

A Critical Examination of Genesis i. to xi.

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ONE of the most marked features of biblical study is the attention which is being increasingly paid to what is called "the higher criticism." In religious circles this is too often looked upon with suspicion and even dislike. It is regarded as connected with free thought or infidelity. But in itself it is no such thing. It is nothing more than the free investigation of certain facts. To refuse to look facts in the face is to put the very worst weapon into the hand of the adversary. It is a confession of weakness and fear. It is sometimes said that criticism does not deal with facts, but only with arbitrary theories. The real truth is, of course, that criticism has elucidated a certain number of facts, and from these drawn its conclusions. If these conclusions are wrong, well and good; but let us be quite sure that we have first looked into the facts for ourselves. Again, it is urged that critics contradict each other so much, that there is no reasonable assurance that one is right any more than another. But cannot the same be said in a measure of every branch of investigation? We should not, if we had even an elementary knowledge of architecture, dispute the fact of some old Cathedral being composed of different styles of architecture, nor question in the main which parts belonged to which style, because archæologists quarrelled about the exact relative dates of certain unimportant features. So it is with the higher criticism. There is coming to be a remarkable consensus of opinion among the majority of those who have most carefully studied the subject. It is about comparatively minor points that they disagree. In this, as in all other sciences, there is a tendency to form conjectures beyond what the facts confessedly prove. This is a reason for caution in accepting wholesale the views of any one critic, not a reason for rejecting the critical method. But we do not ask any one to accept even the conclusions on which critics are generally agreed; but to study the facts for themselves. Once more, let us not confound facts and conclusions.

There is no part of the Old Testament in which the facts on which the critical theories are based are more conspicuous than the Book of Genesis, and therefore more easily and profitably studied. But why not be content with old beliefs? Why not be satisfied with the unbroken tradition of ancient times that Moses wrote the whole Pentateuch? The critic answers that to his eyes it is self-evident that this was not so; that the narrative bears the most obvious marks of being a

compilation from different sources, not an original narrative by one person. Let us examine these early chapters of Genesis and see whether we cannot look with the critic's eyes. If these chapters are a compilation from comparatively few sources, we are pretty sure to find traces of certain phrases, thoughts, or ways of speaking marking each source, and distinguishing it from the others. If a modern historian were to write a History of England based upon those of Hume and Macaulay, we should be sure to find traces of both throughout his work; and it might be quite possible for a literary scholar, supposing that at some future time both Hume's and Macaulay's histories were lost, to separate to a certain extent the parts derived from Hume and the parts derived from Macaulay.

But this is very far from being really analogous to the case before us. In the works of ancient compilers it was not customary, as in modern works, to aim at reconstructing their sources in the style of the composer, but they were dovetailed together with little alteration beyond the addition of explanatory notes. We have the most familiar example of this in the Synoptic Gospels. The notes or pieces which St. Matthew adds from his own pen, such as iv. 14-16, xxvii. 62-66, can be clearly distinguished in character from the fundamental gospel which is the basis of all three synoptists, and again from those parts which he has in common with St. Luke. We, therefore, should expect to find in Genesis, if a compilation, not only a greater difference of style between sections borrowed from different sources, but also sudden marks of transition, when the compiler passes from a piece taken from one source to a piece taken from another, and these things are precisely what we do find.

Let us see, then, how far we are able with any certainty to resolve these early chapters into their component parts. The abrupt transitions of language and style will help us very much at every point in making our division and classification, so that we generally get throughout paragraphs or sections which are clearly distinguishable. Now, what strikes us at once most forcibly is that the same Divine title is in most cases employed throughout the same section, but in sections following each other different titles are frequently used. This is often regarded as the key-stone of the whole critical theory, and must be treated in some detail. The Divine names employed are (1) God (Elohim), (2) The LORD (Jehovah or, more strictly, Yahweh), (3) The LORD GOD (Yahweh Elohim). Throughout Gen. i.-ii.

3, we find Elohim in almost every verse. In ii. 4-iii. 24 the title employed, and that again with great frequency, is Yahweh Elohim. In chap. iv. it is Yahweh throughout, except once in ver. 25; and this title occurs very frequently in the first sixteen verses. In chap. v. Elohim occurs four times, Yahweh once in ver. 29. In the history of the Flood, vi.-ix., the distinction of passages thus characterised is more difficult to trace; but in some paragraphs it is clear enough. Thus in vi. 1-8, Yahweh is the proper designation of God; Elohim occurs only in the phrase "sons of Elohim," and may very possibly mean angels. In the next section, vers. 9-22, Elohim is used throughout. In vii. 1-5, Yahweh is again used. In what follows to viii. 19 the Divine name does not frequently occur, and in vii. 16 both appear in juxtaposition. It is on this and other grounds believed that here we have a more complete fusion of the original sources. In viii. 20-22, we have the word Yahweh twice. In ix. 1-17, the word Elohim (only) occurs several times. In the rest of the chapter the Divine name does not occur except in the poetical prophecy describing the blessing of Shem and the curse of Canaan, when both names are employed, vers. 26, 27. In chap. x. the Divine name occurs only once (ver. 9), and then it is Yahweh. In xi. 1-9 this word is used frequently, but never Elohim. In the genealogy of Shem, vers. 10-25, no Divine name is found.

Now, it is maintained by critics that these different Divine names occur sufficiently frequently and with sufficient regularity to justify the assumption that the sections characterised by one Divine title are from a different source or set of sources from those in which another occurs.¹ If this general rule is proved by the frequency of cases where it applies, we are then clearly justified in conjecturing explanations which may account for exceptions; and it is hardly just to say that critics are merely tampering with the text to suit *a priori* theories in trying so to explain them. Their argument is clearly, in the first instance, *a posteriori*. Now, to begin with, it is extremely probable that a compiler, who generally inserted the sections as he found them, might occasionally insert a note in which he would naturally use either name without any distinction. This would account for Elohim in chap. iv. 25 and for Yahweh in chap. v. 29, both of which bear the character of philological notes, and may well have been added to give the traditional meanings attached to the words Seth and Noah in the compiler's time, or they may have been added by a still later redactor. It is also open to question, whether chap. ii. 4 (or 4^b)²-iii. 24 should not be classed with the

portions in which Yahweh is used. It certainly resembles chap. iv. in its general character, and it is at least plausible to suppose that Elohim may have been added by the compiler to identify the Yahweh of the second section with the Elohim of the first. It was not, of course, necessary to carry this out any further. It would have been clumsy to have dropped it before.

There are two things further to be noticed about these two kinds of sources (supposing that we are right in connecting chap. ii. 4^b-iii. 24 and iv.). 1. That each kind of source is often distinguished by other characteristics besides the use of the Divine names. A good deal of stress is laid by critics on the difference of vocabulary employed by each, but as this would require a lengthy discussion of Hebrew words, and an argument drawn from such a limited number of passages would be very hazardous, it will be sufficient to mention it, and leave the reader to work it out for himself as far as he can. Of more importance is their difference in general character. Certainly the Yahwistic sections contain more of what we might call stories. The Garden of Eden, the history of Cain and Abel, probably the incident of Lamech, and the Tower of Babel belong only to this group. The only story which the Elohistic sources contain, and that in common with the Yahwistic, is the history of the Flood. Again, the Yahwistic narrative is characterised by picturesqueness and detailed description, and is fuller of the marvellous and the supernatural. The serpent is gifted with speech; the sons of God form an unholy alliance with the daughters of men, and produce a race of giants; the rebellious "children of men" build a tower whose top was to be in heaven. Again, it is more anthropomorphic. Yahweh walks in the garden in the cool of the day; He makes for Adam and his wife coats of skin, and clothes them; He comes down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded; He smells the sweet savour. The Elohistic portions are more prosaic in thought, though they sometimes partake of the artificial characters of later Hebrew poetry. We see this at once by comparing chap. i.-ii. 3 with ii. 4, etc. They contain most, if not all, of the genealogies. Two points here require notice. The phrase, "These are the generations of" (in chap. v. 1, "This is the book of the generations of") is certainly characteristic of them, but it apparently occurs twice in this part of Genesis before Yahwistic sections, in chap. ii. 4 and x. 1. In the last case, however, the Divine name occurs only once in the section, in ver. 9. Is it not very possible that this is a note inserted by the compiler or a later hand? Chap. ii. 4^a is an acknowledged difficulty. On any hypothesis it is not easy to see why an expression which is generally and naturally used of a genealogy of

¹ This criterion, as has been shown, enables us to divide definitely all except chaps. vii. 6-viii. 19 and xi. 10-25, and we should probably add chap. x. 1-14 for reasons given below.

² See below.

persons should be used of the heavens and the earth. It is very commonly assigned by critics to the preceding account of the creation. But this, not to mention the awkwardness of *4b* as it would thus stand at the beginning of the section, is contrary to the usage of the phrase elsewhere in Genesis, according to which it always precedes the subject to which it refers. Other critics believe it to have been transposed from the beginning of chap. i.; but there seems no good reason why the compiler should have treated it in this way. A better conjecture, perhaps, is that he inserted it where it stands on the analogy of the other passages where it occurs. 2. A second fact worth noticing is that in many cases the Elohistic and Yahwistic narratives cover pretty nearly the same ground. We have, in part at any rate, two accounts of the creation. Probably the compiler was compelled, in order to get a natural sequence, to omit the first part of the Yahwistic creation narrative. We have a double mention of the line Adam-Seth-Enosh. A double account of the Flood. Chap. vi. 1-8 clearly corresponds to vi. 9-13. Again, viii. 20-22 bears resemblance to ix. 1-7. We have distinct indications of a double and closely parallel narrative in the rest of the description; but the division into its several parts is extremely difficult and uncertain. This probably accounts for the fact that whereas Noah in vii. 2 is commanded to take of each clean animal seven, and two of every other, he is distinctly said, in vers. 8, 9, to have taken two of all animals, whether clean or unclean (cf. also ver. 15).

Having thus come to the conclusion that the Yahwistic and Elohistic sources are distinct, we naturally ask whether we have any grounds for determining which are the most ancient. Everything seems to point to the priority of the Yahwistic. The name of Yahweh, the peculiar name of the national Hebrew God, as distinct from the different gods of the other nations, is an early conception; whereas Elohim used absolutely implies that there is only one true God. The anthropomorphic idea of God is, of course, a sign of antiquity. The Yahwistic stories of the first chapters of Genesis remind us, in some of their features, of the early stories of primitive traditions existing among all nations. We see how the earliest threads of revelation corresponded, under Divine guidance, with the crude notions of a primitive people. This is one of the most important results of biblical criticism. It shows how God revealed Himself, not only "in divers manners," but in "divers portions," gradually making Himself and His laws known, as men were able to understand them, until by degrees He made possible that perfect knowledge which came to man in the Incarnate Person of Jesus Christ. Those who maintain the unity of the Book of Genesis have to explain how it is that the writer begins with a highly theological conception of God and creation, though not altogether scientific from our modern point of view, and then goes back to a circle of religious ideas suited to the human race in its early childhood.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF FIRST CORINTHIANS.

I COR. XIII. II.

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child: now that I am become a man, I have put away childish things" (R.V.).

EXPOSITION.

"I spake" is an unfortunate rendering, precisely what St. Paul did *not* mean. Render "as an infant I talked." *Δέγειν*, *to speak rationally and articulately*; *λαλεῖν* (used here), *to talk, prate, chatter*.—*Evans*.

It is difficult not to admit that "spoke" is a covert allusion to the "tongues," and if so, it is an additional proof that this gift consisted in ecstatic utterance.—*Edwards*.

"I felt." The word expresses the unity of feeling, thought, and will: "I felt, I aspirèd." Thus prophecy, whose glance penetrates to the perfection yet to come, corresponds to the ardent aspirations

of the childish heart, which goes out eagerly into the future, expecting from it joy and happiness.—*Godet*.

This word (*φρονεῖν*) is not the generic name for emotion, though it includes emotion as well as thought. It seems to be used in the general meaning of thinking. The first stage is that in which the child babbles, and is slowly learning articulate speech. It enters on the second stage when it learns to think—that is, to form general notions. Tyndall's rendering is, "I ymagined." The third stage in the child's mental history is reasoning; from its general notions it draws inferences.—*Edwards*.

"I spoke . . . I thought . . . I reasoned."—*Ellicott*.

It seems evident to me that by the three terms the Apostle alludes to the three gifts—tongues, prophecy, knowledge.—*Godet*.

The gift of tongues shall be as the feeble articulations of an infant; the gift of prophecy shall be as an infant's half-formed thoughts; the