

CHAPTER II.

TWO CONTENDING THEORIES OF THE HISTORY.

There are practically two accounts given of the earlier religion of Israel, that of the Biblical writers and that of modern critics, and in vital points they are opposed—The Old Testament books agree, or have been made to agree, in their statement of a scheme—Its outlines—Modern objection to this view that it is an afterthought—Contending theory advanced by critics—Its outline—The contrast—How is the balance to be held between them, since both appeal to the same books?—Proposal to leave aside at the outset the disputed books or portions—Reasons given for this method—Proceeding from the known and admitted to the unknown or disputed—The result will, among other things, determine the value of the books which at the outset are left out of account.

WE have seen that the history of Israel resolves itself into a history of religious ideas. The outstanding events of the nation's history are all invested by the Biblical writers with religious significance; and it is through its religion that Israel is still a power in the world. A history of this people which should be confined to political events would be as unsatisfactory and as uninteresting as a history of Greece which should take no account of art, philosophy, or science. The vital point is to determine, if possible, what was the nature of the earlier religion of this people.

There are, practically, two accounts given of the history

of Israel's earlier religion, between which we have to choose,¹ and they are, in important respects, opposed to each other. There is the account of the Biblical writers, which may be gathered from the Old Testament books. Whatever, and however many, may be the original sources of which the Pentateuch and historical books are composed, and in whatever particulars the various sources may be found to be divergent or discordant among themselves, they all agree, or have been manipulated so as to have the appearance of agreeing, in the main view which they exhibit of the course through which the history ran. These books, in addition to an account of primeval history contained in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, have, in the remainder of that book and in the succeeding books to the end of 2 Kings, a connected narrative of the fortunes of Israel from the call of Abraham to the time of the Captivity; and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the events connected with the return. Besides these, there are other writings, particularly those of the prophets, which have for the most part their known historical dates, and are therefore valuable contributions to the Biblical account of the history. Now the account which all these books together give of the history is ostensibly consistent and of one tenor.² It amounts to this: that the people of Israel, from the time of Abraham, stood in a peculiar relation to God, and received from Him special intimations of His will and character, and were by Him peculiarly guided and directed in their growth into a nation, and

¹ See Note IV.

² The books of Chronicles are confessedly of late date, and stand in some respects by themselves. Whatever may be said of their historic value in detail, they rest on the earlier books and imply the same general scheme of history.

in their existence as a state. By a signal display of divine power they were delivered from the bondage of Egypt and led into the desert of Sinai, where the covenant made with Abraham was renewed with awful sanctions. Upon the covenant was reared the law, ordaining holiness on God's people, fencing round their daily life with ceremonial prescriptions, and educating their spiritual life, so that they might be in deed as in ideal a kingdom of priests, an holy nation. Up to this ideal, however, they never came. On the contrary, they sinned under the very shadow of Sinai; and throughout the course of their journey in the wilderness, marked as it was by constant tokens of divine guidance, they exhibited continual backsliding, and fell into one corruption after another. Even when, by signal displays of divine favour, they were brought into the promised land and made victorious over its inhabitants, they sinned against the God who had favoured them, and conformed to the practices of their neighbours. Nevertheless they were not rejected, nor was their education interrupted. A series of prophets, from Samuel's time onwards, arose to testify against them and to plead for a higher life. These men, with one voice, whether in the northern or the southern kingdom, tell the same tale of God's great doings for His people in the past; they reprove, rebuke, exhort; they confront kings and people, and denounce priests and false prophets alike,—the burden of their message being the same from age to age. Nor do they lose faith in God's promise. As troubles gather about the nation, their reproof of sin becomes more stern, their enforcement of God's righteousness more emphatic, but their trust in His faithfulness remains unshaken. As the fabric of the nation falls to pieces, their views be-

come only the more spiritual, and hope lives on even in captivity. It was indeed the voice of prophecy and the belief in its fulfilment that sustained the captives in Babylon, and stimulated the pious under Ezra and Nehemiah to return to their native land, and there, cured finally of idolatry, to set up the worship of God with punctilious regard to the precepts of the old law, which, during their prosperity, had been slighted.

Such is the view presented in the Biblical books. It involves a plan or scheme of history of a sort. It is a record of a religious movement proceeding in close connection with certain alleged historical occurrences, which to the Biblical writers are of prime significance; so that in their estimation the different stadia in the religious advance are marked by definite events in the national life. I have said that the narrative contained in the Biblical books is ostensibly consistent and of one tenor; and the proof of this is the fact that till recently no one thought that any other account could be derived from these books of what the various writers unanimously meant to represent. Indeed those who in modern times think they have proved that the course of the history was different, do not deny that the Biblical books, as they lie before us, give the account which has just been sketched. What they maintain is, that the scheme of the Biblical writers is an afterthought, which by a process of manipulation of older documents, and by a systematic representation of earlier events in the light of much later times, has been made to appear as if it were the original and genuine development; and they think they are able, by separating the early from the late constituents of the writings, and by a legitimate process of criticism, to prove from the Biblical documents themselves,

that the history and the religious movement had quite a different course.

On purely literary and scientific grounds we cannot at the outset refuse to entertain such a supposition. The books of the Old Testament lie before us as so many literary compositions, and we cannot in advance claim for them such authority as will bar any legitimate inquiry into their origin, and any legitimate criticism of them as literary productions. It is in itself a legitimate supposition that the writers of the Old Testament books, living and moving in a narrow world of their own, took a circumscribed view of their national history, and in a simple unscientific age saw marvels where modern writers would see only natural occurrences. It is also quite conceivable that Hebrew writers of history, like other historians, had their views of past occurrences coloured by the medium of their own time through which they regarded them, and at a comparatively late time framed a theory of their past history, in accordance with what succeeding events led them to believe it must have been. And finally, it is conceivable that such late writers should for the first time have set themselves to put down an account of early events from their own standpoint, or have touched up older documents in order to make them square with their own conceptions. Whether all this was indeed the case must of course be proved before we accept it; in the meantime we cannot refuse to look at it as a hypothetical account of the matter. Nor need we wonder if, in an age like the present, when the demand is made in every department of investigation for scientific processes and strict verification of facts, the theory of the Biblical writers should be challenged to submit itself to the scrutiny of nineteenth-century examination. Neither need

we wonder if men who are trained in the methods of modern historical research, and who have made the religions of the world a subject of special study, have sought to frame a theory of Israel's history in accordance with what they regard as established scientific principles. Of course it will be required of the modern theory that it give a better account of all the facts of the case, and present on the whole a more consistent and credible explanation of the things which are not matters of dispute.

We shall have occasion in the sequel to consider the main points of the theory that has been put forward in opposition to the Biblical one. In detail there are variations in the views held by different writers; but in a general way the modern theory may be stated as follows: A number of wandering Hebrew tribes came from the desert and found a settlement in Canaan. Like the races around them they had their national God, Jahaveh,¹ who was to them very much what Chemosh was to Moab or

¹ In using this name for the first time, I must make a brief explanation. It is now universally admitted that the traditional pronunciation, Jehovah, which appears in our English Bible, is a mistake. By the time the vowel-points were supplied to the Hebrew Bible the Jews had acquired the habit of saying *Adhonai*, the LORD, wherever the sacred tetragrammaton (JHVH) occurred, and to guide to this reading they wrote the vowels of the name *Adhonai* along with the consonants of the unpronounced name. Taken as a Hebrew name, and vocalised after the analogy of other words of similar formation, the name should in all probability be pronounced Yahūveh or Yahveh. The objection to the use of the form Yahveh or Jahveh is, that the *h* in the middle is apt to become quiescent, and the word to be pronounced Ya-veh, which is a mistake. I may add that whatever objections there may be against deviating from a pronunciation which is invested with sacred associations, there are certain advantages, which will appear as we proceed, in keeping, in a discussion like the present, as near as possible to the original. In quotations from modern writers the spelling of the respective authors is retained. The origin and the significance of the name are considered in the sequel (chap. xi.)

Milcom to Ammon; and they possessed certain traditions, variously accounted for, of their origin and of the manner in which He had become their national God: but their religious faith and religious observances were very much of the same kind as those of the nations around them. Particularly from the Canaanites, among whom they settled, and whom they gradually assimilated or absorbed, they adopted many religious customs and beliefs,—appropriating their sacred places, making pilgrimages to their sacred tombs, and ascribing to their own ancestors the honours which were paid by the Canaanites to local heroes departed. Custom grew into law, legend was made into history, and at the time when we have the first authentic records of them, they are practising the rites of a worship which had grown up in the way indicated, with conceptions of their national God similar to the beliefs of the neighbouring nations regarding their gods. The Biblical books which relate the history up to the eighth century B.C. did not exist in anything like their present form till long after the events; and it is only from early pieces contained in them, or by various inferences, that we can get a true account of the history of that time,—the books in their present form being manipulated by later hands, and exhibiting a projection of later ideas into past times. But by the eighth century we have compositions belonging to that century itself, and from that time onwards literary works come to our aid for the understanding of the history. It was to the prophets that the purification of the religious conceptions of Israel was due. They first perceived and taught the people a higher truth, and by them the ethic monotheism of the Old Testament was developed. Before their time “the nation had been the ideal of religion

in actual realisation; the prophets confronted the nation with an ideal to which it did not correspond. Then to bridge over this interval the abstract ideal was framed into a law, and to this law the nation was to be conformed."¹ In this way the code of Deuteronomy was prepared some short time before the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah, when it is said to have been discovered in the Temple. This code of law does not therefore belong to the age of Moses, though it is represented as coming from him, to give it higher sanction. It was, in fact, the attempt to frame a norm for the guidance of Israel in the truth which the prophets had taught. But it had an effect other than its framers had anticipated; it substituted for the free living voice of God speaking through His prophets, the voice of a dead law; and so, without meaning it, the prophets became "the spiritual destroyers of the old Israel."² Law, therefore, was the outcome of prophecy, not its antecedent; and it found its ultimate development in the Levitical code of Ezra, which was the starting-point of modern Judaism.

Without entering now into any discussion of the points here raised, we may observe that this theory professes to expound the history of Israel according to the principle of a continuous natural development, showing the gradual expansion of the religious idea from the narrowest conceptions of nationalism, or even animism, to that of a pure monotheism, and the rise of religious institutions from mere natural custom, often the most superstitious, to codified law with divine sanctions. Stade, a distinguished advocate of the modern view, says³ we must at the outset regard the religion of old Israel as

¹ Wellhausen, *Hist. of Israel*, p. 491.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, vol. i. pp. 8, 9.

in the process of becoming, and not entering the world in a completed form like Christianity or Mohammedanism. Christianity, he says, appears as a completed religion, just because it is the conclusion of the religion of Israel; but we must not apply to the religion of Israel the maxim of Schleiermacher, derived from a consideration of Christianity, that a religion is seen in its greatest purity at its source.¹ On which it may be remarked, that whatever mistakes may have been made on this subject in the "traditional view," the Biblical records themselves indicate very clearly a development of its kind. The great difference in the two theories consists in the germ from which the development took place, and the stage of evolution that had been reached in the earlier times whose history we seek to determine.

We have, therefore, two opposing views of the history—the Biblical view, set forth by the Hebrew historians, and the view formulated by the modern historians of Israel. The latter does not hesitate to call the former unhistorical, and might itself therefore be called the anti-Biblical, though I shall simply call it the "modern theory." I have called them two contending *theories*, for so they are. The Old Testament historical books are not bare chronicles of events. They are animated by a principle, in accordance with which the writers profess to explain the events. If we suppose the accounts of early times to have been written early, or if we take the very earliest of the written sources which the critics will admit, even then they are more than bare recitals of facts. There is ever a certain interpretation of the facts, a certain view taken by the narrator which colours his facts or guides the disposal of them in his recital—a certain insight, true

¹ See Note V.

or false, which he thinks he has into the secrets and *causes* of things. If, again, we suppose that these accounts of early times are written late, the accounts again imply reflection, interpretation, theory. In any case, there is more than the mere representation of facts. "History, as distinguished from chronicles or annals, must always contain a theory, whether confessed by the writer or not. It may not be put prominently forward, but it lurks in the pages and may be read between the lines. A sound theory is simply a general conception, which co-ordinates and gives unity and a causal relation to a multitude of facts. Without this, facts cease to have interest except to the antiquarian."¹

The state of the case is this: The history of Israel ran through a course of development of some kind. The Hebrew writers had some knowledge of the events and crises of the history, from personal experience, from oral tradition, from conviction engrained in the national consciousness, or from written sources; and they set themselves, at the time or at some time, to give an ordered account of the events. But in any case, it is *their* view of the history that lies before us. Modern writers also have knowledge of certain events. From the writings in our hands, and from other sources, they have information of the crises and outstanding facts. They have also before them in these books the views that the Biblical writers entertained, and on the strength of all these they write their histories of Israel. But, again, it is *their* interpretation of the events and phenomena that lies before us. The date of the written history in either case does not *in itself* affect the validity of the theory. Writers of this nineteenth Christian century

¹ Simon S. Laurie, *Rise and Constitution of Universities*, Pref. p. vi.

claim that they have the true account to give of the matter, although they have practically no additional facts to go upon. We cannot therefore allow them, on the mere ground of *lateness*, to reject a theory which, let us say, was framed a few centuries before Christ. It may be that the early theory had the more accurate insight and gave the more correct interpretation of the facts of the history. The question simply is, Which of the two theories gives on the whole the better explanation of all the circumstances which are known and admitted? There is a sort of higher criticism in either case, but the theory that is to hold the field must not only raise difficulties but must lay them, and must, on the view of all the facts of the case, commend itself, on literary and critical and common-sense grounds, as the better explanation. There is something worth thinking of in the words of Thoreau: "How comes it that history never has to wait for facts, but for a man to write it? The ages may go on forgetting the facts never so long: he can remember two for every one forgotten. The musty records of history, like the catacombs, contain the perishable remains, but only in the breast of genius are embalmed the souls of heroes. There is very little of what is called criticism here. It is love and reverence, rather, which deal with qualities not relatively but absolutely great; for whatever is admirable in a man is something infinite, to which he cannot set bounds. These sentiments allow the mortal to die, the immortal and divine to survive."¹ Now the Hebrew writers were very far from being dry annalists, and it is quite possible that they, like the evangelists after them, possessed those sentiments of love and reverence which qualified them for being true historians.

¹ Review of Thomas Carlyle.

Some of the outstanding facts which have to be accounted for have already been mentioned, such as the persistence of the race and religion, the early consolidation of the people around their religious faith, and the power of this faith to produce two of the greatest religions of the world. Other features will meet us as we proceed, such as the high spiritual tone of the religion, as early as we can obtain contemporaneous accounts, and the influence of the prophets, which, on either theory, is immense. For all these things there must be found, if possible, an adequate cause and sufficient historical explanation. And even if the accounts contained in the Biblical books are pronounced unhistorical, we have before us a very difficult problem—viz., to explain how, at what time, and from what causes arose the conviction which these writers so firmly hold, that this was the true course of events. The Biblical historians say, "We write thus, because thus things occurred." If the anti-Biblical historians say, "Things did not so occur," they are bound, among other things, to give a reasonable explanation why the Biblical historians so wrote.

In a general way we may contrast the two theories thus: The modern theory undertakes to trace the development of the religion from the lowest stages of animistic worship up to ethic monotheism, and from custom up to authorised divine law, and this too within the period distinctively embraced in the history of Israel as a people. The Biblical theory also posits a development; but the essential things which were finally reached—a belief in a moral deity, the one ruler of the world, and a law divinely given—are there in germ and substance to start with at the threshold of the nation's life. There are low stages of belief, there are customs rising into laws, on

both theories. The difference lies in the place assigned to them.

These are the two theories of the history, and we have before us a mass of literature which gives the sole or the main information which we possess regarding it, and from which, therefore, is to be obtained in some manner the only standard by which the two theories can be tested. The one theory has, let us say, overlaid itself upon the books, or worked itself into them; the other has, by critical processes, worked itself out of them. How shall we hold the balance between them? Clearly we must approach the subject by its literary side: we must neither, on the one hand, invest the books as a whole with authority and claim for them inspiration, for that would be to foreclose the whole inquiry, as it would be opposed to the principle of Protestantism;¹ nor must we, on the other hand, summarily reject books or portions of them on merely subjective grounds, saying that such and such parts represent later and unhistorical views, or arbitrarily set aside as unhistorical everything in which there is a miraculous element. The books are our only witnesses—the only materials we have for forming our conclusions. This has been well put by Kuenen himself: “The Bible is in every one’s hand. The critic has no other Bible than the public. He does not profess to have any additional documents, inaccessible to the laity, nor does he profess to find anything in his Bible that the ordinary reader cannot see. It is true that here and there he improves the common translation; but this is the exception, not the rule. And yet he dares to form a conception of Israel’s religious development totally different from that which, as any one may see, is set forth in the

¹ See Briggs, *Biblical Study*, p. 106 ff.; Whither? p. 73 ff

Old Testament, and to sketch the primitive Christianity in lines which even the acutest reader cannot recognise in the New.”¹ Since, however, the critics undertake so much, we must stipulate that their criticism shall be fair. They must not criticise the books away altogether. The books are the materials out of which the structure of the history is to be built, not a mere scaffolding, within which out of other materials—say of a purely subjective character—the building is to rise. When all is done, the books should appear more valuable as parts of a compact whole; and even the late parts, when proved to be late, ought to fall into their proper place, and add symmetry to the structure.

Here then, manifestly, a difficulty in procedure presents itself. The Biblical theory is formulated in the books as they lie before us. The modern historians do not deny this, but maintain that the parts of the books in which the theory finds expression are not trustworthy documents, but are of late origin, and give expression to late views. Both theories profess to be supported by the same books, but they imply different views of the books.

In order to have a clear point of departure and a fair start in the inquiry, it is essential that there should be some position on which both parties in the controversy are agreed, if only for a moment, before diverging so widely as they ultimately do—some determinative fact or facts which shall not be disputed, the evidence of which shall neither be assumed in advance nor called in question at a later stage. If certain witnesses are suspected, we must either sift their testimony, or fall back upon witnesses whose word is beyond question.

Now the main point in dispute is as to the history of

¹ *Modern Review*, July 1880. *Comp. National Religions, &c.*, p. 69 f.

religious belief and practice in the earlier period, particularly the period from Moses to the time when, as is admitted on both sides, we have the contemporary writings of prophets. But this is the very period as to which the modern theory says the books give no reliable history. The narratives contained in the Pentateuch, which ostensibly exhibit the earlier phases of the religion, are, they say, not history at all, but merely an account of what later writers fancied the early history must have or should have been, and represent only *their* views, and reflect their times. It might seem, therefore, a natural course at this point to set ourselves to a critical examination of these productions in particular, so as to eliminate from them the credible element, in the shape of a substratum of fact, and thus obtain reliable materials for that period of the history. This, in fact, has been the method usually followed by those who have undertaken recent histories of Israel—to criticise or verify the sources. It is a tedious, and in some respects a dreary process, as may be seen by turning over the pages of such a work as Kuenen's 'Hexateuch.' How far the critics have been successful in their work I shall not now stop to inquire, because, in order to reach the end before us, I believe that there is another and surer way, which will enable us to dispense with so laborious an investigation. There are three practical reasons which I think sufficient to justify the course which I propose to pursue. They are these:—

1. The merely critical process of examination of the documents in question is not decisive for the purpose of giving us an undisputed starting-point. Even if it be granted that critics have succeeded in separating the component parts of the Hexateuch, there remains the deter-

mination of their order and respective dates, and the degree in which they are dependent one upon another. When it comes to the settlement of these points, recourse is had to a hypothesis of the manner in which the development of the history took place; and different critics, even when they agree in the main as to the separation of the sources, give very different accounts of the time and manner in which they came together. Kuenen himself admits the point for which I am contending. In giving a history of the criticism, he says that up to the time of Bleek, when critics sought on purely literary grounds to determine the order of composition of the sources, there was no certain result attained; and that it was only when the aid of "historical criticism" was called in that an arrangement of these was possible.¹ The most striking proof of the matter is, that one element of the Hexateuch, the so-called fundamental writing or priestly document, which was on all hands set down as the earliest of the sources, is now by the Grafian hypothesis made the very latest; and the only reason for this change of view is the introduction of the hypothesis as to the course of the history. There is thus always a certain amount of reasoning in a circle, the theory of the history being introduced to determine the dates and orders of the documents, which otherwise could not be determined; while the books themselves, rearranged according to this hypothesis, are appealed to as proofs of the new theory of the history. Of course it is maintained that the theory of the history can be and is proved on other grounds; that the succession of the elements in detail is fixed by "reference to an independent standard—namely, the inner development of the history of Israel, so

¹ Kuenen, *The Five Books of Moses*, a Lecture delivered at Haarlem, 1870, translated by John Muir, 1877, p. 7 f.

far as that is known to us by trustworthy testimonies from independent sources."¹ So be it; we shall see by-and-by on what independent grounds it rests. My point at present is, that we cannot at the outset debate it on the ground of the Pentateuch, where confessedly it cannot be settled.

2. The Biblical theory does not depend upon the authorship and mode of composition of the Hexateuch. It is indeed often assumed on both sides that it does; and the critics usually combat "the traditional theory,"² as it is called, on this subject. It is important, therefore, that we should see exactly how this matter stands, so that the Biblical theory may have fair play, and may not be weighted with what is not a part of it.

It is certainly the case that the tradition of the Jewish Synagogue, followed without scrutiny by the Christian Church, was to the effect that the Pentateuch was substantially written by Moses. By the time that the books of the Old Testament were collected into a Canon—how much earlier we cannot tell—the five books forming the Pentateuch had come to be spoken of as the Law of Moses, or the Book of the Law of Moses. This was natural enough, since they contained as a main element the Law which the nation accepted as of Mosaic origin. These books have indeed as much right to be called the books of Moses, as the books of Joshua, Judges, or Samuel to be named as they are. Whatever may have been the view of those who first collected the Canon as to the share Moses had in the composition of these books, in point of fact we find the Jewish tradition on this subject, as early as we can trace it, assigning to him the authorship. The time of modern literary criticism was not yet, and probably those

¹ Wellhausen, *Hist. of Israel*, p. 12.

² See Note IV.

who gave utterance to the dictum did not think what it involved. In proof of the loose way in which the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was held, we may refer to the tradition, equally persistent and not considered inconsistent with the other, that Ezra "restored the Law;"¹ or even to the belief current at an early time that he rewrote the whole Old Testament.² The account which the Talmudists give of the composition and authorship of all the books, shows how little they actually knew about the matter. The truth is, that the tradition was of a general kind, and the matter is one in which we cannot rely on tradition for the preservation of exact details. And so the Christian Church, in accepting the canonical books of the Old Testament, accepted also without question and without reflection the current traditions as to their authorship. In point of fact, however, the books of the Pentateuch, like the historical books which follow them, are anonymous. The book of Genesis gives no hint of its authorship, neither does the book of Leviticus; and the few passages found in the other books which speak of Moses writing such and such things "in a book," will be discovered on examination to refer to certain specific things. Indeed the very fact of such expressions occurring within the books may even be taken as a presumption that it was not he who wrote the whole.

The "traditional" adherence to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch has caused no little confusion. For when it was seen that there were certain things that could not possibly have been written by him, and when the composite character of the books was pointed out, it was thought that the credibility of the books was destroyed; alarm was felt

¹ See Note VI.

² See Robertson Smith, *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 155.

on one side lest the authority of Scripture should be undermined, and on the other side it was triumphantly asserted that the books were of no historical value because they were not contemporary compositions. Both positions are untenable. (1.) The historical value of these books does not depend on their being written by Moses, or indeed on our knowing who the author was. Suppose the books had borne on their face that Moses was their author, the books themselves give us almost all the information we possess as to Moses; and from them, therefore, alone, we can judge whether he was likely to give us a true history. We should be again reasoning in a circle; proving the truth of the books on the authority of Moses, and proving the existence and activity of Moses on the authority of the books. And if the credibility of the books is to be made dependent on our knowing the author, on what grounds are we to believe the succeeding books whose authors are entirely unknown? (2.) On the other hand, the critics would not have been likely to accept the statements of books such as these are, even had it been proved that they were written by Moses or some contemporary of his. They would have reserved to themselves the right of rejecting or accepting on internal grounds the history recorded. For example, Kuenen, speaking of Islam, laments the deficiency of information just at the points where it would be most valuable, and says "the tradition is coloured throughout by the dogmatic convictions of the first believers, and is often open to the gravest suspicion."¹ Just so; even if it were demonstrated to a certainty that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, that would not make the critical school a whit more ready to accept its statements. The course of New Testament criticism furnishes an illus-

¹ *National Religions*, p. 10 f.

tration of what is possible in a case like this. Though the Gospels are proved to be of so early a date that the writers could have had knowledge of the things they profess to relate, the modern advanced critics of the New Testament do not feel themselves bound on that account to receive the books as historical. They have to make allowance for the bias of the writer even when the writer is a contemporary; and if he relates events which they consider cannot have occurred, his account is rejected as incredible. Critics of the Old Testament are in the habit—as we shall see—of treating documents and writers in the same way, altogether irrespective of whether these are contemporaneous or not; and therefore little value should be placed on a contention coming from their side, that if the Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch is disproved, its historical value is affected. In other words, critics would not accept the Pentateuch as historical, even if it were proved that Moses was the author.

It seems to be too readily assumed and too readily admitted, that contemporaneousness and credibility of documents are necessarily inseparable, or to be inferred as a matter of course one from the other. A moment's reflection will show that an event may have historically occurred, and that we may have good evidence of it, even although no account of it was written down at the moment of its occurrence; as also that false statements in regard to certain matters of fact may be made, and put on record at the time of the actual occurrences. The mere writing down of these at the time does not make them credible, nor does the omission to write those make them incredible. Assyrian and Egyptian kings may lie upon stone monuments—very probably they did—in regard to events of their own day; and Hebrew his-

torians may tell us a true story of their history though they wrote it long after the events.¹

The point to be established is, that for the Biblical theory of the history it does not matter who wrote the historical books. The theory does indeed imply that those books contain true history; but its acceptance of the facts does not depend on a knowledge of who wrote them down; for on this point the books themselves are for the most part silent. Moses may have written much, or may have written little, of what is contained in the Pentateuch; it will remain unknown who were the authors of the succeeding books: our knowledge of these things would not necessarily guarantee the history. The Biblical theory, as an account of the manner in which things took place, does not stand or fall by the determination of the contemporaneousness of documents, and the modern theory certainly has no higher claim to the possession of contemporary sources for its support.

3. And thirdly, the modern theory, like the Biblical, is now formulated in such a shape that it can be taken as a whole, and tested on grounds that lie apart from questions of the authorship of the books of the Hexateuch. There are certain admitted facts; at a certain point we come upon ground that is undisputed; some outstanding facts and phenomena of the history are before us; and each theory in turn gives its account of the origin and significance of these facts and phenomena. At a certain time we emerge upon the ground of admitted history, when contemporaneous writings come to our aid, for the determination of conditions and circumstances which have a clear significance for the history; and it becomes possible by an examination of the two theories to determine

¹ See Note VII.

which of them answers the more accurately to those conditions and circumstances, and so fits in the more accurately to the course of the history at a point which is undisputed.

What is here proposed, therefore, is to leave entirely out of account in the first place those books or parts of books which are declared to be unhistorical, and to come to a time at which both theories agree that we are on clear historical ground. The critical historians shall be allowed, provisionally, to indicate what that period is; they shall also be allowed to indicate the writings which belong to that period; and without passing judgment upon the selection, but merely viewing the whole theory as a hypothesis, we shall leave challenged witnesses entirely in the background, and question those who are brought forward as trustworthy. We shall try to discover what testimony they afford in regard to certain distinctive points of the two theories, and to find in which direction the truth lies. There are certain great turning-points, and outstanding phenomena which are explained differently by the two theories. So far as these fall within a sphere where we have trustworthy evidence, we shall examine the witnesses as to their significance, and in every case shall seek to proceed from the known and admitted to the less known or unknown or disputed. We shall not claim authority or inspiration for any of the writings, but shall insist that they be taken in *bona fide*, and interpreted by a fair and common-sense criticism. If the claim to authority is not pressed on the one side, the claim of subjective or theoretical criticism is to be disallowed on the other. We must have *some bona fide* witnesses to start with, or no progress is possible. If the only witnesses available turn out to be unworthy of cre-

dence, it is difficult to see how any conclusion at all can be arrived at which may be regarded as safe.

By thus testing the two theories according to a standard which is accepted, and on ground which is undisputed, we shall obtain some means of estimating the value of those other witnesses also, who at the outset are held in the background. For if the Biblical theory can sustain itself on independent ground, it is evident that those challenged witnesses who are in its favour will have to be regarded as credible testimony; in other words, if apart from the historical books which are disputed the Biblical theory is established, then those books or portions of them which proceed on the Biblical theory fall into their proper place as history. If by purely historical inquiry we can determine the main line and trend of the history, then it will be safe to criticise the documents by literary methods, so as to determine earlier and later elements, separating duplicates, and so forth, but always with regard to the historical line that has been ascertained. This is more scientific than positing a hypothetical line of development, and then trying to make the materials square with it, or arranging them to suit it. If it is only on the basis of a historical criticism that the arrangement of the materials can be made, the historical scheme should, if possible, be determined on independent grounds, and not put forth at the outset as hypothetical.