

**Cambridge Biblical Essays.<sup>1</sup>**

## I.

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**I**N the wake of the Cambridge *Theological* Essays of 1905 there comes this volume of Cambridge *Biblical* Essays, under the editorship of Dr. Swete, who also contributes the final essay on "The Religious Value of the Bible." The essays, sixteen in number, are divided between the Old Testament and the New, the latter having rather the larger share. The essays are all by able writers, and, in their fearless and independent character, have the merit of showing where, in the opinion of Cambridge scholarship, present-day criticism of the Old and New Testaments stands, and what kind of results are held to flow from it. As a mirror of existing phases of thought, the volume is of distinct value.

The essays represent different standpoints, and the results seem satisfying, as a whole, to the writers themselves. Dr. Swete is persuaded that nothing is lost and not a little is gained through them for the religious value of the Bible. This optimistic estimate, as respects a great part of the contents of the volume, does not seem to the present writer to be justified. There are papers of a more moderate and reassuring tendency, but there is no shutting of the eyes to the fact that in several of the essays it is nothing less than a revolution which is seen in process. If the revolution is based on truth, it is, of course, useless to contend against it; it must have its way. But there is no good in that case in comforting oneself with the idea that the Bible, Christ, the Gospel, Christianity itself, are going to remain the powers they have been, or sustain the life and activities of a Christian Church as they have done. It may be true, as Dr. Swete says, that a conviction of the

<sup>1</sup> "Essays on Some Biblical Questions of the Day." By Members of the University of Cambridge. Edited by Henry Barclay Swete, D.D. London: Macmillan and Co., 1909.

unique religious nature of the Bible can, in some cases, survive the critical disintegration, the rejection of miracles, and even an "abandonment of the Catholic doctrine of the Person of Christ" (p. 550, Harnack is quoted); but this is not the Christianity the Church of Christ stands for. This of itself warrants a very keen attention being given to the new methods, and to the sweeping conclusions reached by them.

It would be well if writers who have so keen an appreciation of the weaknesses of "traditional" opinions would do a little more justice to the positions they reject. When Mr. A. A. Bevan, in his essay on "Historical Methods in the Old Testament," writes, "The belief in the infallibility of the Old Testament historians long discouraged all such investigations, for it seemed impossible to institute any comparison between narrators whose information rests on human testimony, and *narrators, whose information is communicated from heaven*" (p. 5, italics ours), it is pertinent to ask, Did he ever know or hear of anyone who held this absurd view? If he will take the trouble to consult any of the standard books on the subject he will find that every writer acknowledges that historical information came to the inspired writers through the ordinary channels of knowledge (see, in illustration, Mr. Scott's essay, pp. 336 *et seq.*). Why raise and argue upon a false issue of this kind?

A further curious anomaly is that, while it is constantly claimed that the very wide divergences in standpoint and details among critics do not in the least affect agreement and security in the essentials of critical theory, the adherents of "traditional" views are held down to the strictest views of inspiration and literality, and are not allowed to move one inch from the positions their fathers occupied a century or half a century ago. Any recognition on their part that discovery and learning have done something to change the perspective in dealing with certain questions is fastened on as a "concession," carrying with it the penalty of accepting all the critical extravagances that are going! Critics really should get to see that one may welcome many things as a legitimate increase of knowledge, while yet,

on good grounds, retaining a view of Divine revelation, of religious development, and of the historicity of the great facts of revelation, which is the antithesis of views wrought out from naturalistic premises, and dependent largely on these premises for their cogency. This is perfectly compatible, within limits, with divergences on points of detail.

Mr. Bevan, above quoted, is as assumptive as most writers of his class in his assurance that Israel had no *continuous* historical tradition going back farther than the founding of the monarchy—*i.e.*, the eleventh century B.C. (pp. 6, 7). In the Book of Judges, he contends, we find no continuous tradition, but clear proof that such did not exist when the narratives were compiled (p. 8). With this we read, strangely, that “the older parts of the Pentateuch and of the Book of Joshua (namely, those parts which are conventionally known as JE) date from about the same period as the older part of the Judges” (p. 8). Does JE, then, contain no trace of a “continuous tradition” at the time it was written? The argument is to show that even if the Israelites knew writing, there is no reason to suppose that it was used for history earlier than the monarchy. “To the Israelite historians the period before the Kings was what the *Jahīlīya*, or age of heathen barbarism, was to the historians of Arabia” (p. 8). It is ignored that the well-ordered patriarchal and Mosaic narratives speak to an entirely different kind of past from that of the Arabian historians, and that the Pentateuch itself contains many notices of the application of writing, in the days of Moses, to narrative, legislative, and hortatory subjects. It is easy to set all this aside, but it is not so easy to establish the right to do it. If only the critical writers could put themselves for a little in the position of those who believe it possible that the course of the history—its revelations and events—was, in the main, what these narratives declare it to have been, they might find less difficulty in believing in the careful literary transmission of the tradition even from an early time.

The present writer has been often blamed for insisting on the rationalistic root from which a good part of the modern

criticism of the Old Testament, as of the New, has sprung, and for contending that a theory of Old Testament religion and literature growing out of this root can never be satisfying to the Christian mind. It seems to him to be a truism, and he must be pardoned for reiterating it. Dr. Swete speaks gently of "the transition from the old to the new" as being, in England, "made under the guidance of scholars so reverent and conservative of essentials as Robertson Smith,<sup>1</sup> A. B. Davidson, G. A. Smith, Dean Kirkpatrick, and Professor Driver," and adds, "It has been made with general consent" (p. 548). Possibly; but the fact that reverent-minded men have gone a long way in accepting theories which had their origin in a very different spirit from their own, and which few of them carry out to their logical results, is no reason for not looking very carefully into the nature of their theories, or for, off-hand, pronouncing them innocuous. The men whose names appear in this volume as identified with the origination and advocacy of the Wellhausen movement—Vatke, Von Bohlen, George (of older date); then Reuss, Graf, Kuenen, Popper, Kosters, Kayser, Duhm, Wellhausen himself (pp. 57, 58)—were men of a totally different order of thought and feeling in regard to the element of supernatural revelation in the Old Testament from those above named, and it is a simple delusion to suppose that their historical criticism is not affected by this fundamental difference in principle.

Dr. Driver, *e.g.*, is constantly made use of as a proof of how "moderate" and "safe" an Old Testament critic may be. But it must be frankly said that Dr. Driver, with his caution and would-be mediating position, is in no real way representative of the nature and aims of the movement with which his name and works are associated. He is not at one in principle with the writers above referred to, and just as little does his "moderate" position represent the real trend of the movement at the present hour. There is a logic in these things,

<sup>1</sup> Whether Robertson Smith, in some of his writings and utterances—still more in the trend he introduced—was "conservative of essentials" is a point on which opinions may differ.

which is bound to work itself out, and no protests of cautious scholars, as Mr. Stanley A. Cook, for one, is well aware (p. 87; *cf. Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1907, pp. 811, 818-19), are likely to stay it. Dr. Driver is really as far away from many of the positions even in this book as he is from those of the more conservative writers for whose slowness of heart to believe his censures are mostly reserved.

Things, in fact, are moving far and fast, and the critical situation gets more radical and complicated with every new advance. *E.g.*, in his last (revised) eighth edition of his "Introduction," Dr. Driver writes of the constituents of the Hexateuch: "Although, however, critics differ as to the *relative* date of J and E, they agree that neither is later than *circa* 750 B.C.; and most are of opinion that one (if not both) is decidedly earlier" (p. 123). Will anyone affirm that this adequately represents the recent or existing attitude on the dates of these supposed documents? Would the writers of the Oxford *Hexateuch* accept it unreservedly? Would Mr. Cook in this volume accept it? It need not be asked if Mr. Kennett, who writes the fourth essay—perhaps an extreme case—would accept it. With a theory of Deuteronomy which carries it down (with earlier "nucleus") in its most characteristic provisions till after the Exile (pp. 104-5), he places the completion of J after the reformation of Josiah in 621 B.C., and possibly as low as 586 B.C. The union of J and E is in the Exile, as a result of the fusion of the Bethel and Judæan worships. Mr. Kennett's whole essay is a fine example of untrammelled historic *imagination*; but he hits on some conspicuously weak points in the ordinary critical construction, which furnish him with "motives" for his own. His theory is fatal, of course, to the historical character of the books; but this is frankly admitted to be true of nearly all the essays.

Mr. Cook's essay on "The Present State of Old Testament," following on that of Professor C. H. W. Johns on "The Influence of Babylonian Mythology upon the Old Testament," has a character of its own, as acknowledging the difficulties

which have arisen from this new quarter for Old Testament criticism, and as endeavouring to appraise the results. Dr. Johns favours the view of a deep-reaching influence of Babylonia upon the Old Testament—an influence creating, he says, “a vexation which attacks modern critics quite as virulently as orthodox traditionalists” (p. 43). Mr. Cook sees in this influence an alteration in the form of the critical problems, which will have to be faced in a more radical spirit than has ever yet been done. The Babylonian movement has attracted notice “partly through the strength of its adherents, and partly for its tendency towards conclusions which, among some of the scholars, are considerably more conservative, but among others distinctly more radical, than those which represent the modern prevailing critical standpoint” (p. 56). “The situation,” he admits, “is not a little bewildering and unsettling to those who sympathize with modern efforts to study the greatest of the old Oriental writings with the aid of the highest scholars.” We are reminded, of course, that “critical scholars are almost unanimously agreed upon the essential literary and historical conclusions”<sup>1</sup>; while “conservative writers” “usually misunderstand the problems, and generally confuse fundamental questions with those which are purely secondary or tertiary” (p. 66). One thing, at any rate, which the “conservative” people appear to be right in is that criticism is drifting into a considerable muddle as the result of these new views, and that neither the Winckler nor the Wellhausen school seems to be able to get satisfactorily out of it. Would it not be wise, in these circumstances, to stop throwing stones at “traditional” views, until it is seen whether, with what suitable modifications the facts may require, these older views do not after all hold the true solution of the problem? The partially conservative trend in Baentsch, Volz, and others, would certainly go a great deal farther but for their essentially naturalistic presuppositions. “It will be perceived,”

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Cook, however, should not represent Hommel as endorsing the literary analysis and conceding that the Wellhausen theory “explains everything” (p. 80), in face of Hommel’s subsequent explicit disavowal (see “Problem of Old Testament,” p. 397).

says Mr. Cook himself, speaking of these writers, "that the arguments which vindicate certain traditional views would also prove a great deal more than the most moderate of the 'Babylonists' would admit. Hence it is that some have seen in the new movement the likelihood of a return to a more conservative position in Biblical criticism. It would probably be more correct to say that the choice lies between the traditional history itself and such views as shall follow from a more comprehensive study of the problems in the future" (p. 83). Is this position less nebulous than that attributed to the "conservative" writers? It hints, however, at developments which leave Dr. Driver far behind.

Dr. Driver finds (*cf.* his "Genesis") a substratum of historical fact, if idealized, in the patriarchal narratives. The present volume will be searched in vain for any admission of the kind. Dr. Driver, again, concedes a considerable nucleus of Mosaic civil and ceremonial legislation ("Introduction," pp. 152, 153), and assumes the Priestly Narrative and Code to be completed by the time of Ezra. Few writers in this volume would concede as much on the former point, and critical scholars take greater liberties with the Code. In the newly published volume on Ezra and Nehemiah, *e.g.*, in the "Century Bible," it is held that the Code which Ezra introduced and tried to enforce was still not the Priestly Code, and a date *circa* 400 B.C. is ascribed to this. The ground is the admitted difference of the P legislation from that of Nehemiah's time—a fact which points rather to the antiquity of the Code. Mr. Kennett, in his essay, defends the radical position that there was no return under Cyrus. His whole conception, as indicated, is subversive of the history.

It has already been stated that there are papers in the volume of a much more positive tendency—that, *e.g.*, by Dr. W. E. Barnes on "The Interpretation of the Psalms," in which there are some useful cautions, and a keen criticism of Duhm on the Messianic Psalms; that by Mr. A. E. Brooke on "The Historical Value of the Fourth Gospel," a counterpoise,

so far, to Dr. Inge's freer treatment in his essay on "The Theology of the Fourth Gospel"; Professor Anderson Scott's discussion of "Jesus and Paul," in criticism of the extremer representations of the relation of Master and Apostle; and the fresh paper of Dr. J. H. Moulton on "New Testament Greek in the Light of Modern Discovery." One of the most interesting essays in the book is that written from a Jewish standpoint by Mr. I. Abrahams on "Rabbinic Aids to Exegesis." It is sane and fair. Mr. F. C. Burkitt's contribution on "The Eschatological Idea in the Gospel" does not carry us far beyond the idea of "a good time coming" (on earth) as the essence of the eschatological conception. The paper on "Our Lord's Use of the Old Testament" sums up the facts very fairly, but disposes of Christ's mistaken attitude to the books of the Old Testament, and to their historical contents, by the theory of the "kenosis." "He stood, as man, at the intellectual standpoint of His day and country. And He *could not, because He would not*, know otherwise, for us men and for our salvation." Other papers serve the useful purpose of exhibiting the present state of thought on New Testament questions—as on the "Synoptic Problem" (H. L. Jackson) and on "New Testament Textual Criticism" (A. V. Valentine-Richards). Here, again, the general effect is "unsettling." On Synoptical Criticism, *e.g.*, the result is that "a shifting of the position is inevitable." The Evangelists "have gleaned their material from a variety of sources; it has been freely handled and embellished by them. Of their subject-matter a great deal is unquestionably genuine tradition, stretching back to apostolic times and to the days of Jesus. A remainder will have to be assigned to the purely legendary, to accretion, to historic incident, to ecclesiastical development, to ethics elaborated by the Primitive Church, to sayings which came to be ascribed to Jesus" (pp. 456, 457). The idea must be discarded that we have three independent sources in the Gospels; but we have original sources in the Mark Gospel and in the "Q" document (the so-called "Logia") embedded in Matthew and Luke. Even this "narrowed ground is not un-



challenged. . . . For the sake of argument—be it so ” (p. 458). We have still the citadel in the nine passages—the “ foundation-pillars ”—accepted by Schmiedel, which are “ proof conclusive for the existence of Jesus as a real historical personage ”! There are other sayings which have on them the incomparable stamp of originality. To this the matter is refined down. No wonder the essay ends with the ambiguous sentence: “ There is sometimes ground for the objection that to keep the divinity of Jesus within the limits of the purely human, while not denying that He is worthy of worship (Neumann), is to affirm too little or to affirm too much ” (p. 459).

## II.

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Those who may turn to the essay on “ The Present Stage of Old Testament Research,” by Mr. Stanley Arthur Cook, in the hope of finding an up-to-date and impartial presentation of the topic with which it deals, will be disappointed. The book appeared in October, 1909, but there is no reason to suppose that the essay was written in the same year. The internal evidence as to its date and composition would be satisfied by a hypothesis ascribing the original writing of the essay to the month of May, 1908, and postulating a subsequent “ redaction ” (presumably in proof) in or about the first half of November, 1908. With regard to impartiality, Eerdmans is never mentioned, although his book on Genesis appeared long before November, 1908; and Professor Sayce is spoken of (p. 67) as being “ no less opposed to methodical principles of criticism,” the subject of comparison being Professor Orr.

In a short notice it is not possible to deal exhaustively with all the points that might be criticized, and in this case it is certainly not necessary, for there is one great outstanding criticism that suggests itself at once. Let the following sentences