

ARTICLE VI.

PROFESSOR W. ROBERTSON SMITH AND HIS THEORIES
OF OLD TESTAMENT CRITICISM.

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It is the purpose of this paper to set forth the views of W. Robertson Smith in respect to (1) the character, purpose, and method of biblical criticism; (2) the formation of the present Hebrew text of the Old Testament; (3) the formation of the canon of the Old Testament; and (4) the origin of certain individual books.

The materials for this exposition consist of the articles, at the present writing some dozen in number, which Professor Smith has contributed to the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and of which the more important are those relating to the Bible and to the Hebrew language and literature; and also of a volume of lectures on biblical criticism, entitled, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*. It is in this volume that the author's views are elaborated, and it forms the principal authority in setting them forth.

Before beginning the task, however, it is of worth to recall the occasion which gives to the theories of Professor Smith their peculiar importance. In the year 1870, at the early age of twenty-four, W. Robertson Smith was recommended and elected to the professorship of Hebrew in the Free Church College in Aberdeen. "Here," he writes,¹ "I continued for seven years, teaching, pursuing my own studies, and occasionally writing, till my connection with the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* suddenly aroused the conservative party." This connection is represented in the article on the Bible in the *Encyclopaedia*. This article, the positions of which will presently be stated in detail, treated of the sacred

¹ Extract from a private letter, June 29, 1881.

books with a freedom which to the conservative party seemed at least irreverent, if not heretical, and was made the foundation of proceedings against its author. Accusations against Professor Smith were first brought before the Presbytery of Edinburgh, thence before the General Assembly, and were by this body sent to a Commission. The case was returned to the General Assembly with two reports; the majority censuring, the minority acquitting. Professor Smith, addressing the Assembly in his own behalf, disclaimed any heretical purpose in his writings, and complained that the gloss which his antagonist had placed upon the article was unjust. By a vote of two hundred and ninety-nine to two hundred and ninety-two the Assembly acquitted Professor Smith of heresy, but admonished him to more guarded utterance.

Before this acquittal, however, which was reached in May 1880, he had prepared another article, on the Hebrew language and literature. He attempted to withdraw it from the editor's hands; but in the make-up of the eleventh volume of the Encyclopaedia it had already taken such a place that the request could not be granted. On its appearance the opposition to Professor Smith again broke forth. In August 1880, new charges were laid before the General Assembly. In the following October he was formally suspended from the functions of the professorship during the coming session, and further consideration was deferred to May 1881. But between October and May Professor Smith delivered the lectures which compose his *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, in Edinburgh and Glasgow. These lectures failed to indicate a withdrawal from his positions. In the meeting of the General Assembly in May 1881 the chief debate occurred on the following motion:

“The General Assembly having had their attention called by the judgment of the Commission in October, and by overtures from presbyteries, to certain writings of Professor Smith, and in particular to an article, ‘Hebrew Language and Literature,’ in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*;

“ And, considering that said article was prepared for publication by Professor Smith after he had accepted service of libel on account of previous statements made by him on cognate matters ;

“ And, considering that said article was not before last Assembly when they pronounced judgment on said libel, because it did not appear until after the Assembly had risen, and the Professor, in accepting admonition as to the unguarded and incomplete character of previous utterances, gave no indication of its being in existence ;

“ And, having in view also a letter from Professor Smith to the Free Presbytery of Aberdeen, in which he explains and defends his conduct in relation to that article ; find :

“ 1. That the construction of last Assembly’s judgment in Professor Smith’s case, on which in his letter he claims that the right was conceded to him to promulgate his views in the manner he has done, is unwarrantable. The Assembly, therefore, repudiate that construction, and adopt the statement on this subject contained in the report submitted to the Commission in October.

“ 2. That the article ‘ Hebrew Language and Literature ’ is fitted to give, at least, as great offence and cause as serious anxiety as that for which he was formerly dealt with.

“ 3. That it contains statements which are fitted to throw grave doubt on the historical truth and divine inspiration of several books of Scripture.

“ 4. That both the tone of the article in itself and the fact that such an article was prepared and published in the circumstances, and after all the previous proceedings in his case, evince on the part of Professor Smith a singular insensibility to his responsibilities as a theological professor, and a singular and culpable lack of sympathy with the reasonable anxieties of the church as to the bearing of critical speculations on the integrity and authority of Scripture.

“ 5. That all this has deepened the conviction already entertained by a large section of the church that Professor Smith, whatever his gifts and attainments, which the Assem-

bly have no disposition to undervalue, ought no longer to be entrusted with the training of students for the ministry.

“Therefore, the General Assembly, having the responsible duty to discharge of overseeing the teaching in the divinity halls, while they are sensible of the importance of guarding the due liberty of professors and encouraging learned and candid research, feel themselves constrained to declare that they no longer consider it safe or advantageous for the church that Professor Smith should continue to teach in one of her colleges.

“The Assembly resolve to resume this matter on Thursday forenoon, with the view of giving effect to this judgment, and with the view of finally disposing of the remaining elements of the case.”

The final motion, whose passage closes the case, was as follows :

“The General Assembly having resumed consideration of the papers transmitted in the case of Professor William Robertson Smith, with the overtures and memorials, and taking into view the judgment pronounced on Tuesday last, hereby appoint and declare that from the thirty-first of this month Professor Smith’s tenure of his chair shall cease as regards all right to teach and exercise professorial functions in the College of Aberdeen, and as regards all ecclesiastical rights and powers grounded on his professorial charge. The Assembly appoint the full salary meanwhile to continue, leaving it to future Assemblies, if need be, to regulate that matter as reason and justice may require. In accordance with this finding, the Assembly declare the chair vacant, and direct that the usual steps be taken with a view to election of a Professor at next General Assembly ; and meanwhile empower the College Committee to make provision for the instruction of the classes during next session. Further, as regards the overtures from presbyteries anent the lectures entitled ‘The Old Testament in the Jewish Church,’ the General Assembly, while very far from being disposed to treat lightly the anxieties which the work has

awakened, yet, considering the judgment already arrived at in regard to Professor Smith, and considering that, from the very recent date of publication, many members of Assembly have not yet had an opportunity of studying the book, so as to be able to judge whether it is necessary or expedient to commit the church to a formal investigation of its teaching, considering also that it is always open to the church courts of the church to institute such investigation, if, on more mature consideration, that course appears to be required, the General Assembly think it more fitting at this time to pass from the overtures."

This motion was passed by a vote of three hundred and ninety-four to two hundred and thirty-one in favor of a motion of an opposite character.

These facts suggest the peculiar importance which is attached to the views of Professor Smith. To the consideration of these views, in the order suggested, we now turn.

I. DEFINITION, PURPOSE, AND METHOD OF BIBLICAL CRITICISM.

Historical criticism, Professor Smith holds, should be applied to the Bible with a rigor similar to that with which it is applied to any other ancient book. It may be defined, he remarks, "without special reference to the Bible, for it is applicable, and is daily applied without dispute, to every ancient literature and every ancient history. The critical study of ancient documents means nothing else than the careful sifting of their origin and meaning in the light of history. The first principle of criticism is that every book bears the stamp of the time and circumstances in which it was produced. An ancient book is, so to speak, a fragment of ancient life; and to understand it aright we must treat it as a living thing, as a bit of the life of the author and his time, which we shall not fully understand without putting ourselves back into the age in which it was written. People talk of destructive criticism as if the critic's one delight were to prove that things which men have long believed are not true, and that books were not written by the

authors whose names they bear. But the true critic has for his business not to destroy, but to build up. The critic is an interpreter, but one who has a larger view of his task than the man of mere grammars and dictionaries,—one who is not content to reproduce the words of his author, but strives to enter into sympathy with his thoughts, and to understand the thoughts as part of the life of the thinker and of his time. In a word, it is the business of the critic to trace back the steps by which any ancient book has been transmitted to us, to find where it came from and who wrote it, to examine the occasion of its composition, and search out every link that connects it with the history of the ancient world and with the personal life of the author. In doing this we must use every light that can be brought to bear on the subject. Every fact is welcome, whether it come from Jewish tradition, or from a comparison of old MSS. and versions, or from an examination of the several books with one another and of each book in its own inner structure. It is not needful in starting to lay down any fixed rules of procedure. The ordinary laws of evidence and good sense must be our guides. And these we must apply to the Bible just as we should do to any other ancient book. That is the only principle we have to lay down. And it is plainly a just principle. For the transmission of the Bible is not due to a continued miracle, but to a watchful Providence ruling the ordinary means by which ancient books have all been handed down. And, finally, when we have worked our way back through the long centuries which separate us from the age of revelation, we must, as we have already seen, study each writing and make it speak for itself on the common principles of sound exegesis. We must not be afraid of the human side of Scripture. It is from that side alone that scholarship can get at any biblical question. The common rules of interpretation tell us to read the book as nearly as we can from the stand-point of the author, and always to keep our eye fixed on his historical position, realizing the fact that he wrote out of the experience of his own life and from the stand-point of his

own time. In this department of intellectual life science and faith have joined hands. There is no discordance between the religious and the scholarly methods of study. They lead to the same goal; and the more closely our study fulfils the demands of historical scholarship, the more fully will it correspond with our religious needs."

The opponents of the historical criticism of the Bible say that they have no objection to legitimate historical study, and that the present method is not legitimate. It is founded, they assert, "on the rationalistic assumption that the supernatural is impossible, and that everything in the Bible which asserts the existence of a real personal communication of God with man is necessarily untrue."

The principal answer to this objection, Professor Smith affirms, is found in the fact that "all truth is one, that God who gave us the Bible has also given us faculties of reason and gifts of scholarship with which to study the Bible, and that the true meaning of Scripture is not to be measured by preconceived notions, but determined as the result of legitimate research. Only of this I am sure at the outset, that the Bible does speak to the heart of man in words that can only come from God — that no historical research can deprive me of this conviction, or make less precious the divine utterances that speak straight to the heart. For the language of these words is so clear that no readjustment of their historical setting can conceivably change the substance of them. Historical study may throw a new light on the circumstances in which they were first heard or written. In that there can only be gain. But the plain, central, heartfelt truths that speak for themselves and rest on their own indefeasible worth will assuredly remain to us. No amount of change in the background of a picture can make white black or black white, though by restoring the right background where it has been destroyed the harmony and balance of the whole composition may be immeasurably improved.

So it is with the Bible. The supreme truths which speak to every believing heart; the way of salvation which is the

same in all ages ; the clear voice of God's love, so tender and personal and simple that a child can understand it—these are things that must abide with us, and prove themselves mighty from age to age apart from all scientific study. But those who love the truth will not shrink from any toil that can help us to a fuller insight into all its details and all its setting ; and those whose faith is firmly fixed on the things that cannot be moved will not doubt that every new progress in biblical study must in the end make God's great scheme of grace appear in fuller beauty and glory.”¹

II. THE HEBREW TEXT.

It is well known that all MSS. of the Hebrew Bible represent one and the same text. There are, indeed, slight variations, but they are such as even a careful copyist might make. The question before us relates to the origin of this text. Where and when was written that standard copy upon which all other MSS. seem to be founded ? There is evidence proving that before the Christian era the Hebrew MSS. differed at least as much as the current MSS. of the New Testament. But the evidence to be derived from quotations indicates that at the beginning of the second Christian century the Hebrew text was practically in its present form. This formation of the Hebrew text was accomplished by the scribes. They chose the text we now have. “Were they,” it is to be asked, “in a position to choose the very best text, to produce a critical edition which could justly be accepted as the standard, so that we lose nothing by the suppression of all divergent copies ? Now this at least we can say, that if they fixed for us a satisfactory text, the scribes did not do so in virtue of any great critical skill which they possessed in comparing MSS. and selecting the best readings. They worked from a false point of view. Their objects were legal, not philological. Their defective philology, their bad system of interpretation, made them bad critics ; for it is the first rule of criticism

¹ These and preceding extracts are from Lecture I. of *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*.

that a good critic must be a good interpreter of the thoughts of his author. This judgment is quite confirmed by the accounts which are given in the Talmudical books of certain small and sporadic attempts made by the scribes to exercise something like criticism upon the text. For example, in one passage of the Talmud, we read of three MSS. preserved in the court of the Temple, each of which had one reading which the other MSS. did not share. The scribes, we are told, rejected in each case the reading which had only one copy for it and two against it. Now every critic knows that to accept or reject a reading merely according to the number of MSS. for or against it is a method which, if applied on a large scale, would lead to a very bad text indeed. Then the early scribes are related to have made certain changes in the text, apparently without manuscript authority, and merely in order to remove expressions which seemed irreverent or indecorous. We have seen that in later times, after the received text was fixed, the Jewish scholars did not venture to make such a change. They permitted themselves to make a change in the reading but not a change in the writing; but in earlier times, according to the statement of the Rabbinical books, a certain small number of alterations, chiefly on dogmatical grounds, was made even upon the writing of Scripture. Now if the scribes were not the men to make a critical text, it is plain that they were also not in a position to choose, upon scientific principles, the very best extant MS.; but it is very probable that they selected an old and well-written copy, possibly one of those MSS. which were preserved in the court of the Temple. Between this copy and the original autographs of the sacred writers there must have been many a link. It may have been an old manuscript, but it was not an exorbitantly old one. Of that there are two proofs. In the first place, it was certainly written with the 'square' or 'Chaldean' letters used in our modern Hebrew Bibles; but these letters are of Aramaic origin, and in old times the Hebrews used the quite different character called Phoenician. According to Jewish tradition, which ascribes everything to

Ezra which it has not the assurance to refer to Moses, the change on the character in which the sacred books were written was introduced by Ezra; but we know that this is a mistake, for the Samaritans, who did not possess the Pentateuch until fifty years after Ezra, received it in the old Phœnician letter, which they retain in a corrupted form down to the present day. It is very doubtful whether there were any MSS. written in the Aramaic character before the third century B.C., and that therefore would be the earliest date to which we can refer the archetype of our present Hebrew copies. Another proof that the copy was not extraordinarily old lies in the spelling. In Hebrew, as in other languages, the rules of spelling varied in the course of centuries, and it is not impossible to say which of two orthographies is the older. Now it can be proved that the copies which lay before the translators of the Septuagint in the third, and perhaps in the second, century B.C. often had an older style of spelling than existed in the archetype of our present Hebrew Bibles."

The general conclusion, therefore, of Professor Smith in reference to the formation of the Hebrew text is, "that the absence of important various readings from the Hebrew MSS. now in existence does not prove that the text which they present is absolutely perfect and authoritative. The phenomena of the text prove, indeed, that all our MSS. go back to one archetype. But the archetype was not formed by a critical process which we can accept as conclusive. It was not so ancient but that a long interval lay between it and the first hand of the biblical authors; and the comparative paucity of books in those early times, combined with the imperfect materials used in writing, and the deliberate attempt of Antiochus to annihilate the Hebrew Bible, exposed the text to so many dangers that it cannot but appear a most welcome and providential circumstance that the Greek translation, derived from MSS. of which some at least were presumably older than the archetype of our present Hebrew copies, and preserved in countries beyond the

dominions of Antiochus, offers an independent witness as to the early state of the biblical books.”¹

III. FORMATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON.

The canon of the Old Testament was of gradual formation. Some books which are now included in it had for a long time a doubtful position; and others were from their very origin universally acknowledged. In the formation of the canon of the Old Testament the process occurred which it is known occurred in the growth of the New Testament canon. In the first Christian centuries the books of the New Testament were divided into Homologoumena, those that were universally accepted, and Antilegomena, those that were acknowledged only by certain portions of the church. Gradually the number of the Antilegomena was lessened, either by including them in the list of books universally received or by placing them among those of authority so doubtful that they could not bear the name.

“We must suppose that a similar process took place with regard to the books of the Old Testament. About many of them there could be no dispute. Others were Antilegomena—books spoken against—and the number of such Antilegomena, which were neither fully acknowledged nor absolutely rejected, was naturally a fluctuating quantity up to a comparatively late date, when such a measure of practical agreement had been reached as to which books were really of sacred authority, that the theological heads of the nation could, without difficulty, cut short further discussion, and establish an authoritative list of Scriptures. The reason why a greater number of books of disputed position is preserved in Greek than in Hebrew is that the Rabbins of Palestine, from the close of the first century, when the canon was definitely fixed, sedulously suppressed all Apocrypha, and made it a sin to read them.”

Various traditions have obtained currency regarding the formation of the canon. One of them is that Ezra rewrote

¹ *Ibid.*, chapters iii., iv.

by inspiration the whole Old Testament which had been destroyed or injured at the time of the Captivity. This opinion is founded on a fable in 2 (4) Esdras xiv.; but as the fable is unworthy of credence, the opinion has no value. In the sixteenth century, too, the theory became current that the canon was completed by the Great Synagogue of the Jews. But it is now known that the Great Synagogue was a pure fiction. A passage is, further, found in 2 Maccabees ii. 13, 14, which has been supposed to indicate the first steps towards a collection of the Prophets of the Hagiographa. It is as follows: "The same things were related in the records, and in the memoirs of Nehemiah, and how, founding a library, he collected the narratives about the kings and prophets [*according to another reading*, the books of the prophets], and the [writings] of David, and the letters of kings concerning sacred offerings. In like manner Judas collected the books scattered in consequence of the war that came on us, and we have them by us; of which, if ye have need, send men to fetch them." But this passage stands in a spurious epistle, teeming with fabulous details, and, even if not fictitious, it cannot be received with credit.

It is only necessary to turn to the Bible itself to learn what Ezra and Nehemiah did toward the settlement of the canon. From the eighth to the tenth chapters of Nehemiah we discover that Ezra led the people to accept a written code as the rule of faith and practice, and this code we know was the Pentateuch. The people made a covenant to keep the law of Moses. That acknowledgment established the Pentateuch as a canonical book.

The canonicity of other books was determined by their conformity to the teachings of the Pentateuch. The Prophets, "with the other remains of the old sacred literature, were mainly regarded as books of private edification. While the law was directly addressed to all Israel in all ages, the other sacred writings had a private origin, or were addressed to special necessities. Up to the time of the Exile the godly of Israel looked for guidance to the living prophetic word in

their midst, and the study of written prophecies or histories, which, according to many indications, was largely practised in the circles where the living prophets had most influence, was rather a supplement to the spoken word than a substitute for it. But in the time of the Exile, when the national existence with which the ancient religion of Israel was so closely intertwined was hopelessly shattered, when the voice of the prophets was stilled, and the public services of the sanctuary no longer called the devout together, the whole continuance of the spiritual faith rested upon the remembrance that the prophets of the Lord had foreseen the catastrophe, and had shown how to reconcile it with undiminished trust in Jehovah, the God of Israel. The written word acquired a fresh significance for the religious life, and the books of the prophets, with those records of the ancient history which were either already framed in the mould of prophetic thought, or were cast in that mould by editors of the time of the Exile, became the main support of the faithful, who felt, as they had never felt before, that the words of Jehovah were pure words, silver sevenfold tried, a sure treasure in every time of need." The position of the Psalter, too, as the hymn-book of the second Temple, was undisputed.

"Thus three great masses of sacred literature, comprising those elements which were most immediately practical under the old dispensation, and make up the chief permanent value of the Old Testament for the Christian church, took shape and attained to undisputed authority on broad grounds of history, and through processes of experimental verification, which made it unnecessary to seek complicated theological arguments to justify their place in the canon. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were inseparably linked with the very existence of the Old Testament church. Their authority was not derived from the schools of the scribes, and needed no sanction from them. And, though the spirit of legalism might mistake the true connection and relative importance of the Law and the other books, no pharisaism was able to undermine the influence of those evangelical and eternal

truths which kept true spirituality alive in Israel, while the official theology was absorbed in exclusive devotion to the temporary ordinances of the Law. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms are the substance and centre of the Old Testament, on which the new dispensation builds, and to which our Lord himself appeals as the witness of the old covenant to the new."

The oldest reference to a third section of the Hebrew Bible, the Hagiographa, is found in the prologue to Ecclesiasticus, which was written in Egypt about B.C. 130. In this section are included not only the Psalms, but also Proverbs and Job, the five small books of Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther, and also Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah (forming one book), and Chronicles.

Regarding the canonicity of these books it is clear that their very separation from the books of a similar "character which stand in the second section of the Hebrew canon proves that the third collection was formed after the second had been closed. And since the prophetic collection was itself a gradual formation, fixed not by external authority, but by silent consent, this brings the collection of the Hagiographa down long after the time of Ezra. With this it agrees that some of the books of the Hagiographa did not originate till the very end of the Persian period at earliest. The genealogies in Chronicles and Nehemiah give direct proof of this fact, and the book of Ecclesiastes can hardly be dated before the Chronicles; while even so conservative a critic as Delitzsch now admits that Daniel probably did not exist in its present form till the time of the Maccabees. Neither Esther nor Daniel, nor indeed Ezra, is alluded to in the list of worthies in Ecclesiasticus."

In respect to the admission of certain books of the Hagiographa into the canon, it is certain that those books which were "admittedly new had no authority. Nothing could be accepted unless it had the stamp of general currency, or was authenticated by the name of an ancient author dating from the period antecedent to the scribes." Although this offered

a great temptation to forgery, it also provided a "certain security that doubtful books would not be admitted till they had passed the test of such imperfect criticism as the scribes could apply. And, besides all this, the ultimate criterion to which every book was subjected lay in the supreme standard of the law. Nothing was holy which did not agree with the teaching of the Pentateuch. For some of the Hagiographa the test of old currency was plainly conclusive. It does not appear that the book of Job was ever challenged, and the only trace of a discussion about the Proverbs is found in a late Jewish book, and in a form which commands little credence. The same thing holds good of the Lamentations, which, indeed, in the time of Josephus, seem to have passed as an appendix to Jeremiah. Ruth, in like manner, is treated by Josephus as an appendix to Judges. The case of the other books is not so clear, and for all of them we have evidence that their position was long disputed, and only gradually secured."

This seems to be the fact with the book of Ezra-Nehemiah and also with Chronicles. In respect to the book of Daniel facts indicate a late admission. Daniel is not named among the worthies in Ecclesiasticus. The three books of Esther, of Ecclesiastes, and of the Song of Solomon were still controverted up to the end of the first century. But by a large assembly, held A.D. 90, the two latter were admitted to the canon; and the former came gradually to be numbered among the sacred books.

"It is matter of fact that the position of several books was still subject of controversy in the apostolic age, and was not finally determined till after the fall of the Temple and the Jewish state. Before that date the Hagiographa did not form a closed collection with an undisputed list of contents, and therefore the general testimony of Christ and the apostles to the Old Testament Scriptures cannot be used as certainly including books like Esther, Canticles, and Ecclesiastes, which were still disputed among the orthodox Jews in the apostolic age, and to which the New Testament never

makes reference. These books have been delivered to us; they have their use and value, which are to be ascertained by a frank and reverent study of the texts themselves; but those who insist on placing them on the same footing of undisputed authority with the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, to which our Lord bears direct testimony, and so make the whole doctrine of the canon depend on its weakest part, sacrifice the true strength of the evidence on which the Old Testament is received by Christians, and commit the same fault with Akiba and his fellow rabbins, who bore down the voice of free inquiry with anathemas instead of argument.”¹

IV. THE ORIGIN OF CERTAIN BOOKS.

In considering the formation of the canon the question of the origin of certain books of the Hagiographa has been incidentally examined. But the time of the writing and the authorship of the books of the Pentateuch still remain to be discussed. These problems are the most important to which historical criticism can be applied.

“The discrepancy between the traditional view of the Pentateuch and the plain statements of the historical books and the Prophets is so marked and so fundamental that it can be made clear to every reader of Scripture. It is this fact which compels us, in the interests of practical theology—nay, even in the interests of Christian apologetic—to go into questions of Pentateuch criticism. For if the received view which assigns the whole Pentateuch to Moses is inconsistent with the concordant testimony of the earlier and later prophets, we are brought into this dilemma,—either the Old Testament is not the record of a self-consistent scheme of revelation, of one great and continuous work of a revealing and redeeming God, or else the current view of the origin of the Pentateuch must be given up. Here it is that criticism comes in to solve a problem which in its origin is not merely critical, but springs of necessity from the very attempt to

¹ *Ibid.*, Lecture vi.

understand the Old Testament dispensation as a whole. For the contradiction which cannot be resolved on traditional assumptions is at once removed when the critic points out within the Pentateuch itself clear marks that the whole law was not written at one time, and that the several documents of which it is composed represent successive developments of the fundamental principles laid down by Moses, successive redactions of the sacred law of Israel, corresponding to the very same stages in the progress of revelation which are clearly marked in the history and the prophetic literature. Thus the apparent discordance between the several parts of the Old Testament record is removed, and we are able to see a consistent divine purpose ruling the whole dispensation of the old covenant, and harmoniously displayed in every part of the sacred record."

"The current view of the Pentateuch is mainly concerned to do literal justice to the phrase, 'The Lord spake unto Moses, saying' thus and thus. But to save the literal 'unto Moses' is to sacrifice the far more important words, 'The Lord spake.' The time when these ritual ordinances became God's word,—that is, became a divinely sanctioned means for checking the rebellion of the Israelites and keeping them as close to spiritual religion as their imperfect understanding and hard hearts permitted,—was subsequent to the work of the prophets. As a matter of historical fact the law continues the work of the prophets, and a great part of the law was not yet known to the prophets as God's word. The ritual law is, strictly speaking, a fusion of prophetic and priestly Torah. Its object is to provide a scheme of worship, in the pre-Christian sense of that word, consistent with the unique holiness of Jehovah, and yet not beyond the possibility of practical realization in a nation not yet ripe to enter into present fruition of the evangelical predictions of the prophets. From the time of Ezra downwards this object was practically realized. But before the Captivity it not only was not realized, but was not even contemplated. Ezekiel, himself an exile, is the first prophet who proposes a reconstruc-

tion of ritual in conformity with the spiritual truths of prophecy. And he does so not, like Ezra, by recalling the nation to the law of Moses, but by sketching an independent scheme of ritual, which unquestionably had a great influence on the subsequent development. Jeremiah, like Ezekiel, was a priest as well as a prophet; but there is nothing in Jeremiah which recognizes the necessity for such a scheme of ritual as Ezekiel maps out.

“When the Levitical law first comes on the stage of actual history at the time of Ezra, it presents itself as the law of Moses. People who have not understood the Old Testament are accustomed to say, with the usual presumption of unhistorical rationalism, that this is either literally true or a lie. The Pentateuch is either the literary work of Moses, or it is a barefaced imposture. The reverent and thoughtful student, who knows the complicated difficulties of the problem, will not willingly accept this statement of the question. If we are tied up to make a choice between these two alternatives, it is impossible to deny that all the historical evidence that has come before us points in the direction of the second. If our present Pentateuch was written by Moses it was lost as completely as any book could be. The prophets know the history of Moses and the patriarchs, they know that Moses is the founder of the Torah, but they do not know that complete system which we have been accustomed to suppose his work. And the priests of Shiloh and the Temple do not know the very parts of the Torah which would have done most to raise their authority and influence. At the time of Josiah a book of the Law is found, but it is still not the whole Pentateuch, for it does not contain the full Levitical system. From the death of Joshua to Ezra is, on the usual chronology, just one thousand years. Where was the Pentateuch all this time, if it was unknown to every one of those who ought to have had the most interest in it?

“It is plain that no thinking man can be asked to accept the Pentateuch as the literal work of Moses without some evidence to that effect. But evidence a thousand years after

date is no evidence at all when the intervening period bears unanimous witness in a different sense. By insisting that the whole Pentateuch is one work of Moses, and all of equal date, the traditional view cuts off all possibility of proof that its kernel is Mosaic. For it is certain that Israel before the Exile did not know all the Pentateuch. Therefore, if the Pentateuch is all one, they did not know any part of it. If we are shut up to choose between a Mosaic authorship of the whole five books, and the sceptical opinion that the Pentateuch is a mere forgery, the sceptics must gain their case.

“It is useless to appeal to the doctrine of inspiration for help in such a strait; for all sound apologetic admits that the proof that a book is credible must precede belief that it is inspired. The true way of escape from the sceptical conclusions must be sought in another direction. We must ask whether the facts of the case do shut us up to the dangerous alternative so eagerly pressed by the enemies of revelation, and so naïvely accepted by light-hearted advocates of the traditional view?

“The Pentateuch is known as the law of Moses in the age that begins with Ezra. What is the sense which the Jews themselves, from the age of Ezra downwards, attach to this expression? In one way they certainly take a false and unhistorical sense out of the words. They assume that the law of ordinances, or rather the law of works, moral and ceremonial, was the principle of all Israel's religion. They identify Mosaism with Pharisaism. That is certainly an error, as the History and the Prophets prove. But, on the other hand, the Jews are accustomed to use the word ‘Mosaic’ quite indifferently of the direct teaching of Moses and of precepts drawn from Mosaic principles, and adapted to later needs. According to a well-known passage in the Talmud, even the Prophets and the Hagiographa were implicitly given to Moses at Sinai. So far is this idea carried that the Torah is often identified with the Decalogue, in which all other parts of the Law are involved. Thus the words of Deut. v. 22, which refer to the Decalogue, are used

as a proof that the five books of Moses can never pass away. The beginnings of this way of thought are clearly seen in Ezra ix. 11, where a law of the Pentateuch is cited as an ordinance of the prophets. Mosaic law is not held to exclude post-Mosaic developments. That the whole Law is the law of Moses does not necessarily imply that every precept was developed in detail in his days, but only that the distinctive law of Israel owes to him the origin and principles in which all detailed precepts are implicitly contained. The development into explicitness of what Moses gave in principle is the work of continuous divine teaching in connection with new historical situations.

“ This way of looking at the law of Moses is not an invention of modern critics ; it actually existed among the Jews. I do not say that they made good use of it ; on the contrary, in the period of the scribes it led to a great overgrowth of traditions, which almost buried the written word. But the principle is older than its abuse, and it seems to offer a key for the solution of the serious difficulties in which we are involved by the apparent contradictions between the Pentateuch on the one hand, and the historical books and the Prophets on the other.

“ If the word ‘ Mosaic ’ was sometimes understood as meaning no more than Mosaic in principle, it is easy to see how the fusion of priestly and prophetic Torah in our present Pentateuch may be called Mosaic, though many things in its system were unknown to the history and the prophets before the Exile. For Moses was priest as well as prophet, and both priests and prophets referred the origin of their Torah to him. In the age of the prophetic writings the two Torahs had fallen apart. The prophets do not acknowledge the priestly ordinances of their day as a part of Jehovah’s commandments to Israel. The priests, they say, have forgotten or perverted the Torah. To reconcile the prophets and the priesthood, to re-establish conformity between the practice of Israel’s worship and the spiritual teachings of the prophets, was to return to the stand-point of Moses, and bring back the

Torah to its original oneness. Whether this was done by bringing to light a forgotten Mosaic book, or by recasting the traditional and consuetudinary law in accordance with Mosaic principles, is a question purely historical, which does not at all affect the legitimacy of the work."

"The idea that Moses is author of the whole Pentateuch, except the last chapter of Deuteronomy, is derived from the old Jewish theory in Josephus, that every leader of Israel wrote down by divine authority the events of his own time, so that the sacred history is like a day-book, constantly written up to date. No part of the Bible corresponds to this description, and the Pentateuch as little as any. For example, the last chapter of Deuteronomy, which on the common theory is a note added by Joshua to the work in which Moses had carried down the history till just before his death, cannot really have been written till after Joshua was dead and gone. For it speaks of the city Dan. Now Dan is the new name of Laish, which that town received after the conquest of the Danites in the age of the judges, when Moses' grandson became priest of their idolatrous sanctuary. But if the last chapter of Deuteronomy is not contemporary history, what is the proof that the rest of that book is so? There is not an atom of proof that the hand which wrote the last chapter had no share in the rest of the book.

"As a matter of fact, the Pentateuchal history was written in the land of Canaan, and if it is all by one hand it was not composed before the period of the kings. The proof that the Pentateuchal history was written in Canaan is of various kinds. It is founded in part upon the usage of language. In Hebrew the ordinary phrase for westward is 'seaward,' and for southwards 'toward the Négeb.' The word 'Négeb' is the proper name for the dry district in the south of Judah. These expressions for the west and the south could have been formed only in Palestine. At Mount Sinai the sea did not lie to the west, and the Négeb was towards the north. Yet these expressions are constantly used in the Pentateuch. Again, the Pentateuch displays an exact topographical knowl-

edge of Palestine, but by no means so exact a knowledge of the wilderness of the wandering. The narrator knew the names of the places famous in the forty years' wandering; but for Canaan he knew local details, and describes them with exactitude as they were in his own time (e.g. Gen. xii. 8; xxxiii. 18; xxxv. 19, 20). Accordingly the patriarchal sites can still be set down on the map with definiteness; but geographers are unable to assign with certainty the site of Mount Sinai, because the narrative has none of that topographical color which the story of an eyewitness is sure to possess. Once more, the Pentateuch cites as authorities poetical records which are not earlier than the time of Moses. One of these records is a book, the Book of the Wars of Jehovah (Num. xxi. 14); did Moses, writing contemporary history, find and cite a book already current containing poetry on the wars of Jehovah and his people, which began in his own times? Another poetical authority cited is a poem circulating among the *Môshelîm*, or reciters of sarcastic verses (Num. xxi. 27 sq.). It refers to the victory over Sihon, which took place at the very end of the forty years' wandering. If Moses wrote the Pentateuch what occasion could he have to authenticate his narrative by reference to these traditional depositories of ancient poetry?"

It is plain, therefore, that the Pentateuch was not written in the wilderness. But, further, it is not in its narrative parts a continuous work; it is a combination of several narratives originally independent. The evidence of this complex structure is found in the use of the two words, Jehovah and Elohim, for God, in Genesis. "A very clear case is the account of the flood. As it now stands, the narrative has the most singular repetitions, and things come in in the strangest order. But as soon as we separate the Jehovah and Elohim documents all is clear. The first narrative tells that Jehovah saw the wickedness of men, and determined to destroy them. But Noah found grace in his eyes, and was called to enter the ark with a pair of all unclean beasts, and clean beasts and fowls by sevens; for, he is told, after seven days a forty

days' rain will ensue, and destroy all life. Noah obeys the command, the seven days elapse, and the rain follows as predicted, floating the ark, but destroying all outside of it. Then the rain ceases, and the waters sink. As soon as the rain is over Noah opens the window of the ark, and sends out the dove and the raven. After fourteen days the dove, sent out for the third time, does not return, and Noah, removing the covering of the ark, finds the ground dry, builds an altar, and does sacrifice, receiving the promise that the flood shall not again recur, and disturb the course of the seasons. The parallel Elohist narrative is equally complete. It also relates God's anger with mankind. Noah receives orders to build the ark and take in the animals in pairs (there is no mention of the sevens of clean beasts). The flood begins when Noah is six hundred years old, and he enters the ark. The fountains of the great deep are broken up, and the windows of heaven opened; but on the same day Noah, his family, and the pairs of animals enter the ark. The waters rise till they cover the hills, and swell for a hundred and fifty days, when they are assuaged by a great wind, and the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven are closed, and so, just five months after the flood commenced, the ark rests on a point in the mountains of Ararat. After the one hundred and fifty days the waters fail, and continue to decrease for two months and a half, till the tops of the mountains are seen. In other three months the face of the earth was freed of water, but it was not till the lapse of a full solar year that Noah was permitted to leave the ark, when he received God's blessing, the so-called Noachic ordinances, and the sign of the bow. These two accounts are plainly independent, and each is complete in itself. It is impossible that the work of one author could so divide itself into two narratives, and have for each narrative a different name of God."

"What has been said is enough to show that the Pentateuch is a much more complex book than appears at first sight, and that in its present form it was written after the

time of Moses,—nay, after that of Joshua. We cannot venture to assert that the composition of the Pentateuch out of older sources of various date took place before the time of the kings. How much of it is early, how much comparatively late, must be determined by a wider inquiry, and for this the laws give the best starting-point.”

But the Pentateuch does not represent Moses as having written all the legal codes which it embodies. He is not represented as the author of the Levitical legislation. It is nowhere said that he wrote “the description of the tabernacle and its ordinances, or the law of sacrifice.” Yet the Pentateuch affirms that he wrote certain laws. He wrote the “words of Jehovah’s covenant with Israel” (Ex. xxxiv. 27, 28; xxiv. 4, 7). In the former passage the words of the covenant are expressly identified with the ten words on the tables of stone. In the latter passage the same thing seems to be meant.

“Till we come to the Book of Deuteronomy, then, we find no statement that Moses wrote down more than the ten commandments. In Deut. xxxi. 9, 24, on the other hand, the account of Moses’s last address to the people is followed by the statement that he wrote ‘the words of this law’ in a book, which he deposited with the Levites to be preserved beside the ark. Now Deut. xxxi., which speaks of Moses in the third person, is distinct from the code in which he speaks of himself in the first person. Do the words of this chapter imply that the person — not Moses — who wrote it had before him the Deuteronomic code as a book which he knew to have existed separately, and accepted as the actual writing of Moses? It may be so; but the inference is not certain. The narrative certainly implies that the present Deuteronomic code answers to what Moses wrote, that it is the divine Torah as the narrator was guided to present it to his readers. But then we must remember that there is, as we have seen, an elasticity about the phrase Torah. Among the later Jews it may mean something as narrow as the ten commandments, or it may mean something much wider; and

yet the summary and the expansion are not viewed as two Torahs, but as the same Torah in two forms. It was already so in the days of Deuteronomy. This divine Torah begins with Moses. As all goes back to his initiative, the Israelites were not concerned to remember the precise history of each new precept; and when the whole system developed under continuous divine guidance is summed up in a code, that code is simply set down as Mosaic Torah. We still call the steam-engine by the name of Watt, though the steam-engine of to-day has many parts that his had not.”¹

From the examination of the Pentateuch we pass to the consideration of the origin of several of the prophetic books. “The old school of prophecy, whose members, from Samuel to Elisha, were men of action rather than of letters, was not likely to leave behind it any written oracles. The prophets generally spoke under the immediate influence of the Spirit or ‘hand of Jehovah.’ What they wrote was secondary, and was, no doubt, greatly abridged. The most instructive account of the literary activity of a prophet is found in Jer. xxxvi. Jeremiah did not begin to write till he had been more than twenty years a prophet. Some prophetic books, like that of Amos, seem to have been composed at one time and with unity of plan. Other prophets, like Isaiah, published several books, summing up portions of their ministry. In one or two cases, especially in that of Ezekiel, the prophet writes words which were apparently never spoken. Before the Exile there was circulation of individual prophetic books, and earlier prophets quote from their predecessors.

Taking up the origin of several of the later prophets, we assign to the Assyrian period “Nahum, who wrote, perhaps, in captivity, and foretold the fall of Nineveh. Then comes Zephaniah, about the time of the Scythian ravages, followed by the prophets of the Chaldean period; first Habakkuk, and then Jeremiah and Ezekiel, men of heavier spirit and less glowing poetic fire than Isaiah.” The Book of Daniel

¹ *Ibid.*, chap. xi.

can hardly be classed with the later prophecies. It is in form the forerunner of the "apocalyptic books of post-canonical Judaism, though in its intrinsic qualities far superior to these, and akin to the prophets proper."

It remains only to touch upon the origin of a few of the poetical books of the Old Testament. "The greatest name in the early proverbial wisdom of Israel is that of Solomon (1 Kings iv. 32), and beyond doubt, many of his aphorisms are to be found in the Book of Proverbs. Yet this book is not all Solomonic. The last two chapters are ascribed to other names, and part of the collection was not put in shape till the time of Hezekiah (xxv. 1), who can have had no infallible criterion of authorship by Solomon, and must not be credited with critical intentions. . . . The Book of Ecclesiastes bears every mark of a very late date, long after the Exile. On the other hand, a fresh and creative development, alike in point of form and of thought, is found in the Book of Job. . . . It has a comparatively early date. It was known to Jeremiah, and may be plausibly referred to the seventh century B.C. In the Book of Job we find poetical invention of incidents attached for didactic purposes to a name apparently derived from old tradition. There is no valid *a priori* reason for denying that the Old Testament may contain other examples of the same art. The Book of Jonah is generally viewed as a case in point. Esther, too, has been viewed as a fiction by many who are not over sceptical critics; but on this view a book which finds no recognition in the New Testament, and whose canonicity was long suspected by the Christian as well as the Jewish church, must sink to the rank of an apocryphal production."¹ With the poetical portions of the Old Testament, and especially with the post-exile Psalms, the Book of Ruth has a "natural affinity." It is a "graceful prose idyl."²

¹ Encyc. Brit., Vol. iii. Art. "Bible.

² Ibid., Vol. xi. Art. "Hebrew Language and Literature."