

## ROBINSON AND ROBERTSON

### A BRIEF CORRESPONDENCE

During the summer of 1979, I had the opportunity to examine the contents of some eighty box files which had been located in the Angus Library at Regent's Park College, Oxford. These boxes, and their contents, had belonged to H. Wheeler Robinson (1872-1945),<sup>1</sup> and most probably had been deposited in the library shortly after his death. It is not easy, however, to determine the connection between these boxes in the Angus Library and the "H. Wheeler Robinson Bequest" of 1945 which so greatly benefited the College Library, particularly in the field of Old Testament studies. But the contents of these boxes, like many of the books in the Bequest, certainly have at one time been a part of Robinson's own library.<sup>2</sup> For this reason alone, it is appropriate to offer a fuller description of the boxes and their contents before recording the "brief correspondence" which is the proper subject of this note.

Over the years the condition of these box files had deteriorated quite considerably, although their contents were largely unaffected by wear and tear. Many of the boxes were already badly damaged by previous handling, and others crumbled upon being touched. For this reason, the boxes were destroyed and their contents distributed in a manner more appropriate to the requirements of the College and Angus Libraries. Much of the contents consisted of a wide variety of off-prints and monographs which had been sent to Robinson by various scholars, as well as a number of monographs which he must have purchased for his own research at an early stage of his career and which reflected particularly his interest in "the Christian doctrine of man"<sup>3</sup> as well as in the experience of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

The contents of the boxes were distributed as follows. Pamphlets and off-prints of articles by Baptist authors, as well as books and pamphlets on baptism and other Baptist subjects were set aside for the Angus Library. Among these were included copies of several articles by Robinson himself, as well as many off-prints by H. H. Rowley and T. H. Robinson among Old Testament scholars, and W. T. Whitley and E. A. Payne among church historians. Several important books were set aside for the College Library, including Mowinkel's *Psalmstudien*,<sup>5</sup> and the remainder of the collection was placed in the Library Stack Room for subsequent dispersal.

Among the off-prints in the collection, were several by E. Robertson of Manchester, which formed a series on Pentateuchal criticism,<sup>6</sup> and in two of these were contained evidence of the following brief correspondence. In a copy of "Temple and Torah" was the carbon copy of a letter which Robinson had sent to Robertson, along with the latter's handwritten reply. In a copy of "The Priestly Code" there was the carbon copy of a brief typewritten acknowledgement of receipt. The three letters read as follows:

March 14th., 1942.

My Dear Robertson,

Thank you for sending me the off-print of your article, "Temple and Torah". I have deferred acknowledgement until the end of term, in order to re-read and consider it carefully. I fear that I am quite unmoved by your ingenious arguments, which seem to me more worthy of a Rabbi than of yourself. In fact, I have wondered whether you did not lay down your pen (or put the cover on your type-writer, like a careful Scot) with a characteristic smile at your own thesis. The weakness of your theory seems to me illustrated in the first sentence of p.12: "If the Torah was not compiled at this time (sc. Samuel's), then where is the document of similar character which the situation clearly demanded?" But you have *invented* the situation, as a sheer hypothesis, before you proceed to treat it as a datum for argument. I might ask, in your own vein, is it conceivable that Samuel should have done all this without leaving some tradition of his work as a second Moses, and some tradition much more evident in the actual history of Israel? As an example of what seems to me the failure of your detailed arguments, I might name the appeal to "Yahweh of hosts". Köhler (*Theologie des Alten Testaments*, pp.31-33) points out the absence of this phrase from the pentateuch as significant, and its emergence in Jeremiah, Haggai, Zech. & Malachi, with 159 out of the 279 occurrences. Yet you say that Jeremiah's law-code was H, which does not use the phrase. Again, take your reference to Dt. XVIII. 18f. as Samuel's credentials; is not this, on your view, much more dangerously open to the charge of "forgery" than anything in the current theory? Other difficulties I feel are your disregard of the inconsistencies in the Samuel narratives, where they militate against your theory, e.g. that Samuel, whom you make a prophet-leader of all Israel was clearly unknown to Saul (I Sam. IX.6) and that in IX.15ff Samuel shows no sign of "reluctance", but takes the initiative in regard to Saul. The prophetic *toroth* are presented in opposition to those of the priests, and with every appearance of being pioneer work. These are but a few of the difficulties which your argument seems to me to offer. Do not bother to reply; I felt that your kindness in sending me the off-print called for at least the evidence that I have read it with the interest and care anything from you deserves.

All good wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Robertson's reply was handwritten upon headed notepaper:

March 17, 1942

My Dear Robinson,

It was most kind of you to write even if it was to slay me. You have before you, however, a Scot quite unrepentant

and still on the warpath. I have delivered a second Rylands lecture on the same lines as the first which I think will cover some of the objections you raise. You tell me I have invented the situation which I use as a datum. In reply I ask: Do you deny that the separate shrines were centres of legislation as well as of worship? Do you deny the consequent possibility of variations in legislation occurring because of this isolation? Do you deny the change over to political and civil reality with the institution of the monarchy? Do you think it conceivable that the shrines maintained their independence whilst a civil regime operated from Jerusalem and that the inhabitants of the land were bound both by a civil legislation and a, possibly conflicting, religious legislation of their local shrine? If you do not deny these things how can you assert that I have invented the situation?

Still, you can pass judgement after you have read the next reprint which I hope to send you during the summer.

It has been nice to hear from you.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely

Edward Robertson

Wheeler Robinson's next letter to Edward Robertson was written shortly after he retired as Principal of Regent's Park. Although he remained critical of Robertson's theories, his letter was much less explicit.

190, Iffley Rd.,  
Oxford.  
Aug. 4th., 1942.

My Dear Robertson,

Thank you for the fulfilment of your promise to send me the further lecture on your Pentateuchal theory. I have read it with much interest, and it certainly clears up the statement of your position for me, though, frankly it leaves me quite unconvinced, especially your interpretation of ~~2300~~ in I Sam.X.25, which seems to me as insecure a peg on which to hang so much as that of Isaiah XXII.25! But I must not go into more detailed objections; you have certainly broken fresh ground, which is always to the good, and I felt nothing but admiration for the skilful way in which you marshalled your arguments.

With hearty greetings,

I am,

Yours sincerely,

This is not the place to review Robertson's theories concerning the origins and growth of the Pentateuch in any detail. Suffice it to say that his hypothesis, which envisaged the "crystallisation" of the pentateuchal materials around a nucleus of the Mosaic law,<sup>7</sup> has not really commended itself to subsequent scholarship. To this extent the criticisms which Robinson offered in private communication might be considered to have been justified, and their publication of some interest to Old Testament scholars. In addition to this, the exchange between Robinson and Robertson which is contained in the three letters published here might be of some interest to biographers and to historians of biblical scholarship.<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 The entire issue of *The Baptist Quarterly* XXIV No.6 (April 1972) was devoted to H. Wheeler Robinson, in commemoration of the centenary of his birth. See, also, E. A. Payne, *Henry Wheeler Robinson: Scholar. Teacher. Principal: A Memoir*, London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1946.
- 2 Each box was numbered, and a card index file, providing only author and title of each item, indicated in Robinson's own handwriting the number of the box in which each item was filed.
- 3 cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Doctrine of Man*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1911.
- 4 cf. H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Christian Experience of the Holy Spirit*, London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1928.
- 5 Towards the end of his "Reminiscences and Encounters" of Robinson, *BQ* XXIV (1972) pp.243-247, G. Henton Davies states, "... Wheeler Robinson could draw the line and sometimes did. I am told that he refused to put Mowinckel's original work *Psalmstudien* into the R.P.C. Library. It is still not there". (p.247). It can now be added that, even if he did not allow a copy of this work into the College Library, Robinson possessed his own copy of all six fascicles of *Psalmstudien*.
- 6 E. Robinson, "Temple and Torah: Suggesting an Alternative to the Graf-Wellhausen Hypothesis", reprinted from *BJRL* 26 (1941/42), Manchester; *idem*, "The Priestly Code: The Legislation of the Old Testament and Graf-Wellhausen", reprinted from *BJRL* 26 (1941/42), Manchester; *idem*, "The Riddle of the Torah: Suggesting a Solution", reprinted from *BJRL* 27, (1942/43), Manchester. There is no copy correspondence contained in Robinson's copy of the last of these reprints, but evidence that he had given it his close attention is provided by the date, 23.IX.43, which he pencilled into the last page, something which he normally did when he finished reading a book, as well as several brief annotations in the margins. Of greatest interest among these, is the annotation opposite note 1 on p.14: "Different strata lumped together, quite a Rabbinic method".
- 7 O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1974, p.167, has described Robertson's solution as "a kind of 'crystallisation hypothesis'".

8 The "brief correspondence" reproduced here has now been deposited in the Angus Library.

G. G. NICOL

## REVIEWS

*Ministering Angels: A study of Nineteenth Century Evangelical Writing for Children* by Margaret Nancy Cutt. Five Owls Press. 1979. pp.220 plus plates. £9.50.

Ford K. Brown in his book *Fathers of the Victorians* wrote scathingly of the evangelical tract-tale: whatever merit it had had in the days of Mrs Trimmer and Hannah More, it underwent at the hands of the Rev. Carus Wilson and others in the 1830s a process of morbid introversion and ugly fanaticisation which earned the contempt of educated Victorian opinion. Mrs Cutt who has already made an important and revealing study of Mrs Sherwood, authoress of *Little Henry and his Bearer*, now throws down another challenge to the Brown thesis with an account of four female Victorian tract-tale writers, Maria Charlesworth, writing very much in the Hannah More tradition, Charlotte Tucker, a far more vigorous and lively authoress, Hesba Stretton of "Jessica's First Prayer" fame, and a critic of social injustice, and Mrs Walton ("A Peep Behind the Scenes") who lived on till 1939, yet who reverted in some ways to the original pre-Victorian insights.

Mrs Cutt's vindication of these authors and their work is well-balanced and convincing. She shows how according to the tastes of the day, particularly its guilt complexes, the tract-tale's sentiment and pathos must have had a far greater impact than a modern reader can appreciate, how it was one of the several influences which made mass literacy and the 1870 Education Act possible, how, as "Christ's poor" became "society's poor" and "march of mind" took over from the quest for personal redemption, the tracts were caught up in the general secularising trend, with collective substituted for individual guilt, and an aura of "social purpose" pervading the whole. She shows moreover how gradually in this literature the adult world's concern for the child's salvation succumbs to a totally different perspective: the child as bearer of salvation to a corrupt adult world.

Finally Mrs Cutt rightly emphasises that it was not only Charlotte Yonge and the Tractarians who poured scorn on the "street arab tales" of these lady writers: their frank and disturbing revelations provoked the shocked disapproval of the secular Athenaeum and even inspired a batch of late Victorian writers, Mrs Molesworth et al. to divert the juvenile reader's attention to a more comfortable world of pleasant villages, happy schoolrooms and tranquil homes. Here, and not in the work of the Evangelicals, was a genuine literature of escapism.

IAN SELLERS