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THE

CHURCHMAN

MARCH, 1893.

ART. I.—“THE DOCUMENTS OF THE HEXATEUCH.”¹

THE labours of the new critics of the Old Testament Scriptures have awakened a degree of alarm in the religious world which neither the results of their investigations nor the principles which guided them seem to justify. The very title-deeds of our faith were threatened with destruction. It seemed as though the fate of the donation of Constantine, or of the forged decretals, would fall upon them. The process of disintegration was so rapid, the spirit of hypercriticism so bold, that the very suddenness of the attack seemed to paralyze, for a moment, the defenders of the faith of our fathers, while the unquestioned learning of the assailants cast a glamour over their attack, and its very novelty commended the “higher criticism,” as it superciliously claimed to be, to minds which had never thought over the difficulties of the ancient Scriptures with a view to their reconciliation. The tendency of the modern school of doctrine, out of which this movement sprang, has been to separate the books of the Scripture, and to regard the great work as a bundle of tracts—a kind of library of ancient books, rather united by the skill of those who combined them, than forming one vast work—presenting a unity of design and a symmetry of structure which no human work extending over so vast a period could ever claim to possess.

The “City of God,” which the great Latin Father was able to build up in proof of the grandeur and continuity of the work of God from the beginning, in the hands of the new critics is but a fond dream—a vision of beauty that had no existence but in the mind of the Church. It never seems to

¹ A brief review of “The Documents of the Hexateuch,” translated and arranged by W. E. Addis, M.A., Balliol College. (Nutt, 1892.)

occur to them that those who are able to view at a glance the entire building, even at a distance, are better qualified to judge of its design and plan than men who are merely engaged in examining with a microscope the minutest features of its masonry or ornamentation. The true critic is he who, in the words of Milton, is able to see that the perfection of a building "consists in this, that out of many moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes which are not vastly disproportional, arises the goodly and graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure."¹ From the higher standpoint of a reasonable faith, if we do not altogether lose sight of these moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes, we are at least able to estimate them and to weigh against them the unique symmetry and the sublime unity of plan and purpose which have commended the whole pile and structure to the faithful of every age and race.

The "new criticism," according to its latest advocates, is spread over so extended a surface, and overweighted with so vast a body of learning, that its reduction to a regular system has been absolutely necessary to enable the ordinary reader to see it clearly and fully. This need has been well supplied in the recent admirable *résumé* entitled "The Documents of the Hexateuch, translated and arranged in chronological order, with introduction and notes, by W. E. Addis, M.A., Balliol College, Oxford" (Nutt, 1892). In the introduction the author recapitulates the history of the new criticism on the Pentateuch, passing on through all its stages, from the mysterious hint of Aben Ezra to the formulated principle of Astruc (1753), continued by Eichhorn, who is described as "a dry German rationalist, a man of acute mind, and an Oriental scholar of great learning" (p. xxi.). Yet this "dry rationalist," in his profoundly learned "Einleitung in das Alte Testament," has vindicated the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch with all the acuteness of mind and all the wealth of learning with which he is here so justly credited. The attempt to sever the documents of the Hexateuch (Joshua being regarded as inseparably connected with the five preceding books), has been, we are told, continued with unabated ardour at the present day. "In one sense," our author admits, "it is quite true that no one of the theories which have succeeded one another has held its ground," and that "there is still serious dispute." The conflicting materials were so multiplied that it was necessary to multiply the witnesses. Astruc and Eichhorn had only seen two independent elements, but the microscope of their successors discovered first an anonymous author,

¹ "Areopagitica."

whom they term the "priestly writer"—the Deuteronomist being placed as a distinct author somewhat earlier. We arrive, therefore, at a fourfold authorship—the Jahvist (as he is termed), the Elohist, the Priestly Writer, and the Deuteronomist. Yet the relative dates of the two first are left absolutely uncertain, precedence being given by one critic to the former, by another to the latter. Equally insoluble is the mode in which the narratives were united (p. xxxii.). The divided authors soon became legion. When Kuenen came on the scene, he brought with him this distracting array of authors: 1. The Jahvist; 2. The Elohist; 3. The combined Jahvist and Elohist; 4. The Deuteronomist; 5. The Priestly Writer. To make confusion worse confounded, the later discoveries have detected a second Deuteronomist and a second Jahvist. Besides the authors thus multiplied, and doubtless to be multiplied much further, we are introduced to several distinct editors, or redactors, of the work in its different combinations. These different writers are represented by means of algebraic symbols, derived from the first letters of their name, viz., J—E—R—D—P, the different Deuteronomists being indicated as D¹ D², the Jahvists by J¹ J², while R is used for the redactor, or editor, R^{J^E} signifying the editor who combined the Jahvist and Elohist narratives, and R^H for the employer of the same welding process in regard to the whole Hexateuch.

We may well affirm that no document which has ever existed in the world has suffered such wanton and capricious tyranny at the hands of its judges and critics, and that not the most complete and authentic work of any human writer has ever undergone such treatment from the most relentless doubter of its authenticity.

But it must occur to every impartial inquirer, and, indeed, to every reasonable mind, "If this most ingenious and elaborate theory of a series of compilations from earlier works upon which the compilers set so high a value"—a work carried on during the historic period, for the so-called "Priestly Code" is brought down as late as B.C. 444—"be admitted, where are the originals?" It is not usual for the compiler to destroy his authorities, even to the extent of obliterating their very names. The historical books of the Old Testament tell us of several books that have perished, but record their names as the Book of Jasher, the Book of the Wars of the Lord, the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah, the Chronicles of King David. The writers had transferred these portions of history to their own works, and therefore the preservation of the originals was unnecessary. Besides this, they had not the sacred character which the Mosaic writings possessed. To

reduce this contention to its simplest form, I venture to offer these conclusions :

I. Even if we admit that Genesis has in it two distinct elements, this does not involve the denial of its Mosaic authorship. Eichhorn, who was the first to complete the theory of the twofold element, is the most zealous assertor of the Mosaic origin of the whole Pentateuch.

II. In the prehistoric age, when all was traditional, and before the narrative of events could become embodied in a written form, the sources of it were necessarily anonymous.

III. But in the historic age, when documents became multiplied, a work cited from another one is always mentioned by name, as, "The Book of the Wars of the Lord," Num. xxi. 14; "The Book of Jasher," Joshua xviii. 9, 2 Sam. i. 18; "Chronicles of the Kings of Israel," 1 Kings xiv. 9; "Chronicles of King David," 1 Chron. xxvii. 24.

IV. The new critics bring down the age of the Pentateuch from the fifteenth century B.C. to the eighth, thus bringing it from the prehistoric to the historic period. Deuteronomy is brought down still later, while the so-called Priestly Code is fixed as late as the year 444 B.C.

V. All these books, therefore, had their origin in the historic period, when documents were carefully preserved, and when the Jews, above all races, were jealous for the preservation of their national records. Is it, then, possible that they would have destroyed the original authorities for their history directly they had employed them, and left us not even their names? Why should we not have any reference to the Jahvist, the Elohist, the Deuteronomist, or the Priestly Writer, and have a direct, and not indirect and sinister, indication of the composite character of the narrative?

VI. The root of the chronology of the new critics is the date of Deuteronomy,¹ which is assumed to have been not only *discovered*, but *written*, in the reign of Josiah. Eichhorn shows at length the groundlessness of this assumption, and its extreme improbability.

VII. If this date is surrendered the whole fabric of Pentateuchal chronology which has been built upon it must fall with it, for it is the keystone of the whole building.

VIII. But even this date, if fixed, would give us no means of determining the rival claims of the Jahvist and the Elohist for priority, a question which is still in dispute among the disciples of the new criticism.

IX. It is generally admitted, and Eichhorn successfully shows, that the archaic forms of Genesis separate it in point of

¹ Introd., p. xxxvii.

time from all the after-literature of the Hebrews. The fixture of the date of Deuteronomy cannot therefore be a safe clue to the date of Genesis.

Many other considerations of this kind must suggest themselves to the mind of every intelligent student of the new criticism, but perhaps none will present greater difficulties than the groupings of the various writers who are supposed to have been combined in the editorship or redaction of the whole work. The severance between the authors having been arbitrarily carried out, though with such a severe conflict among the critics as to make it difficult to discern the common principle which unites them, the process of reconstruction begins—and here the difficulties become still more insuperable. At this point we have recourse to the words of our author (Introduct., p. xxxiv.):

"There are moreover various theories as to the various strata in the documents, those strata being generally marked as D¹ D², J¹ J², etc. Finally, there is a difference of opinion on the way in which J was united with E, Dillmann being opposed to the common view that J and E were united together before they were united with the rest of the Hexateuch; and there is much wider difference of opinion on the way in which JE came to form one with D and JED with P. Of course the number of editors or redactors assigned must vary with theories on the mode in which the component documents were united. The letter R is generally used to denote an editor or redactor, and so we have R^{JE} for the editor who is supposed to have united J and E, R^H for the editor who united the whole Hexateuch, etc., etc."

Here again we find confusion worse confounded. We have scarcely become acquainted with the body of authors whom the new critics have discovered and christened, when we find ourselves surrounded by a crowd of editors engaged in combining and condensing their original works. We seem to see Paternoster Row carried back to the earliest scenes of the world's history, and to witness the anticipation of the latest methods and appliances of modern literature, even in the prehistoric period. Happily, both the authors and editors are mere phantoms—creations of the sanguine minds of conflicting theorists; they are rather like dissolving-views than actual pictures, and theory succeeds theory so rapidly that we have hardly time to realize their forms before we find them superseded by others. But to speak more seriously, is it, I ask, possible that, in the dimness of the early dawn of history and literature—at a moment when events were passing from the vagueness and uncertainty of tradition into the pages of recorded history—artificers could be found sufficiently skilful

to weave together a narrative so unique in all its features, so continuous in all its parts, as that which we see before us in the Pentateuch, and which so consistently unites itself with the later devotional and prophetic elements of the Old Testament? If such editors ever existed, is it possible that not only their names could be lost, but that not even a hint of their very existence should have been given in their several compilations? The history of the new criticism, short as it is, has taught us that the process of disintegration is not only a very easy but a very rapid one. When once we begin it we must go on. At the rate at which the work has proceeded hitherto, and with the accelerated pace at which the new critics are travelling, the Bible will soon be rent to pieces like the limbs of Osiris, and we shall have to wander about in despair to gather up the few fragments that remain of what we dare yet, in our presumed ignorance, to call the Word of God, and in our infatuation to believe that "it remaineth for ever."

The fascination which has been excited by the new criticism arises from four principal causes—(1) its novelty, (2) its boldness, (3) its ingeniousness, (4) the unquestionable learning of those who have been its advocates.

(1) The novelty of the theory of the divided authorship of the Pentateuch and the new chronology it has introduced, commended it naturally to those who had recognised numerical and chronological difficulties in the work, and who had not attempted to solve them by those arguments and explanations which had been hitherto accepted by theological writers. These persons, startled at so new and specious a plan for their solution, very readily accepted any theory which appeared to solve them so easily. To make the "rough places plain" by a process of levelling the field of Scripture was a method which (as St. Augustine says of the mere reliance on authority) "*magnum compendium est et nullus labor.*" If every method of reconciling "brotherly dissimilarities" and preserving those irregularities which constitute the greatest proof of the originality of the whole work, and save the writers from the charge of collusion, fails, we might have recourse to such a plan. But has every means of reconciliation failed? Has every means been even tried? We are dealing (it is confessed) with documents of immense antiquity; they are presented to us in a language of singular rudeness of structure and primitive simplicity, which give them an obscurity which modern languages, in their verbal refinements, altogether escape. We need not have recourse to novel expedients until we have proved the utter inadequacy of all former methods of explanation, or divorce the members of the

Divine Word until we find that their reconciliation is impossible.

(2) But if the novelty of the new criticism commends it to the minds of those who, like the Athenians in the days of St. Paul, spend their time "in nothing else but either to tell or hear some new thing," its boldness has no less powerful an influence over the weak and unstable who are swayed with every wind of doctrine. The new attack upon the citadel of our faith is so unexampled in its boldness and suddenness that it comes upon such as these with an irresistible force. It is planned so artfully and carried out with such vigour and resolution that too many are willing to surrender their faith at discretion and submit without a struggle to all the conditions imposed by the enemy. It professes to deal summarily with all the difficulties and incongruities which appear on the surface of the ancient Scriptures, and thus to relieve its followers of the task which the wisdom of God imposes upon all His children, not only of "proving all things" but of "holding fast those things which are good." If the difficulties of the natural world have not been cleared up for us, we can hardly expect the still deeper mysteries of the spiritual world to be so fully solved as to leave us with a perfect knowledge, and thus to destroy the very principle and design of faith.

Like the nations which were left unsubdued by Joshua, "that through them God might prove Israel," the difficulties of Scripture are left as a proof and test of the faith of the Church, and to show that doubts and perils must still harass her in her progress towards a final settlement in the land of her promise. The ordinary Christian need not therefore be terrified at the boldness of the attack which has been made on the evidences of his faith. If he falls back from the work of a confessedly uncertain criticism to the higher labour of reconciling apparent contradictions, removing difficulties, making a just allowance for the diversities of statement for which the immense scope of the subject and the obscurities of the language sufficiently account, there is nothing to discourage him in his work. The brilliancy of the light of the new criticism may dazzle his eye for a moment, but it will soon recover its clearness as he pursues his more righteous labour. He will not readily exchange the belief of the Jewish and Christian Churches, unclouded for thousands of years, for the most plausible theories which change from day to day—a kaleidoscope which presents at every turn new features and new combinations, a series of dissolving-views which have a brief life, and then pass into another destined to be as brief.

(3) And if neither the novelty nor the boldness of the new criticism need awaken terror in his mind, still less need the

almost unexampled ingenuity with which it has been ushered into the world. For, not to make mention of the orthodox writers, whose ingenuity was rather exercised in reconciling differences and solving doubts than in creating and increasing them, if he turns to the great work of Eichhorn, already described, he will find that as great a degree of ingenuity can be exercised in defence of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch as any which can be arrayed against it. Ingenuity is a net which catches the minds of all who look rather for superficial than solid argument, and is specially attractive to the younger inquirer. But it is often very deceptive. It often turns mere casual coincidences into designed affinities, and draws inferences of the greatest importance out of the most simple and incidental statements. It is the very paradise of theorists, and the most cunning of the craftinesses of those who go about to deceive. We cannot therefore but look with suspicion on the recent results of its exercise, and very carefully weigh against them the evidence of those who through the long ages of the world's history have arrived at beliefs and convictions which they are designed to overthrow. We have in matters of such supreme importance to deal not only with actual facts and critical difficulties, but with probabilities, with arguments derived from the order and course of Providence, with moral evidences, and many collateral facts, whose due observation must tend to strengthen our faith in the integrity and antiquity of the sacred records. To the wise and prudent these must greatly outweigh the theories and conjectures which rather unsettle everything than give us any clear and solid foundation for the faith they propose to reconstruct, or perhaps to leave as a venerable ruin.

(4) The unquestionable learning of the authors and advocates of the new criticism has undoubtedly had a powerful influence in the reception and propagation of their theories. But we may well claim for Eichhorn a degree of general and Oriental learning unsurpassed by any of his successors in the criticism of the Old Testament Scriptures. The vast and profound stores of learning which the introduction to his "Einleitung" opens to the reader, extending to nearly a thousand pages, is perhaps unequalled by any similar work; and when at its conclusion he boldly vindicates the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the unlearned may well feel strengthened and encouraged in their first faith, and leave the more modern critics to continue their theoretical warfare, and to carry on their work of disintegration until they find a separate author for every separate word. In the meantime, our best defence is determinately to regard the ancient Scriptures as a whole, and not, by reading them in detached frag-

ments, to lose the sense of their unity, and thus to familiarize our minds with the very principle which the new criticism has adopted and so destructively carried out. In the next place, we must endeavour clearly to keep in view the main design of the entire work, which was to declare and enforce the supreme doctrine of the unity of the Deity in the face of the most debasing Polytheism and the most degrading superstitions. All subordinate and dependent portions of the work fall into order and harmony when once their grand design is kept steadily before the eye. Next, we must bear in mind that we cannot meet on common ground with those whose starting-point is the absolute rejection of all miraculous action in the government of the world. With these it is needless to argue, and, like the early Christians, we must oppose our faith to their incredulity; in the words of Bacon, "*Melius est credere quam scire qualiter nunc scimus.*" And the same words may be said of every age and of every stage of advancement in science and knowledge, for we must still be content to the very end to "know in part and prophesy in part." Nor must we surrender in this great conflict with the infidelity of the age the testimony of the "great cloud of witnesses" who have gone before us, and whose faith we are so emphatically called upon to follow at a moment when their evidence is being openly disregarded and disputed. If we concede for a moment the possibility that the Church has for eighteen centuries been walking in a vain shadow and disquieting herself in vain, that she has been deserted by Him who promised to lead her into all truth, and tempted to distrust His words when He referred to the law as "given by Moses," and to David as "writing of Him," we shall soon be led to surrender one truth after another, until the lamp of faith, instead of shining more and more brightly until the dawn of the perfect day breaks over us, will grow fainter and fainter, until it leaves us at last in the darkness of a hopeless infidelity. It would be well for everyone who is tempted for any of the reasons here suggested to leave the "old paths" to consider seriously whither the new path proposed to him as a "more excellent way" must inevitably lead him, and how impossible it will become for him to retrace his steps if he makes a single advance upon it, or to secure again the precious treasure of a reasonable faith when he has bartered it for capricious and ever-changing theories which may be after all the mere delusions of too much learning and a misdirected ingenuity.

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