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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

THE STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT,

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ELEMENT OF COMPILATION IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOKS.[1]

UNDER this somewhat ponderous title I venture to introduce a subject which cannot fail to have some interest for those whose tastes or studies have led them into the wide fields of Old Testament inquiry. It does not fall within my present purpose, even if it were within my power, to discuss any of the recent results or speculations of criticism. Summaries of these, which appear from time to time in our magazines and reviews, render such a task almost unnecessary.

My object in the present paper is rather to consider the spirit in which the results of modern criticism should be accepted, taking as a conspicuous example the ascertained compilatory structure of certain books. The invitation to read a paper upon Old Testament criticism presented an opportunity for a treatment of the subject as far removed as possible from the line either of apology or of attack. It is a line of inquiry beset with peculiar difficulties in our present state of knowledge. But it offers also special compensation. For the boon of liberated religious thought, when its true character is realized, far outweighs in value the inevitable apparent loss, incidental to the adoption of views less compact, less definite, perhaps less intelligible, than those which have traditionally been accepted in the Church.

[1] A paper read before the London Junior Clerical Society, at Sion College, Oct. 8th, 1889, and again, by request, before the clergy of the Rural Deanery of Chelsea, Dec. 12th, 1889.

All will admit that patient and skilful criticism has in recent years made substantial progress in our knowledge of the structure of the Old Testament. Criticism has, with obvious advantage on both sides, been met with counter-criticism. The battle of controversy is still raging round the most disputable details. Amid the smoke and din of exchanging volleys, we hardly notice that the field of combat is being changed. While we concentrate our attention upon this point or that, we are in danger of ignoring the significance which the assured progress in our knowledge has, or is likely to have, for our study of the Old Testament. It is surely a matter of grave importance, that we should endeavour to realize the character of the new ground, on which in all probability, to say the least, we shall eventually have to take our stand. It is surely prudent to pause awhile and estimate the gain, which the progress of our study is likely to bring with it in the near future. For gain it must be, however costly the apparent loss of an untenable position. Gain it must be to us and to all, if we are enabled to see things more truly and to teach men so. The goal can only be seen (I will not say reached) by a generation that is prepared to make its sacrifice at each halting-place in the onward journey of religious thought.

The assured progress, to which I have alluded, forms the assumption upon which the present paper is based. It is an assumption, which even the more conservative students in our own country are prepared to admit in a modified degree, that recent investigation into structure, composition, and style has revealed the compilatory character of a large proportion of the books of the Old Testament. Few scholars would be found to dispute so elementary a statement. But few probably—and certainly very few of the clergy—have realized its significance. And it is because each year of Old Testament study confirms this elementary

principle, and tends to widen its application, that I wish to call attention to it. Familiar as certain literary details of this subject may have become to many students, no apology is needed for reminding them of its relation to Christian thought. The just appreciation of the composite structure of the books of the Old Testament Canon must ultimately influence the attitude of modern Christian teaching towards many problems that centre around Holy Scripture.

It is perhaps desirable at this point to guard against misconception, and to define carefully the position which we intend to take up in dealing with the burning questions of Old Testament criticism. Let us admit at once, that it would be little short of disastrous, if criticism impaired the value and use of the reading of the Old Testament for practical and devotional religious life. But criticism is powerless to touch this one method of study, which both experience and precept unite in pronouncing to be incumbent upon all members of the Christian Church alike. It is powerless to lessen the virtue of the only method in which all can participate equally. The mass of readers are precluded from attempting anything further, by lack of leisure, of training, of books, of interest or inclination. But the spiritual and educational value of the simply practical and devotional study of the books of the Old Testament is universal and never diminishes. It was never more essential than it is now. In days of extended individual freedom and unparalleled facility of communication between the nations of the world, the Christian reader of the latter part of this century will with profit look yet more closely than hitherto to the lessons of the Divine revelation vouchsafed in the history and literature of the chosen people and through the instrumentality of its chosen men. Lessons of moral and spiritual life, for individual family and nation, start up out of the pages of law and prophecy, of psalm and history,

and are of eternal import. Now as much as in the apostolic era they can make men "wise unto salvation."

But the Christian student cannot afford to rest there. The experimental aspect of the study of Jewish Scripture does not exhaust the possibilities of fruitful religious inquiry. His range of investigation cannot be thus limited. A fresh field of labour opens out before him, when he understands that, although the Spirit of revelation is conveyed through the letter, the letter is not the revelation itself, but its record, a human literature by which the Divine message is transmitted from age to age and race to race.

No plea of reverence can be justified, or even tolerated, which would prohibit the student from investigating as narrowly as possible the human conditions under which the word of revelation has been communicated. The Church cannot afford to leave such inquiries in the hands of hostile or prejudiced critics. Her wisdom will require her sons to submit the literature of the Bible to the same searching criticism as other ancient literature—to a criticism more rigorous and unsparing in proportion as its hold over men's beliefs is more universal. Her call to us is imperative: and our duty is clear. We must not shrink from it on account of the almost proverbial unpopularity of such studies in the Church. Their unpopularity is not a matter which should surprise us, however disappointing it may be to find Christian scholarship mistaken for the veiled ingenuity of foes. In spite of the unreasonable character of much of the outcry against modern biblical criticism, students should be prepared to display the most patient sympathy towards those whose susceptibilities they have disturbed and too often thoughtlessly provoked. After all, it is only natural that the requirement to treat the books of Scripture like any other books should provoke antipathy. The task, it must be admitted, is in practice well-nigh impossible. The coolest and most judicial saga-

city is almost inevitably biassed in the consideration of Biblical questions by the influence of a long and sacred association, which seems to demand from the Christian the partiality of peculiar veneration and to excite a corresponding amount of prejudice and suspicion in the minds of avowed adversaries of our creed. Let us remember too that some are jealous of the effect which the critical analysis of the books is likely to have upon their influence as devotional literature. There is a widespread fear, lest the less strictly religious methods of study, conducted by the more learned few, in whom they have little confidence with respect to matters spiritual, should have the effect of undermining the simple faith which has been erected upon teaching drawn from Scripture as the people's book. Again, there are undoubtedly many minds which have been repelled from the critical study of Scripture by the extravagance of extremist theories and by the reckless language of ignorant people, who distort while they seek to reproduce what they have failed to understand.

We should bear in mind the common want of acquaintance with the Hebrew language, the prevalent ignorance as to the formation of the Old Testament Canon, and the lack of imaginative sympathy on the part of modern Christian thought towards the ancient literature of a Semitic race. These are obstacles which affect us all more or less; and while they envelop Old Testament inquiry in darkness, they are apt to encourage the impression, that all movement in this region is insecure, and that it will be best and safest to remain content with our present position. In conclusion, let us sum up whatever other reasons exist for the opposition to critical study under these two heads: (1) That even the youngest among us do not like to confess, that our views may yet have to undergo the same process of modification and reconstruction which has mellowed the wisdom of previous generations; (2) That Biblical criticism will never

escape misunderstanding on the part of those who do not wish to welcome it.

We turn then to the principal subject of this paper, the literary, as distinct from the devotional, study of the Old Testament. It can be pursued on two very different lines. Each of them is essential to the full comprehension of the sacred writings. *Firstly*, they may be treated as a literary whole. As such, they give their witness to the life and growth of the Israelite people; they explain the final development of the Jewish religion; they reveal the formation of Jewish thought and character and society; they are chief among the historic influences which prepared the way for the coming of Christ. *Secondly*, the books may be subjected in detail to critical analysis. The history, style, structure, date of each writing will then receive close scrutiny. Results will be tabulated and systematised. Upon the basis of a comparison of internal evidence, the relationship of the various documents will be determined.

A few words are needed upon this second method of study. It is the genuine product of modern scholarship. It is possible indeed that its spirit may often carry us too far afield, and that it may tempt us now and again to pay excessive attention to the *minutiæ* of linguistic and grammatical analysis. If such is the case, we must look for an explanation in the rebound of biblical interpretation from habits of hasty generalization. The equilibrium of a free and devotional exegesis has not yet been perfectly adjusted. We are still held in some degree by the reaction from methods which applied to matters of literary and historic interest the test of strictly religious assumptions. If its tendency is to be narrow, literal, and unenthusiastic, the modern method is not without its recompense. Closer analysis may indeed upset preconceived notions of date and authorship; but it gives a new power of correlating what

has hitherto been regarded as separate and distinct, it substitutes for blind guess-work the scientific interest in a complex organism, it holds out the prospect, that the varied elements in the written word may contain an unsuspected sequence corresponding to creative epochs in the religious history of the people of Israel.

Very different from this is the other line of study that I mentioned first, which regards the Old Testament Scriptures as a whole, in their work of educating the Jewish race and of preparing for the final revelation in Christ. Regarded under this aspect, the writings of the Old Testament lie before us, as they lay before our Lord and His apostles. They are the Canon of Scripture of the Jewish Church; they are the Bible of the synagogue, which moulded the thought and shaped the religious life of the Jews from whom the Church of Christ arose. To all intents and purposes the contents of the Scriptures, to which our Lord appealed, are identical with our Old Testament. Their vital significance to the Church of Christ and the secret of their influence have not changed since the first days of the apostolic era. The significance of their teaching now, as then, is moral and religious; the secret of their influence now, as then, is spiritual. Literary criticism and historical analysis were foreign to the age at which Christ came upon earth. The Scriptures of the synagogues of Jerusalem derived their position from no approving board of critics, from no censorship of historians. They owed their unique ascendency to the popular conviction, that the Spirit of God had spoken eternal truth through the written word. It was not any theory of peculiar structure or succession of authorship, but just this conviction of its spiritual truth and power, which, having received the reiterated sanction of our Lord and the apostles, occasioned the complete acceptance by the Christian Church of the whole Jewish canon, as the literature of the partial revelation leading up, in the

history of the chosen race, to that which was Final and Perfect. A moment's reflexion is enough to show that this attitude, characteristic (in all reverence be it spoken) of our Lord and the apostles in their study and use of the Jewish Scriptures, is totally distinct from the investigation into letter and form, style and structure, which modern scholarship rightly claims to apply to the remains of an ancient religious literature. Wholly independent of vital religious issues, the determination of these literary problems fails to affect the fundamental relation of the Christian believer to the written word. These problems concern the literary phenomena, which have been the means of transmitting and are the means of teaching eternal truth. It falls to the responsibilities and the duties of our age to investigate phenomena with microscopic accuracy, and, having chronicled results, to draw such inferences as will most reasonably explain the mutual relation of documents, the signs of development in thought and expression, and the growth of religious ideas. Still, after all, the research into the literary phenomena of the books stands outside, it certainly never comes into conflict with the vital religion, whose message Law, Prophets, and Hagiographa can convey to the boldest critic of our own day, no less than to the humblest proselyte who looked for the redemption of Israel in the lifetime of our Lord.

If such be our position, we may approach the critical and analytical study of the books of the Old Testament "in full assurance of faith." We shall not be surprised, if the results of modern investigation applied to a literature, which for centuries seemed to the reverent spirit of Christendom to be shut off from the free operation of human criticism, should prove strange and startling. We shall await with the composure of an undisturbed trust the solution of momentous literary questions. We shall at least endeavour to check the sense of wrong, with which we are prone to

greet each result of criticism that conflicts with our own tradition. Lastly, we shall be in no hurry to draw the conclusion, that belief in inspiration is being violated, because the veil of centuries is being slowly removed from the human frame which has embodied the sacred message of the Spirit. More than this need scarcely be said here. For no theory as to the *modus* of inspiration—a matter concerning which we have no evidence—can help to determine questions of purely literary interest, questions that can only legitimately be determined by the recognised rules of human evidence.

It is no caricature of popular opinion, as prevalent not so very long ago, to say that the fact of a book being included in the canon of the Old Testament was a sufficient reason with the mass of readers to assign its authorship, in its present literary form, to the most holy and influential Israelite of the period with which it dealt. The criticism of modern time puts such hasty assumptions to a severe test. The structure and composition of the book must be examined; the book must so far as possible first tell its own tale; in the absence of good external testimony, internal evidence must practically alone decide its place and period in the history of literature. The late tradition preserved among the Jews or in the Christian Church will of course be taken into account, but at the best such evidence will only be of a subsidiary nature. In the case of a book of great antiquity, convincing evidence of authorship, unless stamped upon the writing itself, or corroborated by testimony from some source sufficiently near in point of time, is not probably to be expected. When this is first realized, we understand, perhaps for the first time, that the value of a sacred writing does not depend upon the identification of its author, nor even upon the unity of its authorship, any more than that its spiritual force is dependent upon the ascertained unique personality of the writer. Perplexity begins

to vanish, and new light to flood our mind, when we first grasp the thought of the law of gradual growth dominating the field of the records of revealed religion. We learn with sensations akin to delight and wonder, that the complex literature of the Old Testament is more bound up with the ordinary life of the Israelite people, and the slowly succeeding stages of religious growth, than with the isolated masterpieces of a few giant minds.

It is at this point that the realization of the large element of compilation in the structure of the Old Testament books becomes a matter of such great and suggestive importance. Many of us can recall statements from the limited experience of our own range of reading, according to which the structure of the books of the Old Testament was of the simplest possible character. The history of the patriarchs by Moses, followed by the journals of the lawgiver himself and his successor Joshua, accounted for the first six books. Judges, Ruth, and the first part of Samuel were assigned to the prophet Samuel, while the remainder of the books of Samuel fell to Nathan and Gad. The books of Kings were very naturally treated as the writing of Jeremiah; Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther were ascribed to Ezra. Job was written by the patriarch himself, or by his presumed contemporary, Moses. The Psalms were the work of David. Solomon bequeathed to us Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Canticles. The books of the prophets came, as we have them, from the pens of those whose names they bear. To summarize this view in a general statement, each book was treated as a separate literary whole; each was assigned, like any modern work, to the composition of some well-known man, whose time of influence coincided with the date to which the book was traditionally ascribed; the thought, that the special gift of inspiration was thus to be accredited to an individual writer, naturally led to the popular identification of the most holy men, who were to be accounted the

channels of the revelation and the writers of the sacred books.

The criticism of recent years has put a very different complexion upon the opinion of students with respect to these topics of Biblical *prolegomena*. Men are now accepting without hesitation views strangely at variance with the old tradition. Thus, to take the most obvious instances, no difficulty is now found in accepting the statement, that the Psalter contains the poetry of many different centuries, and that not only reigns of kings like Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah, but the periods of the Captivity and the Return, and even of the Maccabæan revolt, have largely contributed to the formation of a book once popularly thought to be almost limited to the writings of Davidic authorship. It has been an agreeable surprise to many to notice, with what general assent, if not open approbation, the statement (based on the internal evidence of the book) has been received that Ecclesiastes is the work of an unknown Jew, perhaps of Alexandria, living in the third century B.C., insomuch that the old tradition of Solomonic authorship is fast becoming obsolete. The probability, again, that the book of Job is to be included among the literary products of the exiles of the southern kingdom is being accepted, so far as can be judged at present, with every appearance of surprised satisfaction. Many an English reader has had pleasure in distinguishing for his own use the different groups of proverbial sayings, which, having been preserved in separate collections, were welded together in our book of Proverbs. In the case of the prophet Isaiah, scholars of all schools of thought are now attributing the latter portion of the book (xl.–lxvi.) to a writer living at the period of the Babylonian captivity; and even in the earlier portion, the varieties in style and the peculiarities noticeable in the grouping of the subject-matter have justified the explanation, that we have to deal here with *fasciculi* of Isaianic

prophecies, combined with utterances of a later period, and arranged at a date long subsequent to the days of Hezekiah. The books of Jeremiah, Zechariah, and Daniel are also found to illustrate in different ways characteristic phases in the compilatory process.

Turning to the historical books, it is recognised that the books of Kings are the work of a compiler, who (whether or no he was Jeremiah), at least in recording the description of the temple, and in extracting the whole section relating to Elijah and Elisha, as well as the passages which are repeated almost *verbatim* in Isaiah and Jeremiah, made no effort to conceal the process which he put in practice. In the books of Samuel, the evidence of similar compilatory work, though less exposed to view, has been made abundantly clear. And in the three main divisions into which the book of Judges falls, it is not difficult to distinguish three originally different groups of writing, of which the central portion appears itself to be a compilation derived from different sources.

I would close this hasty notice of a few instances of compilation with a brief reference to the Pentateuch, upon which the closest attention of critics has been concentrated. The conclusion seems now to be very generally accepted, on good grounds, that it is in the main a compilation of four documentary sources, which critics call the Elohist, the Jehovist, the Deuteronomist, and the Priestly Code, and that these four distinct strands of narrative can be distinguished not only in the Pentateuch, but also throughout at least the book of Joshua. Scholars, it is well known, long differed as to the relative proportions of these four elements of compilation. But on the main point agreement has been reached. The battle of controversy is no longer being fought over the question, whether the separate existence of these documents can be identified, but over a different question, which relates to the priority in date of the com-

position of these documents, and more particularly to the age in which the Priestly Code was written. Into the region of that thorny and technical question this is happily not the place to enter.

The foregoing sentences have very roughly summarized what is far from being an extremist statement of the degree in which compilation may be recognised in some of the books of the Old Testament. As scholars detach themselves from the Pentateuchal controversy, it is probable that other indications of compilation among the historical and prophetical writings will become more widely recognised. There is no doubt that in England many of us shrink from an idea which is at first sight startling and novel, partly because it seems to upset the opinion which has rested upon ecclesiastical tradition, partly too because the very conception of the composite origin of a book is so different from our modern experience. Nevertheless, it is essential, I believe, that we should attempt to realize the possible necessity of altering preconceived ideas, and that we should prepare ourselves to appreciate results of criticism, the application of which will very likely be found to prevail more extensively than has generally been supposed probable. It was for this purpose that at the outset I endeavoured to point out, that these steps of advance in critical knowledge are no hindrance to the Christian student of Divine revelation. We need however to go a step farther. It is not enough to tolerate change. We must learn to recognise, to appropriate, and to welcome its help. We must use it as God's gift to us; and I venture to think, that the frank recognition of the element of compilation may unexpectedly aid us in our understanding and enjoyment of the books of Scripture.

Let us pass in review a few points, which tend to show that this may prove to be the case.

1. In the first place, the recognition of the element of

compilation in the structure of the books enables us to reconcile the presence of apparently late forms of language and allusions to late historical events side by side with evident tokens of great antiquity. The work of compilation has left the mark of the compiler's or the redactor's age upon the writings of earlier time. They are no mere sporadic glosses and marginal interpolations. They represent the more recent deposits in the literary stratum, sections of which have been laid bare by the excavations of the critic. For the work of the compiler was often simple and even inartistic. The recognition of it will account for the existence of many a peculiarity, which English readers are apt, in all reverence, to put to the credit of the Hebrew style of writing. The apparent want of arrangement in some narratives, the rapid transition from one subject to another, the strange repetition in a slightly altered form of the same incident, the abrupt parenthetical introduction of apparently uncalled for details and events, the insertion of lists of names, etc.—many of these strange features in the structure of the simplest books receive from the principle of compilation a satisfactory explanation. The compiler had nothing to conceal. His purpose was to transmit the best account of past events or the most complete *résumé* of some important utterance. What better way had the chronicler or compiler or scribe than to make the records from which he drew tell so far as possible their own tale in their own language?

2. In the second place, although many of the reputedly earliest writings show unmistakable signs of revision at different ages and of compilation at a comparatively late period, the separate existence of their component documents carries us far back into remote antiquity. Thus, if we take the Pentateuch to illustrate my meaning, even supposing that the view is correct which assigns the Elohist and Jehovist documents to the literary activity

of the Israelites in the 9th century B.C., it is to be remembered that each of these great written channels of tradition may be held to have had (in the same way as our own completed Pentateuch) a complex history of its own in the past. Both would have compiled from various sources the records and traditions which they now united and incorporated in their single channels. The further we recede into primitive time, the less likely are we no doubt to find traces of a continuous and orderly *written* history. But there is no reason to question, that from the earliest known ages numerous streams of oral and even of written tradition originated from and were propagated by the conditions of tribal life in Syria and of national life in Assyria and Egypt. As time passed on, the various confluents of narrative would become merged in a few main channels, which for vividness, force, simplicity, and completeness commended themselves most to the affections of the people. These oral and written traditions, preserved as seems most probable, in the keeping and by the industry of the priestly families and the prophetical schools, and doubtless augmented from time to time from other sources, awaited their destiny of becoming tributaries to the great stream of narrative and law which carried Judaism forth upon its mission to the world.

I venture to think, that many modern scholars who have skilfully and successfully subdivided the Pentateuch into its component parts have left themselves open to the misunderstanding, that they denied to these component parts any previous history. They have used language which was capable of being understood to mean that Elohist and Jehovist were the figments of one century, and the Priestly Code the figment of another. It appears to me that the analogy of the completed whole is applicable to the several parts; and although I am constrained to admit that the further sub-division of the parts may exceed the ingenuity,

or at any rate the legitimate capacity, of literary analysis, I should strongly contend that a theory of the gradual growth of the component parts, as opposed to that of their sudden formation, will alone satisfactorily account for their origin and character. And I would suggest, that the fair acceptance of such a theory enables us to connect by no impossible links, but by the steady growth of literary power and the agglutination of different elements of tradition, the earliest memorials of Israel with their final embodiment in the books that have come down to us.

The thought of compilation will here remind us that in the books of Scripture we are not dependent upon a single consecutive line of literature, but upon successive and even divergent threads of tradition. Their very variety emphasizes the general unity of thought and accuracy of tradition, written and oral, which, when combined, has given so clear and continuous a narrative. These component documents comprise the substance of national tradition and literature, that was varied (*a*) as to the *manner* of its transmission—by writing, memory, song, genealogies; (*b*) as to its *agents* of communication—by priestly families, by schools of prophets, by royal scribes, by heads of tribes and families; (*c*) as to its *local origin*—by peculiarities of Northern and Southern Palestine, by special connexion with the temple, with places of peculiar sanctity and scenes of eventful deeds.

3. Thirdly, it only remains to say, that the general phenomena of compilation indicate the presence of the same characteristics of Hebrew literature in its earlier as in its later stage. Its characteristics are, on the one hand, to preserve tenaciously, to abstain from removing, the landmarks of the ages; on the other hand, to accept accretions of spiritual force from every creative period and to assimilate the new life with the old. This will account, in the historical narrative, for the preservation of passages derogatory

to Israelite heroes side by side with eulogistic memoirs. This will account, in the records of legislation, for the insertion of later laws and customs in connexion with, or embedded in, those of great antiquity. This will account for pages of Babylonian prophecy attached to the writings of Isaiah, for post-exilic and Maccabean Psalms, for an Alexandrian "Koheleth," and even for the expansion of the story of Daniel in the apocalyptic treatment of the 2nd (?) century B.C.

As we look at the collection of the Old Testament books, we are reminded of one of our own English cathedrals, in which the strangely composite structure reveals the varying taste and sympathies of successive centuries. There is an interest and a meaning in each portion, mingled with much that is quaint and fantastic. And while the whole vast compacted building summons the spirits of worshippers into the presence of their God, each separate gable, tower, and arch not only speaks of the common faith, but also testifies to the individual force or frailty of some different generation, which contributed its best to the glory of God and for the use of those that should come after it.

It is at this point, that I must bid farewell to a subject with which I have already too long occupied your attention and taxed your patience. It would take me too far afield to do more than hint at the extension of interest in the history of Israelite religion, which arises from the recognition of this principle. The object of this paper will have been fully attained, if I have at all succeeded in calling attention to lines of thought, upon which modern criticism may be disarmed of some of its terrors for Christian readers of the Old Testament.

Before concluding, however, I would venture to express the conviction, that the true appreciation of the element of compilation should lead us a long way in the direction

of understanding the process by which the sacred books acquired the recognition of what is called canonicity. The History of the Old Testament Canon forms the natural continuance of the present subject. All evidence tends to show that the idea of a canon of Scripture did not take its rise until towards the close of the monarchy, until the dispersion had begun, until the germ of the Jewish Church was seen and its possibilities understood. Not until then was the need recognised of collecting the various records of tradition, of history and law, of prophecy and poetry and "*Khokma*," and of combining them for the purpose of knitting in closer spiritual union the members of the chosen race, the Israel of God dispersed throughout the world, whom no far off temple-worship at Jerusalem could bind together in religious discipline.

Yet another and more profound subject cannot but be ultimately affected by the appreciation of the subject of this paper. The place and character of inspiration, in relation to writings of such strangely complex structure, is a matter upon which, with our limited material for forming a judgment, no hasty opinion should be hazarded. Attempts to classify inspiration, and to distribute its operation between original authorship, successive stages of revision and transmission, and ultimate compilation, repel us by an assumption of familiarity with things of the Spirit, which transcend all human understanding.

Let us be content to stop humbly at the gates of such mysteries, confessing that, at this early stage of our partial knowledge, we have here no key. None the less let us hail the presence and acknowledge the power of that eternal Spirit, as we search with patience and hope the pages of the records of the Old Covenant. Those records—completed after centuries of slow development—had not long been recognised as the finished Canon of the Jewish race, when the Son of Man came, not to destroy, but to fulfil

the covenant. Christ set His seal upon that Jewish Canon: "these" Scriptures, said He, "are they which bear witness of Me." And what more do we need? Not, surely, more definitions of inspiration; but only this, a better discern- of the Spirit.

τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιοῦν.

HERBERT E. RYLE.

NOTE.

*** This article was written last summer, and sent to the editor of THE EXPOSITOR towards the close of December, 1889. It has therefore no connexion with a recent discussion of the problems raised by Old Testament criticism. I venture however to refer readers interested in the subject to Canon Driver's article on "The Critical Study of the Old Testament" (*Contemporary Review*, Feb., 1890). Some of the points to which allusion is made in the course of my paper are there handled in detail, with the reverence, learning, and courage requisite for the task, and characteristic of the writer.—H. E. R., *April 12th*, 1890.

"FASTING" IN HOLY SCRIPTURE.

THE scope of this paper is strictly limited. It is an inquiry as to the amount and nature of the sanction which the practice of fasting receives from the authority of Holy Scripture.

With the definitions of fasting, in its connexion with religious institutions, we need not greatly trouble ourselves. In Scripture fasting means primarily the total abnegation of food for a particular period; and all later meanings are only modifications of this. In ecclesiastical literature a distinction has arisen between fasting and abstinence,—the latter being defined as "the depriving ourselves of *certain kinds of food and drink* in a rational way, and for the good of the soul"; whereas the former limits the *quantity* as