

## CRITICAL NOTE

### DR. KYLE'S "THE PROBLEM OF THE PENTATEUCH"<sup>1</sup>

THE whole Christian world is greatly indebted to Dr. Kyle for this capable and convincing book, as well as for the other books that have come from his pen. Who knows but that Dr. Kyle "has come to the kingdom for such a time as this"? In many places, conspicuous places too, the higher critical theories that have been so jeopardizing to the faith, not to say destructive of the faith, have prevailed, and have taken large hold on the would-be scholarly mind of the age. It is not enough to denounce these liberalizing views; to grow angry and hurl epithets at them. The negative critics must be answered. Scholarship must match scholarship; logic must meet logic; facts must be appealed to with indubitable certainty.

These last sentences are descriptive of Dr. Kyle's work. Nowhere does he use harsh terms, though he shows clearly what he believes and why he does not stand with the disintegrating critics. He understands the situation; he knows what the liberalistic position is; he sees clearly whither it would lead if it were generally accepted. Yet he never uses the *argumentum ad hominem*—the appeal to fear or passion. We are glad he conducts the argument in so calm and judicial a temper.

According to the subtitle of Dr. Kyle's book, he proposes a "new solution" of the Pentateuchal problem. It is interesting to follow his gradual and thoroughgoing method in presenting his solution. At first you wonder what such and such facts have to do with any solution whatever, and therefore you pursue the study step by step with intense interest, even with keenly aroused curiosity;

<sup>1</sup> The Problem of the Pentateuch: A New Solution by Archeological Methods. By Melvin Grove Kyle, D.D., LL.D., Professor of Biblical Theology and Archeology in the United Presbyterian Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Mo. Bibliotheca Sacra Company, Oberlin, Ohio. 1920. \$2.15.

and when at length the solution is made clear — just at what might be called the “strategic” moment — you draw a sigh of relief and pleasure, and you exclaim to yourself, “Well, what could be more reasonable than this proposed solution?” It is really thrilling to contemplate what a revolution may take place in the religious world and the world of critical scholarship, if Dr. Kyle’s solution of the problem should be generally accepted in lieu of the documentary theory of the Pentateuch now so much in vogue. Would it not bring about a revival of true evangelical religion — a revival that would send out all our Biblical and theological scholars as flaming evangelists for the conversion of the world?

But what is this new solution of the problem of the Pentateuch? The documentary theory, coming down to us from Astruc and Eichhorn through Graf, Wellhausen, Kuenen, Colenso, Cheyne, Driver, *et al.*, holds that the Pentateuch had a multiple authorship; that one portion was written by J, another by E, another by P, etc., and that all these various writings were put together by what might be called “the scissor-and-paste” method at a date centuries after the Mosaic age. Now the critics contend that they can pick out the various strands of this polychrome production, and assign each paragraph, sentence, and even phrase and word, to its particular author. Was there ever in the history of religion and literature another such a stupendous critical task undertaken? And why this manifold authorship in the production of the Pentateuch? Because, forsooth, there is diversity of style in that book; also because there are, according to the theory, many errors, contradictions, and double narratives to be found in this section of the Bible; and because, further, the theory of evolution would be nullified if the Bible were accepted at its face value and if its professed historical narratives were truly historical!

But what is Dr. Kyle’s proposed substitute for this much-vaunted hypothesis? It is comparatively simple, though the author rightly elaborates it at much length, so

that no link in the chain of reasoning may be left out. To change the figure, Dr. Kyle will permit no "drop-stitches in his logic." First he conducts an investigation into the legal terms used in the Pentateuch. Some of these terms he finds to be general terms; they are Law (*torah*, *dhath*, and *khog*), words (*debarim*, plural, *dabar*, singular), Covenant, Testimony, and Commandments (*mitsoth*). But, on further research, he finds that certain legal terms are used in a technical sense, and are so used continually and consistently, and not synonymously with other terms nor loosely in a general way. The first of these are Judgments (*mishpatim*), which are in reality "judgings" — that is, decisions of judges recognized as just and equitable and thus accepted as common law everywhere (p. 16); therefore recognized even among heathen people. Here of course a certain style would be employed in framing these laws.

Next our author finds the term Statutes (*khuqqim*) used in a technical way. These were specific laws, peculiar to the Jews. They dealt with things prohibited by express edict, not with things *mala in se* — things right or wrong in themselves. Hence they would be written in a style peculiar to their purpose. Dr. Kyle also finds that the word Commandments (*mitsoth*) has a technical use, by which it refers specifically to the Ten Commandments. In the examination of these three terms Dr. Kyle conducts a minute, almost infinitesimal work that is equal in hair-splitting processes to that of the Graf-Wellhausen School and its most clever disciples. No passages in which the said terms occur escape his eagle eye.

What follows in the second investigation? Precisely what the alert student of literature would expect, namely, that different literary forms are used in framing the different kinds of laws. Here again the author goes into minutæ. The Judgments he finds expressed in a terse, mnemonic style, so that magistrates and people could easily remember them. The Statutes required the descriptive style, because they were specific laws, and therefore

had to be more or less detailed, so as to be clearly understood, but did not need to be memorized so largely. A third style, the hortatory (or oratorical), is used in Deuteronomy, just as would be expected if that book is what it professes to be, a final address or oration by the great lawgiver, reciting the history of the wanderings and experiences of the chosen people in their wilderness sojourn, reiterating some of their laws, and adding new ones that would be relevant to the new situations ahead of the people. Our acute author also finds that the narrative portions connecting the various legal enactments and indicating the varied circumstances under which they were given, are written in a certain literary style, the narrative style, which is not identical with any of the legislative forms. This is precisely in accord with the methods of a gifted writer of versatile talents, such as Moses is depicted to have been. What diversity of style in the writings of Shakespeare and Milton!

In the third chapter the author treats of "the effect of technical terms and literary forms on style and vocabulary," and this he does with rare skill and judgment. The fourth investigation is the *cruz*. It consists of a comparison of the divisions of the Pentateuch according to the various kinds and uses of the law as previously described with the divisions according to the documentary theory of the Graf-Wellhausen School of both wings and the middle way. The works to which Dr. Kyle especially pays his respects are Wellhausen's "Prolegomena," Kautzsch's "Literature of the Old Testament," Haupt's "Polychrome Bible," and the "Oxford Hexateuch." Well, to make the story short, our author proves, and we think most convincingly, that the diversity of style is far more adequately and rationally accounted for by his own hypothesis — that is, by the different kinds and uses of law and the varied circumstances of writing — than by the documentary theory now so much in vogue by belated scholarship and antiquated criticism. He concludes this cogent chapter by saying that the documentary theory, with its assumptions

of unknown authors and unheard-of documents, "is ruled out by the laws of evidence."

But the author piles up the proof. In Chapter V. he shows how readily his solution harmonizes the style and diction of the various parts of the Pentateuch about which the divisive critics have made so great a noise. We cannot help feeling that this chapter is a fine and much-needed rudimentary lesson for the above-named critics in the principles of rhetoric. Then, after a most detailed examination of the "characteristics of style" in each division, he comes to the conclusion that the "one-author" view of the Pentateuch is much more reasonable than the view which calls for a heterogeneous authorship.

Then comes a long and capable chapter on other parts of the Old Testament and their technical use of law terms. A brilliant chapter is the seventh, on the archaeological proofs of the historicity of the Pentateuch. Here the author is completely at home. Most satisfactory is the eighth chapter, which shows convincingly that the apparent historical difficulties and discrepancies (which are the *gravamen* of the splintering critics) can be most satisfactorily solved by the new method; indeed, many of them are only of the critics' own making, and not of the Bible's at all. The remaining two chapters simply nail down more securely the solution already made invulnerable.

We are glad to present the author's grand conclusion (p. 284), which is that the investigations he has conducted "tend to establish the trustworthiness of the Pentateuchal records at their face value." They are not to be broken up into fragments, assigned to different authors (living at widely separated dates), and entirely reconstructed according to a subjective theory, but are to be read and accepted as they stand; while their peculiarities of style, diction and vocabulary may best be accounted for "by the various kinds and uses of law presented and the journalistic manner of their composition." "Thus the history of Israel presented to us in the Pentateuch, as we now have it in the Bible, is restored to the place of trustworthiness:

the narrative is to be received at its face value." Brave and strong words, these!

A certain writer, in reviewing Dr. Kyle's previous work, "Moses and the Monuments," contends that, whether right or wrong, the documentary theory does not destroy, or even imperil, the evangelical faith or the divine authority and inspiration of the Bible. In reply we have to say that the faith that can accept the Bible as God's Word and as an authoritative book on religion, and yet hold that much of it is only myth, legend, folklore, and the crude ideas of primitive people, and that it teems with scientific and historical errors and numerous contradictions—well, to our way of thinking, such a faith is a *naive* faith, a simple sort of credulousness that cannot endure, and not a faith that is solidly based in experience and buttressed by rationality.

Another reviewer refers with great condescension to the anxiety that Dr. Kyle and other conservative scholars exhibit to disseminate their views of the Bible. It has seemed to us, judging by the copious output of liberalistic books, that the evolutionary critics are not behind in their anxiety to promote their views. However, we pause to say that Dr. Kyle and his fellow workers are actuated by two motives. The first is to establish the truth, which it is always important to do. The second is to show that the Old Testament sets forth the true philosophy of history, which is at the basis of all the missionary movements of the church. History is not the evolution of natural forces. It is plain as can be that, in the Old Testament as in the New, the divine economy and revelation are manifest in setting forth the highest ethical and spiritual standards, such as can be found nowhere else, and then throwing the responsibility upon moral beings to rise up to those standards by the help of divine grace. The main argument of the critics for the late date of the Pentateuch is drawn from the failure of the Jews to hold fast to monotheism during the earlier and middle parts of their history. But the same argument could be brought with increased

force against the date of the Christian revelation, from the sad failure of Christian nations even to-day to attain to the high standard of morality set forth in the New Testament. The very fact that the Old Testament reveals a moral law and a spiritual conception so far above the practices of the Jews is the most cogent and convincing argument that the Old Testament is not of human but of divine origin.

Such a minor matter as a little carelessness — probably it is due to hurry rather than to carelessness — in the proof-reading of Dr. Kyle's book does not in the least derogate from the accuracy of his researches or the irresistible force of his logic. If the critics of the documentary ilk will awake from their slumbers and open their eyes to what is going on in the world, they will note, we opine, that the latest investigations of evangelical scholars have practically undermined the foundations of their proud structure, which is about to topple irretrievably about their very ears.

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