

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

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THE LORD'S TEACHING AS TO THE LAW.

II.

2. FROM the relation of our Lord to the law generally, we may now pass to a brief consideration of two of its precepts from which some inferences may be drawn as to the general question, how far His teaching guides us in our choice between the two views. These two precepts are the law of the Sabbath and the enactment relative to divorce—the two precepts in regard of which there was an enduring dissidence between the teaching of our blessed Master and the rabbinical teaching of the day. In each of these some glimpses may be obtained of divine guidance in the anxious and difficult questions which the so-called Higher Criticism has forced upon our consideration.

(a) Let us take first the precept relating to the Sabbath, and here select for investigation one passage in which our Lord does seem to treat in a critical manner this distinguishing precept of the Mosaic law. Our Lord's general attitude to questions connected with the Sabbath we know well, but on this we need not dwell in our present inquiry. It may be summed up in the single emphatic declaration made by our Lord when His disciples were censured by the Pharisees for plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath day—the declaration, founded on the relation of the Sabbath to man, that “the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”¹ This attitude is maintained throughout. What we have, however, here to notice is not our Lord's authority over the day, but the reasoning which, on one occasion, He was pleased to enter upon in relation to the Sabbath, and the inferences that flow from it in relation to the

general question before us. Let us recall the circumstances.

At the unnamed festival at Jerusalem, mentioned by St. John in the earlier part of his Gospel,² an impotent man was healed by our Lord at the Pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath day. The performance of this act of mercy on the Sabbath called out a malignant bitterness in the Jewish party which, when our Lord visited Jerusalem some months afterwards at the Feast of Tabernacles,³ appears to have vented itself anew, and to have called forth from our Lord an appeal to the law of Moses of a profoundly instructive character. He alludes to the known fact that circumcision was performed on the Sabbath when that Sabbath was the eighth day,⁴ and in doing so he draws a kind of contrast between the sanctity of the Sabbath and the sanctity of circumcision, and the relation of each to the law of Moses. Our Lord, in fact, here passes a critical judgment upon the relation of circumcision to the Sabbath which, when carefully considered, suggests important and far-reaching inferences. He inferentially confirms the narrative in Genesis as to the origin of circumcision,⁵ and its connexion with what may be termed the patriarchal dispensation; He confirms, also, the fact of its incorporation in the law of Moses,⁶ and further, by the whole tenor of His argument, implies that the priority of the rite gave it a kind of legislative pre-eminence over the Sabbath. Whenever the eighth day brought the two rites into competition, the Sabbath yielded to circumcision. The rabbinical principle, “*circumcisio pellit sabbatum*,” could actually, in this particular, claim the authority of the Lord Himself.

With the inferences which have been drawn from this remarkable passage as to questions connected with the Sabbath, we are not here concerned, but we are closely concerned with the broad fact that our Lord does in this passage set, as it were, His seal on the reality of patriarchal history. Few as are the words, parenthetical as

¹ Mark ii. 28. There is some little doubt as to the reference of the *αὐτοι*. The conclusion would not seem to be drawn from the fact that the Son of Man was the Head of humanity (Meyer, *al.*), but from the fact that He was the Saviour of man, and so had power even over that which was primarily designed for the spiritual good of man. See Weiss, *in loc.*

² John v. 1.

³ *Ibid.* vii. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.* vii. 22.

⁵ Gen. xvii. 10, xxi. 4.

⁶ Lev. xii. 3.

the reference to the patriarchs may be,¹ the fact remains that in a passage of a distinctly critical character our Lord makes this allusion, and further, that in referring to Moses and, by inference, to the Book of Leviticus, in which circumcision is ordained, the personal lawgiver becomes connected at least with a passage in a particular book; for here, in the verse we are considering, the context precludes the term Moses being regarded as synonymous with the Mosaic law. When to this we add that, in the verse that follows, our Lord mentions that the object of the exception is that the law of Moses should not be broken, may we not at least say this, that in the passage we are considering the personal Moses is connected with the law that bears his name in a manner which makes it reasonable to believe that he himself wrote far more of that law than modern criticism is willing to admit. In a word, if we adopt the Traditional view the whole passage becomes consistent and intelligible.

(b) With the passage relating to divorce we may deal more briefly, as it has not the same critical aspects as the passage that has just been considered. It is, however, of very great importance in reference to the earliest portion of the Book of Genesis.

It will be remembered that, towards the close of our Lord's ministry, we are told both by St. Matthew² and St. Mark that the Pharisees put a question to the Lord in the hope, apparently, that He might be drawn into the then current dispute between the schools of Hillel the "looser," as he was termed, and Shammai the "binder." The answer of our Lord is somewhat differently worded by the two evangelists, but the substance is the same. According to St. Mark, the Lord answers the question by another question—"What did Moses command you?" and the answer is given, as it only could be given, out of a book with the authorship of which modern criticism assures us Moses had little or nothing to do—the

¹ The purport of this parenthetical clause has been differently explained. The simplest view seems to be that our Lord mentions a well-known fact to show that Moses (to whom the Jews were appealing) himself accepted a system which involved a breaking of the Sabbath rest. The more common view is that our Lord names the fact to show the greater authority of the earlier law than of the later; so Bengel, Meyer, *al.* This, however, does not harmonise so well with what follows.

² Matt. xix. 3 *sqq.*; Mark x. 2 *sqq.*

Book of Deuteronomy.³ Against this answer, which our Lord treats as really no more than permissive, and as a temporary concession to hardness of heart and a low moral condition on the part of those to whom it was made,—against this the Lord sets the primal state,—“male and female made He them,”⁴—and God’s primal declaration in reference to marriage, whether uttered through Adam or the original writer,—“For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife; and they twain shall become one flesh.”⁵

Now whence do these words thus deliberately cited and returned in answer to a formal and momentous question,—whence do the words come? As we well know, from the first and second chapters of Genesis, or, in other words, from a portion of that ancient book which we are now invited to consider as a mythical portion, a portion “in which,” to use the words of a recent writer, “we cannot distinguish the historical germ, though we do not at all deny that it exists.”⁶ Is it too much to say that to derive, from a source in which the historical is indistinguishable, the answer of Christ to such a question as that which was put to Him, is to many minds inconceivable. And the more so, as on the Traditional view that Moses was the compiler, or, as those who heard the words would have said, the author, we have just that form of answer that would have materially helped to bring conviction to the hearers, an appeal from Moses to Moses, from the inspired legislator to the inspired compiler or writer of primeval history. That it *was* an appeal of this kind, or was felt to be so by those to whom the words were addressed, we, of course, cannot assert; but this we may presume to say, that it is not, what we must regard the other view to be, simply inconceivable, unless, indeed, we adopt a theory of accommodation, which, doubtful at all times, would seem to be doubly so in a case like the present.

3. But we may now pass from the Laws to the Lawgiver. There is, it has always seemed to me, an argument of some little weight deducible from the frequent reference of our blessed Lord to the person and authority of Moses. If we turn to a concordance and eliminate our Lord’s mention of the name from incidents or passages which may

³ Deut. xxiv. 1.

⁴ Mark x. 6; see Gen. i. 27.

⁵ Mark x. 7; see Gen. ii. 24.

⁶ *Lux Mundi*, p. 357 (ed. 10).

have appeared in a preceding evangelist, we shall find, I think, that the name occurs in our Lord's discourses some eighteen times, and in the great majority of cases with a clearly personal reference. He is spoken of by our Lord as having given the law,¹ as standing in connexion with historic events,² as having written of the Lord,³ as being one whose writings stood, as far as belief in them was concerned, on a kind of parity with our Lord's own words,⁴ and as one about whose command inquiry is made before a question of controversy is answered.⁵ If we add to this the fact of our Lord talking with him when he was permitted, with Elias, to appear in glory on the Mount of the Transfiguration,⁶ and to speak of the decease that the Lord was to accomplish at Jerusalem.⁷

When we fairly consider these intimations of the aspect in which Moses was regarded by our Lord Jesus Christ, we must at once feel how widely different this Moses of the Gospels is from the Moses of the more advanced writers of the Analytical school. The Moses of that school is little more than the great national "Kadhi" of the wilderness,⁸ the conscientious judge between man and man, the wise counsellor whose brilliant leadership in the Exodus made every Hebrew turn instinctively to him for help and guidance in trials and difficulties, the founder of consuetudinary law, and the one who, by connecting his own family or tribal God⁹ with the religious faith of Israel, gave to that faith a national existence and history. Such, according to the Analytical view, is the true historic Moses. The imaginary Moses, according to that view, is the Moses of the Exile, the Moses of the Priestly Code, and, after what has been just set forth, the Moses, not only of the unbroken belief of the Jewish Church, but of the Gospels and of the Lord Jesus Christ. The break to which we have come, in connexion with the history of Moses, between the Analytical view and the testimony of the Gospels must be pronounced to be complete. We have seen in a former address that the obscuration of the work of Moses as a legislator and as the founder of an organised

religion formed an argument of some validity against the Analytical view. We now see what would appear to be a still stronger argument—the Moses of the Analytical view cannot be harmonised with the Moses of Christ. All this is very monitory. It places very clearly before us the real spiritual peril of being led away by the plausibilities and cleverness of modern criticism, and it seems to tell us very plainly that if we are so led away, we must be prepared to reconstruct our *credenda*.

4. Hitherto we have noticed subjects in which we stand opposed, more particularly, to the extreme party. We may conclude with noticing one subject in which all adherents of the Analytical view, the moderate as well as the extreme, are cordially united. The subject is indeed one which it may seem a little presumptuous to propose to rediscuss: as, if there is one point on which it is claimed that all intelligent critics are completely agreed, it is—that the Book of Deuteronomy was never written by Moses. We are told by one writer that "in all circles where appreciation of scientific results can be looked for at all, it is recognised that it was composed in the same age as that in which it was discovered,"¹⁰ viz. in the days of Josiah. Another writer, of a very different tone of thought, tells us practically the same. "We may suppose," he says, "Deuteronomy to be a republication of the law in the spirit and power of Moses, put dramatically in his mouth."¹¹ Another writer is quite willing to concede that the laws in Deuteronomy are not inventions, but mostly the direct reproduction of more ancient enactments; but he, like the rest, assigns the composition of the book to some unknown writer of the age of Manasseh or Josiah.¹² On this point all are agreed, that in Deuteronomy we *may* have Mosaic traditions, but that the actual composer of the book was some pious, unknown Jew, who, some seven or eight centuries after the days of Moses, put dramatically into the mouth of the great legislator this republication of the Law.¹³

Now it may seem great hardihood to urge any

¹ John vii. 19. ² Luke xx. 37; John iii. 14, vi. 32, *al.*
³ John v. 46. ⁴ John v. 47. ⁵ Mark x. 3.

⁶ Matt. xvii. 3; Mark ix. 4; Luke ix. 30.

⁷ Luke ix. 31.

⁸ Wellhausen, *History of Israel*, p. 434 (Transl.), Edin. 1885.

⁹ Wellhausen, *ib.* p. 433, note,—a particularly painful note to read.

¹⁰ Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, p. 9, (Transl.).

¹¹ *Lux Mundi*, p. 355 (ed. x.).

¹² Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 82 (Edin. 1891).

¹³ See, however, the comments of Professor Driver, *op. cit.*, p. 84, in which he speaks of the writer as "introducing Moses in the third person."

form of argument against such a general consent ; still there is plainly something to be said on the other side, when we take into consideration our blessed Lord's references to this particular book, and the circumstances under which these references were made.

The something that may be said on the other side is this,—that our Lord, on three separate occasions, so referred to the Book of Deuteronomy as to make it morally improbable that the book could have been so referred to if it had been written, not by Moses, but by one who impersonated him and wrote in his name. Let us briefly consider the three occasions, and see if there is not some ground for the statement that has just been made.

The first passage to which we may direct attention is brief, but of very great importance. It occurs in the concluding portion of our Lord's address to the Jews after His miracle at the Pool of Bethesda.¹ In this address, after telling His hearers that if they were believers in Moses, they would be believers in Himself, He adds these confirmatory words : "For he wrote of Me."² Now in these words, it may be said that there is no doubt that our Lord is referring to the striking Messianic prophecy in the Book of Deuteronomy, in which Moses is represented as having solemnly declared unto "all Israel"³ that the Lord their God will raise up unto them a prophet from the midst of them, of their brethren, like unto him that was speaking to them."⁴ The reference of our blessed Lord is, however, not to be confined to this passage. Every type and typical ceremony in which the Messiah was prefigured in the Mosaic ritual must be deemed to be included in the declaration ; but that this particular passage was at the time pre-eminently present to the thoughts of our Lord may with all reverence be regarded not only as probable, but as certain. And for this reason,—that this prophecy was a direct communication from God. For it must not be forgotten that it is stated by the writer that God communicated to him almost word for word this unique utterance.⁵ The prophecy of the writer is simply a re-utterance of the all but *ipsissima verba* of Almighty God.

¹ John v. 46.

² *Ibid.*

³ Deut. v. 1.

⁴ Deut. xviii. 15. This passage is also referred to by St. Peter (Acts iii. 22) and by St. Stephen (Acts vii. 37).

⁵ *Ibid.* xviii. 17.

Now, under these circumstances, is it thinkable that the writer could have been any other than Moses ? Does it not seem almost beyond controversy that our Lord's words must be taken to the letter, and as setting the seal to our belief that Moses, and no other than Moses, wrote, at any rate, this portion ? Would the dramatiser, who, if he existed, was *ex hypothesi*, a devout and God-fearing Jew, have dared to declare that God had so spoken unless he had known that it was so ? And how could he have known that it was so save by direct communication from God ? And what right have we for supposing that he did so receive it, and was thus a distinct medium of divine revelation ? If this is not maintained, the only possible supposition that seems left is, that the Deuteronomist dramatiser had some writing of Moses before him—for the words "*wrote of Me*" seem to preclude tradition—in which this prophecy and its dependence on divine authority was distinctly specified. But if, whenever pressed, by what seems fair argument, the critic has to take refuge in these helping-out hypotheses, it does not seem unreasonable to doubt the validity of the theory which these hypotheses are called out to support. At any rate, the case stands thus. Our blessed Lord definitely says that Moses wrote of Him ; and the tenor of the passage precludes the possibility of the word Moses being taken to mean aught else than the personal legislator. Now in the Book of Deuteronomy a striking and unique passage is found, in which it is generally admitted that Moses does refer to our Lord. The question then appears finally to assume the following form—Which is the more probable, that Moses, who wrote the passage, wrote the book (excepting, of course, the last chapter) in which the passage is found ; or that an unknown writer, impersonating Moses, should have happened to have had a written document of Moses, from which he inserted the passage ? Few, we think, could hesitate as to the answer to the question.

There is not, I believe, any other passage in which our Lord mentions the name of Moses in reference, direct or indirect, to the Book of Deuteronomy. But passages there are in which our Lord refers to or makes citations from it, which it seems almost impossible to think He would have made if the Book was simply the work of a dramatiser. When, for example, the designedly ensnaring question was put to Him as to the quality of the commandment that entitled it to be counted

as the great or the first commandment,¹ is it reasonable to suppose that He would have made (according to St. Matthew) a nearly exact citation of two solemn verses of Deuteronomy,² if the book had been the late-formed composition or fabrication which it is alleged to be. Such a supposition seems, to use the lightest form of words, to jar with our moral convictions.

Still more will this be felt if we take into full consideration the circumstances of our Lord's Temptation, and of His use of the Book of Deuteronomy in His personal conflict with the Tempter. All the circumstances of those forty days of conflict have not been revealed to us; but this we do know, that at their close, most probably on the last of the days, three culminating temptations were directed against our Incarnate Lord, alike in His body, soul, and spirit; and we know, too, that each was repelled, simply and conclusively, by a passage from the written Word of God. And from what part of Holy Scripture did the three passages or parts come? Each one, as we well know, came from this Book of Deuteronomy. Two of the passages came from the 6th chapter,³ and one from the 8th chapter,⁴—all three purporting to form part of the second solemn address delivered by Moses to all Israel in the land of Moab. Each is introduced by our Lord with the solemn "It is written,"—a form of words which, to say the very least, stamps each passage as a direct and consciously-made citation from the Word of God. Each involves an appeal to an authority behind the words, which the very Tempter himself not only recognises, but with which he seeks to enhance one of his own temptations.

Such are the three citations from Deuteronomy in the particular case we are now considering,—citations made under the most solemn circumstances that it is possible for us to conceive, and apparently claiming to be integral portions of the inspired Word of God. Can such passages owe their real origin to an idealising writer of the days of the reformation of Josiah? Is there not some

¹ Matt. xxii. 36 sq.; Mark xii. 29 sq. Observe in each passage the term *τοια*, as marking precisely the nature of the question.

² Deut. vi. 4, 5.

Vers. 13, 16.

⁴ Ver. 3.

thing which to most minds would seem to be unthinkable in the supposition that the fabricated and the impersonated⁵ could find any place in a scene such as that of the Temptation of our Lord? And the more so, when this subjective argument can be supported by the plain objective fact,—that the unbroken tradition of the Jewish and of the Christian Church has always assigned to the great Lawgiver the authorship of the first thirty-three chapters of this most quickening portion of the Mosaic law. The last word has certainly not yet been spoken in a subject which modern criticism somewhat precipitately claims to have now settled beyond the possibilities of controversy.

We have now considered our Lord's testimony to the trustworthiness of the Old Testament, more particularly with reference to the earlier portions of the sacred volume and to the Mosaic law. His testimony as to the prophets, and as to the historical events of the old covenant, we reserve for the following paper.

As far as we have gone, we appear to have found that our first impressions have been confirmed by subsequent and more particular investigations. Throughout these investigations the tenor of our Lord's references may be equitably claimed as supporting—it may be indirectly, yet in a manner that carries much conviction—what we have termed the Traditional view of the Old Testament. And this claim our opponents do not seem disposed to reject. Nay, the very fact that assumptions have been made as to the possibilities of a real nescience, on the part of our Lord in His human nature, seem to imply some general belief that the aspect in which He regarded the Old Testament does not harmonise with the aspect in which it is regarded by modern criticism.

Are not all these things full of suggestion, and full also of monitory significance? If the testimony of Christ is what it has appeared to be, then the likelihood of offence being given by a criticism that has to maintain itself by attenuating the real knowledge of Christ has become perilously great, and His own words come solemnly home to us: "It must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"⁶

⁵ Consider chap. xviii. 17.

⁶ Matt. xviii. 7.