

Jean Astruc.

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THE 'CONJECTURES.'

THE *Conjectures sur la Genèse* (to give the abbreviated or 'bastard' title of the work) forms a small duodecimo of 525 pages, exclusive of the prefixed *Table des Chapitres* (pp. i-x).¹ The contents are arranged in three distinct divisions: (1) the *Reflexions Préliminaires* (pp. 3-24), a summary statement of Astruc's theory and of the grounds on which it is based; (2) a translation of Gen. 1-Ex. 2, arranged in a manner to be afterwards explained; (3) pp. 281-495, a reasoned justification of the author's position and procedure, set forth under seventeen heads or chapters. A very full index completes the work, while a marginal summary of each paragraph materially assists the student to follow the argument of the book. I propose in the following pages to submit a short résumé of the more important parts of (1) and (3), accompanied by such remarks or criticisms as may seem called for on the author's critical results.

In the 'preliminary reflexions,' Astruc starts from the position, already generally conceded, that Moses was dependent for his knowledge of the events recorded in the Book of Genesis on tradition, either oral or written. In support of his preference for the latter alternative in the shape of *mémoires*, or written documents, composed and handed down by ancestors, more or less remote, Astruc appeals to the authority of various theologians of good repute. But while he agrees with these in assuming that Moses had access to such documents, Astruc takes an important step in advance of all his predecessors with regard to the method adopted by Moses in his use of them, a step so epoch-making in the study of all the historical books of the Old Testament, that it would be interesting to know if it was the fruit of a happy intuition or, as I am inclined to think, the result of Astruc's familiarity with the habits and modes of composition of Arab writers in his special department of medicine. His novel and fruitful contention is this: whereas his predecessors had thought of Moses as

reproducing the gist of the documents at his disposal in an original writing of his own, after the manner of a Western historian, Astruc claims to have proved that Moses, 'in order to lose nothing of these *mémoires*, cut them up into sections (*morceaux*) according to the facts therein recorded, *that he inserted these sections in their entirety one after the other*, and that the Book of Genesis is made up of this collection of documents' (p. 9).

The remainder of the preliminary reflexions is devoted to various 'proofs' of the proposition just stated. The first is taken from the frequent and perplexing repetitions that occur in Genesis, such as the double accounts of the Creation and the Flood. Were Genesis an original composition, these frequent repetitions on Moses' part would be inexplicable in a work so short and so condensed, while they at once become intelligible on the supposition that 'Genesis is only a simple compilation' from documents so precious that Moses inserted them entire in his anxiety 'to preserve all that he had received from his ancestors regarding the history of the first ages of the world' (p. 10).

The second proof brings us to the heart of Astruc's theory. It is based on the fact, which has now become one of the most familiar common-places of criticism, that in the Hebrew text of Genesis there are two different names for the Supreme Being, the one *Elohim*, the other *Jehovah* (now generally pronounced *Yahweh*); and further, that these two names are not used indiscriminately as synonyms or for reasons of style (*propres à varier le style*), but that 'there are whole chapters, or large portions of chapters, where God is always named *Elohim* and never *Jehovah*, while there are others, at least as numerous, where God receives the name *Jehovah*, and never the name *Elohim*.' This remarkable phenomenon, Astruc rightly argues, is inexplicable if Moses had a free hand in the composition of Genesis, but finds a satisfactory explanation 'in the supposition that the Book of Genesis is made up of two or three documents joined and pieced together, section by section, the authors of which had each given to God

¹ With reference to my remark in the previous article, that the *Conjectures* does not appear in the catalogue of the Bodleian, the librarian kindly informs me that *two* copies have been acquired since the catalogue was printed.

the same name throughout, yet each a different name, the one *Elohim*, the other *Jehovah* or *Jehovah Elohim*?

The third proof likewise introduces us to a fact of the first importance, the true significance of which Astruc, however, failed to perceive. As soon as Moses comes to speak of his own deeds, remarks our author, or of deeds of which he has been an eye-witness; in other words, as soon as Moses appears as an original author (*compose de son chef*), the alternation of the divine names comes to an end, Jehovah being now employed, except on the rare occasions when Elohim is used *pour varier le style*. The third chapter of Exodus is the beginning of the new order of things.

A fourth proof of the correctness of his theory of the origin of Genesis, Astruc finds in what he calls the *antichronismes* or cases of inversion of the chronological order (*renversements de l'ordre chronologique*), a topic which will meet us at a later stage.

At this point Astruc informs us how, on the strength of these observations, he proceeded 'to decompose Genesis' (p. 17), that is, to separate the various constituent fragments, and by reuniting those belonging to the same *mémoires*, to restore the original documents which he believed Moses to have used. His method of procedure is simplicity itself. 'I had only,' he tells us, 'to join together all the passages where God is constantly called Elohim; these I placed in one column, which I named A, and these I regarded as so many fragments of a first original memoir, which I designate by the letter A. Alongside of it I placed in another column, which I call B, all the passages where God receives no other name but Jehovah, and in this way I got together all the pieces, or at least all the fragments, of a second memoir, B' (p. 17). As this work of allocation advanced, Astruc found himself compelled to postulate two additional *mémoires*, C and D, the former as the source of chap. 7^{20, 23, 24}, where certain details of the Deluge are, as he thought, stated for the *third* time, the latter as a convenient home for a small number of stray passages where both the test names of the Deity are absent, and where the events recorded seemed foreign to the history of the Hebrew people. Astruc, however, is doubtful as to whether these passages should all be referred to one and the same document, or whether they should not be distributed among several documents; and, as a matter of

fact, at a later stage, he distributes the contents of column D among no fewer than nine different *mémoires*, denoted by the letters E to M (e.g. E = chap. 14, F = 19²⁹⁻³⁸, L = 36^{1-19, 31-43}).

The second division of the *Conjectures* (pp. 25-280) consists exclusively of the Book of Genesis and the first two chapters of Exodus, according to the Geneva version of 1610, preferred by Astruc as reproducing more faithfully than the Vulgate the alternation of the divine names. The text is so arranged that the portions assigned to the document A occupy the left half of the page, those assigned to B the right half, while the presumed contents of C and D are placed in the middle, all of which the following reproduction of part of p. 52 of the *Conjectures* will make clear to the reader. The page of Astruc's book, it may be of interest to note in passing, is of exactly the same width as the outer column of this magazine:—

GENÈSE, CHAP. VII.

A

19. Et les eaux se ren-
forçerent trez fort sur la
terre, & furent couver-
tes toutes les plus hautes
montagnes estans sous les
cieux.

C

20. Les eaux se ren-
forçerent de quinze cou-
dées par dessus: dont les
montagnes furent cou-
vertes.

B

21. Et tout chair qui
se mouvoit sur la terre,
expira, tant des oiseaux
que du bestail, des bet-
tes & de tous reptiles qui
se traient sur la terre:
& tous hommes.

A

22. Toutes choses qui
estoyent sur le sec, ayant
respiration de vie en leurs
narines, moururent.¹

¹ To enable those interested to compare Astruc's analysis with that of present-day critics, I give here the former's analysis of chapters 1-10.

A	1-3	5	6 ⁹⁻²²	7 ⁶⁻¹⁰	19	22	24
B	2 ⁴⁻²⁵	3,	4 ¹⁻²⁶	6 ¹⁻⁸	7 ¹⁻⁵	11-18	21
A	8 ¹⁻¹⁹	9 ¹⁻¹⁰	12	16, 17			
B	8 ²⁰⁻²²	9 ¹¹	13-15	18-27	10		
C	7 ^{20, 23, 24}						

The remainder of the *Conjectures* (pp. 281-495)—modestly entitled 'Remarks on the proposed Distribution of Genesis'—is mainly devoted, as has been already stated, to a more exhaustive presentation and justification of Astruc's theory. After a preliminary chapter proving that the art of writing was known long before the time of Moses, Astruc addresses himself to an objection which he foresaw would be made to his explanation of the phenomena presented by the divine names. This objection is based on the well-known passage Ex. 6^a 3, where the name Jehovah is expressly said to have been unknown to the patriarchs; and to have been first revealed to Moses. If that is so, one naturally asks, 'How can we postulate a document older than Moses, in which God is always known as Jehovah and by no other name?' (p. 298). The difficulty, our readers will perceive, is a very real one, and we must admit that Astruc's solution is anything but satisfactory. After an elaborate discussion of the significance of the names Shaddai and Jehovah, he concludes by saying that these names were both known to the patriarchs *qua* names, but that only in the case of the former was either name known 'in the full extent of its meaning' (p. 305). In other words, Jehovah was a name familiar enough to the patriarchs, but to Moses first of all was the *full import* of the name made known. This, I need scarcely add, has been the favourite explanation of conservative scholars down even to our own day. It is an explanation, however, at variance with the *primâ facie* meaning of the passage in question, and has its *ultima ratio* in a mistaken apologetic interest which seeks in this way to escape the implicit discrepancy between the parts of the sacred narrative.

Chapter iii. is intended to supplement the remarks in the 'preliminary reflections' on the different *mémoires* traceable in Genesis, and contains the distribution of the D column among nine different documents, to which I have already alluded. Of a more piquant interest is the chapter which follows, containing Astruc's surmise regarding the authors of these different documents, although at the outset he writes: 'I confess in good faith that I know nothing on this point, *Nec me pudet fateri nescire, quod nesciam*' (Cic. *Tusc.*). These speculations have now a merely historical interest, and it must suffice to remark that Astruc considers the more extensive of the two main

documents, viz. A, to have been '*un Mémoire de famille*' preserved by Moses' parents, containing contributions from remote ancestors down to his father Amram, who was perhaps the author of Ex. 1-2. For the smaller memoirs, E to M, Moses was probably indebted to the Midianites and other neighbouring peoples, while as regards the B document, Astruc can only hazard the general remark that 'it comes from one of the pious patriarchs.'

More deserving of our attention are the sixth and following chapters, in which our author proceeds to enumerate at considerable length the advantages of his theory of the composition (or, rather, compilation) of Genesis over that sanctioned by tradition. In stating the *first* of these advantages, Astruc returns to what he rightly regards as the key to his whole position, the alternation of the divine names Elohim and Jehovah. Tertullian, and after him Augustine, had long before attempted, as theologians without number have done since, to give a reasonable explanation of the sudden change of name, which meets us in Gen. 2^d ff., based on the different connotation of the two words as representing different aspects of God's relation to mankind. Astruc, however, has a clear vision of the futility of such explanations. 'This variation,' he says, 'is so striking and so often repeated that I defy anyone ever to bring forward a single valid reason for it so long as it is supposed that the whole of Genesis comes from one and the same pen, and that it has been composed by one and the same person; while this difficulty disappears entirely as soon as one brings oneself to accept my conjectures, and to suppose that the document in which God is named *Elohim* comes from one pen, and that the other, in which God receives the name *Jehovah*, comes from another pen' (pp. 334, 335). The theory here so clearly expounded, which a fellow-countryman has characterised as 'the thread of Ariadne,' the only effective clue to the pentateuchal labyrinth, constitutes Astruc's crowning merit in the eyes of Old Testament students. We would not, any more than Astruc himself, conceal the fact that the documentary analysis of Genesis is by no means so simple an affair as the words above quoted at first sight seem to imply. Yet we have here *le premier pas qui coûte*, the first step, firm and irrevocable, on the path along which the most fruitful study of the Pentateuch, as a body of literature, has ever since advanced.

The *second* advantage claimed by Astruc for his theory of Genesis, that it gives the only satisfactory explanation of the numerous repetitions in the book, such as occur in the account of Creation, the Flood story and elsewhere, is so self-evident that it calls for no further comment here. Nor is the justice less apparent of his contention with regard to the *third* advantage, which he considers the most important of all. 'The greatest advantage of the opinion which I propose is that it does away with the *Antichronismes* and the *Hysterologies*, that is to say, the inversions in the chronological order and in the sequence of the narrative' (p. 378). The chronology of Genesis, as we all know, has ever been a favourite butt for the cheap ridicule of the sceptic and the infidel, and Astruc deserves more credit than our happier times ever think of according him for his courage in fearlessly and reverently facing the problem, and suggesting so simple and yet so effective a solution. It would serve no good purpose to adduce once more the familiar examples, most of which are fully discussed by Astruc (pp. 379-430). It is only when we perceive, by the help of the document theory, that the chronological framework belongs to one document and the recalcitrant 'antichronisms' to another that the laugh is turned against the traducer of Holy Scripture.

The *fourth* and last advantage claimed by Astruc betrays a joint in the armour. His theory, he considers, frees (*disculpe*) Moses from the charges of negligence and incompetency, rashly brought against him on the strength of the repetitions, lack of arrangement, and general confusion of the Book of Genesis as we now have it. For Moses, we are asked to believe, arranged the documents used by him in four columns on the same page after the manner of a Gospel Harmony (p. 434).¹ The negligence of copyists, however, and the ignorance and presumption of critics (p. 433), have long since done away with this arrangement, the different documents have become fused together, and our present Book of Genesis, with its offending repetitions, its arbitrary changes of the divine name and its chronological inversions, is the unfortunate result!

The Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, then, modified, as we have seen, to the extent of postulating compilation rather than composition for the Book of Genesis, is still an article of faith with

¹ Cf. the illustration given above.

Jean Astruc, and the weakest part of the *Conjectures* is that in which he essays to cure what he calls (p. 454) 'the malady of last [the seventeenth] century,' the rejection of the Mosaic tradition by Spinoza and others. There is, no doubt, a certain amount of justice in Astruc's claim (pp. 452 ff.) that his document theory 'brings to nought the vain triumph of Spinoza,' who maintained that 'all is *pesle-mesle*' in the Pentateuch. We must also admit that Astruc has something to say to the argument from the occurrence in the Pentateuch of post-Mosaic place-names (p. 463); but when he attempts to prove that even the familiar *crux*, Gen. 36³¹ ff., the list of the kings of Edom, is from Moses' pen, we have Astruc at his worst. He knows that the section referred to is 'that over which the unbelievers are most jubilant'; but what is the explanation that he offers? (pp. 472-486). His good sense refuses to believe that we may 'ascribe so many details to the prophetic spirit of Moses' (p. 475),—as some previous apologists had done,—nor will he admit that the whole passage is a later interpolation. He offers instead a double alternative. According to the first, to which Astruc himself inclines (p. 474), the 'king over the children of Israel' of ver. 31 is no other than God Himself; according to the second, he is 'Moses or at least Joshua' (p. 485). Surely an hypothesis of despair.²

In estimating the merits and demerits of the *Conjectures*, we must keep in mind that a pioneer work in any science must be measured by a standard of its own. It is little to *our* credit if, after a century and a half of study along the lines first laid down by Astruc himself, we are able to see the weakness as well as the strength of his position. To the abiding worth of Astruc's book these articles are themselves a witness. Its main defect, it seems to me, is to be found in the fact that the author's attention is devoted almost exclusively to the Book of Genesis. Now the problem of the Pentateuch—or rather of the Hexateuch—can only be solved by taking what we in Scotland call 'a conjoint view' of *all* the books, with their implicit references, one to the other. Genesis

² A more extended summary of the *Conjectures* than was possible within present limits will be found in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. xli. 1884, from the pen of Professor S. J. Curtiss. Cf. also Böhmer's art. 'Astruc' in Herzog's *Realencyclopädie*, ed. 2, vol. i. and Westphal's more critical estimate in *Les Sources du Pentateuque*, i. pp. 101-116.

postulates Deuteronomy and Joshua quite as much as these presuppose Genesis or Exodus. This solidarity of the Pentateuch Astruc has entirely failed to observe. The consequence is serious, inasmuch as it penetrates to the heart of his theory, the alternation of the names Elohim and Jehovah. *This alternation does not cease with Exodus 2*, as indeed Astruc himself perceived. But while the latter, with reason, scouts the idea that the names are interchanged in Genesis 'in order to vary the style' (p. 12), he is compelled to assume, almost in the same breath, that in *the following books* Elohim, when used at all, is used *pour varier le style* (p. 14). It was reserved for Astruc's successors to make the fundamental discovery that the documents which meet us in Genesis go with us to the close of the Pentateuch. Every theory,

consequently, that is based on a supposed distinction between the linguistic and other characteristics of Genesis and those of the other books is built on air.¹

The irony of history is proverbially cruel. Of this, we have a conspicuous illustration in the case of Jean Astruc. He, the champion of the Mosaic tradition against *les prétendus Esprits-forts*, has had to submit to be classed as one of the arch-enemies of religion, and now lives in history as the man who, in the hope of infusing new life into a moribund tradition, in reality dealt that tradition its deathblow.

¹ Detailed proof of this statement from a competent hand will be found in Canon Driver's article, 'Principal Cave on the Hexateuch,' in *The Contemporary Review* for February 1892.

Sermonettes on the Golden Texts.

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The God of House and City.

'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.'—Ps. cxxvii. 1.

THIS has often been taken to be a reference to Solomon's temple. No doubt there is a special fitness in such a reference; we remember how David earnestly desired to build a house for the Lord, and yet died leaving the task to his son, for he had never been satisfied that God would approve of and bless him in the undertaking.

It seems more likely, however, that it is a Song of the Restored Jerusalem—a 'Table-Song,' sung by the head of a household as he sat at the table where his family were gathered, at 'family worship' as we would say to-day. It is a psalm of everyday domestic life rather than of memorable occasions and great events. It takes us back to ancient days, and presents the pictures of two sides of simple life—house and city, building and watching,—the chief works representing peace and war.

Israel's *architecture* was a poor affair compared with that of other nations she knew of. Edom, Bashan, Assyria, Babylon, Egypt—each in its own

style might claim to have reached something more eternal and more worthy of song than the hastily-constructed dwellings that rose on Israel's return from the East. Her *military defences*, too, were weak. She had been taunted sorely concerning the walls of her new Jerusalem. Now the city walls had risen, and towers sprang from their corners, and gates of wood and metal again swung on deep-set hinges; and as the darkness settled down and the gates were closed, a lamp lit and shining from the little slit in the wall above the gate, showed what before was hardly noticeable—the chamber of the watchman who went his rounds armed with lamp and sword.

Poor though all this was, it was her own. And had not Israel been a people chastened and taught of God, her buildings and defences might well have made her self-sufficient. These were everyday familiar things. One knew how they were done, and all about them. As they saw house after house rise successfully from foundation-stone to roof, and as night followed night with no alarm, a sense of security, and of the efficiency of human appliances to produce intended results, might well have come upon them.

Yet in building and in defence, Israel had had