The Teaching of our Lord as to the Authority of the Old Testament.

BY THE RIGHT REV. C. J. ELICOTT, D.D., BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER AND BRISTOL.

THE TWO THEORIES.

We now enter definitely into a full consideration of those statements as to the Old Testament which are regarded by foreign writers of eminence and learning as fully established by modern criticism; and which, further, are said to be very generally admitted by writers and scholars who have made the nature and composition of the Old Testament their especial study.

We may ourselves admit, at the very outset, that there is an amount of accordance between foreign scholars and critics as to the general structure of the earlier Books of Holy Scripture, and even to some of the more important details, considerably beyond what we might have expected, when the differences of the points of view of the writers are properly taken into account. It is startling, for instance, to find a venerated writer like the late Dr. Delitzsch in accordance with Professor Wellhausen in many essential matters connected with the Book of Genesis, and to find coincidences of opinion in regard of some of the characteristics of the Pentateuch between writers as divergent from...
we may pay little heed to the assurance of a recent writer on this subject, that the modern development of historical criticism is reaching results as sure, where it is fairly used, as scientific inquiry.

But it will be well now to enter into details, and to proceed to place these alleged certitudes in contrast with that traditional view of the characteristics and composition of the Old Testament which, with some modifications, has existed for two-and-twenty centuries; and which, we may very confidently say, will substantially remain to the end. Modifications there may be. Each age as it passes suggests, it may be, some rectifications. Each period of controversy like the present necessitates a closer study, both of matter and of language, and consequently a clearer perception of those details in which surer knowledge enables us to introduce rectifications and corrections. These modifications we may expect, but subversive changes in the estimate of the true nature of Holy Scripture, such as those which we are now invited to accept, will never enter into the credenda of the Catholic Church.

We begin, then, by defining what we mean by the term that we are using,—the Traditional view of the Old Testament. We mean that view of the contents, their authorship, and their trustworthiness, that prevailed in the Jewish Church after the final formation of the Canon of the Old Testament,—that is clearly to be recognised in the New Testament,—and has continued in the Christian Church, with but little substantial modification, to this nineteenth century of salvation. Now, however, in the closing years of this century, we are told that this view must, to a great extent, be given up. We are, in fact, called upon to set aside the greater part of the beliefs of the past, and to see in the Old Testament a collection of ancient documents, many of highly composite structure, which came consecutively into existence centuries later than when they have been supposed to have been written; and which, after various re-edits and redactions, only received the form in which now we possess them, in the later, if not the latest, period of the Exile.

What general answer have we to make to these startling demands? Well, to begin with, certainly this,—that the view that we are thus somewhat summarily called upon to dismiss may in substance be recognised as dating from the time of the Apo-

---

1 Lux Mundi, p. 357.
crypha. We find in the writings of that period not only the same recognised divisions that were current in the days of our Lord, but a deliberate ascription of sacredness to the ancient books, and especially to the Mosaic Law and to its author, into whose soul Wisdom herself vouchsafed to enter. The Books of the Old Testament were apparently ascribed, as we now ascribe them, to prophets,—the term prophets in the Apocrypha being applied not only to men who "showed what should come to pass," and who spake "from the mouth of the Lord," but who were guided by His Spirit, and ranked with the "friends of God."

We may recognise substantially the same views in Philo, though in a more exaggerated form. With him the Old Testament is ever regarded as one divine whole, breathed through by the Spirit of God, one inseparably connected holy Word, of which the Pentateuch is to be accounted the crown and the glory. The same views are expressed by Josephus, though in more restrained and moderate terms. He too regards the sacred Scriptures as a divine whole. They were written by a succession of prophets, the greatest of whom was the inspired writer of the Pentateuch,—true prophets, yet with separate gifts,—some writing under immediate inspiration from God, others only truthfully and faithfully recording the events of their own times, though never without some measures of divine guidance and direction.

Such generally were the views entertained in the Jewish Church after the formation of the canon of the Old Testament; such the views in the time of our Lord; and such, though not without various modifications in detail, the views entertained by the early writers in the Christian Church, the Eastern Church involving more of the speculative element, the Western more of the formulated and traditional. The broad principles that were maintained were the harmony of the teaching of the writers of the Old Testament, the organic unity of the two Testaments, the self-sufficiency of Scripture for the setting forth of truth, and its blessed and plenary perfection. It is only in heretical writings, and particularly in the Clementine Homilies, that we find any traces of that kind of criticism of the Old Testament with which that nineteenth century has made us so painfully familiar. Even from early days controversy has prevailed in regard of the nature of the inspiration and the infallibility of Holy Scripture, but it is only in the last hundred and forty years, and particularly in the last quarter of a century, that the broad principles of the Traditional view have been deliberately and even contemptuously flung aside, and the genuineness, integrity, and trustworthiness of the Old Testament impugned and traversed by the industrious ingenuity and really limitless assumptions of modern analysis.

This destructive criticism has, however, not been without its uses. It has at last compelled us to study more diligently and systematically the Old Testament. For a very long period the critical study of the Old Testament has been comparatively neglected by biblical scholars. The Hebrew language has to a great extent dropped out of the curriculum of modern theology; the critical questions that have been now brought to the front by men of singular acumen, as well as of untiring industry, come upon us with a kind of startling novelty; and we find ourselves, as it were, taken by surprise, and brought suddenly face to face with questions pressed upon us by experts, to which we are uneasily conscious that we can give no answers that can stand five minutes of steady criticism.

This state of things is, however, passing away. We are at length beginning to realise the gravity of the present state of the Old Testament controversy. The Traditional views are being re-examined under the light of modern discoveries; and efforts are beginning to be made fairly to put in contrast that inspired and trustworthy record of the past bearing the name of the Old Testament, and sealed with a belief of more than two thousand years in its genuineness and integrity, with that strange conglomerate of myth, legend, fabrication, idealised narrative, falsified history, dramatised fable, and after-event prophecy to which modern critical analysis has sought to reduce that which our Church, day by day, calls the "most Holy Word" of Almighty God.

Such a contrast we are now endeavouring to make,—a contrast which it is believed will in itself go far to reassure the perplexed and the doubtful, and will show what we must term the dangerous credulity of those who are advising us, for the sake of the shaken faith of young men at our Universities, to accept the leading conclusions of this revolutionary analysis. To strive to help failing faith is a noble endeavour, but there are limits to the extent to which that help is to be carried. Are
we to have no thought for the countless numbers of those simple trustful believers who, in the language of a modern poet, are leading “lives of melodious days,” because clinging to the old faith, and accepting what Apostles and Evangelists, yea, and the dear Lord Himself, have expressly guaranteed to them? Are these babes in Christ to be forgotten? Are good and earnest men to be so over-eager for the comparatively few, as to lose sight of those whose very salvation may be endangered by this precipitancy of literary credulity?

At any rate, let us make our contrast. Let us state succinctly on the one side what we have termed the rectified Traditional view of the composition and authorship of the Old Testament, and, on the other side, the modern Analytical view; and then, further, those modifications of it which English Churchmen of earnestness and piety advise us to accept as helpful to weakened faith, and as that which, to use the words of one of these writers, may “legitimately and without real loss be conceded.” Conceded, and to whom? To Edward Reuss and to Graf, to Kuenen and to Wellhausen, and to their followers in this country who adopt, in a greater or less degree, their conclusions. When the contrast has been completed, we will, without entering into any technicalities, let common sense be brought to bear upon the contrast, and endeavour to make a rough but equitable estimate of the preponderance of the probability which the Traditional view may claim over the Analytical view, and the real insufficiency of the arguments on which this latter view appears principally to rely. This done, we will then make our appeal to far higher and more conclusive authority.

1 Lux Mundi, p. 362.


By the Rev. Principal Brown, D.D., Aberdeen.

I.

The A.V. abounds in italics where the verb, though not required in Greek, is needed to make a complete sentence in English; it ought not to have been printed in italics. Also, where the idiom of the English language requires more words than the Greek, the indispensable words should not have been printed in italics, as in Matt. ii. 18, “Rachel weeping for her children”—where the R.V. prints “for” properly in Roman.

Such superfluities, however, are harmless, but not where they give the wrong sense. Thus in John vii. 6, the A.V. has a long exposition of the sense of an action of our Lord’s, which, even if the correct one, translators have no right to do. The case was that of the woman taken in adultery, whom the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees brought to Jesus, wanting to ensnare Him by asking what He would do in such a case. Instead of answering them, Jesus stooped down, and “with his finger wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not” (adds the A.V.). On their persisting in demanding an answer, “Jesus lifted up Himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” Now observe what follows: “And again He stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, . . . and Jesus was left alone.” Beyond doubt, then, His stooping down and writing on the ground was to allow those holy hypocrites to slink away, unobserved by Him, and so not be put to shame in His presence. Anyhow, the explanation given in the A.V. should have been left to the expositor.

- In Acts vii. 59, “They stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” It is a pity that King James’ translators or revisers inserted or left (for I have not the previous versions at hand) the italic word “God.” For though it expresses what is true, it does not