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A MAGAZINE FOR THE STUDENT WORLD

Spring Term, 1950

SIXPENCE

WHO IS THE CRITIC?

By the REV. J. STAFFORD WRIGHT, M.A.

WHEN once a theory has found its way into a sufficient number of text books, it tends to be treated as a fact. Generally it is right that it should be. But it has sometimes happened that the dead hand of a theory has held up further advance. When the theory was novel, it was criticized. When it received the sanctity of age, it became impatient of criticism.

This moralizing is suggested by the present state of Pentateuchal criticism. Every Christian knows something of the problem. A certain theory, once novel and horrifying, now sits securely in the text books. Its division of the Pentateuch into five main documents, compiled over a period of some 600 years, can be set out so neatly that anyone can learn its main outlines in half an hour.

But only those 'in the know' realize what devastating attacks have been made on every section of this theory by careful writers of every school of thought. A lecturer at one university admitted that he himself did not hold the theory, but he was forced to teach it, since it was in all the text books that were available to the students. One can see the point. Students must get through their examinations and they have not the time to pass critical judgments on their text books.

Those who feel that this is an exaggeration should have a look at *A Short Introduction to the Pentateuch*, by G. Ch. Aalders, D. Theol. (Tyndale Press, 6/-). Dr. Aalders is Professor of Old Testament in the Free University of Amsterdam. He is also a critic — that is to say, he

comes like Socrates to the complacent theory of today, and poses some awkward questions.

His fourth chapter is a revelation of just how hard the accepted theory has been hit in recent years — a fact about which the average text book is silent. But obviously the question cannot be settled by pitting one authority against another. A number of chapters are therefore devoted to an examination of the reasons for holding the documentary theory. Such an examination has of course often been made before, but it would be hard to find another writer who has done it so concisely, with an eye both to the scholar and to the student who has not made some special study of the relevant material.

For example, how safe is it to try to distinguish one source from another by the way in which the different names of God are used? This was once a sheet anchor of the modern theory. Chapter V gives good reasons, backed by expert opinions, for querying this supposed criterion of authorship. It is pointed out also that the Koran, with its single author, shows a similar variation in its use of the names.

Stylistic factors are useful up to a point (chap. VI), but when one has eliminated such differences as inevitably occur when one author is dealing with themes as different as simple narrative and genealogical or legal records, there are very few differences left apart from those that are discovered by the subjective feelings of different commentators. Moreover, if Moses used family records in compiling Genesis, it is obvious that

in this book there will be certain stylistic differences from time to time.

Dr. Aalders next deals with the standard difficulties of Mosaic authorship, such as the double narratives. Although he does not say so, such double occurrences are fairly common in personal and national experience, and one could give instances if space permitted.

From chapter XIII onwards Dr. Aalders turns to the positive presentation of his case. This section, particularly chapter XVII, will be useful to those who are puzzled by the I.V.F. position on the authorship of certain Books of the Bible. Reviewers of I.V.F. books sometimes seem mystified about this. Why, for instance, does the *New Bible Handbook* accept Peter as the author of 2 Peter, and yet reject Paul as the author of Hebrews, or Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes? Surely orthodoxy is bound to insist on the traditional authorship of all three of these Books!

The point at issue in each case is what Scripture actually claims. Dr. Aalders asserts that there is nothing in Scripture to lead us to suppose that Moses wrote every word in the Pentateuch, though there is much to indicate that he wrote, or caused to be written, the bulk of it. There are in fact some passages that must have been written after the time of Moses, such as the account of Moses' death, the list of Edomite kings in Genesis xxxvi, and the inclusion of an extract from the Book of the Wars of the Lord in Numbers xxi.

According to one view, such passages are accounted for as additions and comments made to the original Mosaic record to bring it up to date. Dr. Aalders is not inclined to this, though we should like to have seen a

fuller discussion of the point.' Although in a footnote on p. 108 he states that he does not believe that the Pentateuch was ever written in cuneiform, yet his arguments on the same page seem to rest upon the assumption that Moses used clay tablets, which could not be altered except in ink once they were dry. My personal opinion is that Moses used leather rolls, on which marginal and interlinear notes could be made by later readers, and which would provide places at the beginning or end of a roll, where such a section as Numbers xxi. 10f could be inserted.

However, Dr. Aalders' theory is equally satisfying. By a careful examination of the historical and prophetic Books he demonstrates that considerable portions of the Pentateuch were known from the time of Joshua onwards. This is a most valuable section. But the existence of the post-Mosaic passages is held to point to a date between the accession of Saul and the first seven years of David's reign for the present form of the Pentateuch.

It is interesting that this date is to all intents and purposes that reached by Dr. E. Robertson and Dr. Brinker of Manchester, though the latter at least holds rather a different opinion of the origin and accuracy of the Books. Dr. Aalders accepts entirely the accuracy of the records and the accurate transmission of the laws as given to Moses by God.

Dr. Aalders has asked critical questions that must be answered. He has put his own case in a critical way that anyone can follow, without being content to give slick or obscurantist answers. The book is well produced, and well indexed, and may play an important part in the move back from an uncritical 'criticism' to a sane view of the Pentateuch.