

DEUTERONOMY—WHENCE AND WHY?

A STUDY IN SCRIPTURE CRITICISM AND HEBREW PSYCHOLOGY.

I

IN his book, "The Divine Unity of Scripture," Dr. Adolph Saphir says: "A man might as plausibly say that the Epistle to the Galatians was written by Luther, as many say nowadays that the book of Deuteronomy was written centuries after the death of Moses."¹

These words were penned about forty years ago; but their application holds good also, and, perhaps, more so, to-day.

For, the majority of leaders, and teachers, of the most modern School of ultra-critical Bible study, who virtually deny the supernatural in the Old Testament, and postulate the Naturalistic, or, as the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, and others, call it, the "Evolutionary" view of history, maintain, that the book of Deuteronomy was not written by Moses but by some unknown author or authors during the reign of King Josiah (639-608 B.C.), or shortly before that reign. They further aver that the reason why the book was written was because its author or authors hoped by means of it to promote a religious Reformation, a return to the true God, in Israel. It is also declared by the same ultra-critical School that it was "the book" that Hilkiyah the High Priest "found" in the Temple. (2 Kings xxii. 8-10; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14.) And some critics say that Hilkiyah himself was the author of the book; whilst other, milder critics, shrinking from this imputation of literary forgery, refer it, on various grounds, to the time of Manasseh (cf. *Ewald, Driver*) or the early days of Isaiah (cf. *Kuenen, Cheyne*, etc.). They all, however, unanimously concur that the book was not written by Moses but that some author or authors wrote it long after the days of the great Lawgiver of Israel.

Now, this theory is in direct conflict with the account which is given in the book itself, and which was unmistakably believed to be true by King Josiah, by the prophetess Huldah, by the writers of the Books of Kings and Chronicles, and by others besides.

Moreover, the whole tone of the book is inconsistent with the

¹ Id., p. 154; 1892 ed.

later date assigned to it. A number of philological archaisms in the book, references to places and peoples, and scriptural historic evidences, from the book of Joshua onwards, go to prove that the book in question is much older than the Josiah, or even the Prophet Isaiah, period, in ancient Hebrew history. Several able and consecrated scholars have already fully dealt with these aspects of the Problem of Deuteronomy. And it is an outstanding and remarkable fact, worthy of special note, that such books as Hommel's (Munich) *The Ancient Hebrew Tradition*, Orr's *The Problem of the Old Testament*, Prof. Green's (Princeton Theological Seminary) *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch*, A. H. Finn's *The Unity of the Pentateuch*, Prof. Sayce's *The Higher Criticism and the Verdict of the Monuments*, and the telling Sermon on *The Five Books of the Torah*, by the Very Rev. Dr. J. H. Hertz, the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, in his book, *Affirmations of Judaism*—it is, we say, most remarkable that these and kindred publications from the pens of prominent British, American, German and Dutch Scholars and Historians, Christian as well as Jewish (cf., Graetz, in his *Geschichte*, ii. 408-39) are still waiting to be effectively answered by the ultra-rationalistic critics of the Old Testament.

Our purpose in this article is to deal with the Hebrao-Psychological aspect in reference to the "Evolutionary" theory about the "Whence" and "Why" of Deuteronomy.

II

What, in plain language, this extremely rationalistic theory implies is this: That Moses was not the author of the book, but that the sublime speeches or addresses contained therein were surreptitiously put into his mouth in after centuries; also that the references to the Israelitish wanderings in the desert, and the vivid "colourings" of the life in the wilderness and all the other incidents, personal and national, and circumstances, recorded in the book are mere fiction, clever literary forgeries, fabricated as an imaginary setting, or background, for the purpose of nothing less than promoting a revival of religion, a return of sinners, from their fraudulent and evil ways, back to the true God.

Mark it well: a Literary Forgery and a Religious Revival! What strange companions, to be sure, in the household of "true religion and undefiled!"

This is not a case of controverting sane and well-informed

criticism in defence of Bibliolatry. All sane students of the Word of God will agree that a superstitious adoration of the *mere letter* of the Book is as abhorrent to God as it is injurious to the human soul. "The letter killeth; it is the spirit that gives life"—the spirit of Wisdom, of Understanding, sanctified by Common Sense and the Fear of the Lord. But how much of real wisdom, of true understanding of human nature, is there exhibited in the theory before us? Very little indeed; since Fraud and genuine Faith do not beget each other. Nor is it Satan's way to drive himself out. But apart from this, there is also very conspicuous ignorance shown, through this theory, concerning the people amongst whom, by whom, and upon whom, that literary fraud, in the name of true religion, is said to have been perpetrated.

Ancient Israel has been guilty of many sad and foolish blunders in matters of Faith and Fidelity to the true God. But there is no evidence to imply, let alone prove, that the Hebrews of old were given to stuffing their Sacred Writings with false, forged, lying literary productions. It is an historical fact, for instance, that none of the Hebrew books published by Jews under assumed names (as, for example, *The Book of Enoch*, *The Apocalypse of Moses*, *The Ascension and Vision of Isaiah*, etc., etc.) were included in the canon of the Old Testament. May not one reason for that be, that the Hebrew compilers of the Old Testament felt that it was not morally right to include these books on the very ground of the irregularity of their authorship?

And, besides, in view of the special vocation and unique mission of ancient Israel, a people specially chosen to receive the revelation of God's mind and heart, and charged with the responsibility of conveying that revelation to the world, it is hard to conceive of the idea that, on the literary side of that nation's high calling for God and Mankind, there was a low indulgence in fraud and forgery. "As long as the world lasts," says an English secular writer, "all who want to make progress in righteousness will come to Israel for inspiration, as the people who have had the sense for righteousness most glowing and strongest; and, in hearing and reading the words Israel has uttered for us, carers for conduct will find a glow and a force they could find nowhere else."²

² Matthew Arnold.

For our modern civilisation, we are debtors to the ancient Egyptians, and the Greeks and the Romans, aye, and to the great Asiatic races. There have been "Lights of Asia" besides those which issued from Mount Zion. And the people of Zion, as a people, were often perverse and faithless. 'Forty years long was God grieved with that people,' chants one of their own inspired Psalmists. But when all that is acknowledged, still the Jewish race stands alone, not only in the great world, but even among the Semitic races, which are believed to have been specially predisposed to religion. *Spiritually and mentally the ancient Hebrew race was specially predisposed to religion. Out of that race there came forth the heralds of pure spiritual life, and faith in God.* It is, therefore, difficult to reconcile this outstanding fact about the ancient Israelites with the theory of a forged book, now known as the Book of Deuteronomy, and a part of that very revelation of God, having crept into the Jewish religion in the days of King Josiah, and having led to the religious Reformation.

That a whole nation, and the unique Hebrew nation at that, was turned to God, by means of a cleverly manipulated literary trick, is, in other words, what the modern postulators of the Naturalistic idea of Old Testament history would have us accept as an historical fact. That, to put it mildly, is a far-fetched theory. It does not at all square with what is known of the Jewish race. *It is, in short, a psychological impossibility.*

Just think how the Jews of old watched over their sacred books, carefully passing them on to succeeding generations. In days of old the Hebrew Psalmist sang :

"O how I love thy Torah !
It is my meditation all the day
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet
And light unto my path" (Ps. cxix. 97 and 105).

And, in our own times, a Jewish *Yiddish* poet exclaimed :

"The Torah has been our consolation,
Our help in exile and sore privation
We have sacrificed all. We have given our wealth,
Our homes, our honours, our lands, our health,
Our lives—like Hannah her children seven—
For the sake of the *Torah* that came from heaven,"

To this day, the truly orthodox cultured Jew (the Jew who is not "modern" enough to ape the foes of Holy Writ) still finds

¹ J. L. Gordon ; translated from the Yiddish by Alice Lucas and H. Frank ; see *A Book of Jewish Thoughts*, Oxford Edition, p. 255.

in the Torah, like the Psalmist of old, his heart's "delight." The following words, used by the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire about *The Five Books of the Torah* (otherwise the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy included), show the true Jew's attitude towards the Old Testament, the Scriptures of Truth of ancient Israel :

"If we judge this Divine book by its results what an elemental, majestic force is Israel's Torah. It shattered not only the idols but the stone heart of antiquity, taught mankind the doctrine of the One Holy God who is the Father of all men, proclaimed the great commandment 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' and implanted pity within the soul of humanity."

Official Jewry in the days of Pontius Pilate would not have Jesus, Whom the common people followed gladly, as the Divinely promised Messiah of Israel. The fact, nevertheless, remains that "*unto them were committed the oracles of God.*" The Jews did not tear their own Scriptures of Truth to tatters and reduce the Old Testament contents to legends and faked literary fiction. On the contrary, the God-ward aspiring Hebrews, from Joshua to the brave Maccabean family, drew for their moral strength upon the "*Book of the Law.*" As against that, Wellhausen, one of the foremost modern exponents of destructive Bible criticism, proclaims that the influence of the Pentateuch was unmitigatedly evil. In his book, *History of Israel and Judah*, p. 223, Wellhausen says with regard to the Hebrew Scriptures of the Pentateuch: "*So viel an ihm liegt, enseelt es die Religion, und verdirbt die Moral*" ('As much as in it lies, it demoralised religion and depraved morality.') Another modern critic of the Old Testament, Friedrich Delitzsch (son of the great Hebraist and godly man, Franz Delitzsch), goes even further than his master, Wellhausen, and denounces the Hebrew Scriptures as "The Great Deception"; and "he calls upon the Christian world to cast off the incubus of the Jewish Bible." (See Dr. J. H. Hertz' *Affirmations of Judaism*, pp. 39-54.)

It is the "modern" anti-supernatural Schools of Bible students who seem to see deceit and forgeries in the Old Testament. But not so, psychologically, the "People of the Book." To the true Jew of old, "All Scripture was inspired by God and profitable for teaching . . . and for moral discipline, to make the man of God proficient and equipped for good work of every kind." "Blindness in part," with regard to Jesus Christ,

has indeed come over Israel. But, as a race, the Jewish race has been ever very wide-awake towards the sanctity of the Old Testament.

It is pure assumption, therefore, and nothing else, that the ancient Hebrews were in such an undeveloped and naïve state of mind with regard to the moral aspects of forged Scripture documents as to be led into a Reformation of Religion by means of a faked document purporting to have been written by Moses.¹

III

The great Christian Reformation in the sixteenth century was certainly not brought about by some faked epistles in the name of St. Paul. Christianity was then partly taken back, by the Reformers, to the Bible itself, to the old, and ever fresh, Word of God; and there, men and women came to see what their Lord God did require of them. There, out of the pages of the Scriptures of Truth, they learned how to "keep the securities of their Faith intact, and how to avoid the profane jargon and contradictions" of what is falsely called "Knowledge." And by the light of the Word of Truth they, some of the Reformers, and humble Protestant Martyrs, were enabled to "light such a light" in the temple of the human soul that it is still more or less shining. May it never be quenched again!

Now what happened in the sixteenth century A.D. is true also of other periods in history. Souls are not now, and never in the world's history, Jewish or Gentile, have been, truly turned—*i.e. converted*—to the true God by means of forged literary productions, however cleverly done. In ancient Jewish history, the brave Maccabeans, in their heroic stand against the cruel Antiochus Epiphanes, and in Christian history, men like Wycliff, Luther, John Huss, John Knox, the Scotch Covenanters, and the Wesley brothers, for the purpose of furthering the work of God in human lives, had no need to indulge in anonymous literary productions, and pass them off as genuine writings of an Isaiah or an Elijah or a St. John or a St. Paul. God does not attract souls unto Himself by means of trickery, literary or any other; and He certainly would not have man do that for Him, at any time, B.C. or A.D. For God is Sanctity, and also Intellectual Sanity;

¹ See Bredenkamp in *Gesetz und Propbeten*, p. 6; ed. 1881. Also Ed. Naville, LL.D., D.C.L., in *Archæology of the Old Testament*, p. 205. ("Deuteronomy . . . I believe bears the character of the last words of Moses.")

and He longs for man, originally made in God's image, to be likewise.

We conclude, therefore, that if the Book of Deuteronomy was the "Book of the Law" that was "found" in the Temple in the days of King Josiah (and as far back as the days of Jerome, who died 420 A.D., the "Book of the Law" and "Deuteronomy" were thought to have been practically identical), then it was what the book itself says it was, namely, an old Divinely-directed Volume of the Law, by none other than Moses. With the exception of the last chapter, where the account of the death of Moses is given, which account was, probably, written originally by Joshua, or Caleb, or some other person, who was intimately connected with the Lawgiver and deeply revered the memory of the man "whom the Lord knew face to face," the book which the High Priest Hilkiah "found" was *substantially* the book of Deuteronomy as we now know it. It was, in other words, a part of the inspired *Torah* of ancient Israel, originally written by Moses, by means of which God wrought a revival of Religion in the days of the good King Josiah.

IV

The Book of Deuteronomy was a means of blessing in ancient Judea. And, as a part of the Word of God, it also possesses more than an historical interest for us. Apart from the fact that the Lord Jesus made special use of this book when He repelled the Tempter in the wilderness, there are eternal truths proclaimed in this sacred Volume of the Law that are as vitally important for our day as they were in the days of Moses and, later on, of King Josiah.

1. There is, first of all, the great truth of *The Supremacy of God in History*. This was a conviction that flamed in the soul of the inspired Lawgiver. It was God, the Great I AM, that brought Israel out of Egypt, the land of slavery. It was God who went before them to the Promised Land. God first, and God always, controlling the doings of His people.

2. Then also, there is a *quenched passion for Heart-Sincerity in religion* expressed in the book. Not outward forms of religion only, but, and *more so*, *inward faith*, a faith written upon the tablets of the heart. "For this commandment . . . is not far off . . . But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, in thy heart" (see Deuteronomy xxx. 11-19).

3. Furthermore, the book sets forth *a great and magnificent hope for Israel and the whole human race*, if men were only to give heed to it. Foes may assail. Life may be, and often is, a dark valley of gloomy shadows. Yet there is no need to be dismayed. On the contrary, there is a call here for COURAGE. For, there is :

“No God like the God of Jeshurun,
 who rides through heavens to your rescue ;
 God Eternal is your home ; and UNDERNEATH YOU
 ARE THE EVERLASTING ARMS.” (Deut. xxxiii. 26-27.)

Woodfalls,
 Downton, Wilts.

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