

ARTICLE VI.

IS THE DOCUMENTARY THEORY TENABLE?¹

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I.

THREE IMPORTANT ADMISSIONS.

SINCE I wrote my last article for the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* (Oct. 1912), remarkable things have occurred in the field of Pentateuchal inquiry. In Germany, in England and America, leading members of the prevailing school have either abandoned important positions held by the higher critics or adopted the methods of the textual critics. We cite three instances:—

1. In Germany, Hugo Gressmann has published his work "Mose und seine Zeit" (Göttingen, 1913). According to this, Moses is the founder of the Israelitish religion (p. 446); out of the organic development of his work sprung the works of the great prophets; they are the heirs of Moses, without whom they could not have accomplished what they did (p. 467); the Red Sea incident is an historical event which was an ocular demonstration to the Israelites of the absolute supremacy of Jahweh over the gods of the Egyptians (p. 470). The religion of Jahweh, which Moses introduced, is a thoroughly moral religion. Through the services of Moses the sphere of justice was for the first time embodied in the domain of religion on Israelitish soil, thus creating the firm foundation for the future nature of the state (p. 471). The stories of Genesis emanate, in their original form, from pre-

¹Translated by Florence Chaney Geiser, Oberlin, Ohio.

Mosaic times (p. 426); those of the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, extend in their oldest parts into the time of Moses; indeed, they are perhaps, in part, still older (p. 385). Concerning the Decalogue, Gressmann not only considers a Mosaic conception of it possible, but he even asserts (p. 476) that the Decalogue of Exodus xx. is in distinct accordance with Moses' foundation of religion, and that Exodus xx. was the catechism of the Hebrews in Mosaic times!

What a change in the view concerning the development of the religion of Israel; since, as late as 1890, Eduard Reuss voiced his well-known thesis that the Prophets are older than the Law, and the Psalms younger than both! But now Gressmann expresses the conviction that the current formula "Moses and the Prophets," which critics have sought falsely to reverse, may still, as formerly, be justified. The same Eduard Reuss, in 1890, wrote in the second edition of his "Geschichte der heiligen Schriften alten Testaments": "It may properly be asked, whether at the time of Moses there could be a question concerning the art of writing and of the other allied arts among the Israelites to the extent presupposed" (p. 96). The controversy concerning the origin of the alphabet gives him another ground for doubting the genuineness of the Mosaic documents.¹

To-day, however, even on the Sinaitic Peninsula, traces of the Semitic alphabet have been found by Professor Petrie; and, according to Professor Zerbe, "on the basis obtainable from epigraphy, the Phœnician alphabet must have reached its completed form as early as 1500 B. C." And now what a strong contrast between Gressmann's view of the Decalogue and that of Beer, who recently expressed the opinion that the

¹ It is important to call attention to this fact just at this point, because it is now denied by the representatives of higher criticism that such statements had ever been uttered on their side.

Decalogue must be post-exilic! Such utterances are to-day no longer in accordance with the spirit of the times.

Moreover, Gressmann makes admissions not only in regard to religious history, but also in regard to literary criticism. In his critique of my book "Textkritische Materialien zur Hexateuchfrage," in the *Deutschen Literaturzeitung* (1913, No. 20, cols. 1221-1227), he admits (col. 1225) that the divine names Jahweh and Elohim do not always lead infallibly to the identification of the original documents. Outside of Genesis one cannot be guided by the divine names because no fixed variation exists; and even in Genesis the revision of the divine names has been greater than critics up to the present time have been willing to admit. Perhaps it would be better entirely to avoid the names Jahwist and Elohist in case a better and simpler designation of the sources could be found!

This utterance of Gressmann is not merely an accidental one, but much rather an evolution, necessitated by my book "Textkritische Materialien," of that which he has already admitted in his book "Mose und seine Zeit." There, for example, he says: "Concerning the division of the Priestly Code there is general unanimity of opinion. But, on the other hand, the differentiation of J and E can be carried out with only approximate certainty, since the means of distinguishing the divine names which is useful in Genesis, fails almost entirely in the middle books of the Pentateuch, and since the evidence of literary usage is very feeble on account of the poverty of the Hebrew language. In many instances J and E are nothing more than labels which may be changed at will. In spite of this one must attempt to get along with the hypothesis of JE, remembering, however, that it is an hypothesis. Still, in order to come to an understanding, and in order to find one's way in the midst of so many variants, the labels JE are indis-

pensable, even though they can claim only relative validity" (p. 368). Thus the assured results would appear to-day to give one the right to change the labels at will! And yet others dare to regard J and E as undoubted capitals?

2. In England Dr. Skinner has discussed in the *Expositor* from April to September, 1913, the first part of my book, which contains 121 pages. The length of his discussion, 128 pages (7 more than the part of my book under consideration!) shows that, nevertheless, it has gradually become clear to the representatives of higher criticism that they must, *nolens volens*, right themselves in regard to the materials for textual criticism offered by Mr. H. M. Wiener, myself, and others. In Dr. Skinner's articles there are noteworthy utterances.

In the first place, Dr. Skinner again and again positively asserts that there is no reason at hand for doubting the correctness of the documentary theory; since the Massoretic text is a solid and sufficient working basis for the analysis of the sources. According to him it "has undergone no material variations for more than 2,000 years" (July, p. 24; Sept., p. 278). He continually maintains that the deviations from the Massoretic text in the divine names which are found in the LXX (May, p. 407) or in the deviating Hebrew MSS. (July, pp. 27 ff.) are scribal errors.¹ Moreover, according to him in regard to the הוֹרָתָהּ in Exodus vi. 3, *five* witnesses, independent of one another, have committed the same scribal error (April, p. 301). This belongs to the list of chance coincidences, as he says (p. 302), and they seem to play an important rôle in all of his discussions.

Secondly, Dr. Skinner's whole effort is bent towards depreciating the value of the LXX. "The Hebrew text," in his

¹ Even if the *same* deviation is found in the LXX and in one or some of the Hebrew MSS., this is to be considered as a scribal error.

opinion, "possesses credentials to which no version, and perhaps the LXX least of all, can pretend" (April, p. 290). "The presumption is all in favour of the original, because it is not subject to the uncertainty which inevitably attends the mental process of translation; especially when, as is abundantly clear in the case of the LXX, word-for-word translation was not aimed at" (Sept., p. 273).

If Dr. Skinner is right, however, in this characterization of the LXX, how does it happen that he makes the most distorted use of the text readings often implied by the LXX in his Commentary on Genesis? And what does Dr. Skinner think of Dr. Kennedy's "Plea for Fuller Criticism of the Massoretic Text," in the same April number, in which he exalts the Massoretic text above everything? How could he subscribe to the statement by nonconformist scholars in the *London Times* for October 2, 1912 (p. 7), which reads, "Since the Hebrew text is in not a few passages unintelligible, and in others almost certainly wrong, and since the Jewish commentary [i.e. the vowel points], though valuable, is not infallible, many passages still convey in the Revised Version, as they had conveyed in the Authorized Version, a meaning which is certainly at variance with that of the original text. In any future revision, the fullest use should be made of all existing material for the determination of the original text and its meaning. But much remains to be done before this material and especially the Septuagint Version can be fully and satisfactorily used"? This recognition of the necessity of a comprehensive textual criticism does not coincide with the great majority of Dr. Skinner's utterances on this point in the *Expositor*. There he generally denies any value the LXX may have for the restoration of the original text.

To be sure, there is in the *Expositor* one statement similar to

that in the *Times*. On the last page of his last article (Sept., p. 288) he finds himself compelled to emphasize the fact that he is "far from thinking that the last word has been said about the problem of the LXX and its bearing on the history of the Hebrew text. Dahse's work has made it impossible for critics to treat that problem lightly, and has set a high standard of accuracy and thoroughness to those who shall attempt it." And in the same article (p. 267) he admits that "the real effect of Dahse's work will be rather the diffusion of a vague uncertainty as regards the Hebrew text in general"; yes, even "that confidence in the results of critical analysis must be seriously shaken." The most important admission, however, in which there lies a triumph for Mr. H. M. Wiener, is contained in the words of the April article (p. 291): "We must frankly acknowledge that the trustworthiness of the Hebrew text in its transmission of the divine names calls for more thorough investigation than it has yet received at the hands of critical scholars."

Indeed, Dr. Skinner could not very well do anything else but make these admissions, since nearly all the Old Testament critics, at least in Germany, begin to do the same. Of course Dr. Skinner is trying from the outset to break down every argument that may lead to a fatal result to his theory from such text-critical observations, in that he states: "The textual evidence as to the divine names has much less importance than certain writers imagine" (p. 290). So also the reviewer in the *Hartford Seminary Record* (April, 1913) expresses himself likewise: "Even if there be some uncertainty in the divine names in Genesis, this is not so fatal to the documentary theory as Dahse supposes, for criticism has long since outgrown a slavish dependence upon the divine names as a criterion in the analysis. Other facts, such as the

duplication of narratives, different diction, and different historical and theological standpoints, are taken into consideration in assigning passages to one or another document; and these facts occasionally contradict the evidence from the divine names and compel us to suppose that there has been textual corruption" (p. 139). According to this reviewer (likewise according to Dr. Rothstein in the *Theol. Literaturblatt*, 1913, No. 13, cols. 297, 298, in his critique of H. M. Wiener's *Pentateuchal Studies*), there is no objection to a text so long as it agrees with the usual source distinction; but if the divine names do not thus agree, then there has been textual corruption! Whoever thinks thus, shows that he is attempting to uphold a cherished view at any price, even that of violating elemental principles of philology, according to which the transmission of the text must first be considered before the sources which may arise can be investigated.

In order, at the outset, to safeguard himself against any unpleasant results of textual criticism which may develop, Dr. Skinner then further affirms (April, p. 293) that "is a very great exaggeration" to maintain that "the documentary analysis of the Pentateuch depends on the distinctive use of the divine names in different sections to such a degree that if this criterion can be shown to be unreliable the whole edifice crumbles to the ground." In his September article (p. 266) he again reiterates the charge of gross exaggeration on my part. I shall contrast this charge with only the sentence of Gressmann, already cited above, that in the middle books of the Pentateuch the differentiation of J and E can only rarely be carried out with approximate certainty, since the means of distinguishing the divine names is almost entirely inapplicable and since the argument from literary usage is very weak on account of the poverty of the Hebrew literature.

Herein lies, however, for every one who can read and is willing to understand, the admission that *only* the divine names are a *certain* means of distinction between J and E; besides, the labels may be exchanged at will! This "exclusive importance" is attributed to the appellations of God, not "in the ill-considered utterances of controversial writers on the subject" (April, p. 295), but by the Berlin Professor Doctor of Theology Hugo Gressmann! Moreover, Dr. Skinner himself also admits (April, pp. 295, 296) that one part of the documentary theory is largely dependent on the divine names, viz. the separation between J and E. And this admission Principal Skinner not only makes in his first article, but he repeats it in his last one: "If the text with which critics have operated could be shewn to be either demonstrably wrong or hopelessly uncertain, the evidence for the documentary hypothesis would at some points (at least in the analysis of J and E) be sensibly weakened" (Sept., p. 266). In the *Expositor* of December, 1913, I attempt to show that Dr. Skinner himself in his six articles admits the superiority of the text of the versions, or else the uncertainty of the original reading, in so many places that really through these admissions by Dr. Skinner (something of that nature is found in almost every chapter from Gen. i. to xxi.) the worthlessness of the divine names as source distinctions is shown, and therewith the impossibility of proving the source writings J and E.

In this connection I must protest against an imputation which involves a false representation of my views. I have never asserted, as Dr. Skinner would make believe (April, p. 294), that, apart from the criterion of the divine names, there would be no evidence for diversity of authorship in the Pentateuch at all. As the readers of the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* know, in my article of October, 1912, I accept different strata of the Pen-

tateuch, but I deny the correctness of the discovery of the former independent sources J and E with their alleged parallel accounts.

In order to authenticate these alleged formerly independent original narratives and duplicate accounts, one would need criteria running through from the beginning to the end, an Ariadne thread for every original narrative, to which one could hold firmly from the beginning to the end, in analyzing and dividing up every chapter. Such tests have been *only and solely* Jahweh and Elohim, Jacob and Israel! All the other criteria of *language* occur only singly, and in comparison with those main criteria are quite inferior. And whatever other criteria are advanced — duplication of narrative, different historical and theological standpoints — do not prove in the slightest degree the former independent existence of the alleged source writings J and E. They go only toward proving different strata of the Pentateuch, and show that various hands one after another have produced new editions of the old "Book." For it is my firm conviction that since the oldest times of Israel there has been a Book of Moses, which when the times demanded it was published anew and probably enlarged. According to my opinion, that is the only solution of the Pentateuchal problem which corresponds both to tradition and to the text, for which a great list of analogies speak, and for which there is a large number of proofs.

3. But before I present this opinion further, let me mention a third higher critic of marked ability who in the United States has recently allied himself with our methods, Professor Julius A. Bewer. Already in his article "The Literary Problems of the Balaam Story" (*Am. Jour. Theol.*, April, 1905, pp. 238-262) he had exercised a remarkable restraint against an all too minute source distinction in that he had turned

against the usual discursiveness of the accounts, and accepted only two great connected source divisions. Now he has published an article in the *American Journal of Semitic Languages* (July, 1913) in which he employs, in reference to the book of Judges, the same rules which the textual critics would like to see employed with regard to the Pentateuch. It is the article "The Composition of Judges, Chaps. 17, 18." There he states: "Now it may be set down as a working principle of literary criticism, or if not as a principle at least as a reasonable demand, that the theory of a compilation of two parallel versions in a given story should be resorted to only when the other theory fails which tries to overcome the difficulties by means of textual criticism, by the discovery and excision of glosses and interpolations, and by the emendation of corruptions, and when there are clear and convincing evidences of two originally distinct versions" (p. 261). For the following twenty pages the author deals according to this principle, and his result is: "We have come to the conclusion that there is no need for the critical theories of compilation or of interpolation in Judges, chaps. 17, 18. The story is a unity throughout with very few redactional touches. . . . Through the severest process of literary criticism these chapters have come, various critical theories have proved inadequate, and now at the end of the process we may confidently regard them as a unity" (p. 283).

Here you have Dr. Julius Bewer's judgment. Would not the same investigator arrive at the same conclusions if he investigated the Pentateuch in the same manner, just as independently, and without prejudice? At any rate, he has, with this extremely praiseworthy article on "The Composition of Judges, Chaps. 17, 18," made from within the first breach in the fortress of higher criticism. *Vivant sequentes!*