

at the door of our souls there is a foe who would wear the "brows of grace," and enter as a friend, a foe who has robbed us all of the paradise of innocence; and who offers in return, if we will but sell our souls to him, as Cain and Lamech did, his doomed enchanted paradises of lust, or gain, or ease, or glory. But the Bible also tells us of a voice speaking to us from within our souls, and asking us all, as it asked Cain before he made his fatal bargain, "If thou doest well, shall thy offering not be accepted?" and offering us all the help of an ally who is stronger than the foe. Christians, indeed, have no cause for a failing heart in the great struggle; for the victory which our Leader won at Calvary and the Sepulchre has been proclaimed along the lines of wavering battle, and has nerved the arm of every true-hearted combatant with the certainty of triumph.

But if any of you in this chapel, at any period of your lives, shall ever for a time lose your hold on the blessedness of this certainty, take heart from the example of Abel, who raised his rude altar and offered of his best to God, and was accepted, though he had not received the promises. And

if the deepest feelings of your hearts shall ever find a true expression in the poet's words—

"I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope through darkness up to God,
I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope,"—

surely He who accepted Abel will not reject you. There is indeed only one way—that way is Christ. But on this way you may tread, though, like Abel, you know Him not. He may reward you, even in this life, with the blessing of a fuller light and a clearer knowledge. But if not, He will not cast you off while you are seeking after God. Few comparatively of those who, in the language of our text, sacrifice aright, may have come near that perfect knowledge of the things of Christ which none can absolutely attain; but "ten thousand times ten thousand" is the number of His "ransomed saints"; unmeasured by the narrow lines of creed and system is the "roll of His elect."

Ryle's "Canon of the Old Testament."¹

BY THE REV. J. A. SELBIE, M.A., BIRSAV.

THIS work fills up a distinct gap in English theological literature. We have been hitherto without a standard work, up to date, dealing with the canon of the Old Testament. There are valuable references to the subject in Driver's *Introduction*; the question is elaborately discussed in Robertson Smith's *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*; but Professor Ryle's book is unique in selecting the history of the canon for its exclusive subject. Moreover, in the judgment of competent critics this work has not been rendered superfluous to the English reader even by the recent translation of Buhl's *Canon*. The standpoint and the conclusions of our author are revealed in the motto: "*Canon non uno, quod dicunt, actu ab hominibus, sed paulatim a Deo, animorum temporumque rectore,*

productus est." The history of the canon of the Old Testament, as is succinctly stated in the Preface, is "the history of no sudden creation or instantaneous acquisition, but of a slow development in the human recognition of the divine message, which was conveyed through the varied writings of the old covenant. The measure of the completeness of the canon had scarcely been reached when 'the fulness of the time' came. The close of the Hebrew canon brings us to the threshold of the Christian Church." This conclusion is diametrically opposed to the traditional view as represented by Josephus, whose position, as defined by Dr. Robertson Smith, was that "each new book was written by a man of acknowledged authority, and simply added to the collection as a new page would be added to the royal annals of an eastern kingdom." It is an easy task for Professor Ryle to show that known facts preclude the truth of such a hypothesis. As to the part

¹ *The Canon of the Old Testament. An Essay on the Gradual Growth and Formation of the Hebrew Canon of Scripture.* By Herbert Edward Ryle, B.D. Macmillan & Co. 1892.

popularly ascribed to Ezra in connection with the formal closing of the canon, it is not going too far to say that there is really no evidence worthy of the name to support his claims. Jewish legends so late as to be wholly untrustworthy, popular assumption, uncritical speculation—all these, reinforced by human indolence, have combined hitherto to maintain a position which the first breath of independent inquiry scatters to the winds. The Jews would seem to have acted upon the principle of ascribing almost everything to Ezra which *even they* found it impossible to ascribe to Moses. Hence arose the tradition, which passed over into the Christian Church, and found wide acceptance for many centuries, that Ezra rewrote by inspiration the whole of the books of the Old Testament, which had been destroyed by the Chaldeans. *Excursus* A of Professor Ryle's book, which discusses these Jewish traditions, supplies material for reflection. We see how utterly uncritical was the age when these notions originated, and with what unquestioning faith the writers of each succeeding age received them from their predecessors. At length, however, this monstrous notion about Ezra was discredited, and the rôle he had played was assumed by "the Men of the Great Synagogue." Now it is more than doubtful whether such an institution ever existed, and it is only fair to say that whatever functions Jewish tradition of the third century attributed to its members, we never find it claimed for them any part in the completing of the canon. That expansion of the legend was reserved for a Jewish contemporary of Luther, Elias Levita, who, in the year 1538, published his *Massoreth Hammasureth*, in which he contends that the work of collecting and editing the Scriptures of the Old Testament was performed by the "Men of the Great Synagogue." It is upon foundations no more substantial than these that the traditional view rests. This is coming nowadays to be more generally known, and there are tokens that the phantoms conjured up by mediæval Judaism will cease ere long to haunt the walks of canonical research. In the absence of external evidence as to the steps by which the canon was formed, we are thrown back upon the evidence of the books themselves. "Scripture must tell its own tale." And let it not be imagined that an inquiry of this kind is hazardously subjective, and can lead only to doubtful conclusions. Critics of all schools are now approaching agreement on all

the main positions. Professor Davidson has remarked in the *Expositor* for July how Buhl and Ryle, working quite independently of one another, have deduced results that are virtually identical. Is this not a presumption in favour of the general trustworthiness of their conclusions?

In proceeding to the constructive part of his work, Professor Ryle gives us an excellent chapter on the "Preparations for a Canon." Several principles must be noted here which are frequently overlooked. For instance, we must not identify the time when a book was composed with the time when it was received into the canon; nor are we to forget that the present form of a book may have behind it a long history, its main elements may have existed and been well known centuries before its final redaction. Professor Ryle also reminds us that in the canonical books of the Old Testament we have not an *anthology* of Jewish literature, but a selection made for *religious* purposes, and hence swayed by the religious contents of the books. Our author recognises three stages in the history of the component elements of the Hebrew Scriptures. These are the *elemental* stage, or that of the formation of the literary antecedents of the books of the Old Testament; the *medial* stage, or that of their redaction to their present literary form; and the *final* stage, that of their selection for the position of honour and sanctity in the national canon of Holy Scripture. Amongst the instances of collections of writings that existed prior to the beginnings of the canon, Professor Ryle specifies Songs, Laws, History, and Prophecy. Of *Songs*, we have mention in the references to the "Wars of Jahveh" and the "Book of Jashar." As to *Laws*, the Pentateuch in its present form presupposes many previous codes of greater or less extent. A comparison of the Decalogue of Ex. xx. with that of Deut. v. would seem to point to the existence of an earlier and shorter form of the "Ten Words." Then the "Book of the Covenant" (Ex. xx. 20-xxiii. 33) and the "Law of Holiness" (Lev. xvii.-xxvi.) evidently occupied an independent position of their own before their incorporation into the Pentateuch. The same holds good of the Deuteronomic legislation, and even of the Priestly Laws, which, though of late date in their present form, must have been based on previously existing collections. The existence of *Historical* works is pointed to in the mention of the official scribe or "recorder," whose work is perhaps seen in the

skeleton of the Books of Kings. Under this head we include the two writers of the Pentateuch, the Jahvist (J) and the Elohist (E), whose separate works were probably welded into one (J E) by the middle of the eighth century B.C. *Prophecy* meets us at a comparatively early stage in Israel's history. Originally the utterances of the Prophets were committed to memory; it is not till the time of Amos and Hosea that we meet with written prophecy, and even these written prophecies, although they circulated in certain quarters, were for a long time far from attaining to the position of canonical Scriptures.

The beginning of the canon took place, according to Professor Ryle, when "the Book of the Law" was found by Hilkiah in the reign of Josiah (621 B.C.). This was the first book that received general veneration, and that was accepted as authoritative by all classes, king, priests, and people. Its distinguishing feature was its *popular* character, it was not the priests' but the people's book. It is almost needless to say that Professor Ryle repudiates emphatically the notion of forgery or bad faith on the part of Hilkiah and his fellow-reformers. The book, which must have been substantially identical with the legislative part of our Deuteronomy, was probably composed late in the reign of Hezekiah, or early in that of Manasseh, and having disappeared during the reactionary period of the latter's reign, was *bonâ fide* discovered in the Temple in the reign of Josiah. The work was in a sense new, yet the substance of it was old. The legislation was for the most part of ancient date, but this was specially adapted to the times by the homiletic setting which it received. The book produced an immense sensation on its discovery, and its language continued for long to colour the style of Hebrew writers. This is specially marked in the case of Jeremiah and the author of the Books of Kings, the latter of whom finds in Deuteronomy the standard whereby to judge and to interpret the history of Israel. In spite of the reformation of Josiah, it appears, however, that this "Book of the Law" failed to gain the *lasting* veneration of the people before the Exile. Several causes prevented its reaching that position it ultimately gained. So long as the living voice of prophecy continued to make itself heard, many would attach more authority to this than to a written book. Moreover, as long as the Deuteronomic law-book stood alone, its readers would be conscious of

serious defects. It required to be supplemented on the side of history and even of legislation. Hence Ryle concludes that during the Exile this book received its definitely historical setting (Deut. i.-iv. and xxxii.-xxxiv.); that the Book of Joshua was added to it, and that about the same time a redaction of the whole Jahvist-Elohist compilation was prefixed to the Deuteronomic laws. The institution of the synagogue would help the reception of this work into public favour. Our Pentateuch was completed when the Priestly Laws were compiled, many of which had been in force for long, but with which only the priestly families had hitherto been conversant. "The Law of Holiness" probably assumed its present form not long before Ezekiel, who shows an acquaintance with it. The Priestly Laws proper belong to a later period, and were not recognised as possessing co-ordinate authority with Deuteronomy so early as the return from the Exile (536 B.C.). Deuteronomy was for a considerable time the only "People's Bible." The full Priestly Law was not popularly known in Jerusalem till the year 444 B.C., when it was promulgated by Ezra, practically in the form under which it has come down to us. It is possible that some time elapsed before it attained to such veneration as to prevent alterations or minor attempts at textual revision. Ryle fixes upon the year 432 B.C. (the probable date of the Samaritan schism) as the *terminus ad quem* for the conclusion of the first Hebrew canon of Scripture, which he proves conclusively to have consisted simply of the Torah (*i.e.* the Pentateuch).

But this collection of sacred literature was manifestly incomplete. It did not contain the works of those men who had done so much to make Israel's history—the *Prophets*. "Without prophecy the law was a body without a soul." Hence the writings called *N'bhiiim*, or "Prophets," came gradually to be set apart as canonical Scripture, although they probably never attained to the same dignity as the "Law." The history of the process is very obscure. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, compiled during the Exile, are entitled "Prophets," and doubtless gained acceptance because of the prophetic spirit and principles which underlie them all. As to the Prophets, more strictly so-called, the collection of their works may have begun in the time of Nehemiah, but their complete recognition as Scripture will scarcely have come till a century later. The *terminus a quo* is about 300,

the *terminus ad quem* 200 B.C. With canonical acceptance, "the Prophets" attained also to liturgical use, the *Haphtarah* or Lesson from the Prophets being now added to the *Parashah* or Lesson from the Law. Thus was concluded the second stage whereby the canon now contained "the Law and the Prophets."

The Prologue to Ecclesiasticus (132 B.C.) refers to other writings besides the Law and the Prophets, but not in terms that justify us in concluding that its author knew the third group, the *K^e thubhim* or "Writings" in a completed form. The collecting of the works that form the third canon was probably begun during the Maccabean period. Of the writings that had escaped destruction by Antiochus, those would be selected which had exerted the greatest influence on the spirit of devout Jews during the national rising and the humiliations that preceded it. *The Psalter* was the first to attain to canonical recognition. In part, at least, this had been long in use as the service-book of the Temple singers, but now it was finally revised and invested with canonical authority as the hymn-book of Israel (160 B.C.). At or about the same time were added Proverbs, Job, Ruth, Lamentations, Ezra, and Nehemiah, and very possibly Daniel. The "Antilegomena" (Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Esther) and Chronicles obtained far more tardy admission. Professor Ryle, as the result of a searching investigation, concludes that the third canon was *practically* closed, with its present contents, about 105 B.C., although its contents were not *officially* determined till the Synod of Jamnia, about 100 A.D. Since the beginning of the second century the only modifications that have taken place have been in the order of the books of the Hagiographa (the present order is due to mediæval Jews), and the subdivision as late as the sixteenth

century of the Books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. Professor Ryle contends strongly that no apocryphal works ever found a place in the Hebrew canon; Ecclesiasticus and 1st Maccabees alone enjoying such favour as perhaps to lead to an attempt in some quarters to gain for them a place in the canon, an attempt, however, which was quite without success. The handling of this question and of the relation of the Septuagint to the Hebrew canon furnish almost the only instances in the book where we should venture to question some of Professor Ryle's conclusions, and to suggest that he is unduly conservative. Few additional materials for the history of the canon are supplied by the Talmud and by early Christian writers. The position of one book, Esther, long remained doubtful. It is even omitted in the list of canonical Scriptures given by Melito of Sardis so late as 170 A.D. The closing chapter on "The Arrangement of the Books" finds confirmation of the results that have been reached, in the tripartite division "The Law," "the Prophets," and "the Writings," and in the fact that the arrangement of the "Prophets" and the "Writings" is neither chronological nor according to subject matter, a fact which is explained only when we recognise the *gradual expansion* of the canon.

Such are the main positions of this work, whose appearance is so opportune. Finally, we may remark that the style and tone of Professor Ryle leave nothing to be desired. The reader's interest is never allowed to flag, and we feel that we are in the hands of one whose scholarship it would be presumption to praise, whose critical research is conducted in a reverent and cautious spirit, and whose conclusions give us a higher conception of the wisdom of Him who spake to the fathers "by divers portions and in divers manners."

Our Debt to German Theology.

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III.

WE have spoken of the favourable change which has come over German theology; and something should be said of the leader in a religious revival, which was as wonderful in its kind as the one under the Wesleys in England. Schleiermacher,

who died in 1834, gave the deathblow to the dreary, sapless Rationalism which was almost universal in Germany before his day. He did this, not by any direct refutation, not by systematic teaching or vindication of orthodox doctrine, for