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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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The fifty-fourth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, met in the Central Church, Kansas City, Mo., May 21, 1914, and was dissolved at 3:30 P. M., Thursday, May 28th. This is the third Assembly in succession which has limited the span of its life to six working days. These precedents will probably have the force of law for the future. Time was when the Assembly had to rush its business toward the close, in order to dissolution by the end of the ninth day from date of organization. The volume of business has increased rather than diminished. The recent Assemblies have shortened the time not by covering less ground, but by increasing the speed. The liberty of speech has been abridged. It has come to pass that by the time a speaker gets fairly launched, the cry of "question," "question," warns the speaker that further effort to get a hearing for his views will be useless. Age and distinguished services do not secure immunity from such discourtesy. The Assembly is ceasing to be a deliberative body, and coming to be an organization merely for business routine.

Obviously, our Assemblies are inoculated with the speed-madness of the age. It could hardly be otherwise. The members, who compose the Assembly, are accustomed, by the use of the telephone, rapid transit, and other time-saving devices, to dispatch business at a rate that would have made a former generation dizzy. The speed at which we live is constantly increasing,

THE PRESENT TREND OF OLD TESTAMENT CRITICISM.

BY REV. PARKE P. FLOURNOY, D. D., BETHESDA, MD.

As all readers of current literature must have observed, the Bible is much more referred to now than in former times. More people are now willing to read *about* the Bible, and fewer reading the Bible itself, perhaps, than for a long time past. This is due to several causes. The Bible has been under fire for the last half century in an unusual degree, as scholars have known, and for the last quarter of a century the general public have known it. Critics have been questioning the accuracy, and even the authorship, of both the Old and New Testaments, arriving, with some degree of unanimity, at results which have been proclaimed "assured." The work of specialists of ability has claimed to be so scientific in its methods that their conclusions must be reliable.

One of these conclusions is that the five books of Moses were not written by Moses, nor under his supervision, nor in the period in which he lived; but were made up from documents* which were written at a much later time, a period extending from the time of the earlier kings of Judah and Israel to the age of the exile and the restoration under Nehemiah and Ezra. This view has been very generally taken and represented as the result of a thorough and scientific investigation, and published far and wide in literature of every grade as unquestioned except by the ignorant.

Writers of popular literature, like other people, do not wish to be considered behind the times, and referring to this question, are apt to let it be known that *they* are too well informed to imagine that the five books of Moses are the productions of Moses.

*When the term "documentary theory" is used, the theory or hypothesis of radical modern higher criticism alone is indicated. The most conservative scholars think that Moses used some earlier documents in writing the Pentateuch.

On the other hand, for the last ten years, a movement has been going on and gathering ever-increasing momentum as it proceeds, which is causing qualms and heart-searchings among extreme higher critics. They are beginning to feel the foundation on which they have been building trembling, and even crumbling, beneath their airy and soaring edifice. In short, they are finding that they have been so enamoured of their favorite theories that they have not given sufficient attention to facts. They have been so busy about the domes and turrets of their imposing structure that they have neglected to examine carefully the foundation. But of late, some have been examining it in a strictly scientific way, and are finding it insecure. As is well known, higher critics have adopted the "Astruc clue" as their guide in their endeavor to find those seams in the Pentateuchal records where they imagine that extracts from different documents have been patched together to form the text which we have in our Hebrew Bibles. This so-called clue is the use of the divine name and appellations. Certain passages in which the divine name Jehovah is used are assigned to a writer whom they call the Jehovist, J. being used to designate such passages. E. is used to indicate passages in which the appellation Elohim (God) is used, and they are assigned to the Elohist.

Then they add D. to mark the work of a supposed Deuteronomist, P. for that of a supposed priestly writer, R. for remarks of a Redactor or editor who is supposed to have combined the documents in the form in which we find them in our Hebrew Bibles. Some also introduce J2 and J3 for other Jehovist writers whom they imagine they have discovered.*

But the crisis of this criticism has come. These critics of the critics, whose work of the last ten years has been mentioned, have been going around the stately edifice, examining very carefully, and in minutest detail, the foundation on which it has been reared—namely, the Hebrew text† which the Massorets agreed

*See especially *Text in Colors in Sacred Books of Old Testament, Genesis in Hebrew*, C. J. Ball, under the editorial direction of Prof. Paul Haupt.

†The Massoretic text of the Old Testament is the work of Jewish scholars, beginning in the sixth century A. D., probably at Tiberias, and continued by successors until the eleventh century, of which many eminent scholars prepared, with great labor, and at great expense, editions since the invention of printing such as that of Gerson (1494), which Luther translated, and those of Bomberg, Stephens, the great Complutensian Polyglott of Cardinal Ximenes (1522), with more recent editions by Jablonski, Van der Hooght, Michaelis, Kermicott, Hahn and others.

upon and "pointed " as we have it in our Hebrew Bibles.

The question these examiners raised was this: *Does this Massoretic text agree with the original text in the use of the divine name and appellations?* They have been searching to see if there were not far older Hebrew texts than the Massoretic, and whether such older texts used the name and appellations in exactly the same way that the Massoretic does. A Jewish scholar, Harold M. Wiener, A. M., of Cambridge University, a barrister of Lincoln's Inn, London, and Johannes Dahse, of Freirachdorf, Germany, have been among the most careful investigators, and discoverers of facts which make the use of the Astruc clue seem utterly unreasonable. Wiener in his *Essays in Pentateuchal Criticism*, *Pentateuchal Studies*, and *Origin of the Pentateuch*, many articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra* and *The Expositor*, and Dahse in his *Textkritische Materialien zur Hexateuchfrage*, other books and articles, have probably done more to discredit the documentary theory than any other two men; but other eminent scholars have contributed to this result of truly scientific investigation.

A number of the most prominent critics have so far yielded, under these assaults, as to sign a public announcement that it is now the duty of scholars to give more thorough study to the Hebrew text. All who can think at all on such a subject must now see that this should have been done before the divisive theories had been published abroad over the world with the claim that all scholarship worthy of the name accepted this theory. Had they begun at the foundation instead of the superstructure, they would have builded far more wisely than they have done, and many whose faith has been overthrown might now have been in the company of believers. Eminent critics are now recognizing the absolute necessity of using all the means at hand for deciding upon the correctness of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The Massoretic text, as is well known, is in need of correction in many places. Yet, the documentary theory rests chiefly on the use of the divine names as they appear in the Massoretic text. The following appeared in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July, 1913): "That progress is being made among Old Testament scholars in recognizing the fact that the Masso-

retic text is in need of revision is evidenced by the following quotation from a communication to the *London Times*, October 2, 1912, signed by J. Rendel Harris, W. H. Bennett, J. Estlin Carpenter, T. Wilton Davies, T. R. Glover, A. Buchanan Gray, J. T. Marshall, G. Mulligan, James Moffat, James Hope Moulton, Arthur S. Peake, John Skinner, Alexander Souter, J. G. Tasker, Owen C. Whitehouse, and H. G. Wood:

"The revisers of the Old Testament, unlike those of the New Testament, confessedly abstained from making any systematic use of the materials that existed for controlling the received text, and, as a rule, closely adhered not merely to the received Hebrew text, but also to the Jewish commentary which is attached to that text in the form of vowel points. Since the Hebrew text is in not a few places unintelligible, and in others almost certainly wrong, and since the Jewish commentary, though valuable, is not infallible, many passages still convey in the revised version, as they had conveyed in the authorized version, a meaning which is certainly at variance with that of the original text and its meaning."

The late Dr. Charles A. Briggs, in his *General Introduction to the Study of the Holy Scriptures* (1899), "the product of thirty years' work," impresses upon scholars the necessity of the study of the *text* of the Old Testament in order to arrive at reliable results. He tells us (p. 229), "There can be no doubt," as Robertson Smith states: "It has gradually become clear to the vast majority, of conscientious students that the Septuagint is really of the greatest value as a witness to the early state of the text."

(Wiener has followed the plan of comparing the Septuagint in all recensions of it that are obtainable, together with the Samaritan Pentateuch, with the Massoretic Hebrew text, from which our English translations have been made, in order to determine the original Hebrew text, from which it is found that the Massoretic Hebrew often differs, especially in the matter of the use of the divine names, or appellations.)

Dr. Briggs adds, on page 230, "It has become practically impossible for any scholarly work to be done on the Old Testa-

ment without the use of all the resources of *textual criticism* for a sure foundation." (Italics mine.)

Now, it is plain that, while the Massoretic Hebrew text from which our English Bible was translated has not been so affected in transmission as to present essentially false views of history or to affect the great truths of revelation, in many cases, it is found to differ from other texts in the use of the divine names, so that no reliable judgment can be based upon such a shifting foundation, as the use of the divine names in it has been found to be.

How utterly unreliable this foundation for the documentary theory of modern higher critics is, may be seen from the following statements: (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct. 1912, pp. 658 ff.) "The worthlessness of the names of the Deity as a source of distinction has been pointed out in the *American Journal of Theology* in 1904 by Redpath; in England by Wiener (since 1909); in Holland by Erdmanns (1908); in Germany by Clostermann, Johannes Lepsius (in *Reich Christi*, 1903); and by myself (in *Archiv fur Religion Wissenschaft*, 1903). Moreover, various Catholic theologians, as Hoberg, Hummelauer, Schlögl and Weiss have written appropriate contributions."

The writer, Dr. Johannes Dahse, proceeds to speak of the faulty method that has been adopted by the advocates of this theory.

"Because of a few peculiarities of one edition of the books of Moses (but not valid everywhere without exception), viz: the Hebrew which is called the Massoretic text, they accept the existence of many sources, without stopping to consider that we have other editions of these books, and without testing to see if the same peculiarities are found in them as in the usual Hebrew edition."

The folly of relying on the Massoretic text alone is shown by pointing out the evidence of the existence of much older editions of the Hebrew. Such evidence is found in the Vulgate, the Old Syriac, "the Septuagint, with its contributions from Origen, Lucian, and Hesychius, whereby the existence of four other valuable Hebrew texts is proved. Then we have the four other Greek translators—Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, whose

Hebrew sources here again deviate in different places from the present Hebrew. Finally, there is the Hebrew text of the Samaritans* with its deviations. Thus, we see, a scientific inquiry has to deal with more than ten different textual editions of Genesis of which traces are found occasionally in extant Hebrew manuscripts. These may, however, all be heard as to the origin of the Pentateuch; for who will guarantee that one of the most recent texts, the Massoretic—has preserved the correct information?"

Wiener, in his books and articles published in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, has presented in tables the many differences between the Massoretic text (from which our English translations are made), and such versions as have been mentioned, and which show the differences in Hebrew editions older than the Massoretic. Yet, strange as it may seem, the modern documentary theory of the higher critics has been based upon the Massoretic text. Can this be called scientific?

Says Dr. Aalders, of Ermelo, the Netherlands: "The critics know very well that the names of God are very variable elements of the text, but do not at all reckon with this fact, and build a very radical hypothesis concerning the origin of the Pentateuch on the use of the names of God in the Massoretic text."†

Speaking of an apparent "conspiracy of silence as to the textual objection to the current Pentateuchal hypothesis," he continues, "Would it not be inferred from this, that the adherents of the theory cannot say much against the textual objection? The presumption grows to a certainty when we read what is said by a few champions who have ventured to take up the gauntlet that has been thrown down."‡

But the higher critics, like other people, are very slow to surrender a position which they have taken and pronounced impregnable. Since the Astruc clue has been shown to be an utterly unreliable guide, some are saying that this is by no means a

*The Samaritan Pentateuch, though written in Samaritan script, is in the Hebrew language.

†*Bibliotheca Sacra*, July, 1914, p. 398.

‡Even Dr. John Skinner, who has written a number of articles (*Expositor*, April, September, 1913) in the endeavor to furnish props for the documentary theory, has made the following acknowledgement: "We must frankly acknowledge that the trustworthiness of the Hebrew text in its transmission of the divine names calls for more thorough investigation than it has yet received at the hands of critical scholars." (*Bib. Sacra*, Jan., 1914, p. 100.)

matter of the first importance, and claiming that the extracts from the supposed documents can be identified by other features than the use of the divine names. As Dr. Aalders, the Dutch scholar, expresses it:

“The defense of the threatened entrenchment has evidently lost all charm for the adherents of the current Pentateuchal hypothesis. After a feint, they abandon the bulwark raised by Astruc, in order to retreat behind other supports, thinking that they will even then be able to defend the attacked fortress successfully.”

Dr. John Skinner, the late Dr. Driver and others, have striven hard to show that the Wellhausen theory is not dependent on the use of the divine names, and that it has several other reliable supports.

Dr. Aalders tells us (*Ibid.* p. 403), that “Sellin divides them into three groups:

“First, Those of an historical nature (showing a different conception of the ancient history):

“Second, Those of a religious nature (showing a different conception of the Deity, of His revelation and of His Will.)

“Third, Those of a grammatical nature (lexicological and grammatical differences).”

After citing declarations of very prominent scholars to show the dependence of the Wellhausen theory on the Astruc clue, he says: “I think that is enough to show that, in the estimation of the higher critics themselves, the documentary theory rests principally on the criterion of the names of God.” (*Ibid.* p. 403.)

He quotes Eerdmans as saying, “It is true that critical acumen has also tried to discover other characteristic features of the sources and has even thought it permissible to assign to the authors entirely different theological ways of thought; but all this was not discovered till the analysis founded on the names of God had been effected, and is moreover of a most problematical nature.” (It should be remembered that Eerdmans was formerly an adherent of the Wellhausen school.)

But stranger still, Aalders informs us that “Wellhausen himself

has admitted that the latest attack on his celebrated hypothesis has touched its sore point.”*

The article of Dr. Aalders from which these quotations have been made, concludes with these significant words:

“Now that the criterion of the names of God cannot be maintained against the objections of textual criticism, the day is not far distant when the Wellhausen hypothesis of the Pentateuch, the glory of which is already dying away in the scientific world, will crumble into ruins.”

So it seems clear that the present trend of Old Testament criticism is in such a direction that the radical theorists who for years past have proclaimed themselves the only real biblical scholars, will find themselves lost in the wilderness of doubt and far behind the vanguard of scholarship which they have thought they were leading. In the meanwhile, those who have believed Christ's testimony concerning the Scriptures will rejoice to find that more careful investigation has shown that the destructive higher criticism is itself coming to destruction. Truly, “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of the Lord endureth forever.”

*In a letter of Wellhausen to Dahse. (Ibid. p. 395.)