

THE WORK OF THE CHRONICLER

ITS PURPOSE AND ITS DATE

BY

ADAM C. WELCH, D.D.

Emeritus Professor of Hebrew
and Old Testament Literature
New College, Edinburgh

THE SCHWEICH LECTURES
OF THE BRITISH ACADEMY

1938

LONDON

PUBLISHED FOR THE BRITISH ACADEMY

BY HUMPHREY MILFORD, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

AMEN HOUSE, E.C.

1939

PREFACE

THE author acknowledges the honour which the Schweich Trustees have conferred upon him by inviting him to become their lecturer. He acknowledges even more warmly the opportunity they have put within his reach of publishing a study on a somewhat neglected book, which, without their help, would never have seen the light. The chance to contribute something to the elucidation of a literature to which most of his working life has been devoted is more to the writer than any personal honour, high and highly valued though that is.

The lectures have been entirely recast in their new form. The time at the lecturer's disposal as well as the character of the audience made it necessary to present in the lectures no more than the author's results. In the present volume he has offered in full the evidence on which those results are based. Without the evidence the results would have been negligible to his fellow students.

It only remains to add that, after the Introduction, the symbols C and K are generally used for the Chronicler and for the author of Kings respectively; and that the Biblical references follow the numbering which appears in the Hebrew text.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1-9
I. DAVID IN THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES	11-41
II. THE CHRONICLER AND PROPHECY	42-54
III. THE CHRONICLER AND THE LEVITES	55-80
A. The Levites as Singers	56-63
B. The Levites and the Ark	64-73
C. Other Functions assigned to the Levites	73-7
Excursus on II Chr. 24: 4-14	78-80
IV. ANALYSIS OF I CHR. CHAPTERS 23-6	81-96
V. HEZEKIAH'S REFORM	97-121
VI. THE CHRONICLER AND DEUTERONOMY	122-48
VII. CONCLUSION	149-60
INDEX OF SCRIPTURE PASSAGES	161
GENERAL INDEX	162-3

INTRODUCTION

IN an earlier series of lectures, delivered under the Baird Trust in Glasgow, the writer advanced the opinion that the nine chapters at the beginning of the books of Chronicles and the two verses which form their conclusion have no integral relation to the rest of the material, and have been added later.¹ The work of the Chronicler, therefore, which is the subject of the present study, is to be found in I Chr. 10: 1—II Chr. 36: 21 and, when the alien elements have been removed, can be seen to present a definite unity. It dealt with the period of the kingdom in Judah from the time of its foundation by David to that of its collapse under Zedekiah.

Thus to define the scope of the Chronicler's work brings into the foreground the fact that his book covered the same ground which had already been traversed in part of Samuel and in the two books of Kings, except that the author ignored the existence of the northern kingdom. This inevitably raises the question of the reason which led a writer, living a generation or more later, to return to the history of the Davidic kingdom and to rewrite its record with such fullness of detail. A duplication of two narratives, which shows precisely the same features as here, is unexampled in the Old Testament. We are familiar with the phenomenon of parallel accounts in Scripture. There were once in circulation two accounts of the patriarchal period, which told how Israel came to be, and which ended with the event of the Exodus which gave the nation its distinctive character and its national consciousness.²

¹ The reasons for this judgement are to be found in my *Post-Exilic Judaism*, pp. 185 ff.

² This is written in full recognition of the value of the work of Volz and Rudolph, *Der Elohists als Erzähler — ein Irrweg der Pentateuch-Kritik*, which has recently thrown doubt on this conclusion. The authors have shown good cause for questioning whether it is legitimate to pronounce with confidence that the J and E documents can be separated with the

Those records told how the people, possessed of common traditions about their past, and sharing an experience which set them apart from the world, were prepared to meet the future. Again, what we can only infer about the patriarchal narratives is no matter of inference as to the history of the kingdom, for the compiler of the books of Kings has referred to the sources on which he drew, and has stated that he used material from the North Israelite and Judean archives. But these two cases of duplication differ in important aspects from that which engages our attention. Thus it is not hard to understand why, in the period when both branches were quickened into vigour and national consciousness by the institution of the kingdom, the desire was awakened to tell the story of how Israel came to be and to commemorate the men who helped to make it. Each produced its own version, which reproduced its peculiar traditions and glorified its own heroes. As naturally, each of the rival kingdoms preserved the records of its past in the Chronicles of the kings of Israel and Judah. In both instances, however, these separate narratives were combined in the form which we now possess; and, as it was possible to find a reason for their separate existence, it is equally possible to account for their amalgamation. With the disappearance of the northern kingdom Judah became the only representative of Israel, and, as it maintained all the hope for the future, so it inherited all

exactness which has been claimed for the process. They have also shown that too much reliance has been placed on differences of language, and even at times on the existence of narratives which were supposed to be duplicates. The criteria employed by criticism in its work of dissection have been too narrow in their character and were often too uncertain to bear out all the conclusions which have been based on them. The superstructure is top-heavy, and is crumbling because of the inadequacy of its foundations. But, in my judgement, their work has not succeeded in overturning the broad conclusion that there were once two parallel documents. The proof for this theory may have been inadequately stated and at times has been overstrained; but the theory itself meets too many difficulties and accounts for too many facts to be lightly discarded.

the traditions of the past. The men of that generation were seeking to restore the lost unity of Israel, and were using the bond of their common religion and of their common past to serve this end. They recognized that the continued existence of separate records of that past was worse than useless, since these brought a constant reminder of the old schism, the memory of which they were anxious to obliterate. The blending into one of the records of the two branches of the people was a part of that process of centralization which began after the fall of Samaria, and which is too narrowly construed when it is thought of as no more than the centralization of sacrificial worship at the temple. The single record of the past meant a reassertion of the unity of Israel. The situation, however, is different when we turn to the work of the Chronicler. Here we have an author who belonged to the reunited nation, and who was writing in and for the same community as that for which the author of Kings produced his book. Yet he rewrote the history of the kingdom, and was so conscious of the importance of what he did that he made his account as long as that of his predecessor. Also, though he added a good deal which dealt with the temple and the relation of the kings to the sanctuary, he did not put this into an appendix to Kings, but gave it a more appropriate setting in his own narrative, as though it could only be fully appreciated in its new connexion. Nor was any effort ever made to amalgamate the two records. It might appear as though men were conscious of a difference between the two which made such a step impracticable.

This feature of the book has not received much attention from those who have issued commentaries on Chronicles. Kittel in his commentary¹ was largely dominated by his interest as a historian. While it would be ungrateful to ignore the value of his notes on the chapters which deal with the temple and its arrangements, it remains true that his chief interest lay in determining the relative value of Kings and Chronicles as sources for providing material to the

¹ *Handkommentar zum A. T.*: Vandenhoeck und Rupprecht.

history of Israel. He compared with great care the parallel passages in the two books, and brought the acuteness and wide knowledge of a trained historian to bear on the question as to which supplied the more reliable information on the kingdom. His general conclusion was that, while in a few cases Chronicles might draw upon other sources than those which appeared in Kings, the author, as a rule, followed closely the account of his predecessor. Yet this decision only made it inevitable to ask why the Chronicler had taken the trouble to reproduce material which was more adequately set down already. Nor did Kittel fully realize the extent to which the later writer recast in certain cases the incidents which he borrowed, so that in his account they convey a wholly different view of the character of a king or of the connexion of events. This limitation is specially evident in connexion with the life of David and the course of Josiah's reformation.

Further, there is a considerable element in the Chronicler's work, which his commentator treated in a somewhat perfunctory fashion. He dismissed it with little consideration, calling it mere *midrash*, though he nowhere defined the precise meaning of that term. The reader was left to infer that the reason for this treatment of the passages was their want of value as a contribution to history. Yet the material is there, it is tolerably abundant in the document under review, and it is characteristic of that document, since none of it appears in Kings. It is somewhat cavalier treatment of an ancient book to measure its contents by the extent to which they conform to the standard laid down by a modern historian. Real recognition of this peculiar element in the book might have suggested that the Chronicler was not specially interested in history *qua* history, but was using that form of writing in order to convey his judgement on a period. The recognition of this possibility might in turn have explained why he added so little to the record which he took over from Kings, and why he recast some of the incidents in a way which suited his purpose.

The monumental commentary, which was begun by Rothstein and completed by Hänel,¹ was very different in character. Rothstein was convinced that the books of Chronicles were not homogeneous, and he set himself with infinite patience to trace the different hands which had contributed to give them their present form. He employed the methods which had been followed in the criticism of the Pentateuch, and relied greatly on the evidence of difference in language and on the presence of contradictions or parallels in the account. But the results were not very convincing, perhaps because scholars were beginning to become uneasy about the reliability of the results from the application of these methods in the earlier field. When one found a verse, which was merely introductory, assigned to three different hands, it was difficult to believe that any book had come into existence after this complicated fashion. The dissection might agree with Rothstein's criteria, but a reader could scarcely avoid the suspicion that criteria which compelled such conclusions were themselves doubtful. Nor was he reassured, when he attempted to discover why the original had been subjected to this elaborate series of revisions, for there did not appear to be any common outlook which gave unity to the notes or parallel material which had been so liberally introduced into the text. The annotations remained sporadic in character and a little haphazard in their additions to or corrections of the original, and showed no particular aim in the successive editors. One thing, however, the commentary has done; it has clearly proved that Chronicles is not derived from one hand, but has been subjected to a very thorough revision. But by accomplishing this, it has raised another and very pertinent question. Why has the Chronicler's work been so liberally annotated by later hands, while that of his predecessor in Kings has been left practically without correction? It might have been expected that the opposite would have been the case, and that the earlier book would have required a revision in order to bring it

¹ Sellin's *Kommentar*: Deichertsche Buchhandlung, Leipzig.

into agreement with the outlook and needs of a later time. There must have been some element in the Chronicler's treatment of his subject, which not only excited the interest, but roused the criticism of his contemporaries. What made this conclusion more sure was that the annotations were most frequent in the passages which were peculiar to the Chronicler, and were fewer and less important in the material which was common to him and the author of Kings.

This brief résumé of some recent work on Chronicles does not pretend to sum up all the contributions made to its interpretation, or to deal adequately with the special contribution of the two scholars cited. The present writer has chosen the two modern commentaries which best represent two leading lines of approach to the study of the book, and has indicated the results which in his view they have proved. But these results have left unanswered two questions relating to the book, which to him appear of primary importance—the reason which prompted the Chronicler to duplicate the history of the kingdom, and the reason for this account having received so much attention from revisers. This feeling of something which has not yet found an answer may form the excuse, if one be needed, for approaching the whole question along a different line. It is possible to ignore the demerits of the Chronicler as a historian, a subject which has been already dealt with by Kittel, and to concentrate attention on what the author had to say, and through the study of what he did say discover, if possible, the purpose he had in writing his book. In order to do this, it is necessary to bring an open mind and rigorously to refuse to determine beforehand what ought to have been in a history of Israel's kingdom, or to ignore anything which has been included there. Only after his narrative has been passed in review, is it legitimate to conclude his purpose in writing it.

For the sake of bringing some order into the study, it seemed advisable to group the material round certain large subjects. The first of these must be the life-work of David, were it only because the Chronicler devoted twenty chapters

to the king's reign. But here the aim must be to discover the estimate he made of the character and work of the first king of Israel, and the place he assigned him in the life of the nation, and to recognize whether it differed from the picture which emerges in Kings. If any difference does emerge, it will be necessary to try to measure its significance. Any question of difference on historical matters between the two sources will only be of interest, so far as it has a bearing on the attitude which is assumed to David. The later writer may have departed from the course of events in Kings in order to make it bring out his peculiar view. The study of David will be followed by another on the series of prophets who are said in the second book to have appeared before certain kings to warn or to encourage them in the exercise of their functions. Because these incidents are supported by no other historical source, and are sometimes irreconcilable with the course of events in Kings, and because in themselves they are very difficult to accept as a record of events, they have been generally ignored. For this study they are of peculiar interest, even if they must be set down as a creation of the Chronicler. For they introduce the student directly to the author's mind and to his thought on such large questions as the function of prophecy and its relation to the kingdom. Above all, they throw light on his attitude to the kingdom and to the Davidic dynasty. Where the author of Kings judged the successive kings by whether they suppressed or maintained the high places, the Chronicler introduced a different standard, and measured their allegiance to Yahweh by their obedience to the divine message through the prophets.

Again, Chronicles is distinguished from Kings by the attention which its author devoted to the temple, its cult, and its clergy. He made David the real originator of the sanctuary, and reduced Solomon's share in the work to no more than the faithful carrying out of his father's plans. He further credited David with having organized the temple services and allotted their duties to the temple personnel.

In his description of these arrangements he brought into special prominence the levites, a body of clergy who are ignored in any reference which the author of Kings made to the temple. Two chapters have been devoted to this subject. The first deals directly with the major question of the status which is given to the levites throughout the book. The second is more limited in its character, for it is devoted to an analysis of a block of material which occupies the closing chapters in I Chronicles, and which purports to contain the instructions as to the arrangements in the future temple which David delivered to Solomon immediately before his death. These two chapters introduce, to a greater extent than before, the difficult and involved problem of the extent of the revision which the book has received and of the character of this revision. Cognate to this is the following discussion of Hezekiah's reform. Here, again, it may be necessary to insist that no attention need be given to the question as to whether the account of this reform is historically reliable. Even if it should be held that it is a free creation on the part of the Chronicler, the fact remains that he made Hezekiah, not Josiah, the originator of the great reform of religion which took place some time before the disappearance of the kingdom. The three chapters, therefore, in which he described this reform, present his idea of the lines on which such a reform ought to have been carried out and his conception of the conduct which befitted a reforming king. The closing chapter is occupied with a discussion of the relation between the Chronicler and Deuteronomy, which falls a little out of line with what has preceded. It cannot, however, be omitted in any study on the book, were it only for the light it casts on the question of its date.

The line of approach to Chronicles which has thus been indicated may supplement the work of Kittel and Rothstein. On the one hand, it will bring into the foreground the elements in the book which Kittel was inclined to brush aside, and, by giving them a due place, may suggest that its author had another purpose in view than that of writing

history. On the other hand, it will concentrate attention on the different attitude which emerges in the original narrative and in the annotations, and so may suggest a reason for Chronicles having received an amount of revision which is absent from Kings.