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Newer Phases of Old Testament Criticism.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR JAMES ORR, D.D.

HOW far the critical theory of the Old Testament is from having attained a really settled—that is, a truly scientific—form receives constantly fresh illustration. The influence of the new Babylonian school, already seen in works like those of Baentsch and Jeremias, is, to judge from a noteworthy paper by the Rev. C. F. Burney in *The Journal of Theological Studies* for April, spreading in English thought, and the recent remarkable discoveries of the Aramaic Elephantinè papyri are raising new problems at the *lower* end of Israel's history which seem likely, in combination with the theory of Babylonian influence at the *upper* end, to effect a considerable revolution in current critical speculation. A paper by Dr. Burney on "The Writers of the Old Testament and their Message," included in the "Pan-Anglican Papers" (S.B.), published in view of the Pan-Anglican Congress, 1908, with others in the same series, throws further light on these newer trends of thought. While recognizing valuable elements in these new developments, the present writer would regard it as matter of serious concern if the Congress was induced to give its approval to views which, in his judgment, alter the whole basis of the relation of the Church to Revelation and to Holy Scripture.

Accepting Dr. Burney as the spokesman of this newer trend of thought, affected by Babylonianism, in perhaps its more believing aspect, a few remarks may be offered on his general positions.

Dr. Burney—and here one can cordially agree with him—admits the need of "a reconstruction of the commonly accepted critical view as to the development of Israelite religion during the period which it has become customary to designate as 'the pre-prophetic age'—*i.e.*, the period extending from Moses down to the writing prophets of the eighth century B.C." (*J. T. S.*, pp. 321 *ff.*). "The commonly received critical theory of the development of the early religion of Israel (*i.e.*, prior to

the middle of the eighth century B.C.) stands," he thinks, "upon a very different basis from the documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch, and the theory which is bound up with this of the priority (broadly speaking) of the prophetic to the legalistic period of development. This latter hypothesis, with the reconstruction which it involves of our view of the development of Israel's religion *after* 750 B.C., may now be regarded as proved to the hilt for any thinking and unprejudiced man who is capable of estimating the character and value of the evidence. The former is, I believe, very largely a matter of subjective assumption." He refers to "the growth of a school of thought which," if he is not mistaken, "is destined shortly to revolutionize our view of Israel's early religion." "Babylonian civilization is now known to have extended so far back that, in view of it, the period covered by the early career of the people of Israel appears comparatively modern; and the influence of this civilization upon Israel, and over regions beyond them, appears to have been so comprehensive that in future any treatise which professes to deal with the religion of Israel, and ignores or overlooks the debt which is due to Babylon, may safely be neglected by the serious student." The chief point is the attempt to "vindicate for Moses the establishment of a high form of ethical religion." "I am ready," Dr. Burney says, "to maintain that the title 'pre-prophetic,' with its implications, as applied to the earlier religion of the nation of Israel, is largely a misnomer, and that no sharp line of demarcation can be drawn between the religion of Amos and that of the founder of the national life." To which, as a general statement, one heartily says Amen.

It will be seen that Dr. Burney, in his proposed reconstruction, sharply discriminates between the critical theory of religious development and the documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch, with the theory of the priority of the prophetic to the legalistic period of the development which it involves (*after* the middle of the eighth century B.C.). The former he regards as "very largely a matter of subjective assumption"; the latter he takes to be "proved up to the hilt for any thinking and

unprejudiced man who is capable of estimating the character and value of the evidence." The present writer can only sorrowfully submit to be enrolled among the unthinking and prejudiced, who are incapable of estimating the worth of the evidence ; for the theory is far enough from being proved to his mind, and, what is still stranger, Dr. Burney's own papers, and a study of his methods of reasoning and canons of evidence as there illustrated, strongly fortify his doubts upon the subject. Two remarks may be made on this point.

1. Dr. Burney seems very imperfectly to realize the close connection which subsists between the current (Graf-Wellhausen) critical theory and the theory of religious development which he lends his aid to overthrow. Things here are more of a piece than he supposes. It is indeed true that much in the documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch (its general distinction of J, E, D, P) is older than, and independent of, the religious theory ; but it is just as certain that the cardinal feature in the Wellhausen criticism—the priority of the prophetic to the legalistic period, and the post-exilian origin of the law—is not (as Graf and Wellhausen would admit) a pure result of literary analysis, but depends on the historical construction and the theory of the evolution of Israel's religion and institutions, the foundations of which the Babylonian school are now assailing. Dr. Burney may rest assured that if, as he truly says, "the commonly received critical theory of the development of the early religion of Israel" is "very largely a matter of subjective assumption," the "reconstruction *after* 750 B.C." will soon be recognized to be not less so—indeed, to be even more a matter of "subjective assumption" than the other.

2. When Dr. Burney speaks of the "documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch," with its Graf and Wellhausen developments, as proved "up to the hilt for any thinking and unprejudiced man," he exhibits a curious obliviousness to the changes and transformations which that hypothesis itself has of late years been undergoing. The "Pan-Anglican" paper is of use here as showing what he takes to be "proved and generally accepted"

in this documentary theory. But the truth is that hardly one of his propositions correctly formulates the present state of influential critical opinion on the points set forth. Things here (though "proved to the hilt") are in a condition of continual flux, and the critical "certainties" of to-day are outdone by the more advanced and arbitrary theories of to-morrow. Is it, *e.g.*, "generally accepted" to-day that "the continuous narrative," J, was written about 850 B.C., and was not rather the work of a "school" whose labours extended down to the exile? or that E is a "similar" (*i.e.*, a continuous) narrative drawn up about 750 B.C.? As we have it, it is a broken, discontinuous set of passages, which probably never existed in an independent form—certainly are not "proved" to have done so—and are attributed likewise to the labours of a "school." Are not (or *were* not) the critics who accept J and E as "documents" pretty fairly divided as to which was the earlier, and whether the dates above given should not be reversed; also whether J was really, as alleged, of Judæan origin? Is it "generally agreed" that the "Book of the Law" discovered in Isaiah's reign included chaps. iv. to xxvii., xxviii., etc., of our Book of Deuteronomy? If this is "proved to the hilt," it is striking that Wellhausen should dispute it, that the authors of the Oxford Hexateuch should throw it overboard in favour of a "school," and that Steuernagel should evolve a totally different and contradictory theory. Is it "generally agreed" that the Law of Holiness is not earlier than Ezekiel? or that "the documents of the Pentateuch" (J, E, P) run on throughout Joshua? On the latter point, Wellhausen will be found again dissenting. Even the bare scheme of the distinction of documents is immensely complicated by the introduction of J^{1, 2, 3}, E^{1, 2, 3}, P^{1, 2, 3, 4}, R^{1, 2, 3}, etc.—an analysis which Dillmann fitly named "a hypothesis of perplexity." The truth is that, except in the broad general distinction of P and JE—D is a separate book—the supposed agreement is largely illusory, and the whole critical scheme is in process of "reconstruction," as truly as the theory of Israel's *pre*-prophetic religion.

Leaving the critical theory, we turn to Dr. Burney's revised theory of the religious development of Israel, and here find, to our disappointment and regret, with some things that are good and suggestive, most of the objectionable features of the newer criticism afresh conspicuously illustrated. The laudable object is to prove that the Yahwe of Moses was "a Being endued with very definitely marked ethical characteristics—the kind of characteristics, in fact, which distinguish the Decalogue of Exod. xx." This is attempted to be made out by tracing the evolution of the conception of Jahwe—the name, it is contended later, being "of remote antiquity," and "well known to the Babylonians"—then showing that "Yahwe's character, as represented to Israel by Moses during the desert wanderings, must have possessed certain sharply defined features of such a kind as were capable of withstanding the outside seductions of Canaanite worship, and of keeping His religion alive and vigorous in a form to which the chief characteristics of the Canaanite Baal were felt to be antagonistic." The characteristics in question are those "distinctive of the moral Decalogue of Exod. xx." The objection drawn from the prevalence of image-worship (which the Decalogue forbids) among the people is met by an argument developed at considerable length to show that "the whole of the tribes which afterwards went to make up the people of Israel" were not sojourners in Egypt, but that "some Israelite tribes (*e.g.*, Asher and Gad) had already entered Canaan, and made the country their home at a date considerably earlier than the Exodus." These Canaanitish Israelite tribes worshipped Yahwe after the manner of a Baal under the symbol of a young bull, as the type of exuberant strength and fecundity. When the desert tribes entered Canaan, "the natural tendency would be for the Canaanite Yahwism to overshadow and supersede the Mosaic Yahwism." Yet, as we know, "the Mosaic Yahwism survived and ultimately won the battle." Thus the two strains—the Baal and image-worshipping strain and the ethical Mosaic strain—are thought to be accounted for.

There is no intention of discussing Dr. Burney's theory,

which reaches its end by a quite unnecessary circumlocution and arbitrary departure from the course of events as pictured in the Bible,¹ in anything like detail, but a few words may be said on what seems to be the gravest aspect of this whole method of treatment.

In his "Pan-Anglican" paper Dr. Burney describes the Old Testament rightly enough as "a record of Divine revelation"—"an historical record of the process of Divine revelation in old time, leading up to the New Testament revelation"—which, "as pointing forward to and finding its fulfilment in the New Testament, may be regarded as evidential of the truth of Christianity." It is also rightly said that the Old Testament "is seen to represent that revelation as gradual and progressive, conveyed through human media which were subject to the limitations of humanity." It is, moreover, assumed to be a *true* revelation. As points in it we have "Israel's special relation to Yahwe" ("Yahwe made choice of Israel, and sealed His claim to their allegiance by the deliverance from Egypt, and on the basis of this claim a covenant was concluded at Sinai or Horeb"), and, beyond this, "the doctrine of the covenant ratified once for all between Yahwe and Israel in the person of Israel's righteous ancestors" ("thus we get the doctrine of the indestructible nation").

A doctrine of a real revelation of Yahwe to Israel, however, is one thing, and a doctrine of the evolution of the idea of Yahwe out of men's own minds, on the basis of phenomena of nature or of moral conceptions borrowed from Egypt or Babylonia, is another; and *it is the latter, not the former, and it alone*, which we find in Dr. Burney's new theory of the development of Israelite religion. So far as observed, there is not a single occurrence of the word or idea of revelation in the whole article, save, indeed, as describing some subjective conception of men's

¹ The Biblical history is deserted in representing part of the tribes as resident and developing a life of their own in Canaan prior to the entrance of the desert tribes with their purer Yahwism. If the facts are as represented, they point rather, as many scholars hold, to an earlier date for the Exodus.

own minds. Nor is it needed. The entire development is explained (or is thought to be explained) by natural factors. So far from the Old Testament being "an historical record of the process of Divine revelation," it is not, in the bulk of it, "historical at all," and what passes for "a process of Divine revelation" is really a process of naturalistic evolution. The theory is, in short, an ingenious transposing of Israel's religious history from the Biblical note of revelation to the modern note of natural evolution; from what Yahwe was and did for Israel to what Israel thought or imagined about a God they called Yahwe. There is an unbridgeable gulf between these two conceptions.

It is desirable to follow this out a little further.

Start is made with "what we may term the primitive or non-moral characteristic of Yahwe—*i.e.*, "the characteristics of Deity which are the outcome of reflection upon the phenomena of nature regarded as due to a supernatural cause." Man here, evidently, is himself the fabricator of the idea of Yahwe. Taking note, then, "of the natural phenomena which were associated by early Israel with the activity of Yahwe, we shall find that they are those destructive agencies of nature, the effects of which would naturally impress a nomadic people. Especially do we observe that Yahwe is connected with fire, regarded as a consuming and destructive element, and with the thunderstorm and earthquake." Proof is afforded from the appearance of Yahwe to Moses in the form of a flame of fire in the bush, from the fire of Yahwe smiting and consuming (as at Taberah, Korah and his adherents, Nadab and Abihu), the fire of Yahwe consuming the sacrifice of Elijah, the thunderings and lightnings and "pillar of fire" at Sinai, etc. These are supposed to be the "primitive" and "non-moral" characteristics of Yahwe. Dr. Burney himself notices, however, that they appear in all the stages of the Biblical revelation; on his theory, the Korah and Nadab and Abihu episodes (in P) are even post-exilic. He does *not* notice that at *no* period does the God who thus manifests Himself appear as "non-moral." It is in con-

nection with the revelation of His moral attributes that these phenomena occur. The theory does not attach the idea of revelation to these mythical conceptions.

Moses, it was seen, moralized the idea of Yahwe, and introduced this Deity to Israel as possessed of definite moral characteristics. Whence the change? Had Yahwe become a reality, and did He really manifest Himself to Moses, and through Him make a covenant with the people He had chosen? In no wise. If any covenant was made (and it is difficult now, it is supposed, for us to penetrate to the real facts of the case, though Moses probably did give the Decalogue in some form), it was Moses who caused the people to form a covenant with Yahwe, not Yahwe who chose and made a covenant with them. That, again, is only a subjective way of representing the matter. Still, Moses impressed on the idea of Yahwe these higher characteristics. Where did he get them? The answer is: Probably from Egyptian and Babylonian sources. The Negative Confession of Egypt may have furnished some of the elements of the Decalogue, and parallels can be produced also from Babylonian sources (*J. T. S.*, pp. 350-352). We seem as far away from a real Yahwe revealing Himself as ever, and the prophets, in speaking of His love for Israel, and special covenant relation to Israel, must have been as far astray as we are. It may be said that at least the Yahwe in whose name they spoke was real. Unfortunately, unrealities do not in this way develop into realities with mere lapse of time. The Yahwe of the prophets was believed by them to be the same Yahwe as the fathers worshipped. If Yahwe was not a real Being, who in His grace condescended to unite Israel in covenant with Himself, the whole basis of the prophets' religious teaching is destroyed.

It has been seen above how, on Dr. Burney's theory, other Israelitish tribes who remained in Israel moulded the idea of Yahwe, in agricultural fashion, into that of a nature-Baal, a god of productiveness, whom they served with images, feasts, and often lustful rites. Dr. Burney hardly needs to remind us "that

no tradition to this effect is preserved in the Biblical records." The idea that something of the kind is reflected in the patriarchal story of Asher and Gad, whose descent is traced from the handmaid Zilpah, is an order of proof which it is about time to banish from serious Biblical study. There were Canaanitish Baal-worshippers enough to seduce the Israelites into idolatry without calling in these hypothetical tribes with their Yahwe-Baal worship. Biblical history knows nothing of them. It is the old device, which mars so much of our current theorizing, of setting aside the history we have and filling up the blank with purely conjectural speculations.

This, in the view of the present writer, is the serious aspect of this new school of theorizing on Biblical religious history. The old phrases are kept—"the Old Testament the record of a process of revelation leading up to the New Testament"—but the values are changed all through, and the term revelation means no more God's thoughts discovered to man, but man's own thoughts and imaginations about God—a subjective psychological process never rising beyond the limits of the natural. Man embodies his thoughts about God in a history in which God is *represented* as acting and speaking in a supernatural way. But it is merely *representation*. Such a conception has only to be applied to the New Testament to destroy supernatural revelation there also. But in truth neither Old nor New Testament is explained by it.

The true element in Dr. Burney's conception is that which the so-called "traditional" view has contended for all along, viz., that the God of the patriarchs and of Moses was no mere tribal nature-god, but the God of heaven and earth, righteous and holy—the one living and true God. To that, ere long, it is confidently believed, serious Biblical thought will come back. God is pictured *as He is* in even the earliest stages of revelation, because even then He had revealed Himself *as He is*. As for the later period of revelation, probably the Elephantinè discoveries are destined to bring about as great a change of conception as the Babylonian discoveries are doing in the earlier

period. The current theory is that from the time of Deuteronomy any but a single sanctuary at Jerusalem was unlawful. The Levitical law is supposed to assume and proceed on the idea of the single sanctuary. As yet a divinely authorized ritual—a Law—did not exist. The existence of shrines elsewhere than at Jerusalem in the pre-Josianic period is held to prove that Deuteronomy was not yet promulgated. Yet here is a colony of Jews in Egypt in Nehemiah's time who long have had their sanctuary, priesthood, and ritual—a ritual evidently closely akin to that in the priestly code—yet appeal to their brethren in Judah for aid in its rebuilding, apparently without the least offence to conscience. There are problems here which the critics of the newer school may find it hard enough to solve.



Messages from the Epistle to the Hebrews.

BY THE BISHOP OF DURHAM.

XIII.—HEBREWS XIII. 15-25.

THE connection of ver. 15 with the antecedent context is suggestive. We have been led to a contemplation of the Lord Jesus in His character as antitype and fulfilment of the holocaust of the Levitical Atonement. Even as the chief victim of the old covenant, the symbolical bearer of the sins of Israel, was carried "outside the camp" to be consumed, so our sacred Victim was led "outside the gate" of the city to His death, there by His blood-shedding, by His absolute and perfect self-immolation in our stead, to "hallow His people," to bring them forgiven and welcomed back to God. The point of the dread ritual of Calvary specially emphasized is just this, that He "suffered outside the gate." The old Israel, guiltily unknowing, fulfilled the type in the Antitype by refusing Him place even to die within the sacred city. He, in His love for the new Israel, that He might in every particular be and do what was foreshadowed for Him, refused not to submit to that supreme rejection.