

RECENT COMMENTARIES ON GENESIS.

BY PROFESSOR JOHN R. SAMPEY, D.D., LL.D.

It is the writer's purpose to give an estimate of the commentaries on Genesis issued in the first decade of the twentieth century. The list is not exhaustive; but it is hoped that no important recent commentary has been overlooked.

Among the early Protestant commentaries on Genesis, that of Calvin still commands respect for learning and exegetical insight. Of commentaries issued in the nineteenth century, some of the most valuable are the following: Tuch, 1838, second edition by Merx and Arnold, 1871; Kalisch, 1858; Knobel, second edition, 1860; Murphy, 1863. A transition to the modern critical view of Genesis is made by Dillmann, 1875, last German edition, 1892, translated by Stevenson, 1897; Delitzsch, *Neuer Commentar*, 1887; Spurrell, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Genesis*, 1887; Strack, 1894; Holzinger, in *Kurzer Hand-Commentar zum Alten Testament*, 1898. Appearing since 1900: Bennett, in the *New-Century Bible*, about 1902; Driver, in *Westminster Commentaries*, 1903, seventh edition, 1909; Gunkel, *Hand-Kommentar zum Alten Testament*, third edition, 1910; Welton and Goodspeed, in *American Commentary*, 1909; Mitchell, in *Bible for Home and School*, 1909; Skinner, in *International Critical Commentary*, 1910.

Of books other than commentaries which treat of the critical questions connected with Genesis, the following are among the most important: Hupfeld, *Die Quellen der Genesis*, 1853; Graf, *Die geschichtlichen Bücher des Alten Testaments*, 1866; Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der hist. Bücher des Alten Testaments*, 1889; Kuenen, *The Hexateuch*, 1886; Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, eighth edition, 1898; W. H. Green, *The Unity of Genesis*, 1895;

Carpenter and Harford-Battersby, *The Oxford Hexateuch*, 1900; Orr, *The Problem of the Old Testament*, 1906.

The veteran defender of the evangelical interpretation of the Old Testament, Franz Delitzsch, wrote in the Preface to the last edition of his *Commentary on Genesis*: "I am not a believer in the 'Religion of the times of Darwin.' I am a believer in two orders of things and not merely in one, which the miraculous would drill holes in. I believe in the Easter announcement, and I accept its deductions." Delitzsch accepted the general results of the critical analysis as these were brought to light all along through his long term of service as a university professor, towards the close of his life acceding to the modern view that the priestly document was later than the prophetic in the Hexateuch. While freely granting the right of criticism to analyze the Pentateuch into its original documents, he asserted his faith in the inspiration of the extant whole. "It is true," he writes, "that the present destructive proceedings in the department of Old Testament criticism, which demand the construction of a new edifice, are quite fitted to confuse consciences and to entangle a weak faith in all kinds of temptation. If, however, we keep fast hold in this labyrinth of the one truth, *Christus vere resurrexit*, we have in our hands Ariadne's thread to lead us out of it."

August Dillmann was perhaps the most learned commentator on the Old Testament in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He, too, accepted the analysis of the Hexateuch into four main documents, his A, B and C corresponding to the more common notation P, E and J. He took issue with the Graf-Wellhausen school as to the date of the priestly document and in Genesis rejected the theory that the two prophetic narratives J and E were first fused into a single roll prior to incorporation of the P material. In general, Dillmann found no place for a multitude of redactors.

Spurrell, in his *Notes on the Text of Genesis*, has provided the student of Hebrew with an excellent grammatical and exegetical apparatus. The author belongs to the school of Driver.

Holzinger gives the closest attention to questions of literary analysis, a field in which he is quite at home. He also inserts many references to the standard Hebrew grammars and lexicons, for the guidance of the student. Questions of textual criticism receive proper emphasis, the testimony of ancient versions of Genesis being adduced wherever pertinent. The finer poetic and literary beauties of the stories in Genesis do not appeal to Holzinger as they do to Gunkel. As to the historicity of the patriarchal narratives, Holzinger's conclusion is avowedly negative.

Bennett's little volume in the *New-Century Bible* is notable as the first commentary on Genesis by an English scholar in which the modern critical view is applied in the exposition of the text. Naturally the apologetic note is heard occasionally in the midst of the critical discussions, for the *New-Century Bible* is intended for the general reader and not for the critical scholar. There is the fullest recognition of the ethical and religious value of the early stories. As an attempt to win a hearing for the critical view of the composition of Genesis from readers naturally averse to such a theory, it would be difficult to speak in extravagant terms of Professor Bennett's little book. If the advocates of the partition hypothesis had always been thus considerate of the cherished convictions of the Christian reader, no doubt the critical view of the Old Testament would have been more generally accepted. Dr. Bennett never speaks of "manufactured history," "myths," "fables," and "pulverizing criticism." He knows his public, and he approaches it in the most conciliatory way possible. Moreover, he holds substantially conservative and evangelical views of Christ and His salvation; and he leads the reader along the way by which

he has himself come in relating the modern critical view of the Old Testament to Christ and the gospel message. The section on "The Interpretation of Genesis" (Introduction, pp. 47-51) illustrates the author's skill in teaching the modern criticism to an evangelical public.

Perhaps no man has done more than Canon Driver to influence the thinking of the English-speaking peoples in the department of Old Testament study. He is recognized as a master of Hebrew grammar and an exegete of unusual ability. Hence a commentary on Genesis from his pen could not fail to win a wide reading. Scarcely a year passes without a new edition of his Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament and of his Book of Genesis. One thinks of him as the Dillmann of England; and judging from his references to the great German scholar, we feel confident that he would be pleased with the comparison. He combines with the keenest critical analysis and the most thorough-going historical criticism a firm faith in the great doctrines of Christianity. He does not fear that the progress of critical research will rob us of the ethical and spiritual inheritance which has been mediated to us through the Bible.

Professor Driver's views as to the questions of the harmony of Genesis and Science, the historicity of the primeval and the patriarchal stories, the chronology of Genesis, etc., may seem distressingly negative, to one who has been taught to believe in the absolute inerrancy of every statement in the Old Testament. The following summary of the results of Doctor Driver's investigations may be interesting: "We have found that in the first eleven chapters there is little or nothing that can be called historical, in our sense of the word; there may be here and there dim recollections of historical occurrences; but the concurrent testimony of geology and astronomy, anthropology, archæology, and comparative philology, is proof that the account given in these chapters of the creation of heaven and earth, the appearance of living things

upon the earth, the origin of man, the beginnings of civilization, the destruction of mankind and of all terrestrial animals (except those preserved in the ark) by a flood, the rise of separate nations, and the formation of different languages, is no historically true record of these events as they actually happened. And with regard to the histories contained in chs. xii.-i., we have found that, while there is no sufficient reason for doubting the existence, and *general* historical character of the biographies, of the patriarchs, nevertheless much uncertainty must be allowed to attach to *details* of the narrative; we have no guarantee that we possess verbally exact reports of the events narrated; and there are reasons for supposing that the figures and characters of the patriarchs are in different respects *idealized*. And, let it be observed, not one of the conclusions reached in the preceding pages is arrived at upon arbitrary or *à priori* grounds; not one of them depends upon any denial, or even doubt, of the supernatural or of the miraculous; they are, one and all, *forced upon us* by the facts; they follow directly from a simple consideration of the facts of physical science and human nature, brought to our knowledge by the various sciences concerned, from a comparison of these facts with the Biblical statements, and from an application of the ordinary canons of historical criticism." (Introduction, p. lxi.)

Professor Driver discusses at length the scientific difficulties confronting the modern interpreter of Genesis, and in general holds that the physical sciences can by no means be brought into agreement with the statements in Genesis; he affirms, however, that "the man of science who gives due weight to the religious instincts of his nature will be ready to recognize the *religious* truthfulness, —as distinct from the *scientific* truthfulness,—of these narratives of Genesis." Doctor Driver insists that the Book of Genesis loses practically nothing of its religious value through an acceptance of the modern critical view

of its composition and of the legendary character of its narratives: "If, now, upon the basis of the considerations advanced in the preceding pages, we proceed to the question which after all is of the most immediate interest not only to the theologian in the technical sense of the word, but also to the man of general religious sympathies, we shall find that the religious value of the narratives of Genesis, while it must be placed upon a different basis from that on which it has hitherto been commonly considered to rest, remains in itself *essentially unchanged*. It is true, we often *cannot get behind the narratives*,—in Chaps. i.-xi., as we have seen, the narratives cannot be historical, in our sense of the word, at all; and in Chaps. xii.-l., there are at least many points at which we cannot feel assured that the details are historical; we are obliged consequently to *take them as we find them*, and read them accordingly. And then we shall find that the narratives of Genesis teach us still the same lessons which they taught our forefathers." (Introduction, p. lxxviii.)

Gunkel's Genesis is the most extensive and interesting of the recent commentaries on the first book in the Bible. The style of the book is admirable, taking rank with the best work of Adolf Harnack, to whom the commentary is dedicated.

In the elaborate Introduction, six general topics are discussed: (1) Genesis is a collection of legends; (2) Kinds of legends in Genesis; (3) Artistic form of the legends of Genesis; (4) History of the handing down of the legends of Genesis in oral tradition; (5) Jahvist, Elohist, Jehovist; (6) Priest Codex and the final redactions.

Gunkel insists that one must not confuse legend with falsehood; it is a species of poesy in which ancient traditions are handed down in popular narration. He thinks it beside the mark to argue that the patriarchal stories cannot be legends, since Jesus and the Apostles regarded them as true history. He contends that in this respect they shared the opinions of their times, and hence ought

not to be expected to settle in advance questions concerning the literary history of the Old Testament. Among the marks of legend in Genesis, Gunkel names the fact that the narratives took their rise in oral tradition, and treat of personal and private life rather than national and public affairs; moreover for the primeval history the writer of the stories could neither claim to be an eye-witness nor to have received the narrative from such witnesses. The plainest mark of the legend, according to Gunkel, is that they not seldom relate things which to us are incredible. He contrasts the marvels of Genesis with the historic narrative in II. Samuel, and calls attention to the poetic tone of the Genesis stories.

Gunkel's analysis of the so-called legends of Genesis into their different kinds is very minute, and the reader's attention is held throughout the discussion. He finds in Genesis no pure myths, though traces of the mythical have been brought into the narrative from the myths of the ancient Babylonians. Gunkel prefers to speak of the primeval stories as legends rather than myths.

Gunkel has perhaps done more than any other recent scholar of the advanced school to resolve the J and E narratives into short stories of various times and places. One might almost call his theory a return to the fragmentary hypothesis. His imagination revels in the task of describing the origin of the individual short story and its history until it got incorporated into our present Book of Genesis. One cannot but wonder at the author's ability to follow the fortunes of these separate narratives, and but for the charm of the style would certainly declare that the arguments brought forward at various points are not convincing. It does not often fall to the lot of man to write an entertaining commentary: Gunkel has produced one that is fascinating.

Professor Daniel M. Welton, of McMaster University, Toronto, was at work on his Commentary on Genesis, when he was smitten down by his last illness. At his re-

quest, Professor Calvin Goodspeed, of Baylor University, Waco, Texas, undertook the final revision of the comments, and prepared the Introduction. Both writers stand for the historicity of Genesis and for the substantial unity of the book. According to Doctor Goodspeed, "All the lines of evidence from the whole Bible as we have it, from the Pentateuch itself, from the other books of the O. T., from the attestations of archæological discovery, from the consistency of the legislation with the situation which is said to have called it forth, and from the testimony of our Lord and the N. T., converge upon Moses as the source of the Pentateuch, and its author in a broad but true sense." The difficulties and perplexities of the current Graf-Wellhausen theory of the Old Testament are pointed out, and the present tendency of the more radical critics to assume a larger and larger number of documents and redactors is shown to threaten the disintegration of the whole fabric. Doctor Goodspeed thinks that "fuller recognition by more conservative scholars that the author of the Pentateuch doubtless used earlier records in the composition of Genesis, and that also a somewhat larger margin may be allowed for later glosses and explanatory notes," would remove a large part of the objection to the Mosaic authorship. Doctor Welton's notes everywhere defend the credibility of the narrative, though his chief interest lies in the explanation of the author's meaning, for the benefit of the general reader.

Doctor Mitchell's brief commentary, in "The Bible for Home and School," is intended for the general reader. The author's statement of the modern critical theory of the origin of the Pentateuch introduces us to his own view: "The Pentateuch was compiled from four separate works, written at different periods, the last three being united one after another with the oldest by a succession of editors. Three of these works were used in Genesis. The oldest is supposed to have been written

by a native of Judea as early as the reign of Jehoshaphat (878-843 B. C.); the second by an Ephraimite, or native of the kingdom of Israel, probably under Jeroboam II. (785-745 B. C.) These two were first united, but not until after 650 B. C., when both of them had been more or less revised and enlarged by later writers. Meanwhile, in the reign of Manasseh (686-640 B. C.), there had been produced another work, some form of Deuteronomy, which, on being made public in 621 B. C., became the program of Josiah's reformation. It was probably added to the previous compilation soon after the beginning of the Exile (586-538 B. C.). Finally a priestly writer, or school of writers, during and after the Exile, produced a fourth work, which Ezra seems to have brought with him from Babylon in 458 B. C., and, with the help of Nehemiah, persuaded the Jews to accept, either separately or as a part of the practically complete Pentateuch, in 444 B. C. This, in outline, is the more prevalent form of the so-called Documentary Hypothesis. Applied to Genesis, it means that the book is composed of parts taken from the first two and the last of the works mentioned, fitted together with more or less skill to make a continuous narrative covering the period from the beginning of history to the death of Joseph." Doctor Mitchell's mode of procedure is to "follow the composite text, taking each paragraph separately and using the modern theory of the origin of the book as a key to the difficulties that appear in the given passage." Naturally one in love with criticism calls frequent attention to its deliverances. However there is much comment that is informing to the reader on other subjects.

The most recent commentary on Genesis, and one of the most important, is Skinner's volume in the *International Critical Commentary*. Driver and Gunkel seem to have influenced Doctor Skinner most profoundly, though he has studied to good purpose most of the works of his predecessors. The author's general attitude to critical

questions is defined in the Preface: "On the more momentous question of the historical or legendary character of the book, or the relation of the one element to the other, opinion is likely to be divided for some time to come. Several competent Assyriologists appear to cherish the conviction that we are on the eve of fresh discoveries which will vindicate the accuracy of at least the patriarchal traditions in a way that will cause the utmost astonishment to some who pay too little heed to the findings of archæological experts. It is naturally difficult to estimate the worth of such an anticipation; and it is advisable to keep an open mind. Yet even here it is possible to adopt a position which will not be readily undermined. Whatever triumphs may be in store for the archæologist,—though he should prove that Noah and Abraham and Jacob and Joseph are all real historical personages,—he will hardly succeed in dispelling the atmosphere of mythical imagination, of legend, of poetic idealization, which are the life and soul of the narratives of Genesis. It will still be necessary, if we are to retain our faith in the inspiration of this part of Scripture, to recognize that the Divine Spirit has enshrined a part of His Revelation to men in such forms as these. It is only by a frank acceptance of this truth that the Book of Genesis can be made a means of religious edification to the educated mind of our age."

From Doctor Skinner's treatment of Genesis, the student can gather the views of most of the representative scholars who have written on the subject. He is familiar with the findings of critics, exegetes and archæologists. The views of Eerdmans, Orr, and other opponents of the current analysis are criticised, and an effort is made to buttress the prevalent critical theories. The author is particularly strong in theological discussion. While prepared for advanced students, much of the book is intelligible to the general reader. The work must take high rank as a product of broad and profound scholarship.

It is a significant fact that only one of the recent commentaries on Genesis supports the so-called traditional or conservative view. Christian students are more and more confronted with the necessity of examining and weighing the findings of literary and historical criticism. If all the new commentaries propagate the Graf-Wellhausen theory, the next generation of students and preachers will believe it and teach it. Will such a revolution in the Christian view of the Old Testament mark an advance, or a decline? If the supernatural is eliminated from the Old Testament, will the New Testament miracles of the Incarnation and the Resurrection still stand? Let us follow the truth, though the heavens fall; but we should *prove* all things, and hold fast only that which is good.*

* In the next issue an article will appear in which the author's views as to the composition of Genesis will be given.