

EPILOGUE

THE EVIDENCE SUMMARIZED

THIS volume has been occupied with a single problem, the date of the book of Deuteronomy, and more particularly of the legislation contained in chapters xii-xxxvi.

If little consideration has been bestowed upon the remaining parts, especially on chapter xxviii and the poetry of chapters xxxii, xxxiii, this is not because they are lacking in interest or importance, but from the desire to focus attention upon the heart of the book, the law itself, and next to that upon the discourse of chapters v-xi, which is so closely linked with it.

The inquiry has been pursued from many standpoints, the results of which can now be summarized. At the outset objective tests were found in the most characteristic phrases of the author, and the use made of the divine titles. The former relate to the great events of Moses' life, the exodus from Egypt, the approaching occupation of the land of Canaan, the covenant relationship with Jehovah; and they show no sign of influence from the monarchic period.

The latter also correspond, somewhat closely, with the call of Moses and the choice of Israel to be the people of Yahweh; whilst certain titles used by the prophets are conspicuous by their absence.

The topography was next brought under review. It displayed a manifest interest in, and an accurate knowledge of, the desert route from Horeb, by way of Kadesh and round Edom to Moab, and a close acquaintance with the geographical features of Trans-jordan. In contrast to this, the only knowledge shown of the western side prior to chapter xxxiv is such as could be gained from outside.

The peoples inhabiting the land at the time of the invasion are enumerated, with the names of the still earlier occupants and the primitive descriptions by which they were known. The geographical data, therefore, appear to be of early origin.

Next, the laws were examined one by one, beginning with

those which had some parallel either in the old Semitic codes or in other parts of the Pentateuch.

Certain laws are of pre-Mosaic origin, being found also in Hammurabi or other ancient collections; of which some are peculiar to Deuteronomy, some to JE, and some common to both. Among them (including those peculiar to Deuteronomy) can be seen traces of an adaptation of the older forms to Hebrew religious ideas, which some scholars have attributed to Moses. This comparison fails to justify the chronological sequence JE, D, P, or to reveal any obvious connection of the JE code with the early monarchy, the laws of Deuteronomy with the seventh century, or of P with the exile or later.

The remaining laws, commands and institutions contained in, and peculiar to, Deuteronomy xii-xxvi were then considered *seriatim*. Some could belong to any period, some only to the time of the occupation of Canaan by the Israelites; several were incapable of application in the reign of Manasseh or Josiah. This added seriously to the difficulty of regarding the Deuteronomic law as a collection made for use at that time.

The theory that the aim of the legislation was to abolish the 'high places' and to centralize worship in Jerusalem was examined in the light of the history and of the arguments based upon Ex. xx. 24 and Dt. xii. An initial objection was found in the absence of any mention of the 'high places' in the laws or the introductory discourse, a fact difficult to explain if this hypothesis be correct. The details of Josiah's reformation do not correspond so closely with the laws as to require an immediate connection between them. Wellhausen's interpretation of Ex. xx. 24 does violence to the words themselves and to their context; and the meanings which he read into Dt. xii are forced and unnatural, alien to its professed object of guarding the people against Canaanite influences which would threaten them after the crossing of the Jordan.

The command in Dt. xxvii. 1-8 to erect an altar on Mount Ebal is also irreconcilable with this hypothesis.

The history shows that the primacy of Jerusalem as the centre of Yahweh's worship goes back to the building of the temple; and the account of Josiah's reform shows that the sin charged against 'the fathers' (2 Ki. xxii. 16) was not that they had worshipped

Yahweh outside of Jerusalem, but that they had forsaken Him to worship other gods. The object of the reform was to restore the old religion, not to change it.

As to the writings of the early prophets, although they contain no certain references to the book of Deuteronomy, they testify to the existence of a 'law of the Lord' which the people should have obeyed but which they had broken; and they contain passages proving that certain of the rules laid down in Deuteronomy were already in force.

A comparison of Deuteronomy with the writings of Hosea and Isaiah reveals differences of thought-forms, of outlook and of background; the author of Deuteronomy does not seem to have lived soon after, or to have been influenced by, Isaiah's preaching.

When the prophetic writings from Amos and Hosea to Jeremiah are regarded as a series, they indicate a progressive change in the outlook (*a*) upon 'all Israel' as the people of God, (*b*) upon the surrounding nations, (*c*) upon the religious declension of the people, and (*d*) on the nearness and certainty of God's judgment upon the nation. In all these matters Deuteronomy can most suitably be placed at the beginning of the series.

When the brief narrative portions of the book are taken together they form a more or less connected whole. The style of the narrator is simple, sincere and free from artificiality; he evidently believes what he records, and here and there are indications which imply that no great lapse of time separates him from the events.

Finally, the laws and the introductory discourse reveal so many contacts with the life and the character of Moses, as that is recorded elsewhere, as to justify the belief in a real, historical connection between them.

There is therefore solid ground for taking seriously the claims which the book makes for itself. These are definite and precise, namely that the law was declared by Moses at a given time and place, and that it was subsequently written and placed in the hands of the priests. These statements are put forward as matters of fact, and the evidence, which is cumulative, points to their truth. If it does not compel belief, it leaves the way to it open.

Up to now the problem has been treated as one of literary and

historical criticism, like any other; but when this treatment leads to the conclusion that the law really proceeded from, and was written by, Moses, the student is brought face to face with its claim to be part of a divine revelation which was accompanied by supernatural events.

Here many draw back, and seek for some alternative solution. But those who can believe that miracles may have happened under the old dispensation as well as in the new need not be under this constraint. Together with R. de Pury¹ they can say: 'If the stone was not rolled away on Easter morning, then the sacred history of Israel is cut at its roots. But if Christ is risen, all the miracles of the Old Testament as well as of the New, range themselves (*s'ordonnent à*) round this miracle.'

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND DEUTERONOMY

In many quarters today there is an increasing disposition to recognize the bond which exists between the Old and the New Testaments, and to seek to interpret each in the light of the other. In particular, it can be said that 'the Old Covenant at Horeb was fulfilled in the New Covenant mediated by Jesus Christ',² and cannot fully be understood in isolation.

It is therefore right that we should conclude our inquiry by a look into the New Testament to see what light it throws upon the book of Deuteronomy and its origin.

The New Testament contains several references to, and some citations from, the book of Deuteronomy, and in these its Mosaic authorship and divine authority are generally assumed.

In Heb. x. 28 the words of Dt. xvii. 6 are cited as 'Moses' law'. Paul quotes Dt. xxvii. 26 and xxi. 23 with the introduction: 'It is written' (Gal. ii. 10, 13), and similarly parts of the Decalogue in Rom. vii. 7, xiii. 9 and Eph. vi. 2. In a remarkable passage (Rom. x. 6-9) he equates the words of Moses in Dt. xxx. 12-14 with 'the word of faith' which he preaches.

The strongest endorsement of its claims comes, however, from the Master Himself. In the hour of temptation He three times

¹ *Le Libérateur*, Librairie Protestante, Paris (undated), p. 16.

² N. W. Porteous, *OTMS*, p. 327.

quoted its words as authoritative (Mt. iv. 1-11; Lk. iv. 1-13). The account must surely have come first from His own lips.

He called the grand declaration of the unity of God in Dt. vi. 4, 5 'the first and great commandment', and described the Decalogue as 'the commandment of God' (Mk. vii. 9-12) or as 'the word of God' (Mk. x. 17-19). In answer to a question of the Pharisees, He described the permission for divorce under certain conditions given by Moses (Dt. xxiv. 1) as the precept which 'Moses wrote' (Mk. x. 5).

It is a fair inference that He was well acquainted with the book and accepted its claims.¹

There are those who will set aside these sayings with the remark that the disciples and the Lord Himself shared in the ignorance and mistaken notions of their own time.

But not all will be able to do this;² many will rather seek to attune their thoughts about the Old Testament to the recorded sayings of the Master and to the apostolic teaching.

They will stand in imagination upon the mount of Transfiguration and ask themselves why Moses, as well as Elias, appeared there to speak with Jesus 'of his decease which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem' (Lk. ix. 31, RV), and what light this may throw upon the words of Christ recorded in Jn. v. 45, 46. Are those commentators right who see here a probable reference to Dt. xviii. 15?

Their thoughts will travel on to the day of the resurrection, and to the testimony of the two disciples on the Emmaus walk that Jesus, 'beginning at Moses and all the prophets expounded to us in all the scriptures the things concerning himself' (Lk. xxiv. 27); and again to the occasion when, on the same evening, the eleven and others were gathered together, to whom He said: 'All things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms concerning me' (Lk. xxiv. 44, RV). Was it therefore from the risen Christ Himself that Peter learned thus to interpret those verses of Deuteronomy which he quoted on the day of Pentecost? (Acts iii. 23, 24; Dt. xviii. 15, 18, 19).

¹ Cf. E. J. Young, *The Infallible Word*, Philadelphia, 1946, pp. 54-60.

² See R. V. G. Tasker, *Our Lord's Use of the Old Testament*, London, 1953, pp. 18, 19.

Here we must leave our reader, and where could we leave him better than in such company? Our task has been the humble one of collecting data, chiefly from the book itself, which help to determine its probable date and origin. If these pages contribute, in however small a degree, to a deeper study and a better understanding of this portion of God's word, the labour involved will be amply repaid.