D.R.*, and that they have not been altered nor edited.

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later joined the Roman Catholic church when Friedrich, her eldest son, was three or four years old. In writing to the Baron in 1906 Edmund Bishop had presumed that von Hügel himself was a convert to Roman Catholicism. The latter responded:

I am a convert only in the sense of having, owing to a variety of circumstances, had to regain and to conquer for myself, morally, spiritually, and intellectually, a positive faith in the Catholic religion: from 13 to 18, I would have hesitated as to affirming a positive adherence to the Church; and I had considerable interior work to go through even after those early years.<sup>1</sup>

This statement of fact by von Hügel about his own growth as an actively believing Christian, and one who adhered to the institutional structure of Catholicism, is important. The Baron was not a man to whom religion was merely one among many factors of personality and life. It became *the* integrating factor of his own personality, and was also the dimension in which his life was most deeply lived.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, he never confused nor identified religion itself with the structures within which it became institutionalized. To be true to the most important currents of his life, the religious currents, without repudiating the ecclesial structure within which he felt this life should be channelled, was the chief struggle of his adult years. As he matured the struggle intensified until it became critical; eventually it was resolved, and without compromise of principle on the Baron's part. That there should have been such a struggle at all is largely due to the radical difference between the dominant intellectual climate in the Roman church during von Hügel's lifetime, and the climate of ideas and attitudes which became his own consistent habit of mind. To understand the struggle one must have some understanding of von Hügel's mental growth and of the ideas which became his own conscious life.

On the more particularly moral and spiritual side of von Hügel's religious development, his chief mentors were, as he himself often noted, a Dutch Dominican priest, Raymond Hocking, and a French secular priest, Henri Huvelin.<sup>3</sup> Hocking's influence came when von Hügel was

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Vaughan first met von Hügel when the latter was but twenty-one. He wrote to Lady Herbert of Lea: 'I have met von Hügel twice or three times and formed a very high estimate of his worth. He is quite unlike the ordinary run of young men, and I should think that there is in him a loftiness of view and aspiration which will very well suit Lady Mary's temperament of character. That he is not an Englishman is probably a defect which neither regeneration nor salvation will ever be able to cure or atone for...' Herbert Vaughan to Lady Herbert of Lea, 28 Oct. 1873, *Dublin Review*, vol. 219, no. 441, Oct. 1947, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> References to Hocking are less frequent than to Huvelin, thus indicating, to some extent

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eighteen years old and undergoing a moral crisis which in later life he referred to only in vague terms. Although this influence was, apparently, of great importance at the time in which it was felt, the relationship with Hocking was, nevertheless, only temporary. Huvelin's influence was of greater duration. Von Hügel first met him on 16 June 1884 in Paris,<sup>1</sup> and the relationship grew and developed, both through letters and personal visits, until the French abbé's death in the summer of 1910. Huvelin's influence was decisive; it began when von Hügel was thirty-two years old; and it lasted until his own death in 1925.<sup>2</sup> This influence was not that of ideas so much as it was the personal influence of a concrete life. Less than three years before his own death von Hügel publicly acknowledged that it was largely Huvelin's example by which he was 'helped to keep my faith and my reason through those terrible years of 1906–1914'.<sup>3</sup> It was not so much what Huvelin said which helped the Baron maintain his balance, as what he was. 'There sanctity stood before me in the flesh,' he wrote, 'and this as the genuine deepest effect and reason of the Catholic Church; I could now utilize the sufferings of these hurricane years towards growing a little less unlike this mediator of Church and Christ and God.' How little the historian, even the historian of ideas, is able to chronicle a relationship and influence of this sort is demonstrated in a recent biography of Huvelin.<sup>4</sup>

On the more strictly intellectual side of von Hügel's interior growth, notable early influence was exerted by two of the most colourful figures of the Oxford Movement of a previous generation. In 1873, the year of his

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at least, the relative influence of the two men. One of the most splendid expressions of what Hocking had meant to the Baron's early religious development is found in *Letters from Baron Friedrich von Hügel To a Niece*, edited by Gwendolen Greene, London, 1965, p. xxiv. Huvelin is mentioned in the same passage, and also more impressively in the Baron's *Essays and Addresses on the Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd series, London, 1963, pp. 96 and 242; *Eternal Life*, Edinburgh, 1948, pp. 374–7; and in the Baron's Preface to the Second Edition of his *Mystical Element of Religion As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends*, vol. 1, London, 1961, p. vii.

<sup>1</sup> *Diaries*, 16 June 1884. The Baron's manuscript *Diaries*, forty-three volumes, covering the years 1877–9, 1884–1900, 1902–24, are in the author's possession. They will be referred to in the notes merely as *Diaries*, followed by the entrance date under which the material referred to can be found. In his *Life of Baron von Hügel*, London, 1951, p. 46, Michael de la Bedoyère mistakenly gives the date for this meeting as 16 May 1884, and Huvelin's biographer has merely copied de la Bedoyère's mistake (M. T. Louis-Lefebvre, *Abbé Huvelin, Apostle of Paris*, translated by the Earl of Wicklow, Dublin, 1967, p. 147).

<sup>2</sup> Even in his old age von Hügel felt that the advice he himself had heard from Huvelin years before would be of value for his intellectual friends of whatever religion. See, von Hügel to Kemp Smith, 1 July and 13–18 Nov. 1919, SAUL, MSS. 30420.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich von Hügel, 'Louis Duchesne', *The Times Literary Supplement*, no. 1,062, 25 May 1922, p. 342.

<sup>4</sup> M. T. Louis-Lefebvre, *Abbé Huvelin*, pp. 145–58.

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marriage to Lady Mary Catherine Herbert, at the age of twenty-one, von Hügel first came into contact with William George Ward – the ‘Ideal’ Ward of Oxford days. During the remaining nine years of Ward’s life, he and von Hügel were now and again engaged in philosophical and theological discussion, and especially so after they became neighbours in Hampstead and took to walking on the Heath together. The influence of the older man upon the younger was, as far as positive ideas were concerned, largely negative; but his influence as an intellectual catalyst was notable.<sup>1</sup> Von Hügel himself speaks of Ward having drawn him out and trained him ‘as to Theism and its proofs, grace and freewill, the nature and extent of Church authority, and this with a zest and a vigour, with an informality and personal unpretentiousness, with a genial, breezy defiance of all hesitation and uncertainty on any subject which was allowed a lodgement in his mind, such as I have never met with either before or since’.<sup>2</sup> He learned from Ward’s openness in matters purely philosophical where no dogmatic question was involved; he learned from his standard of moral aims and ideals ‘to find, in spite of many obstacles and prejudices, in the highest realizations of the Catholic spirit the deepest responses to all the noblest cravings of the human heart’; and he learned ‘much indirectly’ in matters of history

<sup>1</sup> Von Hügel himself has written an evaluation of this influence in Wilfrid Ward’s *William George Ward and the Catholic Revival*, London, 1893, pp. 365–75. Writing to Wilfrid Ward from Paris in 1899, and telling Ward that he was sending him ‘a copy of Armstrong’s “God and the Soul”’, von Hügel continued: ‘... I really send it because of its frequent most grateful mention of your Father, and its large indebtedness to him. Nothing can give one greater pleasure and encouragement than thus to see how persistent and fruitful is the action of rare devotedness, such as that of your Father, to whom I too owe so much.’ Von Hügel, to Ward, 30 Jan. 1899, WFP, vH MSS. Wilfrid Ward’s daughter, Mrs Maisie Ward Sheed, loaned the author her father’s entire collection of more than 200 manuscript letters and cards from Baron von Hügel, covering the years from December 1882 till April 1916 (i.e. from the year of W. G. Ward’s death till the year of Wilfrid’s own death). Wilfrid Ward (1856–1916) became the most prominent of William George Ward’s sons, and at the age of twenty-eight first came to public notice as a controversialist in the area of religious philosophy with his book on *The Wish To Believe*. Although to the end of his life Wilfrid Ward was concerned with and wrote about philosophico-theological problems, his greatest literary achievements were in the field of biography. His lives of W. G. Ward, of Cardinal Wiseman, and especially of Cardinal Newman, remain classical models of biographical art. With Arthur James Balfour and others Ward was a founder of the Synthetic Society in 1896, and from 1906 until shortly before his death he was editor of the *Dublin Review*. His relationship with von Hügel was at its warmest in the 1890s. As a moderate liberal, concerned to help achieve a synthesis between faith and contemporary learning and culture, he felt that some of von Hügel’s special friends, men like Loisy and Tyrrell, were so excessive in their intellectual conclusions and demands as to compromise such a synthesis. Because of their different evaluations of and commitments to these men, Ward and von Hügel drifted apart, though they never fully ceased to be friends nor to respect one another.

<sup>2</sup> W. Ward, *W. G. Ward and the Catholic Revival*, p. 366.

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and church authority.<sup>1</sup> While unable to accept Ward's own conclusions and attitudes and spirit on these latter topics, von Hügel was helped by the older man's conversations to see more clearly where some of the real problems in these areas lay.

But the man who first helped on von Hügel's intellectual growth in a directly positive way was John Henry Newman. And if in later years the Baron was to criticize some of the Cardinal's positions and to go beyond these,<sup>2</sup> he was largely able to do so because he had so thoroughly grasped and grown through contact with Newman's ideas and cast of mind. Newman's influence on the Baron began through his books while von Hügel was still a very young man. At the age of seventeen and a half he first read one of Newman's books. It was *Loss and Gain*, and of that work he has remarked that it was the first book which made him 'realize the intellectual might and grandeur of the Catholic position'.<sup>3</sup> In the years immediately following his discovery of *Loss and Gain*, von Hügel's intellectual debt to Newman continued to increase very rapidly. In December 1874 he wrote what seemed to be his first letter to Newman. The main business of the letter had to do with a proposed English translation of Bishop Fessler's moderate explanation of the Vatican Decrees on papal infallibility. After treating of this matter, von Hügel wrote: 'I ought perhaps to stop here by rights, but I can't keep myself from at last coming out with one of the many things I hoped some day to be able to tell you.' And he continued:

It is how deeply, profoundly indebted I am to you, for all you have been to me by means of your books. The reading of 'Loss and Gain', 'The Apologia', 'Anglican Difficulties' and 'The Grammar of Assent' has, at different times and in different ways formed distinct epochs in my young intellectual and

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 369.

<sup>2</sup> One of the most significant criticisms which von Hügel ever made of a position taken by Newman had to do with public criticism of Vatican policy. In September 1911 Wilfrid Ward sent von Hügel for the purpose of criticism the manuscript Introduction to his forthcoming biography of Newman. Besides criticizing Ward's attitude expressed in the Introduction towards the late George Tyrrell [Ward removed the offending reference in the published Introduction, (see, von Hügel to Ward, 23 Nov. 1911, WFP, vH MSS.)], the Baron also made the following remark: 'I cannot but feel, more strongly than formerly and doubtless quite finally, one, to my mind now grave, peculiarity and defect of the Cardinal's temper of mind and position. His, apparently absolute, determination never to allow – at least to *allow others* – any public protestation, any act or declaration contrary to current central Roman policy, cannot, simply, be pressed, or imposed as normative upon us all. For, taken thus, it would stamp *Our Lord* Himself, as a deplorable rebel; would condemn *St. Paul* at Antioch as intolerable; and censure many a great saint of God since then. And certainly this way of taking things can hardly be said to have done much good or to have averted much harm.' Von Hügel to Ward, 2 Oct. 1911, WFP, vH MSS.

<sup>3</sup> Von Hügel to H. I. D. Ryder, 18 Aug. 1890, BOA, VC 20.

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religious life. Such intellectual discipline as I have had, I owe it to your books. They have I hope, made up to me, at least somewhat, for the absence in my youthful years of any systematic training, any sympathetic and reliable teacher. I have no doubt I might have profited by them even more, nor have I any doubt that mine is but one out of hundreds of similar cases, and yet I hope to have won from you a permanent possession, and gratitude will out at last, anyhow.<sup>1</sup>

The Baron concluded his letter by telling Newman 'how eagerly, even feverishly', he looked forward to the latter's response to Mr Gladstone's pamphlet on 'The Vatican Decrees in Their Bearing on Civil Allegiance'. Von Hügel was certain, he told Newman, that this new publication from the aging Oratorian's pen 'like your other books, will be to me a fresh starting point, intellectually, and an additional link in the chain of the many helps and enlightenments that binds me to you'. In June of 1876 von Hügel and his wife spent a week in Birmingham, during which time the Baron interviewed Newman on several occasions.<sup>2</sup> The notes which the Baron took on these occasions indicate that Newman was quizzed, primarily, for his ideas on the problem of human certainty about God, the vicarious nature of Christ's suffering, scholastic philosophy, papal infallibility and temporal power. This list of topics about which the twenty-four-year-old von Hügel consulted the seventy-five-year-old Newman is significant, because it includes aspects of problems which would be perennial for the Baron until his death fifty years later. When Newman died in August 1890, von Hügel again commented on his great intellectual debt to the dead Cardinal, mentioning as having been especially helpful and influential in his own formation, *Loss and Gain*, the five lectures of part II of *Anglican Difficulties*, the *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, the *Letters to Dr Pusey* and the Duke of Norfolk, and 'above all' the *Grammar of Assent*. He concluded with the remark that he talked Newman even oftener than he knew.<sup>3</sup>

By the time that Newman came to write his essay 'On the Inspiration of Scripture' in *The Nineteenth Century* for February 1884, with its 'Postscript', printed privately and widely distributed shortly after the appearance of the initial article, von Hügel had begun to take a serious interest in critical biblical studies. In his articles Newman attempted to

<sup>1</sup> Von Hügel to J. H. Newman, 13 Dec. 1874, BOA, MS. 100a.

<sup>2</sup> For an account of these interviews, based on some of von Hügel's own MSS. memoranda now at St Andrews University Library, together with various letters and diaries at the Birmingham Oratory Archives, see R. K. Browne, 'Newman and von Hügel: A Record of an Early Meeting', *The Month*, n.s., vol. 26, no. 1, July 1961, pp. 24-33.

<sup>3</sup> Von Hügel to Ryder, 18 Aug. 1890, BOA, VC 20.

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open a door for the educated Catholic of his day who seemed to be faced with an impossible dilemma – the dilemma created by the conclusions of contemporary critico-historical biblical studies contradicting (or at least seeming to contradict) the current but inadequate Catholic theology of the bible which more or less identified revelation, inspiration and inerrancy. Newman's articles were full of the subtleties which so annoyed many of his non-Catholic contemporaries; but his hair-line distinctions were gratefully received by numbers of his co-religionists faced with the spectre of another Galileo debacle. Among these latter was Friedrich von Hügel. From Valéry-sur-Somme,<sup>1</sup> on the first day of July, he wrote to Newman:

It is the repeated reading and study of your article with 'Postscript' on the Inspiration of Scripture which, following upon a five year's study and consideration of the Greek New Testament text and modern commentaries of various German schools upon it, leads me to wish to thank you – small as I know the value of such thanks to be – for the profound interest and subtle help your papers have been to me personally.<sup>2</sup>

But it was something larger than the mere conclusions of biblical criticism which primarily interested von Hügel, even here. His ultimate concern was Newman's general philosophical principles which, when treating issues touching on religious faith and certitude, gave him a sufficiently broad foundation for avoiding the traps and dead-ends which seemed to turn so many of his Catholic contemporaries into frightened reactionaries when faced with genuine biblical problems. Von Hügel concluded this letter, too, with an acknowledgment of the debt he personally owed to the general philosophical principles of Newman's *Grammar of Assent*.

In this same letter to Newman the Baron remarked that although he knew the New Testament well in its original language, the Old Testament he never expected 'to know otherwise than at second-hand'. Within a decade of writing that letter, however, he had mastered Hebrew to the extent of having read the whole of Genesis three times over in that language, besides Exodus twice and part of Leviticus. Subsequent years would include the Hebrew reading of the rest of the

<sup>1</sup> On 28 April 1884 von Hügel had gone to France with his wife and daughters for a holiday. They remained on the continent until after the first week in July. *Diaries*, 28 April–10 July 1884.

<sup>2</sup> Von Hügel to Newman, 1 July 1884, BOA, VC 22. Newman's original article and the 'Postscript' have been brought out in a critical edition with introductions by J. Derek Holmes and Robert Murray, S.J., *On the Inspiration of Scripture*, London, 1967.

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Pentateuch, Job, Psalms, and various of the Prophets. If in 1884 von Hügel could resign himself, however reluctantly, to never being able to approach the Old Testament as a critic at first hand, by 1890 the realization of the importance of biblical criticism for the progress of religion, as well as his own scholarly instincts, had overcome this reluctance. He was beginning to appreciate, as did few theologians or men in positions of authority in the Roman church at that time, the disaster ahead if Catholic theologians and authorities continued to refuse to acknowledge, in a thoroughly honest manner, the work of contemporary critical scholars and the general biblical problems of which even secular savants were becoming increasingly aware. In the late eighties and early nineties of the nineteenth century von Hügel made contact with the ideas of many of Europe's leading biblical scholars who were then actually labouring on the frontiers of their field of research. Through this reading and these personal contacts, and through much genuine hard work, he prepared himself as a responsible and knowledgeable biblical critic, and as a scholar prepared to defend his field of competence from the encroachments of authoritarian theologians.

Although the latter half of 1884 he spent mainly in the study of Greek sculpture and ancient coins,<sup>1</sup> with many visits to the British Museum, in February 1885 von Hügel paid a visit to Oxford which was to introduce him to the leading biblical critics there. He went to Oxford on Monday the 23rd and remained until Wednesday, the guest of John Wordsworth, who was at that time Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Scripture and who would be consecrated bishop of Salisbury within the year.<sup>2</sup> Although the occasion for von Hügel's visit was a paper given by Charles Gore of Pusey House on the fourth century African theologian Victorinus Afer, most of the three-day visit was actually taken up in conversations with Oxford's biblical scholars. Wordsworth invited the Baron to examine his critical text of the Vulgate New Testament which at that time had reached only the first fifteen chapters of Matthew's Gospel.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Professor Percy Gardner once wrote to von Hügel: 'I suppose we are the only two people in Europe who combine a love of ancient coins with an eager interest in all aspects of religion.' Gardner to von Hügel, 24 Nov. 1913, SAUL, MS. 2600.

<sup>2</sup> *Diaries*, 23–5 Feb. 1885.

<sup>3</sup> While in France in 1884 von Hügel had agreed with Louis Duchesne to write occasionally for publication in the latter's *Bulletin critique* brief 'chronicles' about scholarly British publications and research. After his 1885 Oxford visit with Wordsworth, von Hügel published the following remarks in the French journal: 'Le professeur Wordsworth, d'Oxford, est arrivé enfin, après avoir employé sept ans à collationner des manuscrits par toute l'Europe, à constituer le texte de son édition critique de la Vulgate du Nouveau Testament. Pour saint Mathieu, il a sous la main les collations complètes de vingt-deux manuscrits, plus que n'en a



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On Tuesday evening von Hügel dined with Samuel Rolles Driver at Christ Church in Dr Pusey's old rooms, and there he was shown the first two parts of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum* and books on the Phoenician language. At Gore's address he had met William Sanday, and on Wednesday he had lunch with Sanday at Exeter College. But even in the midst of these discussions he found time for two visits to the Ashmolean Museum and for conversations with Arthur Evans and Robinson Ellis.<sup>1</sup>

While in Paris the previous year, von Hügel had made the acquaintance of Louis Duchesne, the church historian, whose scholarly and critical approach to church history, and whose personality so 'full of life and fire', had commended themselves to the Baron.<sup>2</sup> Although the two men remained friends, often in close communication, until Duchesne's death in 1922, it was not so much Duchesne himself, as one of Duchesne's own mentors, who most consciously and directly influenced von Hügel in the use of exacting critical historical method. Through the review section of Duchesne's *Bulletin critique*, von Hügel discovered and then read in the spring of 1885 a little French volume which considerably influenced his understanding and future use of this methodology. The book was the *Principes de la Critique Historique* by Père Charles de Smedt, the Flemish president of the Société des Bollandistes of Brussels. Thirty-five years later von Hügel reflected: 'I was coming at that time... more and more to love, to attempt to practise, and to settle down for life to the very dispositions, trainings and labours, that I saw before me, in an uplifting degree, within' de Smedt's *Principes*. 'There are chapters in the *Principes*,' he continued, 'such as the masterly analysis of the traditions and the facts concerning the baptism of the Roman Emperor Constantine, which did an abiding work for my mind and soul.'<sup>3</sup> De Smedt was a

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eu Etienne pour toute la Bible. La constitution préliminaire des quinze premiers chapitres est complète; elle présente trente variantes (non orthographiques) par rapport au texte manuel de Tischendorf de 1864. Les évangiles seront publiés séparément, à mesure qu'ils seront complétés.' *Bulletin critique*, tome VI, no. 9, 1 May 1885, p. 177.

<sup>1</sup> *Diaries*, 23–5 Feb. 1885.

<sup>2</sup> According to von Hügel's own Diary, he first met abbé Duchesne on the morning of Monday, 12 May 1884. The Baron's spring holiday in France in 1884 is confirmed as the time of the two men's meeting by a letter of von Hügel to Newman, written on 1 July 1884 (BOA, VC 22). Consequently, von Hügel is himself in error when, thirty-eight years later he wrote in *The Times Literary Supplement*: 'It was in the early spring of 1885 that, myself thirty-three, I first saw Duchesne, already in his middle forties, a professor of Church history at the Institut Catholique of Paris.' *T.L.S.*, no. 1062, 25 May 1922, p. 342.

<sup>3</sup> Von Hügel to Père H. Delehaye, 15 Sept. 1920, AS des B, vH MSS.

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hagiographer and historian of the early church; von Hügel was a student of and 'labourer' in the field of biblical criticism. As the Baron was aware,

these specialties are distinct and largely different, say, between a story in the earlier layers of the Pentateuch, a prophecy of Amos, or a largely apocalyptic vision of Ezechiel, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, the Acts of the Christian Martyrs, genuine or legendary, the conversations as variously reported of Saint Francis of Assisi, or the letters, autograph or otherwise, of Saint Charles Borommeo [*sic!*].<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, both hagiography and biblical criticism, despite their individual specializations and techniques, depend on historical method.

Biblical Criticism is an essentially historical discipline, busy with given documents and with the various kinds of literary forms, and the various degrees of historical guidance, suggested by those documents. And, so far, Biblical Criticism can learn much from so sober and circumspect, so sincere and serene a temper, method and outlook as richly characterised the labours of Père Charles de Smedt in the history of the Church and of the Saints.<sup>2</sup>

Not only did von Hügel learn from de Smedt's books, he also learned from the man himself. The Baron and the Bollandist first met in London in the autumn of 1897,<sup>3</sup> and in later years they met occasionally in Rome or London when the latter's researches brought him to England to work in the British Museum. Their meetings were not frequent, however, and they almost never corresponded. 'Yet the man,' von Hügel could say, 'what he was and what he wanted, and, again, what that personality and those ideas did for me – are still doing for me – are so clear that no documentation could make them clearer to me.'<sup>4</sup> De Smedt seemed to von Hügel the ideal type of one wholly and disinterestedly dedicated to the pursuit of truth within an area of research in which he was complete master of the tools necessary for such research. With de Smedt the Baron always felt that he 'stood before a man whose sheer presence drove away all suspicion of dexterously sophistic manipulation of documents, if and where they might be awkward to a less far-sighted orthodoxy; all fear that the real truth might be argued down – the facts truncated or stretched upon the dread Procrustes bed of, not what *is*, but what ought to have been'.<sup>5</sup> Nearly eighteen years after the event, von Hügel recalled a late autumn afternoon when he had met de

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Diaries*, 5 Oct. 1897.

<sup>4</sup> Von Hügel to Delehaye, 15 Sept. 1920, AS des B, vH MSS.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*