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ART. I.—OLD TESTAMENT CRITICISM IN RELATION
TO FAITH AND TEACHING.

SOME time ago a certain amount of interest was aroused by the supposed discovery of evidence that threatened to dethrone Shakespeare from his pre-eminent position as the prince of poets. This interest languished for a little while, and we heard no more of it. But had all that was promised been fulfilled, the utmost that would have followed would have been to put Bacon in the place of Shakespeare. This would have been a blow to prejudice, but in no sense a loss to English literature. We should still have had the plays, but have called them by another name, a name already so illustrious as to need no accession of glory, while the lustre of Shakespeare would have been tarnished and his fame despoiled. But supposing the theory to have been proved, every one before long would have acquiesced in the result. What Shakespeare lost would have been transferred to the credit of Bacon, and no one would have been any the worse.

But with the Old Testament the case is different, and the interest that its criticism excites is the measure of the issues that are involved in it, and this because it is felt that the Old Testament is possessed of a traditional prestige that is totally destroyed by the so-called higher criticism. The books remain as they were before, their inherent features are the same, their beauty and sublimity are the same, their peculiar characteristics survive unchanged, but we feel that we have been cheated by them, or at all events deceived in them. It is not a mere matter of transference of authorship, as in the case of Shakespeare and Bacon, but the essential credit of the writings is destroyed. "Hamlet" is not less splendid than it was if Bacon wrote it, "Henry IV." is neither more nor less true to history whether it is Shakespeare's or not; but the history of

Israel is totally discredited if the general trustworthiness of its records is impeached. If the personal history of Moses, for example, is not history, but fiction, not the record of the time, but the ideal invention of ages afterwards, what becomes of the covenant of which he was the ostensible mediator? Is there any ground for supposing there was any covenant at all, except in the minds of the people who imagined it? Is there any evidence of any action on the part of God which can sustain the hypothesis of a veritable covenant? any proof that it was He and not chance or circumstance that was moving in and moulding the history of Israel? is there any clearer indication that He was teaching the world by their history, or teaching it otherwise than He was teaching it in the times of the Saxon kings, or the first hundred years or so that followed the Norman Conquest? This is why so much interest is excited by Old Testament criticism, because it is instinctively felt, let the critics say what they like, that more serious issues depend upon it than are involved in any question about the plays of Shakespeare or the dialogues of Plato.

Nor is this all, because it is sufficiently clear that the consequences do not end with the Old Testament itself, but have a fundamental bearing upon the New Testament also. If the general character of the Old Testament is discredited, the position of the New must be materially affected thereby. The general truth and authority of the Old Testament is taken for granted in the New, and therefore, as far as the New is based upon the Old, it must be intimately concerned in the fortunes of the Old. Everything which tends to invalidate the Old must weaken the foundations of the New, so far as the New is dependent upon the Old. Consequently it is impossible to be indifferent to the estimate that is formed of the Old Testament, unless we are prepared to regard it as an entirely independent field of study, and are willing to disregard altogether the aspect of it that is presented to us by the writers of the New Testament. There is, however, little doubt that the way in which we regard the authority of the New Testament is mainly derived from the way in which the writers of the New Testament regard the Old. When once the authority of the New Testament is accepted, it is felt that it is strong enough to stand alone, and we feel with Paley that it is unreasonable to make Christianity answer with its life for every statement and detail of the Old Testament. But this is something very different from entirely overthrowing the historical credit of the Old Testament.

It may be said that a person who *ex animo* believes in the living Christ is independent of all discussions as to the origin and authorship, the genuineness and authenticity of the books of the New Testament. It may be said that such a person can

stand alone. It matters not to him whether the fourth Gospel was written by St. John, or was a romance of the second century. He is not concerned in the ultimate origin of the Synoptical Gospels, or in the genuineness of St. Paul's Epistles. If he is an ordinary individual he is hardly possessed of the means of forming his own conclusion on the matter, and is compelled to leave it to the critics. But I would ask what kind of faith this would be? Is it anyhow distinguishable from obstinate ignorance or from ignorant obstinacy? Is it possible, for example, that faith in Christ can be independent of the historic authority of the Gospels? Does anyone really suppose that the cause of essential Christian faith can be independent of the genuineness of the fourth Gospel? that it matters not to our belief in Christ whether it was written in the first or the second century? It is true that the author says "These things are written that ye might believe, and that believing ye might have life," and the possession of life, it may be supposed, is a sufficient voucher for the faith; but it must be borne in mind that the same writer claims also to have been an eye-witness of what he records, and therefore the foundation of fact is pre-supposed, on which the faith rests and from which the life proceeds. And in the same way the New Testament rests upon the essential truth of the Old, and pre-supposes it.

For example, it will hardly be denied that Jesus claimed to be the Christ, and died in attestation of the claim; but we cannot understand or define "the Christ" without falling back upon the Old Testament as having created and fostered more than 400 years before the hope and expectation of the Christ. The idea may have been a vague one, but it was sufficiently definite to be substantial, and, however erroneous, it was deeply rooted, and was solid enough to be the immediate cause of the literature of the New Testament. The New Testament was the actual product of this belief, which was found only in the Old Testament. It stands to reason, therefore, that there must have been some foundation in fact for an expectation so peculiar, so general, and so deep, which was the growth of long ages, and survived the completion of the books that contained the record of it four hundred years. But for this foundation we could have had no Jesus Christ, and no Gospels or Epistles.

Surely, therefore, having been put in possession of all these things, it will not do to turn round upon the Old Testament and disparage its authority and reject its testimony. For however great Jesus may have been in Himself, He either was or was not the Christ, and if He was not the Christ it was not because He did not fulfil the ideal, but because the ideal was a misapprehension and a mistake. But then it is hardly possible

to deny that He acquiesced in this mistake, that He made use of it and encouraged it; and consequently, so far as He did this, He was compromised in the position He took up in claiming to be the Christ, and was not warranted in the course He adopted; that is to say, He laid the foundation of His Church in misconception and in fraud, which He either shared in or connived at, and Christ, Christian, Christianity, are all misnomers expressive of erroneous and false ideas. And consequently, it is not possible to discredit the Old Testament foundation of the New without undermining our personal faith in Christ. We cannot believe in His theocratic claims if His moral attitude is impeached, and that it most undoubtedly is if He was the victim of a mistake so radical, or made use of and encouraged a misconception so baseless.

But then, on the other hand, if this Christ idea was a justifiable verity, how are we to account for its presence in the Old Testament, and its presence there only? This anticipation of a Christ either was or was not the result of *promises*. If it was not, the *form*, at all events, in which it is presented and has come down to us is that of repeated and gradually developing *promises*. Now, if the *form* of these promises is not delusive and fictitious, we can only regard them as *promises*; but if they are promises, they must either be promises which, so to say, the people made for themselves, or which were made by their prophets and writers; or if they are what in form they seem to be, they were direct messages from the Most High. If, however, they were direct messages from the Most High, then we are compelled to postulate some unknown means of an extra-natural character whereby He held communication with those to whom they were made. That is to say, do what we will, if we even accept the merely substantial truth of the New Testament, we cannot dispense with certain elements in the Old which cannot be accounted for or explained on any natural principles, and which are distinctly upon the apparent evidence outside of and beyond the function and operation of nature to produce. And consequently I am brought to this conclusion, that, do what we will, it is impossible upon any fair dealing with the broad and patent features of the Old Testament to eliminate the supernatural element therefrom.

Now this brings me to the main subject of which I am treating. Because it is absolutely certain that the extreme conclusions of the so-called higher criticism not only tend to minimise the traces of the supernatural in the Old Testament, but are entirely fatal to the belief in it. The position of Kuenen is that the religion of Israel is one of the principal religions of the world—one of them, but not different in kind

from them. He says distinctly "Jahveh was worshipped in the shape of a young bull. It may not be doubted that the bull worship was really the worship of Jahveh." "The bull was an indigenous and original symbol of Jahveh."¹ To my mind it is not possible to distinguish such statements from simple blasphemy, but we must put sentiment aside. Is it possible, then, that bull-worship can develop naturally, because that is the point, into the worship of Jahveh? Why, then, we may ask, was He called Jahveh, if that was His name, which I do not believe? Is the ultimate origin of all religion, and especially the religion of Israel, the spontaneous worship of nature? Is the religion of the prophets and the Psalms the natural evolution of bull-worship? From what, then, does the protest against this kind of worship, which is so conspicuous in the Old Testament, arise? What is there in bull-worship to generate Jehovah worship? Verily, if we will blindly follow these critics in their baseless assertions they will not only rob us of our faith, but also of our common sense, which neither enriches nor belongs to them, and leaves us poor indeed. But there is a fascination about them which attracts the unstable and the unwary, the fascination of audacity and the charm of novelty.

We must beware, however, of imputing motives even to critics so reckless and unscrupulous as Kuenen. If it can be shown that Jehovah-worship was the natural and legitimate development of bull-worship, which, by the ordinary processes of evolution, it would grow into, by all means let it be shown, and the sooner it is shown the better. And especially if it can be shown from the natural, honest, straightforward treatment of the Old Testament records, I, for one, should be eager to see it. I do not know that I should *welcome* the demonstration except as a triumphant feat of critical ingenuity, for which, however, I am quite content to wait. We must by all means beware of imputing motives, but we should also be particularly careful that we be not blind as to results. And there can be no question as to the result of criticism such as this. It is manifestly fatal to anything like faith, not only in the Divine authority of the Old Testament, but also in its historical value. This position, however, of Kuenen's is an extreme position which will probably meet with few advocates at present. Still, it will serve as a landmark of "caution" as to whither some criticism may eventually carry us.

Let us come, then, to a more plausible statement, which has the authority of an Oxford professor. We have been told, and it has been repeated again and again even by those who should

¹ "Religion of Israel," Eng. tr., i. 235.

know better, that "Deuteronomy does not claim to be written by Moses," and that "the true 'author' of Deuteronomy is the writer who introduces Moses in the third person." Very well, then, be it so; such is the statement of the critics. What, then, is the statement of the "true author of Deuteronomy who introduces Moses in the third person"? In chap. xxxi. 9, he says: "And Moses wrote this law and delivered it unto the priests, the sons of Levi, and unto all the elders of Israel." "And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing." And again: "And it came to pass when Moses had made an end of *writing* the words of this law in a book until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, saying, Take this book of the law and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God that it may be there for a witness against thee." That is to say, the *true* author of Deuteronomy affirms that Moses wrote this law and made these provisions for its observance; but on the hypothesis which is adopted by the Oxford professor, we are precluded from attaching any credit to his statement, and that on the ground that "Deuteronomy does not claim to be written by Moses." So when Thucydides tells us that he wrote the history of the Peloponnesian War, we in like manner are not to believe him, though all mankind have done so, and there is no reason why they should not.

But if the "true author of Deuteronomy is the writer who introduces Moses in the third person," what are we to say when he introduces him in the first? "I spake unto you at that time, saying," "I charged your judges at that time, saying," "Also the Lord was angry with me for your sakes," "And the Lord said unto me," "I stood between the Lord and you at that time to show you the word of the Lord," "Thou shalt, therefore, keep the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which I command thee this day to do them," and the like, over and over again. Surely this, on the hypothesis, is the false personation by an unknown writer of the age of Josiah of the character and function of Moses, who elsewhere introduces him in the third person. The writer pretends to be Moses. He appeals to what transpired between him and the people, and between him and the Most High. He solemnly enjoins the people, who had long been dead, to keep a law which he only pretends to have given them, and which he pretends to have made provision for preserving, though he knows that it was not preserved, and merely adopts this device to make believe that it had been so preserved. I would first ask whether under any circumstances this would be honest, or whether it would be permissible, except on the supposition

that the public whom the writer addressed would be perfectly conscious of the impersonation, and consequently in no sense liable to be misled by it (which the unbroken tradition of some five-and-twenty centuries proves was not the case). What should we think of that critic who should have the audacity to suggest that Cæsar's Commentaries were not written by Cæsar, but by some one, whom we know not, who "introduces him in the third person," and makes him the principal actor in events which were merely imaginary? How could we characterise such a work in any other way than as a forgery, or, at all events, a romance? And what would be its value as history? It would be simply worthless, for it would be hopeless and impossible to unravel and to separate the actual truth from the ideal fiction. What, then, becomes of the historical worth of Deuteronomy? and what becomes of the moral elevation of its teaching except on the unwarrantable hypothesis that the purity and sublimity of the end aimed at and secured justified the highly questionable character of the means resorted to?

I want especially to emphasise the fact that upon this theory the historical worth of Deuteronomy is absolutely destroyed. For example, "Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God as ye tempted Him in Massah." Here is a precept based upon a presumed historic fact, for the confirmation of which we are forbidden to appeal to Exodus, because that, on the supposition, is a later document, or at all events a document later than the fact. If the tempting, then, in Massah was uncertain or fictitious, how do we know that there was adequate ground for supposing that the Lord was their God? And yet more, how do we know that this commandment, given in the name of Moses, but not the commandment of Moses, was actually and not merely ideally the commandment of God? And yet it was upon this commandment that the man Jesus took His stand as the commandment of God, when assaulted by the devil in the wilderness. Then on this supposition the position of Jesus was an untenable position: neither He nor His adversary knew what we now know—that this was no actual commandment of God such as He was bound to obey, but an ideal precept ascribed to Him by an unknown writer in the time of Josiah of no intrinsic authority whatever. Is this a satisfactory view to take of our Lord's temptation? Is it not sufficiently plain that it tends to make Him no less mythical than Moses himself? This precept either was or was not the commandment of God. If it was an ideal precept based on an ideal event, put into the mouth of Moses seven hundred years later, I fail to see how in any sense it could be the word of God; and consequently the position of our Lord, who thus

appealed to it, was untenable, for He was mistaken in supposing it to be the word of God, and the ground on which He took His stand was invalidated by an inherent and unsuspected falsehood.

Nor is it otherwise with His claim to be the Christ. If there was an inherent falsehood in that idea which was the product of unwarrantable expectations and misconceptions about the Divine action, then beyond all question the essential position of Jesus, which He maintained alike before His disciples and His enemies, and for which He laid down His life, is vitiated and rendered untenable. If we continue to believe in Him, we must do so on other grounds than those which He advanced of having fulfilled the scriptures of the Old Testament, for He only fulfilled them by destroying them. Then the Spirit of Christ, which was to lead us into all the truth, is only doing so by dissipating more and more the halo which has hitherto surrounded psalm and prophecy, by disintegrating and wearing away more and more the framework of divine history which we have accepted as children, but which was only meant for children. But then, in that case, not only is Jesus no longer the Christ, but Jesus is no longer Jesus, just as Moses is no longer Moses. All that we know of either is vanishing in uncertainty, and, instead of having its foundation laid deep and indestructible in the well-attested facts of the world's history, it is sublimated above the realm of experience and fact to the shifting and cloudy region of hypothetical conjecture and the unreal conceptions of romance.

Now, let us suppose some well-meaning priest of the age of Josiah, weary of the ungodliness and idolatry of Manasseh and Amon (though having little more than the book of the Covenant and the Ten Commandments to enlighten him) to have conceived the idea of working up the very hazy traditions about Moses which had survived in an unwritten form for seven centuries or more, and weaving them into an ideal story designed to have a highly moral and instructive tendency. We must bear in mind that the chief portions of the books of Exodus and Numbers on the hypothesis did not exist; there was nothing but the barest outline of detail which survived. But the actual outcome of this pious intention was the main or the so-called "parenthetic" portions of Deuteronomy. The character of Moses, however, as there depicted was the creation of this unknown writer. The incidents and circumstances to which he refers were purely imaginary; the addresses referring to them were put into the mouth of the Law-giver as Thucydides puts speeches into the mouth of Pericles, as merely the ideal representative expression of what he might have said. It must be borne in mind that we know nothing whatever of the

authority which the writer imagined himself to have for doing this ; all that we are able to surmise is that he felt an impulse to do it, with the hope of bringing about a reformation in the national religion, and that this impulse, which largely expressed itself in the conjectural and the imaginary, he not only supposed to have come from God, but the result and product of it was also the actual instrument or means chosen by God for accomplishing His own purposes and communicating His supposed revelation. We are continually reminded, by an exaggerated application of Bishop Butler's caution, that we are not judges beforehand of the way in which God would be pleased to give a revelation ; but surely it is not possible that the God of truth would adopt precisely these methods of making known His will to man. Without presuming to determine how God would be pleased to reveal Himself, we may certainly say that a method like this would be deficient in every credential and in every proof, and would be dependent only for its evidence upon our own arbitrary supposition that this was the method that He chose. And for this supposition I can see no sort of testimony or ground of belief. The supposition itself rests wholly upon conjecture. It has not even canonical tradition to rest upon.

And there are three manifest difficulties that beset it. First, the paucity of materials which on the hypothesis existed, and consequently the enormous demands on the ingenuity and imagination of the writer. Secondly, the very great gifts of genius with which he must have been endowed to enable him to produce a creation like that of Moses in Deuteronomy, surpassing even the powers of a Walter Scott or a Shakespeare. And, thirdly, the entirely gratuitous and unfounded assertion that the Holy Spirit of God so highly approved of the writer's efforts that He made use of them as the channel of a special revelation to mankind—if, indeed, it was not He who inspired this unknown reformer and iconoclast to invent this portrait of Moses, and to produce this remarkable work which he, presumably with Divine permission, ascribed to Moses. Those who advocate this theory protest against the work being called a forgery, but we are unquestionably within the just limits of truth in characterising it as a fiction or romance ; and unless the end may be allowed in this case to justify the means, the fictitious romance or the romantic fiction is very narrowly to be distinguished from a forgery. At all events, what is absolutely certain is that we can place no reliance on its historical statements as trustworthy matters of fact. And thus, to all intents and purposes, the character of the book is discredited.

Neither do I see how, under such circumstances, it can justly be regarded as the chosen vehicle of revelation. It

requires to be borne in mind that a book is either genuine or authentic—that is to say, it is the genuine production of the supposed writer, or the matters it professes to relate are those of fact and not-fiction. Now, a work may be perfectly genuine but not authentic, as Xenophon's "Cyrœpædia," or Milton's "Paradise Lost"; or it may be authentic, but not genuine, as Defoe's "History of the Plague," ascribed to H. F.; or it may be neither genuine nor authentic, as "Robinson Crusoe." But in the case of the books of the Bible, if they are genuine they can scarcely fail to be authentic. For example, if Moses wrote Deuteronomy it can hardly be other than authentic. And, on the other hand, if they are authentic, they may well be genuine. For instance, if the history of the Exodus is authentic history, there is no one to whom we can so well ascribe it as to Moses, the principal actor in the events. And thus to attack the genuineness of a book is very often to deal a blow at its authenticity. For instance, if the history of Exodus is not genuine, we certainly cannot trust it, for we have no ground for doing so; or, at all events, the main ground for doing so is destroyed. And so with Deuteronomy. If its genuineness is destroyed, according to the modern theory, then its authenticity undeniably comes to an end.

To take a parallel case. If St. John's Gospel is written by St. John, there can be no reasonable doubt as to its facts. We may assume their essential truth. But if this Gospel is the work of an unknown writer in the second century who pretends to be St. John, then we can no longer trust his facts, for it is impossible that he can have had the materials to supply them; and, moreover, as he comes to us with a lie in his mouth, his testimony is thereby discredited. That is to say, if St. John's Gospel is of the second century, it is a forgery. If we cannot believe the writer when he personates St. John, how can we believe him when he personates Jesus, or professes to give us the words which He spake: such, for instance, as, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"; or, "him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out"? Destroy the genuineness of St. John's Gospel, and there is an end to its authenticity—that is to say, its trustworthiness as to matters of fact and statement.

What, then, is there to show that it is otherwise with Deuteronomy? For, *à fortiori*, if Deuteronomy was written, not in the second, but in the eighth century after Moses, it is absolutely impossible to trust anything it tells us about Moses, or about the revelation, or the covenant of which Moses was the supposed mediator. So untrue, therefore, is it to say that

this view of Deuteronomy "concerns not the *fact*, but only the *form* of revelation."¹ If the *form* and accessories of the revelation are disproved, what is the evidence which remains for the *fact*? Why are we to accept it as a fact?

But I must draw to an end. There is a vague and floating impression abroad that the Church is the guarantee for the Christian faith, let the critics say what they will. And thus, whatever authority attaches to Deuteronomy is derived from the position it always held in the Jewish Church. But how, I would ask, did it acquire that position? and how could the Jewish Church give that which was not hers to give? how could it bestow an authority which did not exist? how could it supply the place of an origin which must come from God, if it came at all? We have seen that according to the theory there is no authority at all for Deuteronomy, except such authority as it derives from its place in the canon. But what is the value of this if we know not how it came there?

In like manner it is often assumed that the authority of the Church and the creeds is sufficient for the Christian, let the critics say what they will. But this is not so. The Church itself has, and can have, no authority apart from the credentials on which it rests. It cannot declare itself free from and independent of those credentials. For example, if St. John's Gospel is not genuine, the Church cannot make it so. The Church can do nothing but bear her own testimony to its genuineness, it is for others to test and disprove that genuineness, if they can; but if they do, the Church must assuredly suffer accordingly. It is not hers to restore that which has already been taken from her; and so with the other Gospels and the Epistles. The Church cannot make the evidence of the Gospels to be trustworthy, it is the trustworthiness of the Gospels which makes the Church what it is and creates the Church. If the evidence of the Gospels is disproved, the foundation of the Church is overthrown; for "if Christ be not risen, your faith is vain." If the validity of the history of the Acts is destroyed, and the genuineness of the Apostolic Epistles is disproved, it is impossible that the Church can sustain or survive the loss, for part, and a very large part, of the evidence on which the Church herself depends is thereby destroyed. It is throwing dust in men's eyes, then, to say that criticism may go where it will and the Church is bound to follow, and may safely do so, and take no harm, for that the life of the Church is independent of the results of criticism. Because it is these very so-called results which sap, by the total destruction of miracle and prophecy and the general discrediting of the history, the essential foundations of the Church.

¹ See Driver's "Introduction," p. xvi., *Cont. Rev.*, Feb., 1890.

The stability of any building is destroyed when its foundation is rendered insecure, just as the life of a tree is destroyed when its tap-root is cut.

It behoves men, therefore, to be on their guard when they are told that it is only the "form" and not the "fact" of revelation that is affected. There can be no shadow of doubt that if the "parenthetic setting" of Deuteronomy is of the time of Manasseh or Josiah, the credentials of the Mosaic revelation are virtually obliterated, they are rendered so indistinct that it is impossible to discover them. But the credentials of the Mosaic revelation cannot be destroyed without those also of the Christian revelation being impugned, for Christ said that Moses wrote of Him; and if he did not, or it was not Christ of whom he wrote, then either St. John has misrepresented his Master, or, most certainly, it has been reserved for the so-called criticism of this age to do what His own was unable to do, and convict Christ of falsehood, *i.e.*, of sin.

STANLEY LEATHES.



ART. II.—THE SERVANT OF CHRIST.

NO. IX.—THE GOLDEN RULE.

THERE is no honour done to our blessed Lord by any laborious attempt to prove that everything that He taught was absolutely new. Just as He did not come speaking and revealing the language of heaven, but used the words and ideas of His own country, and wove them all into the eternal speech like which never man spake before, so He took the great simple moral truths which had been made known to men in past ages, placed them in their true proportions, freed them from the growth of corruptions and misunderstandings which had obscured them, added what was new where it was necessary to His purpose, laid stress by His employment of paradox and parable on what was most important, and so unfolded for us the mind of God.

This principle of our Lord's method is illustrated for us by the Golden Rule. Something like it had been understood by a few of the wisest and best men in different lands and in different ages. We believe that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ; and we believe that the Word of God, before His incarnation, was present in varying degrees of clearness in the hearts and minds of all who anywhere sought for God. But never till the Lord Jesus Christ spoke on the hills of Galilee was the royal law set forth in all its comprehensive fulness and perfect beauty as the true way of life.