

Pastor and People.

OPENING OF KNOX COLLEGE.

THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST TO THE OLD TESTAMENT.

This year the opening lecture was delivered by Principal Caven. It was an effort of marked ability, exemplifying his fair and candid treatment of a subject of the utmost practical importance, and of deep present interest. Clear grasp, subtle analysis, concatenated logic and fervent devotion to evangelical truth were discernible from beginning to end of this masterly production of the Principal's pen. He spoke as follows:—

The Old Testament is received by both Jews and Christians as containing a revelation from God, while by the latter it is regarded as standing in close and vital relationship to the Old Testament. Everything relating to the Old Testament has, of recent years, been subjected to the closest scrutiny—the style of its several books, the time when they were written, their authorship, their historical value, their religious teachings. Apart from the veneration with which we regard the Old Testament writings on their own account, the intimate connection which they have with the Christian Scriptures necessarily give us the deepest interest in the conclusions which may be reached by Old Testament criticism. For as the New Testament dispensation presupposes and grows out of the Mosaic, so the books of the New Testament touch those of the Old at almost every point. "In veteri testamento novum latet, et in novo vetus patet." (Aug.)

We propose briefly to consider the testimony of our Lord to the Old Testament, as it is related by the Evangelists. The New Testament writers themselves largely quote and refer to the Old Testament, and the estimate which they form of the old dispensation and its writings harmonizes with that of the Master; but we here, for various reasons, limit ourselves to what He Himself is recorded to have said.

Let us refer, first, to what the Lord actually says regarding the Old Testament Scriptures, and, secondly, to the value of His testimony.

I. (1) Our Lord's authority may be cited in favour of the Old Testament Canon as accepted by the Jews in His day. He never charges them with adding to or taking from the Scriptures, or in any way tampering with the text. Had the Jews been guilty of so great a sin it is hardly possible that, among all the things brought against them, this matter should not even be alluded to. The Lord reproaches His countrymen with ignorance of the Scriptures, and with making the law void through their traditions, but He never hints that they have foisted any book into the Canon, or rejected any which deserved a place in it.

Now the Old Testament Canon of the first century is the same as our own. The evidence for this is complete, and the fact is hardly questioned. The New Testament contains, indeed, no catalogue of the Old Testament books, but the testimony of Josephus, of Melito of Sardis, in the second Christian century, of Origen, of Jerome, of the Talmud, decisively shows that the Old Testament Canon once fixed, has remained unaltered. Whether the steady Jewish tradition that the Canon was finally determined by Ezra and the great Synagogue is altogether correct or not, it is certain that the Septuagint agrees with the Hebrew as to the Canon, thus showing that the matter was not in dispute two centuries before Christ. Nor is the testimony of the Septuagint weakened by the fact that the common Old Testament apocrypha are appended to the Canonical books, for "of no one among the apocryphal books is it so much as hinted, either by the author or by any other Jewish writer, that it was worthy of a place among the sacred books" (Kitto's Cycl. Art. Canon). The Lord, it is to be observed, never quotes any of the apocryphal books, nor refers to them.

(2) If our Lord does not name the writers of the Old Testament in detail, it may at least be said that no word of His calls in question the genuineness of any book, and that He distinctly assigns several parts of Scripture to the writers whose names they pass under.

The Law is ascribed to Moses, David's name is connected with the Psalms, the prophecies of Isaiah are attributed to Isaiah, the prophecies of Daniel to Daniel. We shall afterwards enquire whether these references are merely by way of accommodation, or whether more importance should be attached to them; in the meantime we note that the Lord does not, in any instance, express dissent from the common opinion, and that as to several parts of Scripture, He distinctly endorses it.

The references to Moses as legislator and writer are such as these: To the cleansed lepers He says: "Go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded" (Matt. viii. 4). "He saith unto them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives" (Matt. xix. 8). "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead" (Luke xvi. 31). "For Moses said, honour thy father and thy mother, and whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death" (Mark vii. 10). "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke xxiv. 27). "All things must be fulfilled that are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke xxiv. 44). "There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me, for he wrote of Me; but if ye believe not his writings how shall ye believe My words?" (John v. 46-47). "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?" (John vii. 19). "Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision. . . . If a man on the Sabbath Day receive circumcision that the law of Moses should not be broken," etc. (John vii. 22-23). The omitted parenthetical word "not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers," seem clearly to show, it may be remarked in passing, that the Lord is not unobservant in such references, of historical exactness. The Psalms are quoted by our Lord more than once, but only once is a writer named. The 110th Psalm is ascribed to David; and the validity of the Lord's argument depends on its being Davidic. The reference, therefore, so far as it goes, confirms the inscriptions of the Psalms in relation to authorship. Isaiah vi. 9, is quoted thus: "In them is fulfilled the

prophecy of Isaiah which saith, by hearing ye shall hear and shall not understand" etc. (Matt. xiii. 14-15). Again chap. xxix. 13, of Isaiah's prophecy is cited: "Well hath Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites. . . . this people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (Mark vii. 6). When in the beginning of His ministry the Lord came to Nazareth, there was delivered unto Him in the Synagogue "the book of the prophet Isaiah; and when He had opened the book, He found the place where it is written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor,' etc. (Luke iv. 17-18). The passage read by our Lord is from the forty-second chapter of Isaiah, which belongs to the section of the book, very often, at present, ascribed to the second Isaiah or the Pseudo-Isaiah; but we do not press this point, as it may be said, that the Evangelist, rather than Christ, ascribes the words to Isaiah.

In His great prophecy respecting the downfall of the Jewish state the Lord refers to "the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet;" as in Daniel ix. 27 we read that "for the overspreading of abominations He shall make it desolate," and in ch. xii. 11, that "the abomination that maketh desolate shall be set up."

(3) When Christ makes reference to Old Testament narratives and records, He accepts them as authentic, as historically true. He does not give, or suggest in any case, a mystical or allegorical interpretation. The account of the Creation, of the Flood, of the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as many incidents and events of later occurrence are taken as authentic. It may, of course, be alleged that the Lord's references to the Creation of Man and woman, the Flood, the cities of the Plain, etc., equally serve the purpose of illustration, whether He regards them as historical or not. But on weighing His words it will be seen that they lose much of their force and appropriateness unless the events alluded to had a historical character.

Let us refer more particularly to this matter. When the Pharisees ask Christ whether it is lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause, He answers them: "Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said for this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh" (Matthew xix. 5-8). Again, "As the days of Noah were so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days of Noah that were before the Flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not till the Flood came and took them away; so shall also the Coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew xxiv. 37). Again: "And thou Capernaum which art exalted unto heaven shalt be brought down unto hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom it would have remained unto this day. But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee" (Matthew xi. 23). These utterances, everyone feels, lose their weight and solemnity if there was no Flood such as is described in Genesis and if the destruction of wicked Sodom may be only a myth. Illustrations and parallels may, for certain purposes, be adduced from fictitious literature, but when the Lord wants to awaken the conscience of men and alarm their fears by reference to the certainty of divine judgment, He will not confirm His teaching by instances of punishment which are only fabulous. His argument that the holy and just God will do as He had done—will make bare His arm as in the days of old—is robbed in this case of all its validity.

A view frequently urged in the present day is that as with other nations so with the Jews, the mythical period precedes the historical, and thus the earlier narratives of the Old Testament must be taken according to their true character. In later periods of the Old Testament we have records which, on the whole, are historical; in the accounts of patriarchal life we have fact and fiction intermingled, but in the very earliest times we must not look for authentic history at all. An adequate examination of this theory (which has, of course, momentous exegetical consequences) cannot here be attempted. We merely remark that our Lord's brief reference to early Old Testament narrative would not suggest the distinction so often made between earlier and later Old Testament records on the score of trustworthiness.

(4) We advance to say that Christ accepts the Old dispensation and its Scriptures as, in a special sense, from God,—as having special, divine authority. Many who recognize no peculiar sacredness or authority in the religion of the Jews above other religions of the world, would readily admit that it is from God. But their contention is that all religions (especially what they are pleased to call the great religions) have elements of truth in them, that they all furnish media through which devout souls have fellowship with the great Power which rules the universe; but that none of them should exalt its pretensions much above the others, far less claim exclusive divine sanction; all of them being the product of man's spiritual nature, as moulded by his history and environment in different nations and ages. This is the view under which the study of comparative religion is prosecuted by many eminent scholars. A large and generous study of religions—their characteristics and history—tends, it is held, to bring them into closer fellowship with each other; and only ignorance or prejudice (say these unbiassed thinkers) can isolate the religion of the Old Testament or of the New, and refuse to acknowledge in other religions the divine elements which entitle them to take rank with Judaism or Christianity. One regrets to find Professor Cheyne, of Oxford, approaching too near this view. In a recent number of the *Expository Times*, in an article on the influence of Zoroastrianism on the religion of Israel, he thus writes: "I will conclude with a wish that does not, I am sure, exceed the limits of Christian generosity. May these two great religions, committed to highly-gifted peoples which have survived equal misfortunes simply and entirely through their strong attachment to their Scriptures, find in my own time a more unreservedly historical, and therefore also at once a more just and a more sympathetic, appreciation from English students."

The utterance of Jesus Christ on this question of the divinity of the Old Testament religion and cultus are unmistakable; and not less clear and decided is his language respecting the writings in which this religion is delivered. God is the source, in the directest sense, of both the religion and the records of it. No man can claim Christ's authority for classing Judaism with Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Parseism. There is nothing, indeed, in the Lord's teaching which for-

bids us to recognize anything that is good in ethnic religions, any of those elements of spiritual truth which became the common property of the race, and which were not completely lost in the night of heathenism; but, on the other hand, it is abundantly evident that the Jewish faith is to our Lord the one true faith, and that the Jewish Scriptures have a place of their own—a place which cannot be shared with the sacred books of other peoples. Samaritanism even, though it had appropriated so largely from the religion of Israel, He will not recognize, "for salvation is of the Jews."

Almost any reference of our Lord to the Old Testament will support the statement that He regards the Dispensation and its Scriptures as from God. He shows that Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled in Himself, or He vindicates His teaching and His claims by Scripture, or He enjoins obedience to the law—as in the case of the cleansed lepers—or He asserts the inviolability of the law till its complete fulfilment—or He accuses a blinded and self-righteous generation of superseding and vacating a law which they were bound to observe. A few instances of explicit recognition of the Old Testament Scriptures as proceeding from God, and having divine authority, may be here adduced. In his sermon on the Mount the Lord makes this strong and comprehensive statement: "Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled" (Matt. v. 17). In the context the law is distinguished from the prophets, and designates, therefore, the Pentateuch; and surely the divine origin of this part of Scripture is unquestionably implied. No such inviolability could be claimed for any merely human institution or production. When the hypocritical and heartless son pretended to devote to God what should have gone to support his indigent parents he "made the commandments of God of none effect"; "for God commanded saying, honour thy father and thy mother" (Matt. xv. 5, 6). In purging the temple, the Lord justifies His action in these words: "It is written, My house shall be called an house of prayer for all nations" (Matt. xxi. 13). Again, "As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob" (Matt. xxi. 31, 32). Again, "Laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the traditions of men, as the washing of pots and cups, and many other such things ye do" (Mark vii. 7). So many passages of the Old Testament are quoted, or alluded to, by the Lord as having received, or as awaiting, fulfilment that it is scarcely necessary to make citations of this class. These all most certainly imply the divinity of Scripture; for no man, no creature, can tell what is hidden in the remote future.

We are not forgetting that the Lord fully recognizes the imperfect and provisional character of the Mosaic law and of the old dispensation. Were the old faultless, no place would have been found for the new. Had grace and truth come by Moses, the advent of Jesus Christ would have been unnecessary. So when the Pharisees put the question to Christ why Moses commanded to give to a wife who has found no favour with her husband a writing of divorcement and to put her away, He replied, "Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. xix. 8). The Mosaic legislation was not, in every part, absolutely the best that could be given, but it was such as the divine wisdom saw best for the time being, and under the special circumstance of the Hebrew people. Not only did the Old Testament set forth a typical economy, which must give place to another, but it embodied ethical elements of a defective and provisional kind, which must pass away when the Incarnate Son had revealed the Father. The Old Testament is conscious of its own imperfections; for Jeremiah thus writes: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt." But in all this there is nothing to modify the proposition which we are illustrating, viz., that our Lord accepts the Old Testament economy and its Scripture as from God—as stamped with divine authority, and as truly making known the divine mind and will.

Marcion and the Gnostics did not receive any part of the Old Testament Scriptures, and the old dispensation itself they held to be of evil origin. So decided were they against the Old Testament that they would not admit into their New Testament Canon the books which especially bear witness to the Old. But the Christian Church has followed its Master in regarding the Old Testament as the Word of God, as the Bible of the ages before the Advent, and as still part of the Bible for the Christian Church. Not till the days of developed rationalism has this position been called in question, except among unbelievers. But it is obvious to remark that the style of criticism which, in our own time, is frequently applied to the Old Testament (not to say anything about the New) touching its histories, its laws, its morality, is quite inconsistent with the recognition of any special divine characteristics or authority as belonging to it. The very maxim so often repeated, that criticism must deal with these writings precisely as it deals with other writings, is a refusal to Scripture, *in limine*, of the peculiar character which it claims, and which the Church has ever recognized in it. If a special divine authority can be vindicated for these books, or for any of them, this fact, it is clear, ought to be taken into account by the linguistic and historical critic. Logically, we should begin our study of them by investigating their title to such authority, and should their claim prove well founded it should never be forgotten in the subsequent critical processes. The establishment of this high claim will imply in these writings moral characteristics (not to mention others) which should exempt them from a certain suspicion which the critic may not unwarrantably allow to be present when he begins to examine documents of an ordinary kind. It is not, therefore, correct to say the criticism in commencing its enquiries should know nothing of the alleged divine origin or sacred character of a book. If the book has no good vouchers for its claims to possess a sacred character criticism must proceed unhindered; but correct conceptions of critical methods demand that every important fact already ascertained as to any writings should be kept faithfully before the mind in the critical examination of them. Science must here unite with reverential feeling in requiring right treatment of a book which claims special divine sanction, and is willing to have its claim duly examined.

(To be continued.)