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*DR. ORR ON THE PROBLEM OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.*<sup>1</sup>

THAT this work well deserves the valuable prize which has been awarded it will probably be denied by few readers. The desirability may indeed be questioned of bequests endowing the maintenance of particular opinions; for when the world outgrows those opinions, the persistence of the endowment occasions inconvenience. And that the world outgrows most opinions is evidenced by the attitude now assumed towards the doctrine of the indestructibility of matter and even the definitions of Euclid. Supposing, however, that such endowment is desirable, it has in this case been well bestowed. The author has undertaken to defend a difficult position, all but universally abandoned, and he has defended it. Among apologetic works his will take one of the foremost places for tone and temper, as well as for learning and persuasiveness. Without in any case employing harsh or disagreeable language, he has succeeded in convicting the most careful scholars of inaccuracies, and finding weak points in the most plausible hypotheses. Like a skilful general, he has not undertaken the defence of any fortress that is quite beyond saving, though even in such cases he has a word of comfort for the despairing garrisons: but there is no doubt that for many minds he has provided grounds sufficient to justify them in maintaining conservative opinions, and in holding the attacks on the Biblical narratives to be "mere clouds that will vanish away."

Where so much is concentrated in a single volume, it is not quite easy to select material for special consideration. The points on which comment will be made in this article

<sup>1</sup> *The Problem of the Old Testament*, by J. Orr, D.D. Nisbet. 1906.

are, therefore, quite likely to be inferior in importance to others that might have been chosen.

In the first place, this book hits moderate opinions far harder than it hits extreme opinions. There are whole pages of which the force is confessedly lost if the reader should happen to disbelieve in the Exodus and the Restoration under Cyrus : whereas, if he accept those facts as historical, they will show him reasons for adopting a conservative attitude on some other matters. Perhaps, therefore, rather more space should have been devoted to demonstrating the historical character of Moses, and to dealing with the difficulties that have recently been brought to light in connexion with the narratives of Ezra and Nehemiah. For though some might think that the denial of the existence of Moses and Ezra was a *reductio ad absurdum* of the systems which required it, not every one will regard it in that light. Dr. Orr appears to urge in favour of the existence of Moses the fact that by the concessions of various scholars, the beginnings of Hebrew tradition can be brought within measurable distance from his time : and that with regard to such an event as the Exodus the national consciousness could not be mistaken. On certain matters, such as the Norman Conquest, the American War of Independence, etc., popular tradition could not go wrong. To this Winckler replies that deliberate fictions can, at times, acquire the circulation which renders them equivalent to a national tradition ; and though he gives no examples, perhaps the connexion of Rome with Troy was in his mind. Moreover, the distance between Moses and the date conceded by the critics quoted for the beginnings of tradition seems to amount to 350 years, an interval that should not be underrated.

So long, then, as Egyptian and other monuments are silent, the existence of Moses cannot be demonstrated.

The point that seems most strongly in its favour is the story of his exposure and adoption by Pharaoh's daughter. For either that story is true or false. If it be true, no more need be said. If it be false, it has the character of stories that attach to Alexander the Great and other heroes, who by some similar expedient are made out to belong to nations with which they had no connexion, but which are anxious to claim them. Thus Alexander in one legend is made out to have been an Egyptian, in another a connexion of the Persian king. The purpose of these fictions is to soothe the wounded vanity of the nations whom he conquered. Similarly the story of the rescue of Moses from the Nile, if it be not historical, has the appearance of being an expedient to prove that a man who was ordinarily supposed to be an Egyptian was really an Israelite; and since relationship is constituted by blood and milk, the legend has been so constructed as to take both these matters into account. But would such a legend be invented except about a historical personage? It is difficult to find a reason for thinking so; for a *myth* that made the Israelites owe their national existence to the labours of an Egyptian would be too singular. Hence it appears that before critics found reasons for doubting the historical character of Moses some of them inferred from the account of his birth in Exodus that he was actually an Egyptian. Certainly, the utmost that can be deduced from this argument is that he was a historical personage, and did some important service to the Israelites; but this, under present circumstances, is not a little.

The second chapter on "The Old Testament from its own Point of View," has, besides the good qualities that have been mentioned, a sort of devotional earnestness that will be respected by all readers, and especially pleasing to those who are in the habit of using the Old Testament

for homiletic purposes. With the saying of Ibn Arabi "no man has ever worshipped anything save God," the matter of this chapter is not in agreement. The author insists on the unique character of the Biblical doctrine, as the sole source of monotheism, as "unfolding in successive stages God's gracious counsel for man's salvation," as indissolubly blending morality and religion. The difficulties which attend these propositions are answered in a discussion towards the end of the volume on the progressive character of revelation, which is one of the best statements of this topic of apologetics. It would be too much to say that any of the objections which can properly be raised against this formula have been silenced; still the lucid explanation of it that has been given should be useful to preachers.

In this portion of the work, too, one is struck by the fact that it bears more hardly on moderate than on radical critics. The author informs us that on first reading Wellhausen's *History of Israel* the rationalizing which predominates therein only brought out more strongly, to his mind, the miraculous elements which the German critic *euhemerizes*—the passage of the Red Sea, the destruction of Sennacherib's forces, the prophecy by Amos of the deportation of the northern kingdom. What if any one goes beyond Wellhausen? The "critical" solution of the imperfect morality of the Old Testament is shown to be inadequate thus: "We may relieve the earlier history of laws and commands of God which offend us; but it is only to roll the burden upon the shoulders of prophets in an age when the higher morality was supposed to be developed." Here too, it is easy to imagine a style of reader whom the reasoning will not affect.

The chapters devoted to the religious development of Israel and the criticism of the Pentateuch contain much

that deserves careful consideration. Apart from their controversial value they are of great use as giving a succinct and accurate account of the chief stages of the Pentateuch question, and of the contributions of various scholars to its solution. The author, in dealing with Deuteronomy, gives reasons for thinking that Hilkiâh's was a real, not a fictitious discovery, and endeavours to show that the contents of the book are more suited to their traditional date than to that of Josiah; and further that they presume acquaintance with matter found in the "Priestly Code," which is now ordinarily regarded as later. The following is a good example of the close and incisive character of his reasoning (p. 301) :

Let us accept, as we are glad to do, the statement that the main stock of the legislation of P is based on pre-existing Temple usage, and see what follows. The observance of this main stock before the Exile either appears in the history or it does not. If it does not, what becomes of the argument from silence against the other institutions? If it does, what becomes of Wellhausen's statement that no trace can be found of acquaintance with the Priestly Code, but on the other hand very clear indications of ignorance of its contents? It is nothing to the purpose to reply, as is commonly done, that before the Exile there was indeed praxis—usage—but no written Priestly Code, or Code of ritual law attributed to Moses. For (1) the very ground on which the existence of a written code is denied is that there is no proof of the practice; and (2) if the practice is allowed, who is to certify that a written law, regulating the practice, was not there?

It seems questionable whether the whole of this defence of the Mosaic character of the Pentateuch is not vitiated by a single concession, viz., that the book, professedly discovered by Hilkiâh, which called forth the reformation of Josiah, "embraced, if it did not entirely consist of, the Book of Deuteronomy." In the note on this sentence (p. 357) there is the explanation that "the narrative in Kings generally does not require, though at points it suggests, more"; and in the discussions concluded on page 284 it is suggested

that Deuteronomy having circulated as a separate book, it was a separate authentic copy which was deposited in the Temple and there found by Hilkiah. (What is meant by an authentic copy is far from clear.) Now supposing it to be granted that the Book of Deuteronomy was what Hilkiah found in the Temple, how is the appearance of the other books of the Law to be explained? There is no record of a further discovery: criticism therefore supposes them to have been *invented*. Unless we borrow a suggestion from the Koran, viz., that the same book may be repeatedly revealed to different persons, it is difficult to think of another alternative. For there appear to have been no *living* MSS. of the Law—persons on whose memory it was faithfully impressed—else the discovery of a copy would have been a matter of little importance. At most its consequence would have lain in its being the autograph of Moses, as the Chronicler seems to suggest.

The account that is given of the origin of the Pentateuch (p. 369) does not seem to deal with this particular question: it is worth quoting, as showing how near conservative views come in these days to radical views:

Our conclusion is not that Moses himself wrote the Pentateuch in the precise shape or extent in which we now possess it; for the work, we think, shows very evident signs of different pens and styles, of editorial redaction, of stages of compilation. . . . In the collation and preparation of the materials for this work—some of them, perhaps, reaching back into pre-Mosaic times—and the laying of the foundations of the existing narratives, to which Moses lent the initial impulse, many hands and minds may have co-operated, and may have continued to co-operate after the master mind was removed; but unity of purpose and will gave a corresponding unity to the product of their labours.

It is very noteworthy that in this account Moses comes not at the *end* of the compilation, in which case it would all be commended by his authority, but somewhere near the beginning; it is not easy, therefore, to see how this

theory, except in the matter of date, differs from that of "irresponsible redactors, combining, altering, manipulating, enlarging at pleasure," with which it is contrasted on page 375. We are still confronted with the question of what the Moslems call the *isnād*; for they, in order to secure themselves against forgeries, devised the plan of requiring for every book, and indeed every saying, a series of authorities in an unbroken chain from the author of the book or saying to the last person who adduces it. The nearest thing to an *isnād* that Dr. Orr produces is to be found on page 370, where five firm strands of tradition are mentioned, viz., the fact that all the codes profess to come from Moses, that King Josiah and the people of his day accepted Deuteronomy as a genuine work of Moses, that the Jewish people of Ezra's time accepted the whole Pentateuch as Mosaic, that the Samaritans received the Pentateuch from the Jews as undoubtedly Mosaic, and that the JE history is implied by both Deuteronomy and P. Now this *isnād* has evidently the weakness which the critics find in it: if it is important to prove that P is earlier than Deuteronomy, an *isnād* should be found for it that is earlier than the *isnād* for Deuteronomy. And indeed, with the opinion of the Jews of Ezra's time, who could not understand the Law without a translation, and that of the Samaritans, who were probably in the same case, we do not concern ourselves. The important thing is surely that the book of the Law first discovered was Deuteronomy, and that in circumstances which imply the absence of the other books.

To the *isnād* for Deuteronomy, i.e. Josiah from Hilkiyah, some space is devoted by Dr. Orr, to whom the question naturally suggests itself—On what grounds was the genuineness of the book assumed by Josiah and his contemporaries? His answer is as follows: "Is it not apparent that though the Book of the Law had long been neglected, disobeyed,



and allowed to become practically a dead letter, men still knew of the existence of such a book, and had sufficient idea of its contents to be able to recognize it when this old Temple copy was suddenly brought to light ? ” The reasoning here seems to fall far below a paragraph quoted above in incisiveness and brilliancy. If people knew of the existence of the book and enough of its contents to be able to identify it, Hilkiâh’s claim to have *discovered* it collapses ; we might, any of us, as well claim to have discovered the Statutes at Large when we go to the Museum to consult them. All that can be granted is that a tradition of a Mosaic code may have been current : the identity of that code with the book discovered by Hilkiâh is made to depend, in the first place, on the critical ability of Josiah’s contemporaries—which Dr. Orr rates fairly high. “ If high priest, scribe, king, prophetess, were misled into thinking that they were dealing with an old Mosaic book, when the parchment in their hands was one on which the ink was scarcely dry, they must have been simpletons to a degree without parallel in history ” (p. 258) This statement is surely hyperbolic. The person whom it was important to convince was the king : if he were convinced, the sceptical would not have done wisely in expressing their doubts. The Bible regularly makes the king responsible for the religion of the country ; and the history of England under Mary I. and Elizabeth makes it certain that this view is correct, even where the royal power is less absolute than it was in Judæa. Hence from the fact that no scepticism is recorded we cannot infer that none was felt when the discovery was made known. Even, however, if there were no doubts, we ought not to demand of the contemporaries of Josiah the skill in dating documents, which is the result of centuries of grammatical and palaeographical study.

In dealing with both Deuteronomy and the code sup-

posed to have been produced by Ezra a good deal is said of the harshness of attributing to the authors of the codes so immoral an act as fabrication. "It is not overstepping the mark to say that men like Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Ezra were as capable of distinguishing between truth and falsehood, as conscious of the sin of deceit, as zealous for the honour of God, as incapable of employing lying lips or a lying pen, in the service of Jehovah, as any of our critics to-day" (p. 294). "Let only the effect be imagined had Ezra interpolated his reading with the occasional explanation that this or that principal ordinance, given forth by him as a law of Moses in the wilderness, was really a private concoction of some unknown priest in Babylon—perchance his own!" This line of argument does insufficient justice to the fact that the distinction between truth and falsehood is largely the product of lengthy training, aided enormously in the last few centuries by the growth of the exact sciences. Science by a variety of instruments succeeds in eliminating the personal equation from large classes of statements; but where the practice of eliminating it has not been cultivated, the rebuke contained in these paragraphs can be easily incurred with absolutely no intent to deceive. What to the trained mind seems a concoction seems to the untrained to be a reality, a necessary deduction from the premises. Nor does the author's own theory of the Pentateuch as given above keep quite clear of the reproach. For if any paragraph headed "and the Lord spake unto Moses saying" contains matter not actually delivered by Moses, it becomes a concoction as much as if it had been put together by Ezra.

We have then to fall back on internal evidence, in which, owing to the strong subjective element, certainty is not easily attained. In his discussions, however, it seems clear that Dr. Orr has exposed the fancifulness of many current

theories, has shown possibilities that have been perhaps unnoticed of reconciling discrepancies, and has even done something towards rehabilitating such portions of the Old Testament as the Books of Chronicles. For any final settlement of the issues between him and his opponents we can only look with modest hope rather than with expectation to archaeology, which may succeed in unearthing fragments of codes or chronicles that will decide the fate of many a conjecture. The paganism that preceded the reform of Josiah appears to have been far too systematic for us to doubt that it had its laws and bye-laws ; and the official chronicles of the kings who favoured polytheism were assuredly written in the spirit of the monarchs whom they celebrated. Fragments of these would be a welcome supplement to the information preserved in the Bible. So temperate and learned a statement of the conservative case as that which Dr. Orr has provided will be welcome even to those whose sympathies are entirely with the other side.

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