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ART. I. — RECENT HOSTILE CRITICISM ON THE
AUTHORITY AND POSITION OF THE OLD TESTA-
MENT SCRIPTURES.

OF the recent criticism of the Old Testament Scriptures, none seems to me just now of so much importance as that which bears upon the genuineness of the Mosaic records. And of this a very valuable portion is not professedly hostile, but is the work of men who take great interest in the Scriptures—as well they may, for their vast antiquity, the nature of their contents, and the paramount influence which they have exercised, and still are exercising, not merely on the Semitic races, but even more powerfully on the leading Aryan nations of the world. But the interest these critics feel is that of scholars, and is of the same kind as that taken in the Vedas, the Zend-avesta, and the sacred books of the Buddhists. The Jewish Scriptures are not regarded by them as having any Divine authority, but must pass through the same crucible as the texts of Confucianism or the Koran.

Now, we have no right to complain of this, nor even of the free handling which necessarily follows. If our books are Divine, they will pass through the fire unhurt. We could not place them there. Their proper use to us is for our edification and personal growth in grace; and when we feel that our souls are fed and nurtured by them we are content, and do not care for a scientific analysis of that which sustains our spiritual life. But, none the less, we may be glad that there is going on an accurate, minute, and most painstaking examination of every line and word of Holy Scripture, and may feel sure that the final result will be to clear away difficulties, and establish the authority of the Scriptures upon a firmer basis; for many an error and false interpretation will be removed, and the truth made more plain. What we have a right to demand is, that

one kind of evidence shall not monopolize attention to the exclusion of everything else. Now, the work of these critics is subjective. They examine in the belief that they can find out everything for themselves by the patient examination of the text of the Scriptures, and they weave elaborate theories, which often are wonderfully plausible and clever. But generally these theories live for a few years only, and then perish for ever. What, for instance, has become of the theory elaborated by that intellectual giant Ewald? All Germany bowed down before it a very few years ago, and now it has passed away into the limbo of oblivion. The evidences of our faith are cumulative, and cover a vast field. From their very vastness the defence is often for a time carried on under a disadvantage, because the attack is made on one selected point, and this is treated as if it settled the whole matter; and only gradually do things arrange themselves in proper proportion. But in one respect this subjective criticism is very valuable; for our knowledge of Holy Scripture has been largely increased by it, and elevated in tone and spirit, and much which used to harass thoughtful minds has been explained, and become in many cases a support to, and not a difficulty for, the faith. If unfriendly, it has been an examination of the Scriptures themselves, and the more close the search, the richer are the treasures that are sure to be disclosed.

This examination was not only inevitable, but it was also certain that it would follow the same lines as those laid down in classical matters. These are chiefly two. The best-known example of the first is the Wolfian hypothesis, which took the "Iliad" of Homer to pieces, and argued that it was a piece of patchwork composed of remnants of several independent poems. After several years of intellectual battling, the result has been wittily summed up by an eminent Oxford man in these words: "The poems of Homer were not written by Homer, but by another man of the same name who lived at the same time and in the same place." The other method was that followed by Niebuhr, who took the early books of Livy to pieces and constructed out of them a new Roman history. He employed in his task much patient labour, years of thoughtful study, and great natural powers, including a lively imagination. His work was received with unbounded applause, and a general consent that all ancient history must be Niebuhrized. A few years have rolled onward, and the general conclusion now is that Roman history is certainly more interesting, and probably more true, as written by Livy, than as made into a puzzle by Niebuhr.

Now, as Isaiah is the greatest poet of the Old Testament, it followed, as a matter of course, that he should be treated as

Wolf treated Homer, and he cut in twain. Tradition says that this was the treatment he actually received from King Manasseh, who ordered him to be placed between two boards and sawn asunder. But it was soon found that so much of the last twenty-seven chapters ascribed by the new critics to the "great Babylonian unknown" was written in a mountainous country, and not in alluvial plains, such as those on each side of the Euphrates, that this easy theory had to be given up. German critics at least examine one another's theories, and do not repeat them on mere assumption. Nevertheless, they will not acknowledge that there could be but one Isaiah, and the current view in Germany now is that what passes under his name is a mere anthology of "elegant extracts"; as if any nation ever produced a series of anonymous poets whose works all reach so grand an elevation, and are all marked with the same high qualities. Zachariah has been dismembered with equal ruthlessness; but the industry and learning and acumen of these scholars has not been rewarded with success, and matters remain much as they were, except that the careful examination of the works of these prophets has ended in our understanding them better, and being less liable to be carried away by the plausibility of the next theory woven by German speculativeness.

Now, both these methods have been applied to the Mosaic records; for they have been cut into fragments, and a new history of the origin of the Jewish people has been framed out of them. Personally, Moses well-nigh disappears. All that Mr. Gore, in "*Lux Mundi*," seems inclined to leave to him is the "Ten Words," and some ceremonial enactments respecting the Ark and Tabernacle. The Pentateuch, so sharply separated from every other book of Holy Scripture by the universal testimony of antiquity, is lumped up with the Book of Joshua, the Domesday Book of the Israelites, and we have a Hexateuch instead. Now, surely, if the Book of Joshua had ever formed part of the same volume as the Mosaic writings, there would have been some trace of it either in the Samaritan Pentateuch, or in one of the Targums, or in the Versions, the Septuagint, the Peshito-Syriac, and the Vulgate. We might even have expected some notice of it in the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus, which is of great value for the criticism of the Old Testament Scriptures. The testimony of all these authorities contradicts this confident assumption of modern critics, and proves that there was always a vast gulf of difference between the Mosaic writings and any and every other book of the Old Testament.

The Samaritan Pentateuch is written in the old character used on the Moabite Stone and in the inscription carved in the subterranean channel of the Siloam aqueduct at Jerusalem, and carries the Pentateuch back to the days of Nehemiah. The history

narrated in chapter viii. of the Book of Nehemiah shows how antique was both writing and language to the returning exiles, who had ceased at Babylon to use their old classical language, and adopted in its stead an Aramaic dialect similar to that in which the Chaldee Targum is written. As the richer Jews remained in large numbers at Babylon, we may feel sure that many copies of the Law of Moses remained in their possession, and would be greatly venerated. The first deportation of the Jews to Babylon was the removal of the best, the most religious, and the most educated portion of the population, who were needed by Nebuchadnezzar for the peopling of his huge city, and they took their treasures with them. There could be no tampering with their sacred books after the dispersion of the people over so wide an area. And yet we are told that these national treasures were the work of Moses in the sense only that they contained some small substratum of Mosaic legislation, and so they must be parcelled out, and an approximate date discovered for each of the fragments. The legal enactments, accordingly, are mapped out into three main divisions, of which the first, contained in Exod. xx.-xxiv., and recapitulated in chap. xxxiv., is called by the critics the Covenant Code, and is ascribed to the reign of Jehoshaphat; the second, which they call the People's Code, contained in Deut. xii.-xxvi., is assigned to the days of Josiah; while the third, called the Levitical or Priestly Code, contained in Lev. xvii.-xxvi., is alleged to be of a date subsequent to the times of Ezekiel, and to have grown out of the prophecies concerning the restoration of the Jews and the rebuilding of the Temple, contained in the latter part of his writings.

Now, all these codes are written in classical Hebrew, a language lost during the Captivity, and you have to assume that no linguistic change took place between the days of Jehoshaphat and those of the exile. The same assumption of an unchanging language has to be made by those who talk of a "great Babylonian unknown" who wrote the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah. Now, just at this time the Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford, Mr. Margoliouth, has published an essay on the place of Ecclesiasticus in Semitic literature. We possess this book in three versions, Greek, Syriac, and Latin, of which the two former versions are independent of one another, and the Latin largely so. The date of the work is about 200 B.C., and when Mr. Margoliouth and the late Dr. Edersheim set themselves to what they supposed to be the easy task of reproducing the original Hebrew from the three translations, they found, to their surprise, that pure classical Hebrew had no words to express the terms used in Ecclesiasticus. They had to go to Rabbinic Hebrew, where alone they found the phrases and words required. Now, we all know that the Hebrew of Jeremiah is

that of a language in its decadence. The Hebrew of Ezra and Nehemiah is known as Middle Hebrew. Here is a New Hebrew fully formed. And, to use Mr. Margoliouth's own words, "If by 200 B.C. the whole Rabbinic farrago, with its terms and phrases and idioms, was developed, and was the classical language of Jerusalem, and the medium for prayer and philosophical and religious instruction and speculation, then between Ben-Sira (who wrote the Book of Ecclesiasticus) and the books of the Old Testament there must lie centuries; nay, there must lie in most cases the deep waters of the Captivity, the grave of the old Hebrew and of the old Israel, and the womb of the new Hebrew and the new Israel." Now, Mr. Margoliouth's conclusion is confirmed by very much in the Old Testament Scriptures, and we shall doubtless soon have the whole question of the growth and inner history of the Hebrew language carefully examined; and we may hope, as one useful result, that the craze of referring most of the Psalms and other parts of Holy Scripture to the times of the Maccabees will be condemned to oblivion, unless some linguistic peculiarities can be appealed to in justification of what up to this time has been mere assertion.

As regards the general question of the authenticity of the Mosaic writings, I may refer my readers to a tract published for me by the Religious Tract Society in their series of "Present-Day Tracts," in which I have shown that the whole range of thought and knowledge in the Pentateuch belongs to the desert, and not to Palestine, and have, moreover, called especial attention to the position of the tribe of Levi. Its lot, dispersed among the other tribes, without any endowment of land except a few homesteads, proved to be equivalent to permanent poverty and exclusion from political power. Ezekiel, in his new law, would have remedied this state of things. In chap. xlv. he assigned to the priests a splendid inheritance of land adjoining the sanctuary, while the Levites were to be endowed with the district bordering on it, and were no longer to be scattered everywhere as teachers, but were simply to be ministers of the temple. Now, in Deut. xxxiii. 8-11 we find that Moses is represented as regarding the position of the Levites as one of special privilege and blessing, and he puts prominently forward their office of being the teachers of Israel, which high duty, though almost ignored by Ezekiel, was the very purpose for which they were deprived of property and power. But as we read the history of Israel in the land of their possession we find few, if any, traces of their having set themselves to discharge the duties which Moses had assigned them. Had they done so, and been able, as the result, to maintain the supremacy of the worship of Jehovah, they would have held the happy position which Moses had intended for them. But they never seem to

have had any enthusiasm for their task, and so the piety, both of Levite and people, sank lower and lower, until idolatry well-nigh crushed out the worship of the one true God.

And as true religion lost its power, so the tithes and offerings intended for the maintenance of the Levites remained unpaid, and at a very early date poverty was their general lot. At all events, we find no less a person than the grandson of Moses content to be priest to the idols which Micah the Ephraimite had set up. Moses had been "king in Jeshurun"; his grandson takes a very equivocal position for need of bread. And the story has been preserved in Judg. xvii., xviii., almost accidentally, as the main purpose of the narrative is to record how the old Canaanite high-place at Dan became the centre of idolatrous worship, even while the conquest of the land was going on. A number of Danites, looking out for a settlement, recognised while on the march the young Levite, and regarding him—as well they might, considering his high lineage—with almost superstitious reverence, they took him with them, with his full consent, and also Micah's images and ephod; and as soon as they had conquered the heathenish sanctuary, they set them up there. And thus, strange to relate, the descendants of Moses became priests at one of the most sacred of the old Canaanite shrines, and continued to minister there until Shalmaneser took the ten tribes into captivity. We could not possibly have a more wonderful illustration of the vast gulf between the expectations of Moses and the actual state of things which followed upon the conquest of Canaan.

But it may be said that the substitution of the name of Moses for that of Manasseh in Judg. xviii. 30 is a mere deduction of the Old Testament revisers. I answer that this is not so, but that the name *Moses* is that written in the Hebrew text. To save the feelings of the worshippers, who would be shocked at hearing that a grandson of Moses so disgraced his ancestry, the name was read in the synagogues Manasseh, and the change was indicated to the officer whose business it was to read by the letter N¹ being written over the word. The Massorites note that this N is suspended, and it is not, therefore, to be written on a level with the rest of the word. As the vowels in Hebrew are a modern invention, and as the very difficulty in reading Hebrew consisted in the uncertainty about the vowels, this suspended N would suffice as an indication to one instructed by the scribes of the change he was expected to make. But what a picture does this give us of the poverty of the Levites at a period so soon after the conquest of Canaan! And when would the Law-giver's own tribe and family have

¹ Nun.

accepted a position so inferior to that of the rest of the tribes, except at a time anterior to the actual subjugation of the promised land, and when their minds were still upborne by the lofty expectations of Moses himself?

But, it may be asked, Does not this involve the idea of the failure of the Mosaic legislation? I answer "Yes" and "No." The Jewish people never, either as a Church or as a nation, fulfilled the expectations of Moses. The prosperity, and even the political existence, of Israel was made to depend upon the piety of the people, in which case they were to be defended from evil, and made to enjoy earthly good by a special providence and direct manifestation of Jehovah's power. They never were true to their God, and their immorality was so gross that the tribe of Benjamin narrowly escaped complete extermination at the hands of their brethren for their licentiousness as early as the days of Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron. Inferior as was the kingly power ideally to the theocracy, it was, nevertheless, the one thing that saved Israel from annihilation. But is not the Christian religion, quite as truly as that of the Old Testament, the setting forth before men of an ideal perfection, after which they are to strive, even if absolutely it be unattainable? Unlike all other religions, Judaism and Christianity were both of them religions of the future. The theocracy is the picture of God's perfect government of a holy and religious people. Now, we can well believe that the possession of so high an ideal of a perfect government would have a very considerable practical effect upon the well-being of the nation; but its attainment was no more possible then than it is now. It no more became a reality than Isaiah's two portraits of an earthly paradise, or Ezekiel's picture of the new temple. But the purpose of the Jewish Church in old time, as of the Christian Church now, is to raise the hearts of the people from the low standard of morality and religion existing around them to the nobler and more perfect ideas of faith and practice taught them in their sacred books. If we regard the Jews as a nation merely, the Mosaic legislation was a failure. If we regard the Jews as a Church, it did not fail; for it saved the world from ruin, and the Jewish Church was the Divine preparation for the Church of Christ. The course of all heathen nations has been irrevocably downwards—first to unbelief, and then to immorality and despair. In Judaism, as in Christianity, there has always been the power of recovery. When corruption seems to have sapped all vital power, if men go back to the Scriptures, a national repentance becomes possible, and religion again revives. You will look in vain in heathen history for such a restoration of faith as was wrought by Samuel or by Elijah. And such revivals are common matters of Christian experience;

for no Christian nation can fall beyond the power of recovery. Let it go back to the old wells of living water, and faith and holiness will once again blossom as the rose.

But to return to the Mosaic records. We are asked: "If Moses wrote the Pentateuch, how do you account for finding in it two accounts of creation and two of the flood? What, too, do you say to the existence in Gen. xxxvi. 31-43 of a list of the dukes of Edom up to the days of the kings of Israel?" Now, to take this last point first, it is no new phenomenon lately discovered, but one long known and recognised. It does not settle the date of the Book of Judges, that in the passage referred to above it is recorded that the posterity of Moses were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land (Judg. xviii. 30); nor of the Books of Samuel, that we are there told that in virtue of the gift of Ziklag by Achish to David, that village remained the private property of the kings of Judah unto this day (1 Sam. xxvii. 6). The Jews were well acquainted with this fact, and explained it by the tradition received among them, that Ezra and the men of the Great Synagogue were inspired by God to undertake the duty of what we should call editing the sacred books, and the notes that we should put into the foot of the page were placed in the body of the text. The Jews are careful to add that from that day onward no change whatsoever has been made in the text of the Old Testament Scriptures, and their care of the Holy Oracles committed to their keeping is an admitted fact. But it is probable that in the earlier days, when manuscripts were rare, and to be found only in the Temple, or in the colleges of the priests or the schools of the prophets, copyists and scribes thought that they were doing a good work in bringing up the information to a later date, and that what we call interpolations are possible. Such interpolations are known to exist in many manuscripts of the New Testament; and, as regards the Old Testament, we have to do with writings of vast and extraordinary antiquity. It is a mistake to subject such writings to the rules and canons of criticism which are the result of our having now to do with printed books. But, fortunately for us, the substantial agreement of the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint, and the other early versions with the Hebrew text gives us a trustworthy guarantee that we have it just as it was received by Ezra and Nehemiah at the return from Babylon.

With regard to the supposed two accounts of creation and of the flood, and the dismemberment of the Pentateuch according as the prevalent name for the Deity is Jehovah or Elohim, I have space for only a few general remarks, which I must confine to the Book of Genesis. Now, how did Moses, whom I still believe to be its author, write this wonderful book? It refers to

events long anterior to his times, of which personally he could know nothing. Was it, then, directly communicated to him by inspiration? Or was it a compilation from written documents, in the same way as the Books of Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles? Now, the answer to this question is to be found upon the very face of the Book of Genesis, except as regards the history of creation in Gen. i.-ii. 3. As long ago as the seventeenth century the great evangelical commentator Vitringa (born in 1659) showed that, excepting, as I have said, the first chapter, all the rest of the Book of Genesis claims to be a compilation. For it consists of a series of narratives called in the Hebrew "generations." As every Hebrew scholar knows, the word means a history, preceded by a genealogy leading up to the person whose history is detailed. And thus in Gen. ii. 4—iv. 20, where the narrative begins with the words "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth," no accurate Hebrew scholar would expect to find a history of creation any more than when he reads in Gen. xxxvii. 2, "These are the generations of Jacob," he expects to find a narrative of that patriarch's life. "The generations of Jacob" is the title of the history of Joseph; and as Adam and Eve had no earthly parentage, and as creation was for their sakes, a brief summary of creation forms the proper introduction to the account of Paradise and to what befell the first man and woman therein. It is not an account of creation, nor could it so be called except by that numerous body of critics whose first qualification for their task is an absolute ignorance of the language in which the Old Testament is written. It is interesting to notice that St. Matthew, who wrote for the Hebrews, calls his Gospel "The Book of the Generations of Jesus Christ." In our phraseology we should say "The Book of the History of Jesus Christ;" but the genealogy forms so important a part of every Oriental narrative that it gives the title to the whole.

Now, if Moses compiled the Book of Genesis from written records, there is nothing surprising, first of all, at our finding corresponding narratives in the oldest literature in the world, nor, secondly, at there being verbal discrepancies. We know that these exist even in the New Testament, and do not affect the question of inspiration, but simply show that it gave no magical power, but left each writer free in the use of his natural gifts. And if Moses combined two narratives of the flood, there was no reason why he should reduce them to the same level, and settle whether there went into the ark "two and two of all flesh," or whether the clean animals went in by sevens, though the other was the usual rule. Similarly, two narratives are combined in the history of David's combat with Goliath, and the variations are startling. It is the rule of God's dealings with

man that His providence interferes as little as possible with our free will; but when all is said that can be said, these occasional discrepancies produce no more actual result than the thirty thousand different readings said to be found in manuscripts of the New Testament, and which affect to so small an extent the general accuracy of the text.

The other is a more important question—namely, What were these records, and whence comes this agreement between them and the narratives found in the old Accadian literature? Now, this literature flourished at Ur of the Chaldees, and we find that this city, wherein Abraham dwelt, was a great trading emporium, and that the art of writing was so common there that ordinary bargains and mercantile transactions were recorded on tablets of clay, specimens of which are to be found in great numbers in our museums. Now, if Abraham took written records with him when migrating from Ur, all is intelligible; and it is remarkable that the agreement between the Accadian legends and the Book of Genesis ceases in Abraham's time. For the narrative of the invasion of Palestine by Chedorlaomer and his vassal kings is not found in Accadian inscriptions, but in those of Assyria. There is a vast difference, indeed, in the nature of the two literatures. The narratives of the Book of Genesis are pure, holy, deeply religious, and acknowledge but one God; the Accadian legends are impure, polytheistic, and often intensely silly in their details. There must have been a vast interval of time between the narratives in their pure form and their debasement to the Accadian level.

Descended from Shem in a direct line, and through a succession of men who in every case were the first-born, Abraham would have in his possession all the records and genealogies of his race. But could he have brought those records with him into Canaan? I see no difficulty. Abraham was a great chieftain, and his migration was that of a powerful clan, strong enough to maintain itself at Haran, which was on the very war-path of the empires on the Euphrates, and able in Canaan to defeat Chedorlaomer and his confederate kings. Nor would there be any difficulty in their being preserved and handed down to Moses. In Canaan Isaac and Jacob were mighty princes, as Abraham had been, and the latter returned in time to be present at Isaac's death and share his possessions. And to Egypt they went leisurely, under the protection of Joseph, the real ruler of the land, who took such fostering care of them that they soon grew to be a terror to the Egyptian kings.

If Moses compiled the Book of Genesis from the records and genealogies preserved by Abraham and the heads of the house of Israel, it becomes easy to understand how the wonderful information it contains was preserved and placed at his disposal; and surely he would intend the book as a preface to some such a

history as that which follows in the rest of the Pentateuch. If he did not write it, we may well ask the critics not to content themselves with picking holes, but to explain to us whence these narratives came, what was the common source of them and of the Accadian legends, who, too, it was that combined these genealogies into a connected narrative, and why these records cease at the time of Moses, and Exodus is written upon an entirely different plan.

And if in our days difficulties—I will not say multiply, for really they decrease—are more ably marshalled and more learnedly set forth, it is a comfort to know that the vast increase of modern knowledge clears away with it many an objection. A short time ago it would have seemed absurd to think of Abraham carrying written records with him, handed down to him through a succession of patriarchs of the family of Shem. Already we know more of the literary skill of those old days. We know that writing materials, both of papyrus and prepared skins, were carried far and wide as articles of commerce by the caravans. We know that the Canaanites had a manufactory of these skins at Debir, and that the Hittites, whose very existence used to be scoffed at, were famous scribes, and constantly appear as the writers of Egyptian records. Only a month or two ago the newspapers were telling us of the discovery at Ilaheen of two documents written on papyrus: the one a settlement of property said to be dated 2550 B.C.; the other a will dated 2548 B.C. They are in syllabic, and not in picture writing, and belong to a people in a high degree of civilization; for the will leaves property to the wife—a privilege which the Israelites never seem to have possessed, though they could, under certain restrictions, will their property to their sons (Deut. xxi. 15-17). The date of these documents is anterior to the date of the flood according to the current chronology, by which it is placed in 2348 B.C.

But I cannot now enter upon this and many other subjects of great interest which rise up before the mind when writing, however cursorily, on so noble a theme as that of the Mosaic Scriptures. I will only add two brief remarks. The first, that nowhere in any sacred book will you find so noble—ay, and so Divine—an account of creation as that prefixed to the Book of Genesis. Surely that man must have a dead mind who can see in it only an occasion for fault-finding. The second, that this book, compiled from these old records, and intended, possibly, by Moses simply to give the Israelites some knowledge of their past history, and of God's gracious purpose for them, contains nevertheless the germ of every truth unfolded in the rest of the Bible. All is there. And herein I see true inspiration, and bow myself reverently before God making Himself manifest to His creatures.

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