

Old Testament History.

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To one who is not committed to any special theory of Old Testament criticism, the greatest difficulty at present arises in connexion with the question of history. In these books of the Old Testament which are being subjected to so searching a criticism, how much is trustworthy history? In reply to that question, a critic of the old school will probably say, "All that professes to be historical should be accepted as such." A critic of the Wellhausen school will assign a large place to tradition, make free use of the genius of an editor, and not reject the help of a myth. In these circumstances it is of the utmost importance that there should be some understanding as to what is veritable history in the books under discussion.

Graf has the credit of having raised the criticism of the Old Testament to the position of a great historical question. It is still being conducted along the lines laid by him. But it seems ridiculous to proceed with a historical inquiry, unless there is something like agreement regarding the history available for the settlement of the points in dispute.

Dr. Driver, in his *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, takes up the following position: ¹—

"Two principles, once recognised, will be found to solve nearly all the difficulties which, upon the traditional view of the historical books of the Old Testament, are insuperable, viz.—(1) that in many parts of these books we have before us *traditions*, in which the original representation has been insensibly modified, and sometimes (especially in the later books) coloured by the associations of the age in which the author recording it lived; (2) that some freedom was used by ancient historians in placing speeches or discourses in the mouths of historical characters."

No doubt, if a critic is allowed *carte blanche* in the matter of traditions, and of speeches partially manufactured (the word is not used in any offensive sense), he may, with comparative ease, explain the books of the Old Testament in harmony with the Grafian, or any similar theory. But so long as the

Grafian theory is not universally accepted, it is desirable, in the interest of full and frank investigation, that there should be some understanding as to what is trustworthy history, on the one side, and what is mere tradition, or freely-reported speech, on the other.

Suppose an argument is founded on a passage which, in the record, professes to be historical, and the answer of those who reject the conclusion arrived at is—not that the words fairly interpreted do not justify that conclusion, but that they are not in the proper sense historical—that they are merely a late setting of an ancient tradition, or a form of speech which a late historian thought fit to put into the mouth of one of his characters, it is obvious that, in such circumstances, discussion must prove unsatisfactory and inconclusive. And the question recurs, and should be answered, "What, then, is veritable history in these Old Testament books, and what mere tradition, and freely-reported speech?"

It may be fair to ask here, "What does Dr. Driver exactly mean by his reference to *traditions* and *freely-reported speeches*?" He is speaking of the *historical* books of the Old Testament. Does he allow a trustworthy historical basis for his *traditions*? Does he admit the real existence of the personages whose speeches are held to be *freely given*, and the actual occurrence of the events in connexion with which the speeches are reported? If he does not, we are simply left in the air, and have nothing to discuss. If he does, the position he creates for us is no doubt interesting in the present state of Old Testament criticism, but it raises the prospect of discussions as perplexing and as difficult of settlement as any that have exercised the minds of critics during our century. Dr. Driver should tell us, and no doubt he will be asked to tell us, what he regards as traditions and what as freely-reported speech, and the historical basis on which they respectively rest. And we wish him joy of his task.

As an illustration of the historical problem which has to be faced, let us take the 22nd chapter of Joshua. Dr. Driver admits a difficulty in determining the authorship of the chapter. In

¹ Preface, p. xvii, n.

the table which he gives, the arrangement of the text is as follows:—

{ P. 22. 9-34.
 { D² 22. 1-6 (7-8).

That is to say, the opening verses of the chapter are assigned to the Deuteronomic editor (to use Dr. Driver's expression), and vers. 9-34 to the author of P, the Priest-code, the latest Pentateuch document. [It is quite true that in a note Dr. Driver admits the difficulty of arriving at a "satisfactory analysis" of vers. 9-34; but this is of no importance for our present purpose; the author uses largely the phraseology of P, and for all practical purposes the narrative may be taken as belonging to the period of P.]

The important question, and the only one with which I am dealing, is this, "Does the author, whoever he was, report a historical transaction?" In other words, "Did the two and a half tribes, whose possessions lay to the east of the Jordan, when they were about to take possession of the territories assigned to them, build an altar which the tribes to the west of the Jordan supposed to be intended for sacrifice?" "Did the building of this altar threaten the infant community of Israel with civil war?" [Ver. 12. "And when the children of Israel heard of it (the building of the altar by the two and a half tribes), the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them."] And, "Did the two and a half tribes repudiate, as with righteous indignation, the construction placed on their action by their brethren of the other tribes?" [Ver. 29. "God forbid that we should rebel against Jehovah, and turn this day from following Jehovah, to build an altar for burnt-offerings, for meat-offerings, or for sacrifices, beside the altar of Jehovah our God which is before His tabernacle."]

Is a historical transaction reported in this chapter? It is of the greatest importance that a clear answer should be given to that question. The law of the central sanctuary, as known and in force at the time of the settlement in Canaan, is involved. And the date of the promulgation of that law is of vital importance in present discussions. It is impossible to read this chapter without admitting that, at the time when it was written, the tribes of Israel acknowledged in the fullest sense the obligation of offering sacrifice to

Jehovah on one altar alone; the altar, namely, which (to use the words of the text) was before the tabernacle of Jehovah (cf. ver. 29). But it is needless to say that a date for the law of the central sanctuary, as early as the time of the settlement in Canaan, is impossible for a higher critic of these days. And, according to Dr. Driver (to keep to his position, as he is, in many respects, the most moderate of these critics), the 22nd chapter of Joshua will have to be explained in accordance with one or other, or both of his canons, thus:—The writer, either (1) uses a certain freedom in the speeches reported in the chapter; or (2) founds his narrative on a tradition which had reached him from past times, and which perhaps he modified and coloured to suit the circumstances of his own day.

Let us frankly concede the principles required by Dr. Driver and apply them to the narrative. Let the writer be accorded a certain freedom—a large freedom, if that should be of any service—in the speeches reported in the chapter. A historical basis is still required around which these speeches may gather. (If not, there is nothing worthy of discussion.) What is the historical event? Was an altar really built by the two and a half tribes? If an altar was built, did it give rise to a dispute between the tribes settled on the east of the Jordan and their brethren on the west of that river? If a controversy did arise in connexion with the altar, did it turn, as the narrative professes to show, on the purpose to which the altar was to be devoted? These questions deserve an answer, and if a historical value is claimed for the narrative, an answer must be given.

The same kind of argument may be applied to the use of tradition—as proposed by Dr. Driver. The principle for which he contends is that "the original representation has been insensibly modified, and sometimes (especially in the later books) coloured by the associations of the age in which the author recording it lived." If the 22nd chapter of Joshua is to be explained as a re-setting of an ancient tradition, the question is, "What was the *original representation*?" which, according to Dr. Driver, is presupposed. How much of the narrative was found in the original representation? Did that representation express a matter of fact? To this question there can be only one reply by a follower of Graf and Wellhausen. The law of the central sanctuary is presupposed as the historical

basis—if there is such a basis—of the dispute between the tribes to the east and those to the west of the Jordan, in the matter of the altar, **וַי**. That law is found in Deut. xii. But the date of Deuteronomy is the period of—not Joshua, but—Josiah. Thus Wellhausen: “In all circles where appreciation of scientific results may be at all counted on, it is acknowledged that it (Deuteronomy) was composed in the age in which it was discovered, and that it formed the basis of the reformation of Josiah, which took place about a generation before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldæans.”¹ This conclusion as to the date of Deuteronomy is the key to Graf’s solution of pentateuchal problems. In accordance with this conclusion, Joshua xxii. must be pronounced unhistorical, because it represents, as already acknowledged, a law which was not promulgated till a good many centuries afterwards.

Let the method of procedure be noted; it has not received the attention it deserves. Certain books are subjected to critical analysis. The result of the process is, in the judgment and to the satisfaction of the critics, the disentanglement of *certain codes of law*, and *the fixing of the terminus a quo* of their operation. When this has been done, the same books are re-read, and anything in the narrative which does not square with the conclusions as to the codes is rejected as historically untrustworthy. The process is a case of reasoning in a circle, and is as unsatisfactory in these discussions regarding the Old Testament as it has been found and acknowledged to be in other discussions. The law presupposed in the 22nd of Joshua is that of the central sanctuary. First, the historical books are examined, and evidence in favour of the existence of this law prior to the days of Josiah is said to be wanting. Then, the same books are again examined; and when this law is plainly required for the explanation of the text, as in Joshua xxii., the narrative is pronounced to be unhistorical, and, as to matters of fact, worthless.

Suppose the process were reversed. Suppose Joshua xxii. were accepted as, upon the whole, recording trustworthy history, and the 12th chapter of Deuteronomy explained in accordance with the law presupposed in Joshua xxii.,—would this method of procedure not be as legitimate as that referred to above? The narrative, on the face of it, wears

¹ Wellhausen, *Gesch.* p. 9.

an air of probability. On the assumption that a central sanctuary was already prescribed for Israel, the circumstances are such as might reasonably have occurred. The desire of the two and a half tribes to have some material monument testifying to their union with their brethren to the west of the Jordan is quite natural. The suspicion of those brethren as to the intention in erecting the altar is what might have been expected on the part of men who, through the discipline of the wilderness and the wars in Canaan, had learned to trust in Jehovah, and to dread His anger. The text of the chapter is not difficult, and the meaning cannot be misunderstood or explained away. It is just such a narrative as the ordinary mind would have no manner of doubt about.

Must it be given up? Must it be pronounced to be historically worthless? That is the question which this paper is intended to raise. There are other narratives, professedly historical, to which the same question applies. This one, in Joshua xxii., is sufficient for the present purpose. Others can be discussed afterwards, if that should be thought desirable or needful. The question is fair and square: “Are the historical books to be read on the presupposition that everything that does not fall in with the views of the higher critics as to the date and operation of the Deuteronomic [and, of course, also of the Levitical] code is unhistorical, and, on matters of fact, utterly untrustworthy and useless?” If an affirmative answer is given to that question, is it unreasonable to ask the critics, who have taken so much trouble to disentangle the codes, to undertake the further, and in many respects more important, service of extricating what is trustworthy history, and setting it down for us in black and white?

It will be extremely interesting to see how far critics agree in the determination of the history by the application of the test of the codes. The time was (and not so long ago) when the use of the word Elohim or Jehovah, as the name of the Divine Being, was regarded as a test for practical purposes sufficiently distinctive for the determination of a document. That is not so any longer. Does a similar fate await the test of the codes? Time will tell. Meantime, let it be noted that, if a man on reading, say, the 22nd chapter of Joshua, should suppose that the teaching of the chapter lies on the surface,—that the narrative records a dispute between different sections of Israel, which

presupposes the existence—at the time of the settlement in Canaan—of the law of the central sanctuary,—he will make a fatal mistake. Ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every hundred thousand will in all probability come to the same conclusion, viz. that the law of the central sanctuary was in operation at the time of the entrance into Canaan. That does not matter; that cannot be helped. The mistake is there, all the same. The higher critics must be appealed to, in order that the truth wrapt up in the apparently simple narrative may be known.

If this position is to be accepted, it is surely not unreasonable to ask that the attention of critics should now be turned specially to the determination of what is trustworthy history in the Old Testament. In the interest of Old Testament discussions themselves—considering the point to which they have been carried—this is desirable. In the interest of the great body of the Christian people, who have little

familiarity with the process by which Old Testament conclusions have recently been arrived at, but who are bewildered by the discussions that are going on and the results reported from time to time, it is still more desirable. It may be said that this is not specially the business of the critics,—that they have shown *the way* to read the Old Testament, and each man must do his reading for himself. This is, no doubt, true. But will they show no compassion in their day of triumph? Will they not stretch out a helping hand to those whom they have been the chief means of throwing off their balance? Besides, these codes, which form the crown of their labours,—and under the guidance of which the reading is to be done,—are *kittle cattle*, and require to be deftly handled. Are the critics satisfied to leave the free use of them to the *profanum vulgus*? If they are, they cannot reasonably complain if the result should frequently prove unsatisfactory.

The "Gospel of Peter" and the Four.

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THE light which this precious discovery may cast on the history of our canonical Gospels is, of course, the question of questions with those who examine it. I am venturing to add one more to the various accounts of our fragment's origin and purpose, in the hope that my suggestion may help in the discussion of the evangelic problems, though I am too imperfectly equipped in post-canonical literature to speak in any tone of confidence.

Whence come the discrepancies between "Peter" and the Four, so many and so remarkable when placed side by side with those coincidences which establish a connexion beyond doubt? The answer has hitherto been generally that the author alters the narrative intentionally under various tendencies. Firstly, there is his implacable hatred towards the Jews, which introduces touches too obvious to need retailing. Secondly, there is his alleged Docetic bias, which will account for some of the romances added to the Resurrection story, and especially for the elimination of (1) some words from the Cross, and (2) the appearances of Jesus to

the disciples on Easter Day.¹ Thirdly, there is conforming to prophecy.² Will these causes account for all the discrepancies? It would be difficult surely to trace any of them in such points as Herod's position as leader of the Jews, Joseph's asking for the Lord's body *before* the judgment, the treatment of the penitent robber, the disciples fasting and wailing "night and day until the Sabbath,"³ their being accused of wishing to burn the Temple, the addition of Andrew and Levi to

¹ Yet may not this be due to St. Mark, who does not *seem* to provide for these appearances, promised apparently for Galilee? Note how strongly the conclusion of the genuine St. Mark is suggested by the end of the last complete paragraph in "Peter." (I should begin the last paragraph of all with the words *ἦν δὲ τελευταία κ. τ. λ.*, which are very unfortunately placed with the description of Easter Day.)

² On this point, elaborated by Dr. Swete in his lectures at Cambridge, I am at a disadvantage through my unfortunate absence from the lectures, which are not yet published.

³ Are not these words proof that "Peter" accepted *Thursday* as the day of the Crucifixion, as Dr. Westcott has argued from our Gospels already?