

CRITICAL NOTE

DR. EDUARD KÖNIG ON "GENESIS"¹

THERE is probably no literary document that has been the subject of more discussion than the first book of the Old Testament. Nor is interest in the same growing less in this age of unparalleled critical investigation and scientific progress. It is true that much negative criticism has within recent years been directed against it; but this seems only to have afforded new occasions for fresh investigations on the part of constructive scholarship.

Of this unusual interest in Genesis we have a remarkable illustration in the book under consideration. While the united Allies' guns were blasting their way, through what had previously been considered impregnable fortresses and invincible armies, toward the heart of his country, a lone German scholar, as if apparently unconcerned, was forging a new link in the long chain of evidence for the truth. When one considers how difficult it is to associate truth with besieging guns, he will recognize the apparent incongruity involved in the production of such a work of German scholarship upon the background of the *Great War*.

For a really great work on Genesis, probably no theologian is better qualified than the eminent Old Testament scholar and recognized authority on Semitic literature, Prof. Dr. Eduard König, of Bonn. His unusual, perhaps unexcelled, qualifications as a Hebrew scholar are attested by such learned works as his "Historisch-kritisches Lehrgebäude der hebräischen Sprache" (3 vols., 1881-97) and his "Hebräische Grammatik" (Leipzig, 1908). His position as an authority on the religious history of the Israelites, is marked by his great works, entitled "Die Hauptprobleme der altisraelitischen Religionsgeschichte" (1884; Eng. trans. by A. J. Campbell, "The Religious His-

¹Die Genesis eingeleitet übersetzt und erklärt. By Eduard König, Dr. litt. semit., phil., theol., Professor in University of Bonn. Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann. 1919. 28 Marks.

tory of Israel," Edinburgh, 1885), his "Geschichte des Reiches Gottes bis auf Jesus Christus" (Brunswick, 1908), his "Die Gottesfrage und der Ursprung des Alten Testaments" (1903), and his "Geschichte der Alttestamentlichen Religion" (1915). That he is a master in the field of criticism is shown by works like his "Falsche Extreme in der neuen Kritik des Alten Testaments" (Leipzig, 1895), "Neueste Prinzipien der alttestamentlichen Kritik" (Berlin, 1902), "Bibel und Babel" (1902; Eng. trans. by K. T. Piltner, "Bible and Babylon" (London, 1905), "Die Bibel-Babel-Frage und die wissenschaftliche Methode" (1904), and "Die moderne Pentateuchkritik und ihre neueste Bekämpfung" (1914). It may be said that in the two works next to the last he met the eminent Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch on his own ground and virtually silenced his more open attacks upon the Old Testament until but recently.¹ And, as a result of his extensive and varied scholarship, he has become an unsurpassed authority on interpretation, as witness such works as "Der Offenbarungsbegriff des Alten Testaments" (2 vols., 1882), "Hermeneutik des Alten Testaments" (1916), and his commentaries. And similarly might we speak of other important works. Indeed, upon almost the whole range of investigation bearing on the Book of Genesis, Dr. König's works may be quoted as authority.

Our learned author has, for his conclusions, put upon the witness stand an astonishing array of authorities from many lands and diverse communions and philosophic and theological convictions, some of whom he compels to testify even against their own peculiar views. It is surprising how familiar Dr. König is with British and American scholarship, with some of which he seems to have kept in touch even during the Great War. It is almost needless to say that he knows at first hand the results of the investigations of men like Harold M. Wiener, A. K. Cheyne,

¹Die Grosse Täuschung. Von Friedrich Delitzsch. Stuttgart und Berlin, 1920. This has already been answered by Dr. König: Friedrich Delitzsch's "Die grosse Täuschung" kritisch beleuchtet. Gütersloh, 1920.

S. R. Driver, James Orr, George A. Barton, Albert T. Clay, Herman V. Hilprecht, Melvin Grove Kyle, Paul Haupt, and the geologist and scientific apologist G. Frederick Wright, not to speak of many others. And among the various English periodicals with whose contents along special lines bearing upon his subject he is acquainted, are such recognized publications as *Bibliotheca Sacra*, *The American Journal of Theology*, *The Biblical World*, *The American Journal of Semitic Languages*, *The Expository Times*, not to speak of the proceedings of various learned societies, such as the *Proceedings of the Society for Biblical Archaeology*, etc. The extent of his resources is well-nigh universal in content; the range of his authorities is cosmopolitan in personnel. In addition to this array of *special* witnesses, all the really great commentators on Genesis, of many centuries and of many lands, are also made to pass before the reader and lay their direct and indirect contributions at his feet. But from this it must not be gathered that the work is simply a learned compilation of the results of the thoughts and researches of hosts of other men. On the contrary, as already indicated, our author is along some lines of investigation himself almost without a superior, who, moreover, like a learned judge, reviews all the evidence of these many witnesses and, with his own thorough understanding of the case in all its literary and historic bearings, gives in this great work on Genesis his charge to a world of jurors. It becomes us, then, to have before us at least a brief outline of the charge of so notable a judge, even though one may not agree with all its details.

In form the book is an octavo volume of viii and 784 closely printed pages. In his *Foreword* (Vorwort, pp. iii-vi) he sets forth the reason for adding another to the many already-existing commentaries on Genesis, and the purpose and scope of the present work. This is followed by an outline of its contents (vii-viii). Then comes the historical and critical *Introduction* (Einleitung zur Erklärung der Genesis, pp. 1-128), which is a masterpiece of its kind. In it he treats first of the name of the first book of the Penta-

teuch and of its outward form, its divisions, etc. The text in its linguistic aspect, as well as in the light of the Septuagint, the Targum, the Peshito, etc., is here considered somewhat at length. Among important questions answered (pp. 2-13) which had never before been met in any commentary, is the one repeatedly pressed by certain critics as to a possible cuneiform Babylonian original, of which the Hebrew Genesis is alleged to be a translation. His conclusion that such a theory is untenable, is based upon a most illuminating analysis of the supposed evidence for, and the evidence against, such a theory. His argument would seem to be so unanswerable as to leave the objector no longer any ground upon which to stand. The relative value or importance of the Masoretic Text as compared with that of the Septuagint, etc., is here also considered, not to speak of other important points. Then follows the much-debated "problem of the literary unity of the Book of Genesis." He sets forth the most conservative arguments for the so-called Elohist (E), Jahvistic (J), and Priestly (P) strata or sources of the Book, and then gives his conclusion as to the alleged bringing together and editing of these parts by a so-called redactor. And even though one might not wholly agree with Dr. König as to his conclusion and as to certain of his premises on this critical and rather uncertain question, he has here a very sane and most reverent statement of this important subject, as to which many conservative scholars follow with keen interest the remarkable investigations of men like Wiener and Kyle. At any rate, our author's faith is in no way disturbed by whatever results may follow from the honest investigations of constructive scholarship. Indeed, he points out quite fully and emphatically the inherent limitations of such an hypothetical partition of the Book. Our author next develops the point of the historic valuation of Genesis, in which he also points out its eternal interest, especially for religion. In his discussion of the religious valuation of Genesis he shows that its world-view is not at variance with that of real science, but only with much of the prevalent *philosophic* world-con-

ceptions. His philosophic development of this point is one of the strongest parts of the book. The *Einleitung* closes with an account of the methods and history of interpretation of Genesis.

The *Einleitung* is followed immediately by the *Erklärung* (pp. 129-762), in which he takes up verse by verse, or paragraph by paragraph, the contents of the Book. A most valuable feature in connection with his explanations, is his new, and in many details improved, critical *translation* of the Hebrew text, for which his recognized qualifications as an eminent Hebraist have so well fitted him.

His discussion of the account of creation (Gen. i.-ii. 3) is exceptionally thorough, covering fifty pages. He devotes considerable space to a discussion of the first verse of Genesis, and of its relation to what follows, the conclusions of which are essentially in accord with the result of the writer's own study of this point.¹ This verse he, of course, regards as expressive of the fundamental or primal creation and not as a mere heading to the whole account. Thus the universe is shown to have had a *beginning*, before which God existed alone without any manifestation in physical creation. And this undoubtedly correct interpretation of Gen. i. 1 is in full correspondence with all the evidence from universal nature, according to which the material universe is manifestly dependent and necessarily finite and temporal.² Of course, with the interpretation that the Hebrew word (*yom*) translated *day* in the account of creation could not, in the view of the writer, have meant a long *period* of time, we could not agree, as we have tried to show elsewhere.³

Of more than ordinary interest is also our author's thorough discussion of the Garden of Eden and the creation of woman, as well as that of the fall of man. To the account of Noah and the Flood he devotes also a good

¹ See "The Creative Days," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October, 1919.

² *Creation Ex Nihilo: The Physical Universe a Finite and Temporal Entity*. By L. Franklin Gruber. Boston: The Gorham Press. 1918.

³ See *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October, 1919.

number (35) of pages. Among other scholars he cites H. V. Hilprecht on the discovery of new non-Biblical accounts of the Flood, and G. Frederick Wright, whose "Scientific Confirmations of Old Testament History" he quotes most appreciatingly on this point.

But time and space would fail us to do more than merely refer to several outstanding points of this great work, so as simply to call attention to it. To outline the position of our commentator on many of the great questions he discusses and on important details of interpretation, such a brief statement would, of course, be inadequate. Suffice it to say that the work can be heartily welcomed as relatively conservative. This fact is all the more noteworthy for constructive scholarship because of the wealth of learning with which its points are established. And even where our author's views might not be wholly acceptable to some of his readers, they, nevertheless, are honest convictions of the author set forth both reverently and as the result of mature reflection.

The arrangement of the contents of the book is such as much to facilitate its use. Its value is, moreover, much enhanced by a very complete index of topics and one of Scripture passages of other parts of the Bible quoted.

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