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THE HIGHER CRITICISM OF THE PENTATEUCH—RE-EXAMINED.

[Summary of first instalment: We have noticed, in sub-sections I-VI of our former article, that because the Higher Critics consider Evolution to be an established fact in science, they cannot consider themselves, or anyone else, to be scientific unless this doctrine is applied to religion. In other words, their object is to show the gradual development in religion from animism to monotheism. They assign an earlier or less advanced conception of religion to the JE source, whilst the later ideal is given to the P source. We have endeavoured to show that the positions taken up by the Destructive Higher Critics are, in this reference, untenable.]

VII

The second main point of criticism that will be considered is that J was compiled in Judah about 850 B.C., whilst E was compiled in the Northern kingdom (Ephraim) about 750 B.C., and that both were joined into one main source JE about 700-650 B.C.

As in the previous section, so now, we will consider the various statements of the moderate critics themselves, so as to hear their evidence first.

"The age to which J and E are commonly assigned is therefore that of the early monarchy—after David (*c.* 1000 B.C.) and before the prophets of the eighth century B.C. who perhaps allude to these narratives; they certainly allude to traditions which are incorporated in them (Am. ii. 9; Hos. xii. 3f, 12f); and certainly also represent a more advanced religious point of view."¹

"Critics of different schools agree in supposing that E was a native of Ephraim. His narrative bears indeed, an Ephraimitic tinge."

"J is commonly regarded as having belonged to the Southern Kingdom."²

"On the relative date of E and J, the opinion of critics differ. Although however they differ as to the relative date of J and E, they agree that neither is later than *c.* 750 B.C., and most are of opinion that one (if not both) is decidedly earlier."³

"All things considered, both J and E may be assigned with the greatest probability to the earlier centuries of the monarchy."⁴

¹ G.O.T., p. 37.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

² L.O.T., p. 122.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

“The relative dates of J and E are variously given, but no authorities bring them down to a lower period than the middle of the century indicated (that is, the eighth century B.C.). On good grounds it has been concluded that E was written or produced in the Northern Kingdom, J being usually assigned to the South. Dr. E. Kautzsch regards J as the earlier, *c.* 850 B.C.—E being later still, down to about 740 B.C. And the blending of the two into one form JE, as it is found in the Pentateuch, was accomplished about 640 B.C.”

In connection with the enquiry on this point of criticism, it will perhaps help if we take three questions and answer them.

- (a) On what grounds are E and J assigned to the Northern and Southern Kingdoms respectively ?
- (b) Why are they given those dates, and are all the critics agreed on this point ?
- (c) Are J and E to be regarded as two sources, or only as one ?

As regards (a) Dr. Driver says “Critics of different schools agree in supposing that E was a native of the Northern kingdom. Localities belonging to the Northern kingdom are prominent in it, and especially Shechem and Bethel. Abraham is brought more into connection with Beersheba ; Reuben (not Judah, as in J) takes the lead in the history of Joseph. J on the other hand is assigned to the Southern Kingdom. The Israelitish tradition treated Reuben as the firstborn, but in J’s narrative of Joseph, Judah is represented as the leader of the brethren. . . . Abraham’s home is at Hebron.”¹

But now in answer to all this, let us consider the other side of the question. It must be remembered that whilst most of the critics state the above view, as though that were the only one that counted, yet there are also those who assign J to the Northern kingdom for the same reasons that others have assigned it to the South (e.g. Reuss and Kuenen) and J. E. Carpenter in his Oxford “Hexateuch” writing on this subject says : “The data do not appear to be decisive, and each possibility finds eminent advocates.”

Moreover, when we look closer into the text of the Bible itself, we do not find that J favours the South, and E the North, as is suggested. Thus it is true that in J, Abraham’s home is at Hebron, as already stated, but it is at Bethel in the North that he

¹ L.O.T., p. 122.

sets up his first altar.¹ Towards the end of his life, he lives in Beersheba (in the South), but E gives this information as well as J.² The same may also be said of Isaac's sojourn in Beersheba. Moreover E gives us some stories in connection with Bethel, Shechem, and Beersheba, but he equally relates that it was on Mount Moriah, that Abraham offered up Isaac. Consequently we can make no definite statement as to the particular places to which each referred, for as it appears, each source gives the place where the event took place, irrespective of the fact as to whether it was in Judah or Ephraim.

(b) Why is J assigned to *c.* 850 B.C., and E to 750 B.C., and are all the critics agreed as to these dates?

"The terminus ad quem is fixed by the general consideration that the prophetic tone and point of view of J and E alike are not so definitely marked as in the canonical prophets (Amos, Hosea, and others), the earliest of whose writings date from *c.* 760-750. It is probable also, though not quite certain (for the passages may be based upon unwritten tradition) that Amos ii. 9; Hosea xii. 3f, 12f, contain allusions to the narrative of JE."³

From this paragraph we learn that the reason for assigning this date is that the language and teaching of the JE writings is not so fully developed as in the prophetic writings. But bearing in mind what we saw in the introduction, that the critics state that religion is a gradual development from the lower to the higher forms, then if it is maintained that the first trace of monotheism for instance, is found in the Minor Prophets, naturally anything dealing with Israel's history must be placed before the Minor Prophets. So far we agree, that the writings were placed before the Prophets, but now the next point is, are we bound to say that these sources originated only just before, or is there any reason why they could not have been written long before? The second half of our question, when answered, will afford the best answer to this. For it really amounts to this, are all the critics agreed that these sources did originate only just before the Minor Prophets wrote their messages?

"On the relative date of E and J, the opinions of critics differ. Dillmann, Kittel, and Riehm assign the priority to E, placing him 900-850 B.C. and J, *c.* 750; 830-800 (Kittel,) or

¹ Genesis xii. 8.

² Gen. xxi. 33 (J), xxii. 19 (E).

³ L.O.T., p. 123.

c. 850 (Riehm). Welhausen, Kuenen, and Stade, on the other hand, assign the priority to J, placing him 850-900 B.C. and E, c. 750."¹

The best conclusion that we can reach as regards the dates of these two sources is that which W. E. Addis makes in his book *The Documents of the Hexateuch*, where in discussing this very question he says, "The question of priority of J or E is still one of the most vexed questions in the criticism of the Hexateuch."

Dr. Driver's conclusion as to the terminus a quo is "It is more difficult to fix with confidence; in fact, conclusive criteria fail us. We can only argue on grounds of probability derived from our view of the progress of the art of writing, or of literary composition, or of the rise and growth of the prophetic tone and feeling in Israel, or of the period in which the traditions contained in the ancient narratives might have taken shape, or of the probability that they would have been written down before the impetus given to culture by the monarchy had taken effect. . . . Both (J and E) belong to the golden period of Hebrew literature."²

The last sentence seems to speak volumes on the whole question of the probabilities suggested above. For allowing for a moment that the critics are right, and that we have two separate sources, still they are parallel ones, and the stories run side by side, and in fact at times the critics are not able to decide as to whether the story is taken from J or E. Remembering also the wonderful retentiveness of the Eastern mind, and how frequently things were circulated orally, and the same stories were passed on from age to age with absolute faithfulness, it is not beyond a possibility, and indeed a very strong probability that both J and E are dependent either on a fixed tradition that had been circulated orally, centuries before (for tradition does not become stereotyped in a day or year), or else had been written down before. The fact that these two sources run on parallel lines, acts in two ways. It shows that the tradition had already become fixed, for if not, we cannot conceive that two stories would have originated from separate sources and would have been exactly alike, and on the other hand, it reacts on the sources themselves, for if the tradition was fixed, we can see how faithfully both authors adhered to the tradition. Bearing in mind then the facts so far as we have been able to gather them, we learn that some critics date these two writings about 900, and we have decided that they are based on a

¹ L.O.T., p. 123.

² L.O.T., p. 124.

tradition which is centuries older, and when we realise that the Egyptian monuments have established the fact of the Exodus, and moreover 1 Kings vi. 1 gives us the date, as 480 years before the building of the temple, we can assume the date of the Exodus to be about 1450 B.C. Thus we have only to go back about five centuries to reach the conclusion that Moses might have been responsible for the original compilation of the tradition, and "Since the actual conclusive criteria fail us," there seems to be no reason why Moses should not have been the author. It used to be stated that it was impossible for Moses to have written these sources, because he did not know how to write, or at least that his knowledge of writing would be only of an elementary nature. But the Code of Hammurabi has proved conclusively that Babylonia enjoyed a very high state of civilisation long years before the days of Moses, and also when it is remembered that "Moses was learned in all the arts of the Egyptians," there is no longer any difficulty in admitting that it was possible for Moses to write these accounts, and now in addition to all this, Dr. Driver says that they were produced in the period of Israel's greatest skill in literary work. He calls it the "Golden Period of Hebrew Literature." When we think of "The Golden Period of English Literature" our minds turn to the sixteenth century, and why do we call that the "Golden Period"? Simply because the style of writing was much more beautiful than in previous ages. So here, we presume that Dr. Driver assigns these two writings (J and E) to Israel's Golden Period, because he considers that the style of writing is more developed than anything that had previously appeared. If that is the case, we have again a strong argument for believing that these two sources were based on a much earlier tradition, either oral or written, and most probably the latter, and it would therefore be this written tradition which had been written down by Moses, and which had been worked over and revised during this "Golden Period." Of course viewed from the fact that we are able to look upon Israel's history throughout the Old Testament, it might mean that the Golden Period of Hebrew Literature was the best that ever existed, so far as we can trace it in the Old Testament, but I can hardly think that Dr. Driver refers to a later period than the time of J and E, for if so, it does not say much for the critical theory, that the prophets who lived and wrote after J and E were the means of raising Israel's religious standard, and neither does it say much for the wonderful writings

of such men as Jeremiah or Ezekiel. Consequently we are driven on the statements of the critics themselves, to the conclusion that if J and E belong to the golden period of Hebrew Literature, then the original tradition on which they are based, must have come into existence at an earlier date, and to allow for this highly refined production, we are quite justified in carrying back the original to the time of Moses.

(c) Are J and E to be regarded as two sources or only one? There are many sections where the two sources are so fused together that it is quite impossible to divide them into two sections, and the critical explanation of such passages is, that originally they were separate, but were later worked over by an editor, and the two sources were then known as JE. But there are many other sections where the critics have been able in a most remarkable way, to divide up the various chapters, and even verses, and assign them to J or E.

It would be quite impossible to give the complete list in such a thesis as this, and therefore here we shall refer to a few only, and ask the reader to get the complete list from any larger Introduction to the Old Testament. Those who use Dr. Driver's book will find the complete analyses on pp. 14-19, 22-32.

Before however we start on these analyses, one other point needs to be mentioned. E is not supposed to appear before Genesis xv. Now let us recall to our minds once again the origin of Higher Criticism. It started by Jean Astruc dividing Genesis into two sources only, based on the usage of the different names for God. Thus originally E included what is now given to P, and so we may say that P and E were at one time identical, in other words E (or as it is now known as P) once began with Genesis i. 1-ii. 4a. But now we are told that E does not appear until ch. xv. We are in this way afforded another example of the way in which the critics shift their ground without any sort of hesitation. Is it to be wondered that the conservative students have their doubts on the genuineness of theories which seem to be built on such very quickly shifting sand?

VIII

But now let us examine a few examples of the way in which various chapters of the Old Testament are minutely divided up into their tiny sections.

GENESIS. Ch. xxii. (The offering up of Isaac).

J. xxii. 15-18, 20-24.

E. xxii. 1-14, 19.

To begin with, if we had not been told this fact, we should never have thought for a moment that there were two sources incorporated into this chapter, for it has read always so obviously to us as one complete story, but now because the reference to the Abrahamic Covenant which is given in ch. xii. belongs to J so this reference to that section must be given to J also, but on closer examination it appears that the critics in order to be consistent with their theory in one place, have let themselves into the trap in other places, for when we read the story, in verse 15 (J) it says, "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time." When was the first time? we naturally ask. The answer is given in verse 11, where incidentally we have "The angel of Jehovah," not "Elohim," as we should have expected, seeing that it is in the E section. In other words verse 15 is dependent on verse 11 for its explanation, and yet say the critics, they are taken from two sources. Moreover if it be said that the words "The second time" refer in connection to Genesis xii., how is it that the blessing here promised to Abraham is based on the fact that he has not withheld his only son from offering him to God, and this he has done in the account given in verses 1-14, not in ch. xii.? We have already noticed that in verse 19 (E) it states that Abraham returned to Beersheba, but this is in the South, and since it is Judah that is specially interested in the South, we might have expected this verse to be given to J.

There is yet one other point in this chapter which calls for comment. In verse 20 we read "And it came to pass after these things" (J), and we naturally ask "What things?" and the only satisfactory answer that we can get is the story given in the earlier part of the chapter, but most of this is assigned to E, and therefore if J is separate from E, then it means that the "These things" lacks a beginning to the story, since verses 1-14 are given to E, whilst this verse belongs to J. If however the whole story is from one main source, then the difficulty disappears.

We take for our next example of this division into sources :

GENESIS, ch. xxxii.

J. 3-13a, 22, 24-32.

E. xxxii. 2, 13b-21, 23.

Here we shall see what ridiculous statements would be made if the various verses of each source were taken consecutively. Seeing that verse 2, and then 13b comes next in order in the E source, it would read as follows: "And when Jacob saw them (that is, the angels) he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim . . . and took of that which came to his hand, a present for Esau his brother." But as the only things that at present have come to his hand are angels, are we to imagine that Jacob made his brother a present of angels? If however the verses are linked on to those which follow, as well as those which precede in the text, then everything is quite plain, for we know from verse 5 that Jacob possessed great possessions of flocks and herds, and then in verses 14 and 15 we see how large a present he gave to his brother.

We can see another section in this chapter which would make no sense if the verses were assigned to the different sources, but which when read together make perfect sense. In verse 21 we have a reference to "that night," and we have another reference to "that night" in verse 22, but as the former is given to E, and the latter to J, it means that in verse 22 (apart from verse 21 (E)) we have no idea as to what night it refers to. Also in verse 22 (J) we read "And he rose up in that night, and took his two wives, and his two women servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok." Then verse 23 is assigned to E on the ground that it is much of a parallel to 22, but whether there is a parallel or not, at any rate we see what happens when we come to verse 24 (J). This verse starts off with the words "And Jacob was left alone." But when we last left the J source (in verse 22) we have already seen that there were fifteen other people with him. Where then had they disappeared? The answer is given in verse 23, where we read that "Jacob took them, and caused them to pass over the brook." Here again therefore we see that whether there are any parallels or not, certainly the story would not be complete without both versions. If it is argued, that the editor or compiler took these odd verses from the different sources to make up one whole, all we can say is that it takes a good deal of believing to think that each of these stories were more or less complete, yet each had to refer to the other for details (usually smaller details, but nevertheless essential details for the completion of the story).

We can only consider one further example, as space does not

allow of more, and moreover it is possible for readers to sort the stories out for themselves, as in the manner indicated above, by reference to some larger work which will give the full details of the analysis. But for our final reference we turn to *Exodus*, chapter iii. (The Vision of the Burning Bush.)

J. 2-4a (to see), 5, 7-8, 16-18,
E. iii. 1, 4b, 6, 9-15, 19-22.

The first division at the end of verse 1, is made because there is a reference to the "Mountain of Elohim," whereas in verse 2, it is "The angel of Jehovah." Moreover in verse 1 there is a reference to Horeb, which is supposed to be one of the favourite places mentioned by E. Then the second division is made at 4a, because again there is a change in the Divine names. According to the Hebrew, the verse runs, "And Jehovah saw that he turned aside to see, and Elohim called unto him," etc. But now let us examine this analysis, as we have done with the previous verses. On turning to verse 4b, God (E) called unto Moses out of the "Midst of the bush," but so far as E is concerned, we have not yet heard of any bush, for the previous reference to the bush comes from the J source in verse 2. It is certainly difficult to understand also, why when God says in verse 15 that He is "The Lord God of your fathers," etc., this verse should be given to E, but when the exact title is repeated in verse 16, it should be given to J.

The above examples have been taken from Dr. Driver's analysis (pp. 15, 16 and 23), but before we close this section it is necessary that we should examine one other point, namely are all the critics agreed on this analysis, because we saw before that certain parts which were once given to E are now apportioned to P, and therefore we may well ask, if there is any possibility of similar divisions taking place with regard to the J and E analyses ?

When we turn to the critics' statements themselves, we read "As regards the analysis of JE, the criteria are fewer and less definite; and the points of demarcation cannot in all cases be determined with the same confidence."

"In the details of the analysis of JE there is sometimes uncertainty, owing to the criteria being indecisive, and capable consequently of divergent interpretation." "Genesis xxvi. 3b-5 has *probably* been expanded or recast by the compiler. The same *may have been the case* with xxii. 15-18. Chapter xxvi. 15, 18 *appear to be* additions. . . . It has been *plausibly conjectured*

that in chs. xxiv.-xxvi., a transposition has taken place. . . . In ch. xxvii. 1-45 *some* critics discover the traces of a double narrative. In ch. 34, the analysis is not throughout *equally certain*."

These quotations are taken from Dr. Driver's Introduction on pages 16, 17 and 19, and they are mentioned so that one can see for oneself the sort of verbs and other words which constantly appear in these sentences, e.g. *May, Possibly, Some* (implying that others do not take the same line of thought on the subject), and the analysis is uncertain, but perhaps the most striking sentence is that given on p. 27, where Dr. Driver says, "The analysis of JE in Exodus, chs. iii.-xi. given above differs in some details from that given in previous editions," etc.

Reference has already been made to this sentence, but it will bear repetition. Whilst one can understand that Dr. Driver might possibly decide on a different analysis from others, yet now he tells us, that he is not quite sure of his own analysis, and in fact, so much so, that he has made certain alterations since he wrote his previous editions.

We are thus forced to this conclusion, that obviously the critics are not agreed as to the minute division into J and E sources, and indeed whilst certain lists may suit some critics, there are others who would give quite a different analysis, and so it may be said that there are as many minute analyses as there are critics. But what is the good of that to a student class for instance? Supposing that a question is set in an examination, as has been set before now, "Show from the story of the spies the composite nature of the book of Numbers," to begin with, it would be quite impossible for any student to carry all the various lists in his head, and yet if he gave one list only, that might not happen to be the one favoured by the examiner, and so it would mean failure for him, because he was not acquainted with the particular division which the examiner expected to be put down in the paper. As therefore there is no reliability to be placed on the analysis as given by some of the critics as contrasted with others, we are led to the final consideration of this main point of criticism, how is it that J and E came to be regarded as originally two separate documents, in other words what are the arguments for separating them from one another?

(To be continued.)

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