

Peters, John P, The Old Testament and The New Scholarship (Macmillan Co.: New York) 1902

p. 111 A modern illustration of this acceptance of a custom as a fact without investigation is well supplied by the famous story of Bismark and the guard on the grass plot at St. Petersburg. When visiting St. Petersburg Bismark noticed a guard stationed on a grass plot near nothing, and apparently guarding nothing. Finally he asked the Czar why the guard was stationed there. The Czar, when his attention was called to the position of the guard, whom, if he had noticed, he must have seen hundreds of times before, was unable to explain it, and found himself on consideration equally surprised with Bismark. He summoned an officer, and asked of him an explanation of the guard, with much the same result. No one knew why the guard stood on the grass plot. The Czar becoming interested to fathom this mystery, after considerable investigation it was discovered that during the reign of some previous Czar the Czarina had discovered the first violet in the middle of that grass plot. The then Czar had stationed a guard there to prevent people from trampling on the violet, and the guard once established had continued by force of custom ever since, although there were no longer any violets to guard. The fact that something is a custom, or that it is established by tradition, or that it is ordered by authority, is far more potent with the immense majority of men than reason. They do not reason; they accept what has come to them on authority, through tradition, or by custom.