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THE  
CHURCHMAN

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JULY, 1893.

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ART. I.—ON RECENT THEORIES OF DEUTERONOMY.

THE main purpose of the analytical criticism of the Pentateuch which has been so largely exercised in the present day, a purpose which is clearly implied if not explicitly avowed, is to account for its production on natural and ordinary principles. On the supposition that the books of the law were produced, as it is manifest that they *prima facie* profess and traditionally are held to have been produced, under the personal authority of Moses, it is impossible not to assign to him a special and unique function as the mediator of the revelation they appear to contain. But to adopt this hypothesis is at once to postulate the operation of so much of supernatural action as would be fatal to the prevalent notion that everything which takes place, or ever has taken place, in human history, is capable, if only it is rightly understood, of a natural and intelligible explanation. To suppose that the Almighty Being, whose handiwork we see around us in the natural forces of the universe, and whose providence is seen only, if it is to be seen at all, in the course of our everyday life and experience, ever, as a matter of fact, condescended to hold intercourse with Moses and Aaron, to come down and converse audibly on Mount Sinai, to give definite and explicit injunctions to Moses in the mount, to carve out tables of stone and to write His laws upon them, is conceived to be so monstrously preposterous and absurd as to be unworthy of all credit and to need no sort of defence. It is true that we are so familiar with these incidents that to give them the lie direct would at once be to offend the susceptibilities of many people, and expose one's self to the charge of irreverence and profanity. Consequently this is not the course adopted. But the sacred narrative is manipulated simply as a narrative, and such and such incidents are treated,

not as literal and actual facts, but as incidents having an existence only upon paper and as true "only in the narrative."

In this manner, after a little critical examination of the sixteenth chapter of Numbers, Professor Driver does not scruple and is not ashamed to say that "Korah is united with Datban and Abiram, not in reality, but *only in the narrative*," in this manner blandly but absolutely setting aside the narrative as a veracious history and virtually maintaining that he knows better than to believe it. In this manner the offence of saying that the story as it stands is not true is avoided, while the same result is secured in the mind of the ingenuous and unsuspecting reader. This is the more feasible in the case of a narrative in which it is not the supernatural element that is in question, but only a detail in the history; but having obtained a foothold in ground where the ordinary details of history are concerned, it is the more easy to proceed on the tacit understanding that any more extraordinary and supernatural incidents are, of course, proscribed. After the credit of the writer or writers for the work, which, with whatever reason or unreason, is supposed to be composite, in a mere matter of ordinary fact is destroyed, it will, of course, be the more easy to set aside their testimony in the case of the avowedly supernatural. I do not say that any such *arrière pensée* is consciously at work in the critic's mind, but it is hard to say how far it may not be, or have been, unconsciously at work, and certainly the effect produced is all the more likely to be operative in proportion as the appearance of consciousness may be concealed or disguised and the suspicion of it avoided in the writer or the reader.

In like manner in such a passage as the nineteenth chapter of Exodus, where it would seem to be important that we should have an authentic record of what took place, if it actually did take place, we are still haunted by the same bugbear of two or more writers, so that we are at a loss to tell which is which, and still more uncertain which has most faithfully followed his original, if, indeed, there was an original, and if that original was any more explicitly to be believed than either of his followers. On the supposition that there was an original, one would have thought that any subsequent writer would have felt more reverence for his authority than wilfully to have departed from it, and as on this supposition we have no standard whereby to estimate the original authority except that of the writer or writers, who, it would appear, were not slack to assert their own independence of him, it is evident that a very serious disparagement of the actual value of the record is occasioned by such criticism. How are we to estimate the authority with which even the

Decalogue itself comes to us, if this or anything like this is a true representation of the way in which the narrative was produced? All the incidents disappear one by one in the haze of conjecture, and not only are we in doubt as to what they were, but assuredly the not unnatural doubt is generated as to whether the whole story may not be a mass of invention, in which it is impossible to determine where the true ends and the false begins.

For even if it is said that the evidence for the Decalogue is *per se* conclusive, independently of all supernatural incidents enforcing it, may we not ask how it would be possible to establish, for example, the authority of such a commandment as the seventh, if society consented to ignore it, or to maintain that of the eighth, if the reign of atheistic communism were to dawn upon us? The authority of the Decalogue is no doubt conclusive to those who acknowledge it, or believe it to have been given by God, but to any such it can hardly be a matter of indifference whether the record of its promulgation is true or false, and certainly, if this record is proved to be unhistorical, or if doubt is thrown on its veracity, the case of those who believe in it becomes in a high degree precarious. It is perfectly true that there is no higher authority than that of truth, but if the setting of the Decalogue is found to be untrue, there is unquestionably some danger lest the jewel itself be regarded as false. It is hazardous in the highest degree to throw men back upon their native and inherent sense of right after all the grounds upon which they have been accustomed to believe in the right have been hopelessly overthrown.

And with regard to the book of Deuteronomy, the primary and most important question, as it seems to me, which has to be decided, is whether it is actual history or imaginative romance, whether the events actually occurred or whether they exist only upon paper, and occurred only in the imagination of the writer. If they actually occurred it is comparatively unimportant how the narrative was produced, and to attempt to decide the former question by an analysis of the narrative would be like determining the veracity of Thucydides by analysing his history of the Peloponnesian War. Doubtless either narrative, if true, must endure the strain of critical analysis, but in either narrative such an analysis would probably invent as much as it discovered, to say nothing of the bias against the narrative which the desire thus to analyse it would probably imply.

Now, in the case of Deuteronomy there is antecedently a powerful incentive to analysis from the very nature of its contents, for unquestionably, if the narrative is literally true,

then it presents the most astounding series of events it is possible to conceive. Naturally, therefore, even if unconsciously, there is a more than ordinarily powerful motive to criticise and minutely examine the narrative, and the very fact of its extraordinary contents must give additional stimulus to the examination. Another point has certainly to be borne in mind, namely, that though certain portions of the narrative which call for explanation may have been sufficiently explained, yet there will always be those to whom the difficulty presents more attractions than the explanation; that is to say, they would rather have the difficulty to fall back upon as an excuse for disbelieving the narrative than admit the explanation, however adequate and satisfactory. But this is, after all, only another form of the initial difficulty which besets every position involving faith. For example, it is impossible to explain the resurrection of our Lord, or the Gospel miracles, in such a way as to foreclose every avenue for doubt. If it were absolutely impossible to doubt, there would be no moral act in believing. Whereas the very purpose of faith is to supply a moral test. The difference between those who accepted and rejected Christ in the days of His ministry was one of moral attitude. And this must always be the case, whether the object of faith be the person and attributes of God or the person and claims of Jesus Christ.

And so with the mediation of Moses as set forth in Deuteronomy. If we accept that mediation it at once affects our attitude towards God. We are obliged to believe that it was compatible with the Divine attributes, and consistent with what we learn of God from nature, that He should act as we are told He did act in choosing Moses for the channel of His revelation, and in giving that revelation. If we believe this, it at once affects our attitude towards God in the moral direction of faith. We can no longer regard Him as a Being about whose being we may speculate as we will intellectually, but He becomes one with whom we have personal relations the recognition of which affects us morally. If, therefore, Deuteronomy is authentic and genuine, it cannot be a matter of indifference how we criticise it. On the other hand, it is impossible to criticise it in such a way as to affect the authenticity of its testimony without destroying altogether its claim on our attention. For if the narrative is an imaginary relation of events supposed to have taken place, but which did not really occur, then all that we learn about God is what it seemed good to the writer that we should learn, which depends upon the justice and propriety of his imagination, and on that alone, inasmuch as on the supposition it was not corroborated by fact. But manifestly, if God did not speak by Moses, then we have

nothing to learn from the way in which He is said to have spoken, and it matters not how He is said to have spoken if, as a matter of fact, He did not speak, or did not speak as He is said to have spoken. On the other hand, it is inconceivable that He should have spoken by Moses for the express purpose of giving a revelation and making known His will to man, and not have provided for that revelation to be preserved; as it is inconceivable that had He spoken by Moses, Moses himself should not have been careful to preserve it. But if, as a matter of fact, Deuteronomy as we have it was the work of priests in the time of Josiah, who had only the slenderest materials of mere tradition to work upon, it stands to reason that we can place no reliance on their work. It is merely an ideal representation of what might have happened, but which most assuredly did not happen as it is represented; for we have no trustworthy record of what took place, nor do we know that anything of the nature described ever did take place.

It is preposterous, therefore, for Driver to say that extreme critical conclusions "affect not the fact of revelation, but only its form." What revelation can there be in Deuteronomy if it first came into existence in the 8th century B.C., unless the essence of the revelation consisted not in what God said to Moses, but in what the priests of Josiah thought He ought to have said. Surely if the revelation of Moses is questionable on historic grounds, their revelation is far more questionable on personal grounds, for we are at the mercy of their conception of revelation, if indeed our own conception has not altogether deluded us. In this case there is assuredly neither the fact nor form of revelation, for there is no ground to believe that there was any revelation at all. What reason have we to believe that certain priests of Josiah's time, whom our own imagination has called into being, had any authority more than others to propound a revelation, or why are we to accept what they thus propounded as revelation, when on the supposition it was nothing but a tissue of imaginary circumstances confessedly compacted without any regard to historic truth, and transparently in conflict therewith? Why should this be revelation at all, whether in form or fact?

This statement of the Oxford Professor leads one very narrowly to question what it is that he can mean by revelation. And it appears to be something of this kind. Anything, whether in narrative or address, which has an elevated moral purpose, and is intended to inculcate lofty conceptions of God and a high standard of duty, may be accepted as of the essence of revelation because it is that which more especially appeals to the sense of the Divine in man, but it is not requisite that in making this appeal there should be any strict adherence to historic truth:

Thus a story based upon the Gospel narrative relating, however, statements and incidents not contained in the Gospels, but in apparent and close conformity with the spirit of the Gospels, would have almost an equal claim with them to be regarded as revelation, inasmuch as the essential teaching of both would be identical. At all events, it is hard to say in what respects the narrative of Deuteronomy would be superior to any such narrative, inasmuch as it confessedly lacks the like substratum of fact. We do not know and cannot discover what the residuum of historic truth is in Deuteronomy. We only know that the revelation with which it is supposed to be instinct is not to be sought for in the historic fact, but only in the particular ethical form in which the narrative of supposed fact is cast, and in the precepts and exhortations developed and deduced from it. In this way the university sermons of Dr. Driver would appear to have an almost equal claim to revelation with the addresses and exhortations of Deuteronomy. But if Dr. Driver claims to be the bearer of a revelation, he must pardon us if we scrutinise and criticise very narrowly his credentials, and certainly he must be prepared to show wherein his revelation differs from that of other scholars, and in what respects it is superior to theirs. I apprehend that if the revelation of Deuteronomy is based upon so sandy a ground as this, it will have little chance of surviving when the waters of criticism wash around it.

Now, as in the time of Moses, everything must depend upon the authority with which he spake, and not upon the artistic skill with which certain unknown priests in the eighth century before Christ endeavoured to present to their contemporaries the conditions and circumstances under which he spake, though we are ignorant alike of the accuracy and success with which they did this, as well as of the authority with which they undertook to do it. To say, then, that the fact of revelation is not affected by a criticism which assumes that there is no fact at all in the narrative of the revelation is a marvellous proof of ignorance as to the nature of revelation, and shows a serious want of appreciation of the essentials upon the possession of which we can alone receive it. For example, are we prepared to say that the revelation of Jesus Christ is independent altogether of the historic facts of His life, death, and resurrection? Can the essence of the Gospel be kept distinct from, and be independent of, the facts of the Gospel? Have we any guarantee that if these facts are destroyed or overthrown the essence of the Gospel will not evaporate altogether? It would be as reasonable and just to say that if the supernatural facts of the life of Christ were got rid of it would be only the form and not the

fact of His revelation that would be affected, as it is to say that if we know no more of the mission of Moses than the priestly romance of Josiah's time has delivered to us it is the form only and not the fact of that mission which is affected thereby. Whereas, what we want to know is whether he had any mission at all. For if he had no mission, then the revelation ascribed to him is a delusion and a mistake. It is one thing to say that the historical evidence for the mission of Moses is unsatisfactory and insufficient, it is quite another to say that if it be so the reality and value of his revelation is not affected thereby. Dr. Driver has in so many words asserted the latter, but he has obscurely and by implication hinted at the former, thereby maintaining a position which is indefensible, while expecting the unwary reader to condone the injury done to faith on account of his assurance that no harm will follow.

The case of the genuineness of Deuteronomy is very much like that of the genuineness of St. John's Gospel. If the fourth Gospel is by St. John, its authenticity is guaranteed to us; we may rely upon the authority with which its message comes to us: but if it is by an unknown writer of the second century, however pure and elevated his purpose in writing, we can rely upon nothing that he says, least of all when he professes to have seen the blood and water flow from the riven side of Christ. The whole body of his independent narrative is discredited, and, so far as his testimony is concerned, we can be sure of nothing that he relates, and if it were not for other sources of information we should be unable to accept the narrative of our Lord's death and resurrection because of the manifest unreality and fictitious character of the fourth Gospel. And it must be so even more obviously with Deuteronomy. If it was the work of Moses we may rely implicitly upon its testimony, but how can we do so if it was an imaginary record of some seven or eight centuries afterwards, dependent for its incidents upon unwritten tradition and upon such fragments of history as had been collected by a J or an E some fifty or a hundred years before, for whatever is ascribed to P is on the supposition very much later? It surely is obvious that the whole framework of the history becomes as shadowy and uncertain as the early narratives of Livy, and yet, when this is shown to be so, we are gravely informed that the fact of revelation is untouched thereby and only the form modified, and that not materially. I pity the writer who has no better revelation than that to guide him, and I pity still more the unwary readers who have been so misled by his authority as to suppose that the revelation given by Moses was nothing more than this.

The objections that have been brought against the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy have been so frequently answered that it is tedious to repeat them. The reply has, indeed, been made that had the answers been conclusive the objections would not be revived. But this is a smart rather than a just retort. We may, perhaps, for the moment assume that the main facts of the Christian faith have been securely established. But does this fact give us any reason for supposing that they will never again be called in question. Nay, is it not a fact that they are continually being called in question. Does this arise from their being not conclusively proved and still open to question, or does it arise from the very nature of the case that no historical fact admits of mathematical demonstration, that just as no criminal is ever convicted on mathematical demonstration, but oftentimes on the combined weight of converging and circumstantial evidence, so any historical events like those of the Christian faith are not matters for mathematical demonstration, but simply of historical testimony and historical evidence; and in a multitude of cases the evidence turns upon the balance of probabilities.

It has recently been suggested that the battle of Waterloo was a series of blunders. This may be shown with a greater or less degree of probability, but it in no way touches the fact that the battle was fought, was lost by Napoleon, and won by Wellington. As to the character and circumstances of the battle there may be room for great diversity of opinion, and it may be difficult to speak the last word or to foreclose all further discussion, but whatever room there may be for discussion, there is no doubt as to the fact and can be none. The certainty of the fact in no way depends upon the ingenuity of the discussions that may be raised about it, which may be endless. And so in like manner because a position has been maintained and proved, as far as it is possible to prove it, we have no guarantee that it may not be attacked again, nor is the fact of its being attacked again any evidence that it was originally weak. The point may be one which turns wholly upon the balance of probabilities, and the more nicely they are balanced the more certainly will opinion be liable to vary.

Now, with regard to Deuteronomy, the question lies between its being the work of Moses and the work of certain unknown priests in the time of Josiah. This is a question which must be decided upon evidence, and the evidence must be weighed in the balance of probability. The evidence may in certain points be deficient and indeterminate. From the very nature of such a case there will be a lack of direct evidence, arising from the lack of sufficient data. But as regards positive evidence there is no lack whatever. The catena of witness,

allusion, quotation, is unbroken from the very first. It is impossible to set it aside without taking such liberties and doing such violence as would be scouted in any similar case, for, as a matter of fact, there is probably no book of antiquity so well attested as Deuteronomy. We are driven, therefore, to this device—we must either acknowledge the testimony or we must affirm that the body and bulk of evidence has been designedly fabricated, manufactured, and manipulated in order to give the appearance of an unbroken chain of testimony, so as to vouch for the genuineness of a work which was never doubted or called in question till within the memory of the present or the former generation. Is this probable?

STANLEY LEATHES.

(To be continued.)



## ART. II.—OUGHT THE PAROCHIAL SYSTEM TO BE MODIFIED?

A GENERAL understanding has been happily arrived at that, as a consequence of the issue of the Lincoln case, there are, for the present at any rate, to be no more prosecutions for ritual instituted by the "aggrieved parishioner." But the individual has not become extinct, nor have his grievances ceased; and while we rejoice that circumstances have practically debarred him from the unfortunate method of redress to which he has hitherto resorted, we may quite consistently, and do most deeply, sympathize with him in his position, and desire that he should obtain substantial relief in a legitimate and unexceptionable manner. Short of secession from the Church, the very idea of which ought not for a moment to be entertained, there is obviously only one direction in which this relief is to be sought. He has failed in his attempt to confine the ritual of his parish church within the limits of what he had a right to consider lawful and expedient. He is now justified in seeking to be supplied from some other quarter with a ritual which shall not exceed those limits. As a Churchman, he is entitled to demand that it should be possible for him to satisfy his desire without lapsing into Dissent himself, or overwhelming the Church in the cataclysm of Disestablishment and Disendowment.

The Church Association, in the scheme of future policy which they put out at the end of last year, and the new Church Protestant Aid Society, in their inaugural appeal which they issued a few months ago, have both of them indicated that they perceive the object to be aimed at, though