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ARTICLE IV.

THE CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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[Continued from p. 99.]

OUR next step backwards brings us to the Second Book of Maccabees. It is of uncertain age, but was indubitably written before the destruction of Jerusalem (A. D. 70), though probably not earlier than B.C. 125, the date of one of the two letters with which it is introduced. This, in fact, was most likely about the time of the composition of the main work.¹ In the second of the two letters which, as I have said, preface it, though not originally forming a part of it, it is represented that the people of Judæa and Jerusalem, with the Sanhedrin and Judas Maccabæus, are addressing their Egyptian brethren, especially Aristobulus, the instructor of Ptolemy VI. Philometer (B.C. 180-145). Beginning with the statement that Antiochus Epiphanes, their dreaded oppressor, is now dead, they go on to say that they are about to celebrate the festival of the dedication and of the re-discovery, by Nehemiah, of the holy fire. To this celebration they cordially invite the Jews of Egypt.

But the part of the letter of special interest to us is that relating to the national literature (2 Macc. ii. 13). It reads: "And the same things, also, were reported in the records, namely, the memoirs of Neemias; and how he, founding a library, gathered together the books concerning the kings, and prophets, and those of David, and epistles of kings concerning holy gifts. And in like manner, also, Judas gathered together all those books that had been scattered by reason of the war we had, and they are

¹ See my *Apocrypha*, p. 59 f.

with us." The book here cited as the "memoirs of Nehemias" is some extra-canonical and now otherwise wholly unknown composition. It is alleged to contain, besides the legend of the holy fire, an account of Nehemiah's founding a library consisting of books concerning prophets and kings, works of David, and letters of kings respecting holy gifts.

We have no wish to press this singular allusion in a singular apocryphal book beyond what it will justly bear. It is conceded that much that is said in the context concerning Nehemiah is incredible. It is by no means certain that, in what is ascribed to him in connection with the founding of a library, his name has not been, consciously or unconsciously, interchanged with that of Ezra, as, a little before (i. 18), certain other things are imputed to him which, on much higher authority, we have every reason to believe were the achievements of a somewhat older contemporary. But, making due allowance for these drawbacks to our perfect confidence in the document as a whole, there are still remarkable and weighty statements in it which cannot be fairly ignored. For any writer's inventing them we can conceive no justifiable occasion. Moreover, they are simply confirmatory of what we are credibly assured of elsewhere, so that we are not at liberty to ignore them, if we would.

First, there is a tacit recognition of the fact that the second division of our present canon, commonly called "the prophets," is made up of two sorts of compositions, historical as well as prophetic. Secondly, we are told that, according to the "memoirs," Nehemiah's collection consisted not only of the works just named, but also of compositions of David and of royal epistles concerning holy gifts. The Psalms are undoubtedly referred to; with great probability, also, the histories of Ezra and Nehemiah; at the very least, the proclamations of the Persian kings, from Cyrus to Artaxerxes, found in them. It was just this fact of royal patronage which, in a letter to

Aristobulus, the tutor of an Egyptian king, we might expect would be singled out for emphasis. That these were all the books contained in Nehemiah's library is not said. The writer has plainly not the aim of giving a full catalogue, but simply, as was natural and in harmony with other references we have met with, to indicate its general character by referring to its principal features. Thirdly, this collection of books, it is distinctly implied, had been gathered and had already come to be highly regarded previous to the Maccabæan period. During the wars of the Maccabees they had become scattered, and had been re-gathered by the great Judas.

Fourthly, it is to be noted that, while clear reference is made to books forming a part of the Hagiography, or third division of the canon, no evidence is given that any apocryphal literature had been associated with it. Fifthly, the failure to name the Law as a part of Nehemiah's list is obviously due to the fact that there was no occasion for it in this place. The writer is discoursing of books which, *in addition to the Law*, which he elsewhere fully recognizes (ii. 1; cf. xv. 9), were in danger of being lost, and so needed to be sought out and connected together. Indeed, the Greek word used, as has been suggested, might well carry with it the idea that Nehemiah had made an addition to a previous collection.⁹ Now, this testimony to the canon of the Old Testament lacks the fulness and precision of others that have preceded. It is weakened, in some respects, by compromising additions. Still, it is clearly in harmony with them in several respects. It recognizes a threefold collection of the Scriptures. It treats it as already ancient in its day. It holds the books of which it is composed in high esteem, and deems them worthy of commendation to compatriots of other lands.

We now find ourselves in the historically brilliant and every way significant age of the Maccabees. As was to

⁹ *Ἐπισυνήγαγε*. Dillmann's remark (Jahrb. f. Deutsche Theol., 1858, p. 447) that this should not be pressed in view of the context (*καταβαλλόμενος*) does not seem to me to be conclusive.

be expected, the noble deeds of the Hasmonæan heroes were left to no single historiographer. Fortunate were it for us if the rest had been characterized by the straightforward honesty and simplicity of him who wrote what is known as the First Book. It covers a period of forty years (B.C. 175–135), and, for a conscientious use of materials, may be trusted about as implicitly as any modern history of England or the United States. The narrative is almost exclusively confined to the deeds of the three great sons of Mattathias—Judas, Jonathan, and Simon. While Jonathan was high-priest a treaty was made with the Lacedæmonians. As a sort of offset to what was doubtless considered by some the folly of seeking an alliance, under any circumstances, with a foreign nation, the treaty is introduced with the remark (1 Macc. xii. 9): “Albeit we need none of these things, seeing that we have the holy books in our hands to comfort us.”

It is a most suggestive utterance, whose genuineness has never been questioned. What is to be especially noted is the epithet applied to the sacred library (*τὰ βιβλία τὰ ἁγία*) and the fact that it is to be found in a public document of this description. Not only is it a guarantee for the existence of the collection, but, as far as its title and the prominence given the books are concerned, it shows a reverence for it worthy of apostolic times. Moreover, this passage does not stand by itself in First Maccabees. In the very opening chapter (verses 56, 57) it is stigmatized as a peculiarly hateful form of the indignities which Antiochus Epiphanes and his minions heaped upon the Jewish people, that they deliberately set it before them as a goal to destroy all copies of the Scriptures which they could find among them; and sometimes, in order to show their contempt for Jewish exclusiveness, and shock, to the last degree, their feelings of veneration, even painted upon their holy pages, as it would appear, hideous pictures of their own idols (iii. 48).³

³ Cf. the commentary on this passage in my *Apocrypha*, p. 495.

In circumstances like these how is it possible for us, with Ewald, echoed by Stanley and many others, to adopt the hypothesis of a Maccabæan canon? To suppose that Judas the eldest brother, either on his own authority, or that of the Sanhedrin of his day, made actual additions to the list of books which they already held in such supreme respect? It finds no real support in the history. It was simply a theoretical exigency that started the idea. If it were possible at this point to limber up a little the historical guarantees with which Divine Providence has buttressed the Old Testament canon, it would, indeed, be an excellent place to slip in, not only a few psalms, but also some alleged late books, or portions of books, for whose present position it is not otherwise easy to account.

But we are not at liberty to exaggerate, much less pervert, the facts of history in order to accommodate our urgent theories. If there are Maccabæan psalms, the fact must be settled, if settled at all, wholly on internal grounds. The Maccabæan heroes and their armies, it is said, sung psalms; but it is nowhere so much as suggested that they ever wrote them (2 Macc. i. 30; x. 7, 38; xii. 37). And the sole historical foundation for the theory of a Maccabæan canon are the passages already quoted (2 Macc. ii. 13, 14; 1 Macc. i. 56, 57; iii. 48). It is said of Judas that he gathered together certain books; but his activity is expressly limited to books which had been scattered by reason of war. Elsewhere we learn more definitely the character of the library thus scattered and collected again: it was the "Holy Scriptures," which were already held in such veneration that, next to the defilement of the Holy of holies, no higher indignity could be shown the Jewish nation than to mutilate and caricature them. To suppose, therefore, that Judas, the Maccabee, or any contemporary of his, personally had any thing to do with the formal enlargement or contraction of the original canon of the Old Testament, is not only totally without historical support, it is *a priori* extremely improbable.

So far, then, we have found the current of history to which was intrusted the sacred books of the Jews, flowing between well-defined banks. As far as we have been able to judge, it has received no contributions from without serving to vitiate our conclusions. The point of transition from sacred to less sacred has not yet been reached. The canon of the Maccabees, in name and in esteem, is the canon of Josephus and the apostles. If it have other limits, we fail to find them. Our next post of observation will be the last before the one stream divides into several and the work of actual exploration begins.

The Son of Sirach is the oldest witness outside of the Bible, to the existence, division, and order of the Old Testament canonical books. His work, the so-called Ecclesiasticus, we date not so very long after the death of the high-priest Simon I. (B.C. 310-290); the translation of it into Greek at about B.C. 132.⁴ The translator, whom we have already cited, introduces his version with most important testimony on our theme, whose genuineness is undisputed.⁵

The first thing we especially notice in his statement is the fact, announced at the outset as something well known to his readers, that Israel was highly privileged in having *received from their fathers* a list of books embraced under three general divisions. These divisions are three times named in essentially the same terms, "the Law, the

⁴ See a full discussion in my *Apocrypha*, p. 278 ff.

⁵ "Whereas, many and important things have been handed down to us through the law and the prophets, and the others who followed after them, for which things Israel ought to be commended for learning and wisdom; and since not only must the readers become skilful themselves, but also they that desire to learn be able to profit them who are abroad, both by speaking and writing: my grandfather Jesus, who had given himself more and more to the reading of the law and the prophets and the other books of our fathers, and had gotten therein no little proficiency, was drawn on also himself to write some work pertaining to learning and wisdom, to the intent that those who are desirous to learn, becoming attached to this also, might make much more progress in living according to the law." The especially pertinent remaining parts of the passage have been already cited above.

Prophets, and the Others," the last expression being exchanged once for "the other books," and, again, for "the rest of the books." It should be carefully noted that in each case the article is used, so that we may fairly conclude he meant to indicate by this title, as by the others, a definite, and, to his own mind, an already complete, collection. This is also implied in what the translator says of his grandfather's attitude towards this literature.

Some have thought that the Son of Sirach himself lays claim to prophetic gifts in one part of his work (xxiv. 30-33), and seeks to put his own composition along side of, and fully on a level with, those here mentioned. But this is wholly to mistake his bearing towards the Scriptures.⁶ They were something, it is stated, with which he had long intently busied himself, and his effort now was not to imitate or rival them, but to enable others to live in harmony with them. Note particularly his eloquent tribute to Bible worthies, from Moses to the post-exilian high-priest Joshua, with Ezra and Nehemiah (xliv.-l.). Of the twelve Minor Prophets he expresses the hope that their bones may revive again from the grave (xlix. 10). This is not the posture of one who aspires to be reckoned among these immortals of his people. In standard and achievement they are afar off to him. His pen already invests them with a half-ideal glamour.

What the collection was to the grandson near the middle of the second century B.C., that, *this testimony*, in harmony with the Book of Ecclesiasticus itself, assures us it was to Jesus Sirach near the middle of the third century B.C.⁷

⁶ In my commentary on this book, *Introd.*, p. 282, I have used too strong an expression in characterizing the author. The context shows that what is claimed is less prophetic *inspiration* than prophetic fulness and flow, as Fritzsche has suggested.

⁷ It has been customary to say that this book does not recognize, in the way of citation, the third division of the canon. But not a few of its proverbs are plainly built on passages in Ecclesiastes which was one of the last to appear in it. Cf. Wright, *The Book of Koheleth*, p. 41 f.

To both, as far as we are able to judge from the language employed, and other considerations bearing on the matter, it was an already closed and highly revered collection. The expression, "the other books," "the rest of the books," is, indeed, peculiar. But the name applied to the third division of the canon was *never any more definite* than this. These productions, centuries after they had become fixed in the canon,—and to this day, in fact, in the Jewish Church,—were known simply as "the books," "the writings" (*kethubim*). Our Lord's reference to the third division of the canon (Luke xxiv. 44), if it were meant to be such, is even less explicit than the one before us. It was not easy to find an exact title for a collection made up of compositions so diverse as the Book of Ruth and Ecclesiastes, or the Book of Daniel and Canticles.

That it was already in its final form in the time of "Ben Sira," as much as the two others known as "the Law" and "the Prophets," there is also another good reason for supposing. If it had not been, and was open, as some suppose, to receive new accessions, just as subsequently the Greek list was open at Alexandria to contributions of all sorts and from all quarters, why was not this very excellent Book of Ecclesiasticus itself received into it in its Hebrew form? Why was it necessary to translate it into Greek in order to find for it even a *quasi* connection with the Hebrew canon? When the translation of Ecclesiasticus was begun, the Hebrew Scriptures were already in a Greek dress. This was not among them. It was a Hebrew waif of former days. Either it had knocked at the gate of the Hebrew Scriptures and been rejected, or, as we have every reason to suppose from the attitude and testimony of grandfather and grandson alike, it had come into being at a time when the Hebrew Scriptures stood already long since apart from the other Hebrew national literature as the special oracles of God. In the face of the declaration of Josephus that since the time of Artaxerxes no book had been added to the Scriptures of his

people, the apparent reference in "Ben Sira" to a *completed* canon is, we submit, entitled to the benefit of any doubt which might arise from the indefiniteness of its form. If it be held that other books were added to the list subsequent to the time when Ecclesiasticus was composed, it must be proved that they were. The weightiest probabilities are against it, and any valid historical evidence whatever in its favor has never been adduced.

And now we may address ourselves more directly to the question how and when the Old Testament canon was definitely established.⁸ Some general principles should be recognized at the start. Unlike the books of the New Testament, which were the product of a single generation, the writings of the Old Testament extend over many hundred years. On the other hand, like those of the New Testament, the collection of the literature of the Old Testament would naturally be a very gradual process, and the result, in general, of a silent recognition of intrinsic claims, after a period of probation, though ordinarily supported by convincing external proofs. Just as in the case of the New Testament, too, it would be natural to expect, as Dillmann has shown,⁹ that the more special veneration of the sacred books would begin to manifest itself—unless, in some degree to the contrary, in the case of known authors of prominence—at that period when the peculiar presence and power of the revealing Spirit that had created them was decreasing or passing away. Moreover, the length of the period over which the books extend, and their externally heterogeneous character, would seem to demand that there be an historic order of canonization, and that it take place by affiliated groups, certain writings being first enucleated and associated together, and then, finally, under the natural law of unity and completeness, all gathered into one volume.

⁸ I use here, to some extent, matter drawn from my *Historic Origin of the Bible* (New York, 1873), p. 284.

⁹ *Jahrb. f. Deutsche Theologie*, 1858, p. 422.

It was probably under these principles, acting more or less imperceptibly, that the Old Testament canon was formed. In the nature of the case we should expect it to be so. Let us see if the hypothesis is not verified by the fact.

The nations of antiquity, especially in the Orient, as if influenced by the traditions of that primitive period when God walked with men, were not accustomed to divorce, as we seem too much inclined to do, religion and the state. The sanctions of religion were eagerly sought, as well in public as in private life, by rulers and people. All literature was to a great extent religious. In ancient Egypt and Babylon, as we well know, the priesthood had a position only inferior to the throne. Not only were they the accredited mediators between God and men, they also held the keys of human knowledge. They were the *literati* of their times, the producers and the depositaries of every kind of learning. And later, in the great historic empires of the West, this was scarcely less true. The libraries of Greece and Rome, too, were their temples. These sacred places were the archives of the nation. Strabo, for example, applies to the temple of his day the very name *Pinakothek* which, in our own time, is given to one of the finest art collections of central Europe.⁸

Consequently the Hebrew nation was in no sense peculiar in putting an Aaron beside Moses, in making their priests the curators of their literature, and the holiest precincts of their religion the place for its deposit. No sooner do we hear of the existence of books or rolls, than we read of their being committed to the custody of the priests. (Deut. xxxi. 9; cf. xvii. 18.) According to the Old Testament history one of the latest acts of the great Hebrew legislator was to deliver what is called the "Book of the Law" into the hands of the Levites with the charge to place it beside the Ark of the Covenant. It was no

⁸ See Liddell & Scott's *Lex. s. v.* It is the name of the principal picture gallery of Munich.

fetich; but in the mind of the people of that day that would be the proper place for it. Nor was it intended as a temporary receptacle during their sojourn in the wilderness; but the one proper place for a law library at the spot where at once their responsibility and the sanctions of the law would be most keenly felt. Whether or not this "Book of the Law" included the whole Pentateuch it is needless here to discuss.*

In the book that next follows the Pentateuch (Josh. xxiv. 26) we read that on the occasion of the renewal of the covenant under Joshua, this successor of Moses wrote the words of it "in the Book of the Law of God." Here, not only is the existence and the accessibility of "the Book of the Law of God" assumed, but also the fact that it contained material similar to that which Joshua was now called upon to add to it. Somewhat later still, when the kingdom was established under Samuel (1 Sam. x. 25), we find this distinguished forerunner of the prophets, not only explaining to the people how its affairs were to be administered, but we are told that he wrote his ministrations in "the book"⁹ (as the margin of our Revised Version properly renders the present Massoretic text) and "laid it up before the Lord;" that is, he did with it what the Levites had been enjoined to do with the documents entrusted to them by the leader of the exodus, and what Joshua had done with the rolls he had taken from their sacred resting place, to record in them the vows of his people. If, indeed, we had had no statement to this effect, just this method of procedure might have been expected from what we know of the customs of contemporaneous nations.

When now we come down several centuries later in the history, we discover a remarkable confirmation of what we have learned up to this point. In the eighteenth year of king Josiah (B. C. 621) the temple at Jerusalem was sub-

* The word, however, is ספר, and not the one ordinarily used for a single roll, מגלה.

⁹ The LXX. has ἐν βιβλίῳ.

jected to repairs. While these were going on, the high-priest Hilkiyah found a copy of what is significantly called "the Book of the Law," and brought it to the youthful king. (2 Kings xxii. 8.)" By the phraseology employed, a book is indicated whose contents, to some extent at least, were known and recognized as binding. Certainly the subsequent conduct of king and people can be explained on no other credible hypothesis. And from this period of King Josiah we may properly date the rise among the *people generally* of what may be called a canonical valuation of the Law. It became to them what, notwithstanding its amazing history, it had never been before, the Book of God. Until the exile, above all other books, even such as were intimately associated with it, it remained almost exclusively so. In the order of history, as by a just logical sequence, it became the radiant nucleus around which crystallized in their order "the prophets" and "the other books."

Dillmann¹¹ has beautifully said that "a law without prophecy would be a body without a soul." There was already prophecy enough in the Pentateuch itself to suggest the need and prepare the way for more. The uniform habit of New Testament writers in their citations to join Law and Prophets is something more than a convenient way of designating the Old Testament literature. It shows a just appreciation of what must be considered the two great and mutually complementary parts in a divine revelation. Nor was this feeling and habit confined to New Testament times. Ezra, too, quotes Pentateuch history as something that had been uttered by God's servants, the prophets. (ix. 10; cf. Neh. ix. 26, 30.) While the canon was still in process of formation, the law and

¹¹ When it is said (1 Kings viii. 9) that, when Solomon dedicated the temple, nothing was found "in the Ark" save the tables of stone, there is probably no reference to the Book of the Law. At least its presence is not denied beside the Ark. Cf. 2 Chron. v. 11; Josephus, *Antiq.* viii. 4. 1.

¹² *Jahrb. f. Deutsche Theologie*, 1858, p. 441.

the prophets were co-ordinated as being on the same level of authority (2 Kings xvii. 13; Zech. vii. 12; Mal. iv. 4, 5; cf. Dan. ix. 2).

Moreover, from the outset, the prophetic writings might be expected, from the high popular standing of the prophets themselves, to be held in the highest esteem; from their first appearance they would fall little short of canonical rank. After Samuel's day, moreover, prophetic schools were in existence. To collect and preserve the writings of their revered instructors and models would be among their chiefest cares. At any rate the prophetic books themselves give ample evidence that such collections early existed. The exact citation of one prophet by another, especially the earlier by the later, is one of their most familiar characteristics; as, for instance, Obadiah by Joel, or *vice versa*, Joel by Amos, Joel and Amos by Isaiah, and Isaiah, in turn, by Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah.¹³

At the same time, a collection of the historical books would be immediately promoted, not alone by the fact that biblical historical writers were themselves regarded as prophets;¹⁴ but by the association of the Book of Joshua for a long time directly with the Torah; while to the Book of Joshua the remaining historical books were of the nature of a sequel. We have every reason to suppose, therefore, that at some period not long after the return from the exile the connected series of histories found recorded in the Books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, were brought to a close, combined together, and associated with the prophetic writings proper, which had been previously collected. The very circumstances of the restored people: the rebuilding of the sanctuary, the knowledge of the fact that the exile itself was a providential visitation upon them because of their neglect of

¹³ Cf. Keil's *Introd.* (Edinb., 1880) § 67, notes 10 and 35; § 69, note 11; § 71, note 8; § 83, note 1; § 93, note 3; § 95, note 5; § 97, note 5.

¹⁴ The name "former prophets," it is well known, was given to them.

the covenant and the impressive lessons of their own history, the dying out of the national language as vernacular, and above all the withdrawal, with Malachi, of the gift of prophecy,—would be, each and all, powerful incentives to such a collection of this class of literature.

As it respects the remaining books of the Old Testament, designated by the Son of Sirach as “the rest of the books,” and known among us as the Hagiography, or Sacred Writings; viz., the Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Canticles, Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, Daniel, Esther, and, possibly, Ruth and Lamentations, at just what precise time within a period of about one hundred and fifty years they attained, severally and as a whole, canonical valuation, it is impossible to say. The use of the Psalter in the services of the temple requires for it, or, at least, for a collection of Psalms, a corresponding early place in the esteem of the people nearly equivalent to canonical rank (2 Chron. xxix. 30; cf. Ps. lxxii. 18–20). It is pretty generally admitted that in the time of Nehemiah this collection was virtually brought to a close. The theory of Maccabæan psalms, as we have already seen, is possible only to a very limited extent and never has been widely adopted. In Nehemiah’s time, too, if not earlier, its five-fold division must have been given to the Psalter, in imitation of the Pentateuch.

Already as early as the reign of Hezekiah (B. C. 726–697) a second collection of Solomon’s Proverbs was made under his direction, and, not long after, the whole work must have been completed (Prov. xxv. 1). These two collections, especially the former, would furnish the link by which the entire class of books to which they belong, would finally be drawn to their subsequent position in the Hebrew canon. Esther was probably the last to take its place;¹⁷ and somewhat before the Book of Ecclesiasticus was *written*, the whole collection, already so highly re-

¹⁷ But see the order adopted in the Tract of the Talmud, Baba Bathra 14b 15a (Ezra and Chron. are placed last).

garded, in all its three divisions had been brought to an orderly conclusion, and the door shut upon new-comers. In this respect the testimony of Ecclesiasticus and First Maccabees is one with that of Josephus and every scrap of credible tradition known to us. And to this testimony the later legend of Nehemiah and Ezra gives a support no less valuable in its *essential features* that in other particulars it lacks coherency and fails to invite our confidence (2 Macc. ii. 13, 14; 2 Esdras xiv. 41-47).

If the Book of Daniel, or any part of it, or any other book, was admitted to the canonical list at the time of the Maccabees, as many critics hold, these critics are bound to give us a sufficient reason for the hypothesis. It fails to account for the attitude of the Maccabees towards the "Holy Scriptures." It overlooks the nearly contemporaneous testimony of the translator of Ecclesiasticus, to say nothing of its much earlier author. It falsifies the direct statement of Josephus, which, in turn, is confirmed by every phase of the Palestinian tradition both biblical and extra-biblical. And, in fine, it loads itself with the heavy problem of accounting for the immediate and undisputed acceptance of the Book of Daniel by the Maccabæan courts of appeal when Ecclesiasticus, and what other books we know not, applied in vain.

But it remains an interesting question: How was the Old Testament canon concluded? Who had the leading parts in so grand a work? Especially, have the persistent traditions connecting therewith the names of Ezra and Nehemiah a basis in fact? Or was the whole matter simply fortuitous, at most, controlled by a very general providence? There is nothing either in the spirit or usages of post-exilian Judaism to lead us to suppose that such a matter would be left to chance, or to shape itself without its concern. The more recent criticism, from the sheer necessity of accounting for admitted facts, has found itself compelled to return to the theory it formerly, to some extent, disapproved, of a great national assembly, restored,

if not organized, by Ezra and Nehemiah, by which, among other only less important things, the Hebrew canon was given the seal of official recognition. The mistake that caused the natural reaction which began two centuries ago, was in ascribing too great, in fact, an almost supernatural, influence to this assembly.

The method of divine providence in this matter, both in the Old Testament and in the New, seems to have been rather to express itself first through the tacit assent of an enlightened religious consciousness and a sort of popular consensus of readers, and not till afterwards to permit the stamp of a formal ecclesiastical approval. The divinely guided *ecclesia* selected; ecclesiastics acting for them and in their name, at most, have only elected. Divine providence, working through the church itself, put all our present books into the canon; the councils, plainly after this preliminary work had come to an end, under the guidance of this same providence, have been set to fix the bound that should keep other less worthy books out of it.

I have already referred to the activity of the royal reformer Hezekiah in the preservation and multiplication of the sacred books. The college of scribes to whom this work was assigned received from him, not only the needed stimulus and support, but took the honorable title of "the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah" (Prov. xxv. 1). Julius Fuerst, in his work on the canon, maintains that this body of men existed, and continued their work, up to the very times of Ezra and Nehemiah.¹⁰ Whether this be true or not, they doubtless existed long after the death of their distinguished founder and patron, and furnished the example, and may be the partial incentive, to the formation of similar bodies in subsequent times. The so-called great synagogue or assembly, in fact, whose very existence some modern critics have had the temerity to deny, is but the natural outgrowth, under circumstances still more seri-

¹⁰ Der Kanon d. A. T. nach den Ueberlieferungen in Talmud u. Midrasch (Leipz. 1868), pp. 27, 75, 76, 77-80, 130-135.

ously requiring it, of this pre-exilian body for whose origin and activity with the sacred literature we have the authority of Holy Writ. The Talmud tradition concerning the rise and order of the sacred books directly connects them together as successive agents in the same undertaking.¹⁹

The oldest and most trustworthy notice of the great synagogue is found in the Talmud tract generally entitled *Massecheth Aboth* (i. 1, 2). It is there said: "Moses received the Law from Sinai; he transmitted it to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; the elders to the prophets; the prophets to the men of the great assembly, who laid down three precepts: 'Be circumspect in judging; make many disciples; make a hedge about the Law.'" Further on, it is stated that "Simon the Just was one of the survivors of the great assembly." In another tract already referred to, where the Old Testament books are especially treated, these men are represented, along with Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Hezekiah and his companions, and Ezra, as having done actual work on certain parts of our present canonical literature. Just what it was, the indefiniteness of the term leaves us in some uncertainty.²⁰ On the whole, however,²¹ the meaning seems to be that they copied the books and edited them for popular use.

The most important matter furnished by the passage is the list of Old Testament books it provides, coinciding precisely with our own, and the fact that the men of the great synagogue are said to have been somehow engaged with others in bringing them into their given order and shape. The Talmud contains a good many other references to this body, of one kind and another, all however on this general line: that it was a post-exilian institution, first called together by Ezra and Nehemiah, having among its membership, along with Zerubbabel and the high-priest

¹⁹ *Baba Bathra*, 14b 15a.

²⁰ *Baba Bathra*, 14a 15b. The word referred to is *כתב*, which, however, it is impossible to believe is used in the sense of "composed."

²¹ It is translated in full by Wright, *The Book of Koheleth*, p. 451 ff.

Joshua, the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi; but extending downward also to the times of Simon the Just, i. e., the beginning of the third century, B. C. The affairs of the restored Jewish commonwealth were its concern. It had its whole existence in that very period from which we receive the Hebrew Bible in its final form. Could it, in fact, have been better employed, or have had an object more suited to its alleged origin and history, than in giving to its own people, and through them to the world, in a completed form, those Scriptures which they had received from prophetic hands?

The first to call in question the statements of the Talmud concerning the existence of this body, was Simon, whose work entitled *The Critical History of the Old Testament* was published just two centuries ago.²² He was followed by Rau,²³ Aurivillius²⁴ (Michaelis), DeWette,²⁵ and others, all of whom made use almost exclusively of the *argumentum e silentio*. The silence of Philo, Josephus, and the apocryphal books concerning any such body, joined with the fact that our first notice of it is in the Talmud tract, whose date cannot be earlier than the first century of our era, in their view rendered it exceedingly improbable that it was any thing more than a quiddity of the rabbins, and no historical entity. On the other hand, names even better known, as Eichhorn, Bertholdt, Ewald, Jost, Zunz,²⁶ and many others, became enlisted in the defence of

²² *Histoire Crit. du Vieux Test.*, 1685.

²³ *Diatriba de Synagoga Magna*, Utrecht, 1727.

²⁴ *Dissertationes* (ed. by Michaelis) Götting., 1790.

²⁵ *Einleitung* (ed. by Schrader, 1869) p. 20. Cf. also Hartmann, *Die Enge Verbindung d. A. T. mit d. Neuen*, Hamb., 1831, pp. 120-166; Taylor, *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, Camb., 1877, excursus ii.; Krochmal in the *Heb. periodical Kerem Chemid*. v. 63 ff.; Kuenen, *Over de Mannen der Groote Synagoge*, Amsterd., 1876; Graetz in *Frankel's Monatschrift*, 1857, pp. 31-37, 61-70; Derenbourg, *Histoire de la Palestine*, pp. 29-40; Bloch, *Studien zur Sammlung*, etc., pp. 100-132; Wright, *Koheleth*, excursus iii.

²⁶ The works of these writers are well known. Zunz (*Gottesdienstliche Vorträge*, p. 33) says: "Der unter dem Namen der grossen Synagoge Vol. XLIII. No. 170.

the tradition, holding that it was an extreme position in historical scepticism to doubt the very existence of a body so clearly in place in the post-exilian times and so frequently the subject of particular notice in the generally trustworthy tradition preserved to us in the Talmud. Without pretending to accept implicitly every statement made concerning it, as to its name, its numbers, and the like, the actuality of the great synagogue or assembly, and its employment in the re-organization of the Jewish religious life and literature, subsequent to the exile, it was argued, could not well be called in question.

And this, it may confidently be said, is the opinion of the majority of biblical scholars of our day. But it is not universal. The subject has of late been given new prominence by a treatise of Kuenen,⁷⁷ whose results are fully accepted in Wellhausen's edition of Bleek's Introduction to the Old Testament,⁷⁸ by Professor W. R. Smith in England,⁷⁹ and far too hastily, as it seems to us, by some critics in our own country.⁸⁰ With this comparatively small company of younger scholars, who, whatever else they may lack, apparently lack no assurance of the justice of their own conclusions, the matter of a post-exilian body of this sort has been peremptorily relegated to the realm of fable.

Professor W. R. Smith says (p. 156): "We now know that the whole idea that there ever was a body called the Great Synagogue holding rule in the Jewish nation is pure fiction. It has been proved in the clearest manner that the origin of the legend of the Great Synagogue lies in the account given in Neh. viii.-x. of the great convocation which met at Jerusalem and subscribed the covenant to observe the law. It was therefore a meeting, and

bekannter Verein von Priestern u. Gesetzlehrern, an dessen Existenz u. stiller, daher wohl den Zeitgenossen unbemerkt vortibergegangener, Wirksamkeit, kein erheblicher Grund zu zweifeln ist."

⁷⁷ See preceding list of authorities.

⁷⁸ Berlin, 1878, p. 51.

⁷⁹ Old Test. in Jewish Church, pp. 156-408.

⁸⁰ See Briggs' Biblical Study, p. 129.

not a permanent authority. It met once for all, and every thing that is told about it, except what we read in Nehemiah, is pure fable of later Jews." Professor Smith refers to Kuenen as the champion of this view. It is he who has "proved in the clearest manner," that the whole hypothesis of a great synagogue is legendary.

Professor Smith, moreover, indicates how Kuenen has done this (p. 408 f.). Besides carrying out more fully Rau's argument derived from the silence of witnesses between the exile and the Christian era, he has shown, he thinks, that the alleged references of the Talmud to a great synagogue are really references to the convocation of Ezra and Nehemiah already alluded to, which they once for all assembled "in the street before the water-gate" to hear the law and to avow their loyalty to it.

Now Kuenen, as we are free to say, has done *something of this kind* and by so doing has rendered a most important service to the cause of biblical learning. We accept many of his facts which are set forth with great clearness and skill, without by any means feeling bound in consequence to accept his conclusions. He has, in truth, made it more evident than it was ever made before, although it is by no means a new discovery, just how and when the great synagogue had its post-exilic rise, who were its earliest promoters, and what its peculiar work, in some sense, was. But he and his adherents, we must think, have stopped short with a half-truth. They have taken what was the beginning of a movement for the whole of it. If the Talmud tradition, on whose trustworthiness Kuenen, too, so far relies as to build his main arguments upon it, teaches any thing, it teaches that while Ezra, Nehemiah, and other noted men of their times formed a part of the supposed great synagogue, they formed *only* a part, and that the beginning of it. The very tract which contains the final notice of the body contains also a statement that Simon the Just, who lived nearly two centuries later, was one of its survivors. This Simon cannot

be made a contemporary and direct co-operator with the early exulants. Elsewhere, too, they are spoken of as successors to the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

We depend on no exaggerations of an Elias Levita. We willingly give up the sixteenth century theory of the great synagogue and its work in the crude and uncritical form in which it was then held. We accept the reasoning of Kuenen and his fellow-critics, while denying, as before said, that it is in any sense a novelty of our times, which identifies, in so far the great synagogue spoken of in the Talmud with the assembly convened by Ezra and Nehemiah respecting the observance of the law. It is in strictest harmony, too, with those pre-Christian traditions already noticed in 2 Maccabees and 2 Esdras. But in accepting the Talmud statements and building on them here, we feel bound to accept them in their full extent. Neither Ezra nor Nehemiah, nor any immediate associate of theirs, *can* have done the work the Talmud ascribes to this body. Only because of a solidarity of interest and a similarity of aim are the offices and titles of widely separated generations treated in the later tradition as one.

And as it concerns the almost unbroken silence of subsequent Jewish history and literature for so long a time concerning this great assembly, how could it well have been otherwise? That history, when one comes to examine it, is nearly a total blank. The forty years of wilderness wanderings, the dark ages of mediæval history are not more marked by black chasms and mysterious silences. Their own inviolable rules, moreover, prevented members of the body itself from publishing in written form its laws and ordinances. Down to the time of the Talmud it was a custom most scrupulously observed to record nothing of such matters as must have characterized the life and material activities of the great synagogue. Then, at last, the seal of silence was broken, and then first, we begin to hear, not once, but many times, and in many forms, the declarations on which our belief in the exist-

ence and general scope and aim of such a body is founded. "He who writes down the ordinances," was the standing motto of these strangely silent workmen of the ancient church, "is like one who burns the law." A praiseworthy loyalty to what they understood to be God's highest revelation had effectually closed their lips to their own labors until considerably after the beginning of our era.

Hence, in harmony with the main body of sober biblical scholars, we are not prepared to give up as yet our belief in the existence and wide-reaching activity of the so-called great synagogue. It forms precisely the link needed to connect two otherwise badly disconnected periods of Jewish history. If it receive somewhat of its support from Talmud tradition, it is a tradition which, in its main features, is unassailable. Meantime, be it observed, its principal support is in positive institutions of post-exilian Judaism for whose being and working we have the authority of biblical books. We are not inclined to attribute supernatural endowments and acts to these mostly unknown men, except as they were under the guidance of God's acknowledged prophets of this period. We do not wish to assume that they did any thing as it respects the canonical books which they did not do. It was really very little that they would be called upon to do, if we may judge from their New Testament collaborators. They had simply to recognize the evident work of Providence. The supernatural element in the formation of either canon is not excessive. The present collection of these books, whatever we may say of their composition, was mostly a natural, by which I do not mean, however, that it was not a providential, result.

We have traced a certain process and movement in the Old Testament literature down to the time of the alleged great assembly. After their times we behold it as a completed work: moreover, with certain unmistakable marks of age and an evident halo of sanctity about it. We do

²¹ Cf. Wright's *Koheleth*, p. 484.

not say that, under God, the great assembly organized by Ezra and Nehemiah did that work. We only say that it was concluded before that assembly broke up not quite two centuries later; that they were eminently fitted to do it; that so far as we are able to look in upon their deliberations, it is the kind of business with which they employed themselves. To put a hedge about the law was one of their confessed aims. And that sounds like a not so very distant echo of the ancient legislator's words: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it." We have an effect which demands a cause. This, so far as we can see, is an every way sufficient and suitable cause.

Some unknown hand reaches down to us out of the mystery of the third century a completed Hebrew Bible. Can we justly doubt that that hand represents the body of men of whom it is said that Simon the Just, whose praises "Ben Sira" sings, was one of the last survivors? With them we must leave it, or we must clearly leave it unaccounted for. It is safe to leave it with them—and with Him who for wise purposes of his own has chosen that here, too, we should see through a glass darkly."

²³ Besides the works and articles already cited, and the well-known Introductions to the Bible, the following are the more important treating the Canon of the Old Testament: Semler, *Abhand. v. freier Untersuchung d. Kanon*, Halle, 1776; Schmid, *Historia Antiqua et Vindicatio Canonis*, etc., Lips. 1775; Movers, *Loci Quidam Historiæ Illustrati*, etc., Breslau, 1842; Herzfeld, *Geschichte* ii. 1857; Bleek, "Stellung d. Apokryphen," etc., *Stud. u. Kritiken*, 1853; Stuart, *Crit. Hist. and Defence of O. T. Canon*, Andover, 1853; Cosin, *Scholastical Hist. of the Canon*, etc., Lond. (vol. iii. of works), 1849; Vaihinger, "Zur Untersuch. ueber d. Abschluss d. Alttest. Kanons," *Stud. u. Kritiken*, 1857, pp. 93-99; Credner, *Zur Geschichte d. Kanons*, Halle, 1857; Oehler, "Kanon d. A. T." *Herzog's Encyk. 1st Aufg.*; Welte, "Bemerkungen ueber d. Entstehung, d. Alttest. Kanons," *Theol. Quartalschrift*, 1855, pp. 58-95; Steiner, *ibid.*, *Schenkel's Bibel-Lexikon*; Ewald, *Geschichte* (iii. Götting. 1868); Diestel, *Geschichte d. A. T. in d. Christlichen Kirche*, Jena, 1869; Reuss, *Gesch. d. heil. Schrift. d. A. T.*, Braunschweig, 1881; Wordsworth, *Canon of O. and N. Tests.*, Hulsean Lect. for 1847-8.