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The Historicity of the Mosaic Tabernacle

James Orr

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It has come to be regarded as a truism by the newer school of Old Testament criticism that the tabernacle described in Exodus xxv ff. and xxxv ff., as set up by Moses in the wilderness, is unhistorical. It never had a real existence, but is a devout imagination spun from the brains of post-exilic scribes. It is but the Temple of Solomon "made portable," halved in dimensions, and carried back in fancy to the time of the wilderness wanderings. It belongs, critically speaking, to the document P, or Priestly Writing, which, originating after the exile, is of no authority as a picture of Mosaic times. It is not denied that there was a tent of some simple sort as a covering for the ark—rather, perhaps, a succession of tents—and evidence of this is thought to be found in the mention of such a tent in the narrative of E, the Elohist, in Exodus xxxiii, 7 ff., with later notices in Numbers xi, 16, 24 ff.; xii, 1 ff.; and Deuteronomy xxxi, 14 f. Everything in these older descriptions, it is said, is of a simpler order. The tent is

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pitched outside the camp, not within it; the purpose is revelation, rather than worship; there is no ministering priesthood, but Joshua alone has charge. Outside the descriptions in P no trace of the elaborate "Tent of Meeting" is discoverable. It is hence to be dismissed as unreal. This is the view of the Mosaic tabernacle introduced by Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen, and now found in almost every critical text-book and Biblical Encyclopædia that is published. I need only refer as examples to the articles on the Tabernacle in Hastings' *Dictionaries of the Bible* (alike in four-volume and one-volume dictionaries), and in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*; and to the recently published *Commentary on Exodus* by Dr. Driver, and *Introduction to the Pentateuch* by Dr. Chapman, writers who would be regarded, presumably, as belonging to the moderate wing of the school.

The rejection of the historicity of the tabernacle rests, as just said, in part on critical grounds—on the alleged late date of the P writing, and the supposed conflict of its descriptions with those in E—but far more on broader considerations, arising out of the conditions of the history, and the general view taken of the religious development. The tabernacle disappears as part of the total picture of the Mosaic age given in the documents JE and P, but specially in P. That picture, it is held, is late, legendary, and incredible. Religion had not, it is affirmed, then attained the stage which made the conception of such a tabernacle possible; and the narratives, when examined, show in every part their legendary and unhistorical character. To take only one point: the numbers of the Israelites who are said to have left Egypt at the Exodus—600,000 fighting men, implying a population of nearly 2,000,000—are declared to be impossible, and still less possible is the subsistence of such an immense multitude in the desert, which, at the utmost, could not have sustained more than 5,000 or 6,000. Then the amount of precious metals, and the high artistic skill, presupposed in the accounts of the making of the tabernacle, are such as a multitude of trembling fugitives cannot be conceived of as possessing. The simple weight of the massive boards, pillars, and heavy sockets of silver and bronze is beyond what the means of transport could convey. Or think of the elaborate weaving and dyeing operations and refined embroidery of fine linen implied in the production of the coverings and hangings of the structure. Putting all together, the case against the historicity of the tabernacle is claimed to be complete.

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It may seem then, as if, in venturing to challenge this array of reasons for setting aside the tabernacle of the Exodus account, I were undertaking an absolutely hopeless task. I do not, however, myself feel that it is so; and I shall leave you to judge, when I have presented the other side, whether a great deal more is not to be said for the historicity of this sacred structure than the critical theories allow.

The purely critical question I do not discuss in detail. So far from admitting that the Levitical Code—the so-called P Code—with its complex of laws, rites, and institutions, is a production of the age after the exile, I believe this to be an arbitrary and wholly preposterous conception, for which no sound reasons have been adduced, and which ere long is bound to be abandoned by thoughtful minds. Imagine Ezra producing this Code of laws—a thing unheard of before—in presence of the returned community of exiles at Jerusalem—a community deeply divided, disaffected, religiously faithless, and in large measure opposed to the reforms of Ezra himself and of Nehemiah—and obtaining from them without demur the acceptance of its egregious historical statements, *e.g.*, that the Levites, unknown before Ezekiel, had been set apart by Jehovah in the wilderness, and from time immemorial had been richly endowed with cities, pasturages, and tithes, and beyond this, the acceptance of its heavy and entirely new financial burdens. I have, however, argued this fully elsewhere, without ever seeing an answer to my argument, and do not dwell upon it further now.

Much more weight, I grant, belongs to the historical difficulties, which here also I would only touch upon, as none of them are new, and they have been discussed and appraised times without number, without the rejection of the Mosaic account following as a necessary consequence. It may be observed that it is not the P document alone, but the JE histories as well, which narrate the marvellous increase of the people of Israel in Goshen, and the immense host that went out at the Exodus; they are pictured as leaving Egypt as an orderly, marshalled host, spoiling the Egyptians of their wealth, freely thrust upon them to secure their speedy departure; their marches, deliverances, and the provision made for them are not figured as natural events, but as the result of the miraculous guidance and bountiful care of Jehovah, their God and Redeemer; the entire history is penetrated by a supernatural element without which, it is freely admitted, it is not intelligible at all, but which, if granted, is in keeping with both the

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antecedents and the consequents in the history of the nation, and becomes part of an orderly sequence of divine events and revelations. I am not concerned, therefore, about schemes even for the reduction of the numbers, which do not seem to me generally happy, and have difficulties to encounter in the consistency of representation in all parts of the narrative. To reduce the numbers to say, 5,000 or 6,000 seems to me absurd; yet, unless this is done—if, *e.g.*, you allow 20,000 or 30,000—the whole difficulty remains, for the desert, under present conditions, is as incapable of naturally supporting that number as it would be of supporting ten times as many.

I leave these outer subjects to return to the narratives of the tabernacle itself, and to ask whether there are not much stronger reasons for accepting them as historical than there are for rejecting them, as the critics do, *in toto*.

The tabernacle, on the critical theory, was, as already said, a creation of the exilian or post-exilian mind—part of a Code intended to apply to the restored community of Israel. Regarded as fiction, it is an extraordinarily elaborate, detailed, and minute piece of invention. Wellhausen cannot find language strong enough to express his contempt for it. "Art products of pedantry," he says, "...One would imagine that he (the Priestly Writer) was giving specifications to measurers for estimates, or that he was writing for carpet-makers or upholsterers... of a piece with this tendency is an indescribable pedantry, belonging to the very being of the Priestly Code.... Nor is it any sign of originality, rather of senility," etc. (*History of Israel*, pp. 337, 348, 350, 353). But now ask—What is the *motive* of this intolerable web-spinning on the part of the Priestly Writer? From the point of view of the theory, it is to provide a Code to be put in force after the return from exile; at least to furnish regulation for worship in the new community. For this purpose could, anything be conceived less suitable than what was actually produced? Instead of a Code for a new temple at Jerusalem, everything takes the shape of a sanctuary and Code of laws for the desert, where the conditions were totally different. The portable tabernacle, with its curtains, coverings, regulations for construction, placing, transport, etc., had no longer the semblance of applicability, while the law providing that all sacrifices should be offered at the door of the tabernacle lost all relevancy after the relaxing rule of Deuteronomy xii, 15. On the theory of fiction the tabernacle must be viewed as a construction wholly in the air—a pure play of imagination from the motive of

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inventing an ideal state of things in the past. How far does this tally with reason or with fact?

The explanation proposed is that the idea of the tabernacle was obtained by taking Solomon's temple as a model, halving its dimensions, making it portable by converting it into a tent, then projecting it back into Mosaic times. The temple was not an enlarged copy in stone of the tabernacle, but the tabernacle was a copy of the temple, reduced to half its size. How does this tally with the facts? I need not dwell long on the structure of Solomon's temple. It was a stately building of hewn stone on a fixed spot, 60 cubits (roughly 90 feet) in length 20 cubits (30 feet) in breadth, 30 cubits (45 feet) in height interior measurement. It was divided by a partition and veil into two apartments—the inner, or holy of holies, 20 cubits in length, breadth and height, with a chamber above; the outer, or holy place, specially called in the narrative the "temple," 40 cubits in length, 20 in breadth, but 30 in height. Before the temple was a lofty porch, in front of which stood two high bronze pillars—Jachin and Boaz—and round the building, adhering; to its walls on the sides and back were three stories of chambers for storage and, perhaps, dormitories for the priests. The temple stood in the court, the dimensions of which are not given—they are generally reckoned as double those of the tabernacle—and this court again within an outer or greater court, the size, situation, and relation of which to the adjoining royal buildings are still matters of keen dispute, and do not concern us here. It was, according to the theory, the imaginative halving of the proportions of this temple and its appurtenances which yielded the tabernacle. A very little consideration, however, will show the fallaciousness of this plausible speculation. There is not such exactitude of proportion as the theory requires, and it is far easier to understand how the

temple should be evolved out of the simpler structure of the tabernacle, than how that tent-like sanctuary should come to be as a simplification of the highly complex Solomonic temple.

Picture to yourself, first, for clearness sake, what in general the tabernacle was. Its name '*ōhel mō'ēdh*, "Tent of Meeting," denotes it as the place of meeting between Jehovah and His people, as the other name *mishkān*, "Dwelling," interchanged with the former in the P descriptions, marks it as the place where Jehovah abode with Israel. The tabernacle enclosure, or court, 100 cubits (150 feet) long, by 50 cubits (75 feet) broad, was formed by white linen curtains suspended from pillars, 5 cubits, or about 7½ feet high. Its entrance was towards the

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east. In the innermost half of this enclosure stood the tabernacle itself. The tabernacle may be briefly described as consisting of a framework of gilded boards, set in silver sockets, over which were cast successive coverings—the first a beautifully embroidered curtain, made of ten breadths, joined, in sets of five, by golden clasps in the middle; the next, a covering of goat's hair, the tent-covering proper, made of eleven breadths, therefore larger than the former, and overlapping it as it hung; finally, a rough covering of porpoise or dugong skins, to protect against the weather. A chief problem about the tabernacle is, whether these coverings were stretched flat-wise over the top of the framework, hanging down at sides and back almost to the ground, or, as Mr. Fergusson and others have ably argued, were raised by a ridge-pole to form a sloping roof, corresponding to the character of a tent. It is certainly in favour of the latter conception that nothing could be less like a tent than the coffin-like structure, with a pall thrown over it, which results from the flat-roof theory, not to speak of the danger of sagging, and the concealment by the curtain of the gilded work and bars of the outer framework, also of the beauty of the curtain itself from the view of those within. Professor A. R. Kennedy meets this by a hypothesis that the framework did not consist of solid boards, but of open frames, through which the curtain would be visible. The theory is ingenious, but has its own difficulties. The mention of "pins" and other appliances of a tent support Mr. Fergusson's view. However this may be, and it is immaterial for the present argument, the main facts about the wilderness sanctuary are clear enough. The tabernacle was not a large structure—only 30 cubits (45 feet) long, by 10 cubits (15 feet) broad. It was divided, like the temple, into a holy and a most holy place—of the dimensions of which I shall speak immediately. A veil divided the two places, and an embroidered curtain, hung from five pillars, closed the entrance.

Such was the tabernacle structure. In its outer court was the altar of burnt offering—only 5 cubits (7½ feet) square and 3 cubits (4½ feet) high (Exodus xxvii, 1)—and the bronze layer for the ablutions of the priests (Exodus xxx, 17-21). In the holy place were the golden candlestick on the South side, the table of shewbread on the north side, and the golden altar of incense, again quite small, 1 cubit square and 2 cubits high, in front of the veil. The altar was regarded as belonging rather to the most holy than to the holy place. In the holiest place, finally, stood the ark of the covenant. It is not always realized how very small this sacred object, with its covering of gold, or

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mercy-seat, and the cherubim at either end, was. It was only 2½ cubits (3¾ feet) long; 1½ cubits (2 feet 3 inches) broad, and the same—1½ cubits—in height.

This is a very cursory description, but it will suffice to enable us to judge of the theory of the halving of Solomon's temple. Beyond the fact that in interior length and breadth the temple was twice the size of the tabernacle the theory has very little support.¹ The tabernacle court is commonly assumed to be half the dimensions of the inner court of Solomon's temple. In reality it is the other way. Nothing is known of the dimensions of the court of the temple, and it is only by inference from the dimensions of the tabernacle court (100 cubits by 50) that we reach the probability that the temple court may have been 200 cubits long and 100 broad. There is no certainty even about that. If it be so, is the fact that the size is not mentioned in Kings not a reason for believing that the description of the tabernacle is presupposed? Passing next to the tabernacle, it is again commonly assumed that the holy place and holy of holies in that sanctuary had the same relative proportions as in the Solomonic temple, only halved *i.e.*, that the holy of holies was 10 cubits square, and the holy place twice that length, *viz.*: 20 cubits. But it should carefully be observed that this again is nowhere stated in the description, which, on the contrary, explicitly declares that the veil dividing the two places hung directly below the clasps of the curtain overhead (Exodus xxvi, 33), *i.e.*, presumably in the middle. That is the only place it could be, on Mr. Fergusson's view of the construction; and even if that be rejected, it remains a serious difficulty, for the shifting back of the joining of the curtains (40 cubits long in all), 20 cubits from the entrance, leaves a full 10 cubits to hang down at the back. I do not wish to press this unduly; I only wish to point out that the usual assumption that the holy and most holy places were modelled on the proportions of the temple has no support in the text itself, which gives no dimensions at all. In other respects the proportions do not agree. In the temple the holiest place was 20 cubits in length, breadth, and height;

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the holy place was 40 cubits long, but 30 cubits high. This has no analogy in the tabernacle. When we proceed to the furniture and belongings of the sanctuaries the halving theory breaks down altogether. There is no halving in the ark, for it is the same old Mosaic ark which accompanied the Israelites in their wanderings, which—shall and disproportionate as it was—was brought up by Solomon, and placed in his more splendid house. What Solomon did was to erect two new massive cherubim of olive wood, plated with gold, the wings of which stretched from side to side of the chamber, and overshadowed the mercy seat and its lesser figures. In the holy place, instead of one candlestick there were 10; instead of one table there were, according to Chronicles, also 10; the dimensions of the altar of incense are not given; in no single particular is a principle of halving discernible in the tabernacle. The altar of burnt-offering is an even more signal example. The dimensions are not given in I Kings, but Chronicles, probably on good authority, gives it at 20 cubits square and 10 cubits high (iv, 1)—an immense enlargement of the 5 cubits square altar of the tabernacle. I think, accordingly, I am justified in saying that, as far as the new theory rests on any assumption of halving the sizes in Solomon's temple, it has no real foundation.

There is another point worth noticing about the temple as bearing on our subject. While special detailed descriptions are given of the new objects in the sanctuary—as the great

¹ Mr. Fergusson, in his article "Temple," in Smith's *D.B.*, while contending strongly for the historicity of the tabernacle, gives too much support to the halving theory when he writes of the Temple: "The first thing that strikes us is that all the arrangements were identical, and the dimensions of every part exactly double those of the preceding structure." Mr. Fergusson's love of symmetry, as shown in the paper leads him here too far.

molten sea and the ten lavers with their ornamented bases in the court of the temple—only allusion is made to such objects as existed in the older sanctuary, as the golden candlestick and the table of shewbread, with their utensils. Beyond the fact of the multiplication of their number (I Kings vii, 48, 49; II Chronicles iv, 7, 8) nothing is said of them. The obvious explanation is that, as these were fashioned after the model of the same objects in the tabernacle, further particulars regarding them were not needed. So, as utensils familiar to the reader, only allusion is made to the pots, shovels, basins and fleshhooks, connected with the altar (I Kings vii, 40, 45; II Chronicles iv, 11, 15).

To a certain extent, therefore, the tabernacle appears as the postulate of the temple, not *vice versa*; and this relation is confirmed when, moving backwards, we glance at the history. The testimony of Chronicles (I Chronicles xvi, 39, 40; II Chronicles i, 3) to the fact that in David's time the "Tent of Meeting" was set up at Gibeon, is discredited by the critics, the ark being at the time lodged in a new tent made for it by David on

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Mount Zion (II Samuel vi, 17). But I Kings also declares (viii, 4) that, at the dedication of the temple, the Tent of Meeting and its holy vessels were brought up to be placed in the new sanctuary. This reference, though found in the LXX as well as in the Hebrew text, is expunged by the critics as an interpolation; or it is alleged that the name "Tent of Meeting" is given to David's provisional tent, a usage without warrant. Without, however, dwelling on this, there are other indications which are not open to such objection. It is quite incidentally that, in the previous history in I Samuel, we come, in the notice of the tabernacle at Shiloh, under its old name, *'ōhel mō'ēdh*, on mention of "the lamp of God" burning, as directed, all night (I Samuel iii, 3; *cf.* Exodus xxvii, 20, 21); and at Nob, of the "shewbread" (I Samuel, xxi)—a characteristic institution of the Levitical Code. It is only, as it were, by accident, that the mention of "lamp" and "showbread" occurs, otherwise their existence also would probably be denied. The argument from silence, as these instances show, is a precarious one. Even Wellhausen admits that at Shiloh there must have been—as at Nob later—a considerable priestly establishment (*History of Israel*, pp. 19, 128), though only Eli and his two sons are mentioned. The reply given to this is that the sanctuary at Shiloh cannot have been the tabernacle, for it is called twice a "temple" (I Samuel i, 9; iii, 3), and had "doors" and "doorposts," implying a permanent structure. On this last point it is to be observed that Old Testament tradition was quite clear that prior to the temple, Jehovah's dwelling was "a tent and a tabernacle" (*'ōhel* and *mishkān*, n Samuel vii, 6; I Chronicles xvii, 5)—the ark of God dwelt "within curtains." It is no contradiction of this that during its century—long stay at Shiloh, the "Tent of Meeting" may have gathered round it other structures, supports and conveniences—gateposts, sleeping chambers for priests and attendants, etc. But this suggests to me another remark which I think is of great importance. Are we bound to suppose that the tabernacle continued during the whole of the long period between the Exodus and the building of the temple—according to I Kings vi, 1, 480 years; on the shortest reckoning about 300—without change, renewal, replacement of parts occasioned by age and decay? The tabernacle as set up in the wilderness was, after all, not a structure that could for a very long space of time, endure stress of wind and weather, not to speak of simple decay of material. Boards will not hold out for ever, even apart from frequent removals and journeyings, curtains will wear out, and become faded and

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tern. The tabernacle could not for three or four centuries retain the fresh, beautiful appearance it had from the first, and, with general adherence to the original model, would undergo repair, replacement, and, as need required, modification. There is no necessity, therefore, for supposing that the "Tent of Meeting," as it existed at Shiloh and Nob, was in every particular an exact facsimile of the original wilderness structure.

In this connection an interesting corroboration of the historicity of the tabernacle may be based on the identity of the sacred ark in pre-Solomonic and Solomonic times I have often wondered that the implications of this identity are not more dwelt upon than they are. There was much that was new in Solomon's temple, but it should carefully be observed that the ark at least was not new. There is little dispute that it was the one Mosaic ark which, after many vicissitudes, was brought up, and deposited by Solomon in his new house, where it remained till the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. The notices we have of this ark—its cherubim (I Samuel iv, 4), the staves by which it was borne, and the tables of stone it contained (I Kings viii, 7-9)—show that it answered so far to the description of the ark in Exodus. The suggestion that the cherubim are in unhistorical addition (Driver, etc.) is opposed not only by the text of the LXX, which agrees with the Hebrew, but by the nature of the case. What motive could exist for interpolating the two small cherubim of the ark, while Solomon's temple, with its large overshadowing cherubim, still stood? The passage in I Kings mentioning the staves and the tables of stone was written while the temple still existed—"there they are," it is said of the staves, "unto this day" (viii, 8). In Deuteronomy also, even if we relegate that book to the age of Josiah, the ark of acacia wood and its contents are described in accordance with the ark of Exodus (Deuteronomy ix, 1-5). In any case, and this is the essential point, there must have been a familiarity with the form and nature of the ark up till the very end of the temple, and if priestly writers described it in the exile, they could hardly have ventured on a wide divergence from the reality. On the theory that the tabernacle was a copy, in reduced form, of the temple, we must suppose that the ark of the tabernacle was a copy also, and this guarantees that the description given of it corresponded very much with the reality of the Mosaic ark. It was, in fact, the one ark, the character of which was well known in exilic times, that persisted to the very end. What follows from this? Ark and tabernacle go closely

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together. It is granted that there must have been from the beginning a tent of some kind as a protection and habitation for the ark. But the tent must have corresponded in some degree with the character of the ark, and if this was the beautiful, gold-covered object which we have seen reason to believe that it was, in other words, if it agreed with the description given of it in Exodus—it is highly probable that, the tabernacle sheltering it would have some degree of splendour also; would be a habitation worthy in dignity and significance of the Jehovah whose ark it was. The counter theory that the ark was originally simply a fetish-chest, with perhaps two meteoric stones representing the deity, I dismiss as a figment of rationalistic imagination contrary to all historical evidence. The ark had a well-known history; men could verify what it was like at the time when David and Solomon brought it up to Zion; when Deuteronomy was written; in the age when the temple was destroyed; and we are on the safest ground when we affirm that Exodus correctly describes it, and with it the tabernacle that enshrined it.

This brings us back to the primary descriptions in Exodus; and to the question of their historical worth. Dr. Driver and other writers say flatly that the tabernacle could not have been historical, because, apart from the costliness and skill implied in its construction, the descriptions are "marked by omissions and obscurities" which indicate that "they are not the working directions upon which a fabric, such as is described, could be actually constructed" (Exodus, p. 427). It may be sufficient to put in opposition to this the opinion of an expert working architect like Mr. Fergusson, who as the result of his minute study of the subject, declared, "It seems to me clear that it must have been written by some one who had seen the tabernacle standing. No one could have worked it out in such detail without ocular demonstration of the way in which the parts were put together" (cited in Speaker's *Commentary on "Exodus,"* p. 379, *cf.* Art. on "Temple" in Smith's *D.B.*) Stress is laid upon the fact (Driver, Kennedy, etc.) that the bulk and weight of the materials of the tabernacle (boards, bars, sockets, pillars, etc.) were such that they could not be transported in the six covered wagons offered by the princes (Numbers vii, 2 ff.). We need not suppose, however, that these gift-wagons were the only means of transport at the disposal of the Levites for this purpose (*cf.* Keil, *in loc.*).

The most plausible critical objection, to my mind, to the historicity of the tabernacle is that drawn from the difference

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in representation in the few JE passages already referred to and the elaborate descriptions in the so-called P sections, which are the main ones. I do not accept the late date of the alleged Priestly Writing, but I do not dispute the distinction in style and character between it and the notices referred to in the E or JE source. But even here the differences are greatly exaggerated, and may perhaps most easily be explained by the fact that the P sections are devoted to a formal and detailed description of the tabernacle, its relations to the rest of the camp, its rules for transport, etc., while the other more popular narrative fixes attention mainly on the incidents, and uses simple and untechnical phraseology in its allusions to comings and goings between camp and tabernacle. It is true that, before the tabernacle and ark were made, Moses, at the time when God was displeased with his people,—possibly till the tabernacle was reared—was used to pitch the tent outside the camp, "afar off," it is said, and the people went out to him (Exodus xxxiii, 7-11). There were then no Levites to attend to the tent, so that the absence of mention of them implies no contradiction to the later law. When, however, it is affirmed, on the basis of Numbers xi and xii, that the same rule prevailed in the wilderness wanderings, this can only be made good by ignoring many clear indications in the JE narrative itself, that the camp was not ordinarily outside, but within the camp, and that it was served by a Levitical priesthood.

In proof of the former, given by me more extensively elsewhere (*Problem of the Old Testament*, pp. 167 ff.), I need only refer to the declaration in Numbers xiv, 44, that "the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and Moses, departed not out of the camp," implying, as plainly as language can do, that its resting place—therefore the place of the tabernacle—was *within* the camp; or again to the formula in Numbers x, 36, at the resting of the ark—"Return, O Lord, unto the ten thousands of Israel," which shows the same thing. The Levitical priesthood is amply attested by the notices in Deuteronomy (x, 6, 8; xxxi, 9, 25, 26) and Joshua (iii-vi). When, again, it is noted as a feature of contrast with the P description that in JE Jehovah descends in the pillar to the door of the tabernacle to speak with Moses, it is not observed that

in the P part also (Exodus xxix, 42, 43) it is said: "At the door of the tent of meeting to speak there unto thee." I cannot, therefore, admit that, while the style of representation is somewhat freer and more popular, there is any essential disagreement between the different accounts warranting us in declaring that the P

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description is unhistorical. It is a very significant admission which Dr. Driver makes at the end of his long discussion to prove that "it does not seem possible to regard the Tent of Meeting, as described by P, as historical," when he says "Although there are great difficulties in accepting all the details as historical, the general plan and outline of P's tabernacle may rest upon historical tradition to a greater extent than we are aware. There are abundant indications showing that the ritual system of P is a development from old, and in some cases archaic ceremonial usage; and the same, *mutatis mutandis*, may have been the case with his picture of the tabernacle" (Exodus, pp. 430-1). If that is granted, I fail to see why, if the untenable assumption of the postexilic origin of the Code is given up, we may not go a good way further, and say that P's picture of the tabernacle goes back to the times when the tabernacle actually existed, and rests on sound historical knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Dr. WILLIAM WOODS SMYTH said: We have been privileged to hear this interesting subject treated by a high, if not our highest living authority. And the subject and occasion are singularly in place just after the publication of Canon Driver's work on Exodus.

It is not sufficiently borne in mind that the Egyptian people, and in considerable degree Israel, at the era of the Exodus had reached a very high state of civilization. Moses was brought up in a court which for culture and refinement surpassed every Imperial and Royal Court in Europe of our time.

Again, Israel in their Exodus "spoiled the Egyptians," and the wealth of Egypt at this time, only after the Rameses period, was enormous. And they owed it all to Israel because of long unpaid labour. This great wealth supplied everything embodied in the Mosaic Tabernacle.

While we acknowledge the importance and utility of Professor Orr's interesting paper, I must express my regret that Professor Orr should have adopted the theory of J.E.P. documents, when so great an authority as Professor Eerdmans, now in the chair of the redoubtable Kuenen, throws them overboard. Where is the use of placing any reliance upon a hypothesis, which is based on the

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fallacious argument, that a given writer always adheres to one, and one only, style in language, composition, method, and illustration in writing, when as a matter of fact most writers run through the whole gamut of composition, the subject matter of discourse having a potent influence in varying the style of writing. Carmichael of Montreal showed the strata the Critics contend for in the Bible to be present in Macaulay's writings. Someone has pointed out that the principles of criticism upon which this farrago of "J," "E," "P," offered us is

based, would with more reason compel us to believe that the writings of Burns show the existence of four or five men of that name.

St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, for the name of our Saviour in the early part of that Epistle uses the form "Jesus Christ." After these chapters we find almost exclusively the form "Christ Jesus" and "Christ," or "Lord Jesus Christ," till the last few verses of the Epistle; where a supplementary passage of three verses occurs, and we have again the form "Jesus Christ." So far as anything the Critics have to show, it is open to us to point out some differences of style in connection with the different use of the sacred Name. Even the Critics fail to convince themselves, unless they are permitted to call in the agency of an unknown, unknowable, unnameable, and unhistoric being called a "Redactor."

Mr. MAUNDER said: May it be permitted to a practical astronomer to express how the general methods of the Higher Criticism strike him? It might seem as if astronomy had no bearing upon such methods, but it follows from the nature of astronomy, which necessitates the collation of observations made in different places and extending over great periods of time, that astronomers are continually obliged to make use of observations made by others. This brings the written document into great importance, as it may be necessary to use observations made a century or more ago. And what is the light in which experience has taught astronomers to regard the written document? Conan Doyle said of the British mob of a hundred years ago that it had been bludgeoned into a respect for law and order. It is hardly too strong an expression to use to say that experience has bludgeoned astronomers into the most scrupulous respect for the written document as it stands.

I could give, if necessary, any number of illustrations from astronomical history in which an account of some apparent contra-

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diction or, because it did not seem to fit in with accepted views, the record of some observations has been rejected. Time and again the written document, sometimes after a hundred years, has vindicated itself, and those who rejected it have suffered in their reputation.

It would be impossible for an astronomer to stand up before his colleagues and advocate some theory which he was basing upon documents that he was treating in the way in which the Higher Critics habitually and of set purpose treat the documents presented to them in the Bible. I am not speaking now from the point of view of my belief that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, but simply from the point of view that it is an existing document of which we wish to make use. If an astronomer were dealing with a record of observations which he felt that he could treat with the freedom with which the Higher Critics treat the text of Scripture, if he felt himself obliged to dissect, to alter, to eliminate, even to one-hundredth part of the extent that has been done in this critical handling of Scripture, he would feel bound to reject it completely as not worth wasting labour upon; it would go, the whole of it, into the waste paper basket at once.

It is, therefore, from the point of view of a practical astronomer, that the methods of the Higher Critics seem to me essentially opposed to the principles of science.

Mr. MARTIN ROUSE said: I can only testify that I know Dr. Orr as in no sense a Higher Critic, but as a defender of the Pentateuch as a firsthand and faithful record of events. It was in this character that two years ago, during my sojourn in Toronto, he lectured to vast crowds of students and others in the University Theatre and in two of the largest churches in Toronto, not to speak of his series of addresses given there to the scholars of the Bible Training School and their friends. Indeed, in the chief Canadian newspaper (*The Toronto Globe*) he was termed "a great war horse" of orthodoxy.

I remember an argument uttered there, to which he alludes in this paper, and by which he upset the theory that the Levitical Code was written upon the return of the Jews from Babylon: the priests who returned were far more numerous than the other Levites who did so—twelve times as numerous, as shown by the muster-rolls. How, in face of such conditions, could Jeshua or Ezra

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or any other priestly scribe have set down as of solemn authority the ordinance, that the mass of the people should give a tithe of all their annual produce to the Levites, and they again a tithe of their tithe, or only a hundredth part of the produce, to the priests? In speaking of the earlier part of the Pentateuch, also, Dr. Orr remarked that Genesis x, with its accurate and comprehensive table of affinities among the nations of the world, stood out as a grand witness to the authentic and contemporary character of the records in Genesis; since it would have been impossible to construct such a table even a single century after the dispersion of the peoples, when settled in their widely severed habitats and speaking tongues so diversified.

The difficulty of the existence of a "tent of meeting" in the wilderness before Moses was bidden to make one is obviated, if in Exodus xxxiii, 7, we read "his own tent" with the Samaritan Hebrew text instead of "the tent" with the Masoretic Hebrew, making the verse run "And Moses took his own tent and pitched it outside the camp afar off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting" (see *Impl. Bible Dict., Samaritan Pentateuch*).

Doctor Orr's idea that the beautiful tabernacle curtains and the goats' hair tent that covered them had to be renewed from time to time appears (at first sight) to be borne out by the Divine statement made through Nathan to David, "I have gone from tent to tent, and from one tabernacle to another," I Chron. xvii, 5. But the two outer coverings, of ram skins and skins of the *takhash*, must have given them a nearly perfect protection against sun and storm: while the Divine words may well refer to the fact that, after the ark of the covenant was brought back by the Philistines, it went no more to the tabernacle at Shiloh or Gibeon, but first to the house of Abinadab at Kirjath Jearim, then to the house of Obed-Edom at Perez-Uzza, and lastly to a tent that David had pitched for it in Zion—I Sam. vii, 1; II Sam. vi, 5-10, 12, 17 *et pll*.

Dr. THIRTLE: I am struck by the want of consistency in the critical position as a whole. At one time we are told that the ancient Hebrews were an unimaginative people; that they had no faculty for the romantic. Yet, all the same, their literature has been dealt with in a manner which cannot but suggest that they included men who were veritable adepts in the work of fiction, men

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whose writings and compilations were, in fact, anything but what they seem. Moreover, as we have been reminded this afternoon, among the leaders in Hebrew literature there were men who (so it is said) set themselves to provide, or rather devise, a *model* structure a good while after the same had been realized in a stately copy! In other words, we are told that these men found delight in describing institutions which never existed; and, having projected the same into a far distant past, suggested that they formed the germ and inspiration of things which had since become well known! And what is more, these men succeeded in foisting the said description upon an unsuspecting community. These various positions do not cohere: in fact, any one of them excludes the others.

Surely some of us remember the time when all possible was done to represent Moses as a decreasing figure in history and literature. It was said, among other things, that he could not have done the things which the Old Testament places to his account. Going into details, Critics sought to show that legend had gathered round the people of Israel; that the provisions of the Decalogue were in some respects inconceivable; and that the writings of Moses were, in part if not as a whole, pious frauds. When, however, it became evident that the art of writing was more ancient than had been supposed; that the nations which surrounded Palestine had laws which were marvellously comprehensive; and that the remains of other peoples contained references to ancient Israel, then, by steady steps, Moses became an ascending figure, and to-day he is increasing in reputation both as a man and a law-giver. Indeed, with the discovery of the Code of Khammurabi, it has come to be held that Moses was not only a leader of his people and a great law-giver, but likewise a statesman well acquainted with the laws of other nations, and, moreover, able to make use of the accumulated wisdom and experience of such nations!

These facts, as I maintain, indicate the most serious defect of Criticism: it fails to do justice to the documents which relate to the man, his people, and the laws which stand in his name. If Criticism would but take due account of the Old Testament, it would find therein a solution of many of its difficulties. For example, it is said that the children of Israel could not possibly find food in the wilderness. Here the record helps us; the Divine Redeemer of the people gave them manna—"bread from heaven."

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Again, when the wisdom and power of Moses is considered, can we do better than follow the Hebrew record with its statement that the law-giver received instruction from God, and that those that executed his commands shared a like endowment from Heaven? As we read, everything was done "according to the pattern shown in the mount."

In a word; Criticism cannot "have it both ways," either with regard to the people of Israel, or to Moses "the man of God." Ark, Tabernacle, and people go together, and Moses occupies the central place. No other nation of antiquity had such a deliverance, such a leader, such institutions. The history presented by the Old Testament documents is one that throbs with the acts of men, and tells of the over-ruling power of God, neither of which factors have due representation in the processes of Criticism, which, in separating itself from history in its most simple expression, yields, as might be supposed, results that are discordant in themselves and mutually destructive.

Sir ROBERT ANDERSON, K.C.B., said: The tent of meeting, which we all mean when we speak of "The Tabernacle," never stood outside the camp. On account of the apostasy of the golden calf, which occurred while Moses was on the mount receiving instructions to make the Tabernacle, he pitched the then tent of meeting outside the camp. But when the Tabernacle was made, it was dedicated by blood-shedding, and placed in the middle of the camp, a position which it occupied ever afterwards.

"The historicity of the Tabernacle" is a question to be decided by evidence; and questions of the kind should be left to men who have practical experience in dealing with evidence—a category which does not include the Critics. Indeed if the matter were not so serious and so solemn, the methods of the Critics might amuse us. Any clever nisi pries lawyer could do their work better and make a stronger case against the Bible. But those of us who have been accustomed to attend the Law Courts know how little that sort of talk weighs with sensible men.

One word more. I think that in dealing with this question we should not forget the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. For with the Christian the Lord's testimony to the "historicity" of the Pentateuch is an end of controversy. One is amazed at the blindness of the Critics in ignoring the fact that it was after the Resurrection

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when the Lord stood free from all the limitations of His humiliation—whatever they were—and spoke with full Divine knowledge, that in the most explicit and emphatic terms He accredited the Books of Moses as Divine. For then it was that, "beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." And again, referring back to His previous teaching, "He said unto them, these are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me"—the well known three-fold division of the Hebrew Canon. (Luke xxiv, 27, 44.)

Professor HULL said: Though I am not in a position to speak on the details of the question before the Meeting, I would like to say that I have followed the line of march of the Exodus step by step through the wilderness of Sinai and Arabia Petræa, and I can confirm the absolute integrity and accuracy of the sacred writers; never was a description of a great migration so definite, clear, and evidently true. I cannot separate the story of the Tabernacle from its historical setting, and that I have been able to confirm by personal experience.

Anyone who reads, with a candid mind, the account in Exodus xxiv-xxxvii cannot fail to come to the conclusion that the details of events which took place at the foot of Mount Sinai (Jebel Mush) were written by one who was a personal actor and spectator of the events there described; and amongst these were the directions given to Moses by Jehovah for the construction of the Ark which was henceforth to accompany the people through their journeyings into the land of Canaan, and the presence of which is so deeply interwoven with their history. For myself I accept the account in Exodus—whether dealing with miraculous or non-miraculous matters, as I would that of any reliable historian. It is the only source of our knowledge of these events, and the whole Jewish nation is a standing witness to its truth.

It is now so many years since my visit with the party sent out by the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1883-4 that many members of the Institute may not have had any opportunity of becoming acquainted with its results; these will be found in vol. xxi of the *Journal of Transactions* (for 1887-8), being the address delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Society.

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The little volume, *Mount Seir, Sinai and Palestine*, which I wrote with details of the expedition is now, I fear, out of print.

The Rev. J. A. LIGHTFOOT said: It seems to me that a strong argument for the historicity of the Mosaic Tabernacle may be derived from the character of the narrative of its construction:—(1) Two accounts of the details of the Tabernacle are given. One gives us the order in which it was revealed to Moses, Exodus xxv to xxx; the other gives us the order in which it was actually constructed, briefly in Exodus xxxv, 10-19, and fully in Exodus xxxvi to xxxix. The fact that we have two accounts gives a verisimilitude to the whole transaction. Surely this would be a quite unaccountable method of narrating, if the writer were an Exilic romancer. It is indeed pointless and clumsy, unless it is a history of what happened. (2) But the two accounts strikingly differ in the order in which they deal with the different parts. The first begins with the Ark and the Mercy-seat (the contents of the Holiest), the Table and the Candlestick (contents of the Holy Place); then follows the Tabernacle. But the second begins with the Tabernacle, and places the making of the Ark, etc., after the Tabernacle had been made. Now if we are dealing with a historical narrative this change of order is natural and intelligible. It was natural that in the order of revelation the Ark should be mentioned first, for it was the central object, and the Tabernacle was constructed for its sake. It was natural that in the order of construction the Tabernacle should come first, for its resting-place must be ready for the Ark before that sacred thing itself was made.

One other point of verisimilitude in the narrative is worth noticing. The series of instructions to Moses closes with an injunction as to Sabbath observance (Exodus xxxi, 13-17). This comes in naturally as a warning, as if God said: "I have set before you a sacred work to be done, but remember that its sacredness will not justify a breach of the Sabbath for its sake"; not even Tabernacle construction is allowed to be done on the Sabbath. It is no less natural that in the series of instructions given by Moses to the people, the reminder about Sabbath observance should come first of all (Exodus xxxv, 1-3).

Bishop Westcott (*Commentary On Hebrews*, p. 233) called the "critical" theory of the Tabernacle "an incredible inversion of history." It seems to me that the narrative itself defies the theory

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of religious romance, and demands to be read as a record of what took place.

Mr. H. M. WIENER said: As it is getting late I must confine myself to one or two points. There can, I fear, be no doubt that Dr. Woods Smyth was quite right in saying that Dr. Orr accepted the documentary theory, though in a modified form. Indeed there is evidence of this in the sentence on p. 113, relating to the history of the Ark, where the composition of Deuteronomy

is treated as an event that took place between the age of David and Solomon and the destruction of the Temple.

I desire to express my entire concurrence in what Sir Robert Anderson said as to the inability of the Higher Critics to weigh evidence.

The main point with which I wish to deal is the question of the tent in Exodus xxxiii, 7 ff. The first of these verses is not accurately translated in the current English version. It should run, "And Moses used to take the tent"—or a tent, for Hebrew idiom uses the definite article in certain cases where the English would require the indefinite "a"—"and pitch it *for himself*, etc." The little Hebrew monosyllable meaning "for himself" is unfortunately omitted in the English versions, but in the most recent English edition of Exodus—that of Dr. Driver—the inaccuracy of the current rendering is pointed out. Now I put it to you, is it really conceivable that if the tent here spoken of had been the shelter of the Ark, Moses would have taken it and pitched it for his own use outside the camp, afar off from the camp, leaving the Ark itself bared and unguarded in the midst of the camp? If that question is answered in the only possible way, it follows of necessity that this narrative does not relate to that tent of meeting, which we call the Tabernacle in ordinary parlance. A difficulty then arises from the name "tent of meeting." It is hard to believe that after seven chapters (xxv-xxxi) almost wholly devoted to instructions for the tent which was to bear that name, Moses should have taken an entirely different tent for his own purposes and applied to that the designation of the intended home of the Ark. If he had done so, the narrative would surely have given us some intelligible explanation of his procedure. I, myself, believe that Exodus xxxiii, 7-11, is at present misplaced, and should stand much earlier (see *Essays in Pentateuchal Criticism*, pp. 93-102, 106 f.; *The Origin of the*

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Pentateuch, pp. 53 ff.), but if I were to start on the subject of the textual criticism of the Pentateuch, I fear we should be here all night. I thank you for your kindness in giving me a hearing.

Dr. HEYWOOD SMITH wished to make two observations. The first was with regard to the author's remarks at the bottom of p. 111 on the wearing out of the boards and curtains; could not the same God that kept the clothes and shoes of the Israelites from wearing out have also preserved the material of his own Tabernacle from deteriorating? And secondly, the author says (p. 113), "We are on the safest ground when we affirm that Exodus correctly describes it." Have we not also the additional testimony of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who, in his description of the Tabernacle with its furniture and the Ark (chapter ix), writes as one who was inspired to speak of things that had had an actual existence and were not dim pictures of a myth.

The CHAIRMAN in summing up said: It is most valuable to have the opinion of experts in two branches of evidence, Sir Robert Anderson and Mr. Maunder, as to the value of questions of Higher Criticism. For my part, I have no doubt that experts in forensic evidence and in scientific evidence have much sounder views of what evidence really means than those whose criticism cannot be verified by experiment or practical life.

I cannot understand the objection to the Mosaic account of the Tabernacle, that it is not clear enough for anyone to work on. At least two of my friends have found it clear enough to construct models not exactly alike but differing only in minor points, the only great difference being whether there was or was not a ridge pole.

As to the remarks which have been made as to the author's views on questions not in the paper, I would say that it is not right to try a man in his absence when he has had no notice of the charge. It certainly is not allowed in law, and I think should not be in discussion.

In conclusion, I propose a hearty vote of thanks to Professor Orr for his most valuable and important paper.

This was put to the meeting and carried unanimously. The following written communications have been received. From Canon GIRDLESTONE:—

P. 104. Reference is made to "high artistic skill." In Petrie's

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Hist. Egypt (i, 140) we read with regard to a pre-Abrahamic artist, "God has made him excel... the work of the chief artist in every kind of precious stone, gold, silver, ivory, ebony." See also p. 177 on the pectoral inlaid with precious stones found in a casket, also his notes on early statuary and painting, and on the simplicity, vastness, perfection and beauty of Egyptian art in patriarchal times, and on traces of Semitic workmanship in Egypt, in the XVIIIth Dynasty (vol. ii, p. 36). In view of these and other utterances, the very natural difficulty about "high artistic skill," etc., vanishes.

P. 104. Dr. Orr's position is confirmed by the fact that the explanations with regard to structure are far more detailed and exact in regard to the Tabernacle than in the case of the Temple.

P. 105. Technical words introduced in Exodus xxv, etc., have to be carefully studied, as is sometimes, but not always, done by the revisers, in order to detect the substitution of other words in Kings and Chronicles. Note, *e.g.*, the substitution of *Row-bread* for *Show-bread* (not marked in Revised Version) and the introduction of "oracle," "chariot," "gourd" (for knop), "felloe" (for fillet).

P. 106. There is a remarkable pair of expressions bearing on the points of the compass, viz., "Southside southward" in Exodus xxvi, 18, and elsewhere, and "Eastside eastward" in Exodus xxvii, 13. What does it mean? In each case the old words used in patriarchal times (*negeb* and *kedemah*) come first, whilst other words used here for the first time in this sense are added by way of explanation (*teman* and *mizrach*). This would never have been needed in later times, and the duplicate expression is never used again except by Ezekiel, who is steeped in the use of Tabernacle expression. The sons of Jacob had not forgotten their ancestral language, and we have here a testimony to the fact.

From CHANCELLOR LIAS:—

I quite agree with the statement on p. 105, that the theory of the Levitical Code, which enjoys the favour of critics just now, is "arbitrary and wholly preposterous." These words I feel to be not one whit too strong. A theory which is established by striking out every passage in the historical scriptures which is irreconcilable with it, and assigning that passage to a later date, is one which, to use the words of the late Bishop Stubbs, a historical expert by no means to be despised, would be "laughed out of

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court" in every branch of historical research except that in which theological prepossessions are allowed to enter. And where we find it supported by the absolutely incompatible assertions (1) that the so-called Priestly Code is "in its present shape" post-exilic, and yet (2) that it is, "in its origin, of great antiquity," and is a "codification of the existing Temple usage," it becomes quite inadmissible. It is a dexterous mode of puzzling opponents, no doubt, for when an opponent proves, as he can easily do, that a large portion of the Priestly Code is pre-exilic, he is, of course, met by the reply, "Precisely so, that is what we say." And if the critic, when challenged to state precisely which of the regulations of the Code are post-exilic and which are not, proceeds calmly to tell us that this "is an archaeological rather than a literary question," and that, therefore, he is not called upon to enter into it, one wonders what theory can possibly exist which cannot be proved by arguments such as these. It is no wonder that Professor James Robertson has invoked the aid of British enquirers to introduce a "saner" sort of criticism which shall correct the exaggerations and arbitrary assumptions of so many German critics.

On p. 111 the Professor refers to the passage in I Kings viii, which states that the Tabernacle (or 11 tent of meeting," as it is called) and "all the holy vessels therein" were brought up to Jerusalem for the service of dedication of the Temple. This passage is characteristically struck out by the critics, and I have never been able to find any reason for this except that it conflicts with their prepossessions. On such principles of historical investigation it could be proved that Queen Elizabeth reigned before the Norman conquest. But I would ask the meeting to note what is said in I Kings iii, 4. It states that at Gibeon was the "Great High Place." And the passages cited by Professor Orr, I and II Chronicles, give the reason. *The Tabernacle was there*. This is the argument from Undersigned Coincidence, now entirely ignored, though made abundant use of by writers such as Lardner, Paley and Blunt, clearer and sounder thinkers, I must believe, than many who have undertaken to instruct us since their day. *Why* should Gibeon be the "Great High Place," greater than any other? Kings states the fact, Chronicles gives the reason. Why should there have been any "High Places" in the days of David and Solomon? Once more Chronicles gives the reason. Because since the days of Eli the Ark had been in one place and the

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Tabernacle at another. It is possible that the shiftings of the Tabernacle from place to place—from Shiloh to Nob, and from Nob to Gibeon—were in order to bring the Tabernacle and the Ark nearer together. Certainly Gibeon was a good deal nearer to Kirjath Jearim than Shiloh was. The whole question is worth fuller treatment. Thus it is clear that the word *heykal* does not necessarily mean Solomon's Temple, for we have the word in the plural in many parts of the Old Testament. *Heykal* means simply a large building, and in I Sam. i, 9, and iii, 3, it

probably includes, not merely the Tabernacle, but buildings surrounding it to protect it from assault or plunder, as well as the "other structures" which Professor Orr suggests.

One remark I should like to add. On p. 106 the Professor criticizes the "schemes for the reduction of the numbers in the Exodus." I do not question his conclusions there. But there can be no doubt that the numbers in the Old Testament generally have fallen into confusion, either by the use of signs for numbers—signs which eventually became out of date, so that they were no longer understood—or for some other undiscovered reason. The best explanation of the difficulty is that of Mr. Harold Wiener, who has given much attention to Old Testament questions. He thinks that the "M" with which the word Meah (hundred) begins, when used to signify one hundred, as it does a thousand among ourselves, may have been confounded with "-im," the Hebrew plural, used in matters numerical for tens, and that, therefore, numbers may have sometimes been inadvertently multiplied or divided by ten.

To my mind the one thing needful at the present moment is full, fair, and free discussion of the whole critical question. As that able scholar Professor Flint said some years ago, it is time to "criticize the critics." I venture to say that the question will never be settled until argument takes the place of assertion, and all objections are fairly met and answered.

DR. ORR'S REPLY

The discussion seems to deal largely with the merits or demerits of the general critical theory, which it did not fall within my province to discuss, rather than with the special question of the Tabernacle. My views on the critical theory may be seen at large in my book, *The Problem of the Old Testament*, and in more popular

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form in *The Bible under Trial*. As will be seen from these volumes, it is not the case that I accept the documentary theory of the Pentateuch in any sense corresponding with the view of the critics, or carrying the work beyond the Mosaic age, and certainly I do not regard Deuteronomy as originating at or near the time of the discovery in the reign of Josiah. That view I have always strongly contested. For the rest, I can only thank the Members of the Institute for their kind reception of the paper.

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Prepared for the Web in August 2007 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

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