
A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

ART. VI.—THE REAL DIFFICULTY OF THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

A HISTORY of the Hebrews,[1] written from the point of view of the Higher Criticism, cannot have failed to raise once more in many minds the whole question of the interpretation of the Old Testament. The author has prefaced his book with an introductory chapter in which he sets himself to write a summary "in a simple form" (p. i) of the main conclusions of the modern school. He is to be congratulated on having made a statement which is not only simple, but is eminently lucid. It commends itself still more by its reverent tone and by the evident signs which it bears that the writer possesses sympathy with those who find it hard to adjust their ideas about inspiration to the modern view. This is manifest, for example, in such words as the following: "Sneers at theories of verbal and mechanical inspiration are often due to a complete failure to apprehend the seriousness of the question at issue, and are of no assistance to those who approach the criticism of the Scriptures with any appreciation of its gravity" (Introduction, p. xii).

It is further to be discerned in the passage in which the question of the Book of Deuteronomy is discussed, in which, after giving the modern view, the writer continues: "On the other hand, there is a most natural repugnance to attribute one of the most earnest and spiritual books in Holy Scripture to one who used the venerable name of Moses to advance his own opinions" (Introduction, p. xxiv).

We are encouraged, therefore, to consider the passages in which Mr. Foakes-Jackson describes the attitude of the objector whom he is so evidently anxious to help. The *first* occurs on pages i and ii,[2] and is introduced by the following paragraph: "The decision of modern criticism is that almost every book of the Old Testament shows signs of being composite in character, the work of several authors combined by one or more redactors. In a sense, this is so in the case of every historical work. No historian can be independent of the works of others. His function is to make inquiry, to sift statements made by others, before presenting his own conclusions. A modern author generally puts his own work into the text, and gives his authorities in notes or appendices, sometimes quoting a passage at length from a work he has con-

[1] "The Biblical History of the Hebrews." By F. J. Foakes-Jackson, B.D. 1903.

[2] This and subsequent references are to the introductory chapter referred to above as "Introduction."

sulted. But in early days, when books were scarce, authors composed their works for the information of readers who cared little how the facts were collected; no scruples were felt in copying authorities wholesale, or in combining the narratives of other writers without any acknowledgment. It is supposed that this was the method employed by the Biblical writers, nor can they reasonably be blamed for appropriating the labours of others, since they wrote, as a rule, anonymously, with the sole object of edifying and informing their readers. It is the duty of the modern critic to attempt to discover the process by which the work before him has been reduced to its present shape, to discern what is really ancient, what is more recent, and what parts have been supplied by its latest editor."

This is followed at once by a paragraph headed "Objection to the Modern Method." It reads as follows: "A possible objection to this method is that, since all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, the sacred writers had no need to set to work like profane historians, to consult traditions, monuments, writings, and the like, but had only to set down that which they were moved by God's Spirit to write."

And a little lower down: "But the answer to the foregoing objection is supplied by the sacred writers themselves. In the later books they do not scruple to acknowledge their obligations to earlier works. From the first, indeed, there is evidence of what may be styled a pre-Biblical literature, consisting of books like those of the 'Wars of Jehovah' and of 'Jashar.' The task, therefore, of attempting to resolve the Scriptures into their original component elements can be approached without either presumption or irreverence."

The *second* passage occurs after the modern view has been illustrated by a consideration of the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis, the conclusion of which is stated in the words: "Enough, however, has been said to show that the theory that Genesis has been compiled from many sources is tenable" (p. xiv), while a little further on it is contended that "the fact that the writer used many authorities should add (to) rather than lessen our admiration for his work" (p. xvi).

Reference is then made to an objection as follows: "Still, the question arises, how far the researches of a student are compatible with the notions current concerning the nature of inspiration. What claim, it may be asked, can men, who, like historians, have gathered together their materials and put them into literary form, have to be considered as peculiarly inspired by God's Spirit?" (p. xvi).

The answer is then given: "In answer to this, it may be urged that the greatest productions of the human mind have,

as a rule, been the result of strenuous effort and careful preparation. Yet the production of the *improvisatore* sometimes excites more vulgar admiration than one who has 'a capacity for taking infinite pains.' Creative genius may be so far identified with our conception of 'inspiration' that in both something indefinable from without seems to make a man accomplish more than his unaided nature is capable of. But just as genius, when combined with strength of character and determination, produces infinitely better work than when it manifests itself in a transitory form, so the highest form of inspiration may well accompany earnest effort and firm purpose to tell the truth. The compiler of such a book as Genesis may have been more truly inspired in his labours than one 'falling into a trance, yet having his eyes open.' Why need the presence of God's Spirit be denied in assisting such a writer to select, classify, and arrange the best information he possessed, if the result justifies such a claim? The value of the work is not lessened because the critical spirit of the present day has succeeded in discovering its present sources. The sun shines none the less brightly because the spectroscope has discovered the elements of which it is composed. The history of the growth of the historical and prophetical literature is, moreover, not merely an account of individuals, but of a Church. The Bible grew with the ever-developing religious consciousness of Israel. By modern methods we are able to discern, not only how inspired books were composed, but how the spiritual life in God's people developed from its earliest stages. It need not be added that the question of the date of the compilation of a Biblical work does not affect its intrinsic worth. Genesis is equally beautiful whether it issued from the hands of Moses in its present form, or whether it was not fully completed till after the Captivity" (pp. xvi, xvii).

No one can read these paragraphs without feeling that the author has made a serious attempt to meet the difficulties of those who stand aloof from the views of the modern school. But, strangely enough, the objection, as he states it, is not the chief objection which is felt towards the Higher Criticism. There are many persons who find no difficulty in believing that the "researches of a student" (p. xvi) are not incompatible with inspiration. To illustrate from the New Testament, there are few who would not be ready to allow that, when St. Luke undertook to write the Acts, he used the ordinary methods of the historian. They would at once agree that there is no reason for "denying the presence of God's Spirit in assisting such a writer to select, classify, and arrange the best information he possessed" (p. xvi). So with regard to the Old Testament: it is conceded by many that in the case

of the historical books earlier "sources" have been used, to which the writers not seldom refer. (In addition to the references to pre-Biblical writings, as instanced by Mr. Foakes-Jackson, there are the frequent references to "the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel" in 1 and 2 Kings, etc.)

For those who think that a true theory of inspiration leaves no room for human means, the remarks above quoted should prove of value; but let it be understood, once for all, that they do not touch that which constitutes the real difficulty which is felt by many to belong to the position taken up by Modern Criticism. It may be well that it should be stated again.

As it presents itself to a considerable number of persons, it is as follows: They feel that the modern theory practically denies to the writers of Old Testament history the historian's instinct. They point out that the Old Testament writers are regarded by the representatives of this school as, not merely collecting a number of documents, but using them for purposes of instruction, and that not always in a reliable way, but so as to be capable of "deliberately improving" (p. xviii) on an earlier narrative, of "intruding" (p. xxvi) their views into a book, of possessing the "tendency to make events as far as possible square with their ideas of how the worship of Jehovah ought to have been conducted in early days" (p. xxv), and in one case—that of Deuteronomy—of "advancing their own opinions by literary artifice" (p. xxiv). They note that the result of this view is to make "a good deal of conjecture" (p. xxviii), not merely allowable, but actually necessary, and that, consequently, "the task of reconstructing the story of Israel from the Old Testament is a hard one" (p. xxvii).

It is such an estimate of the methods which, according to the theory, were adopted by the writers of the Old Testament books which constitutes the real difficulty. It is not a question of repugnance to the idea of a "composite book" in the ordinary sense of the term, but to a *peculiar theory* of "*composite authorship*," according to which each succeeding "editor" becomes himself a "source," so that what he adds has to be allowed for. It is merely confusing to justify the modern view of "editors" (or "redactors") by an appeal to the methods of ordinary historians. The whole point of the view is that, in the case of the "editor," the instinct of the historian was overshadowed by the desire to commend some religious ideal to the men of his own time. We may grant that the books are composite, and yet deny composite "authorship" in the special sense in which the expression is used.

Let us look a little more closely into the meaning of "composite authorship." It means that the history of the pro-

duction of an Old Testament book might have been as follows: An author (B) took as the main basis of his own book an earlier book by another author (A), and proceeded to rewrite it in such a manner as to make it appear that a certain desirable course—affecting belief or practice, or both—was pursued in the earlier time of which A had written, though A (for this is part of the theory) had said nothing about it. The motive of B is supposed to have been both pious and practical. He is supposed to have acted in the interests of a reform of which he felt that there was pressing need. He is supposed to have acted on the principle that the end justifies the means, and to have argued that, because certain things ought to happen in his own time, they must be commended by being as far as possible represented to have taken place in an earlier time. Some years later the book, as modified by B, was rewritten by C with a similar motive, though this time in the interests of a different reform. It follows that, according to the theory, an Old Testament book may consist of different "strata." Thus, in our example the first stratum is the original book (*i.e.*, the work of A). The second stratum is made up of the "modifications" which B has introduced into A's composition, while those introduced by C into the book as it has been left by B constitute the third stratum. A parallel case would be to suppose that a writer of the sixth century A.D. took the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius and rewrote it in the interests of the See of Rome, omitting a few of the facts which he found recorded, and interpolating a sentence or two where the purpose of the writer made it expedient to do so.

Now we affirm that such a theory of composite authorship involves an important question of ethics. If books were constructed on this principle, it is impossible to regard them with the respect with which they have hitherto been regarded, for we lose confidence in the characters of the authors. They cease to be for us honest historians. Indeed, they cease to be in any intelligible sense of the word *historians* at all. To be consistent, we must not merely defend their conduct, we must also defend that of the imaginary later author (or "editor" or "redactor") of Eusebius. Nay, we must be prepared to go further, and say that the principle which regulated the production of the forged decretals (in which the decisions of early Councils were *actually* treated in precisely the same way as the history of Eusebius in our supposed case) may under certain circumstances be defended.

In regard to the Book of Deuteronomy, Mr. Foakes-Jackson does indeed speak of "a most natural repugnance to attribute one of the most earnest and spiritual books in Holy Scripture

to one who used the venerable name of Moses to advance his own opinions" (p. xxiv). But the conduct which on this hypothesis was the conduct of the author or latest author or editor of Deuteronomy differs only in degree, and not at all in kind, from that which is attributed to other authors of other books. The same *principle* is involved in all the cases. In all we have the employment of a method which is as repugnant to the moral sense of the ordinary man as it is opposed to the historic sense of the historian. Whether it is a single sentence or a whole book that is so constructed, the principle is the same. Deuteronomy is an extreme case, that is all.

With regard to Deuteronomy itself, when we read that "perhaps the only way is candidly to admit that such a literary artifice is not as abhorrent to Orientals as it would be to us" (p. xxiv), it is obvious that candid admission leaves the difficulty untouched. Some grounds ought surely to be given for an estimate of the particular "Orientals" in question, according to which the literary artifice would not be so repugnant to them as it is to us. Some reason ought to be given for believing that the literary artifice was so universally fashionable as to render untenable the suggestion that the Spirit of God might have selected one who refrained from its use. And, again, we should expect to know whether there are any grounds for believing that the custom of employing literary artifice of this type had changed by the beginning of the first century A.D.

But we are not at present concerned with any particular instance. What we wish to lay stress upon is that the case of Deuteronomy is not different—as regards the principle involved—from the cases of other books which are held to have resulted from composite authorship.

It may be convenient to sum up what appears to us to be the logical outcome of the Higher Criticism (in so far as it is identified with this theory of composite authorship). It involves for us three paradoxes:

1. That the historians of almost any age and of almost any nationality are more worthy of credit than the historians of the Hebrew nation in the centuries which preceded the Christian era.

2. That the method by which Old Testament books were made to assume their present form was one the adoption of which by certain writers of the early Middle Ages has always been regarded with scorn and abhorrence.

3. That the work of men for whom inspiration is claimed requires to undergo a process of sifting, for which inspiration is not claimed, before the true story of Israel (which includes the story of God's dealings with Israel) can be known.

It is the fact that the theory of composite authorship leads to conclusions of this fundamental character which constitutes its "real difficulty." And as the theory is only a theory after all, it may not be amiss that the Higher Criticism should reconsider its position, and see whether the data upon which its theory is based may not be as adequately explained by considerations of another order. At least, let the difficulty be fully realized. H. J. GIBBINS.

ART. VII.—REMARKS UPON CANON GELL'S "NOTES ON THE INTERMEDIATE STATE AS AFFECTING THE RESURRECTION."

(THE CHURCHMAN, *September*, 1903.)

IT is impossible to deny that Canon Gell has presented a formidable array of Scriptural arguments against consciousness in the intermediate state, and it must be acknowledged that his reasoning is fatal to such developments as the Romish doctrine of purgatory, or the possibility of repentance and conversion in that condition. But we think that he goes too far in ignoring the interval between death and judgment altogether.

On p. 652 he assumes that all who do not accept what is really the popular idea of "sudden death, sudden glory" hold an "activity" of the soul in the intermediate state. But surely there may be a ripening of the sheaves already cut but not garnered, even though there can be no change of tares into wheat. The earliest Christians certainly prayed for the departed, though in a limited sense. This shows that, in spite of New Testament authority, according to Canon Gell, they did not regard the transition from death to judgment as instantaneous. I think Canon Gell does not attach sufficient weight to the fact that the Apostles anticipated a speedy second coming of our Lord, and therefore the intermediate period was not to them a "long period," as he infers on p. 657. He adduces the term "sleep," which is used so much for "death" in the Bible; but, at the same time, this image, it must be remembered, was also very common in heathen writers. In the mouth of the latter it did not always imply an awakening, if ever. In the mouth of Christians it appears to do so, and is surely used to signify a continued life. Sleep is not the same thing as unconsciousness. It has its dreams, more or less. As Hamlet says:

> "To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub,
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come!"