

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### ON THE MOSAIC AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY.

The following lecture was read by Professor Gregg at the closing of the session at Knox College on the 10th instant:—

The Book of Deuteronomy professes to contain a record of the words of Moses, spoken by him shortly before his death, and in the presence of the Israelites whom he had led to the borders of Canaan. To this record of the words of Moses, which includes three discourses, a song, and blessing, there is appended in the last chapter of the book a brief account of the death of Moses and of the appointment of Joshua as his successor. Nothing is said in Scripture respecting the authorship of this closing chapter, which may have been written by Samuel or some other writer; but from the book itself, as well as from other portions of Scripture, we are led to believe that the discourses, song, and blessing were not only spoken by Moses, but also committed to writing by him. In regard to other portions of Scripture, as for example the Book of Job and the Epistle to the Hebrews, we have no definite information respecting their writers, and hence different opinions have been entertained respecting their authorship; but so plainly is the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy indicated in the book itself, and in other portions of the inspired Scriptures, that for more than two thousand years there seems to have been no real difference of opinion on the subject, among either Jews or Christians. Josephus and Philo, for example, attribute Deuteronomy, as well as the rest of the Pentateuch, to Moses. In the Talmud also, the whole Pentateuch, with the exception of the closing verses of Deuteronomy, is attributed to Moses. In the middle ages there were two Jewish scholars, one of whom doubted the Mosaic authorship of one verse in Genesis, while the other questioned the Mosaic authorship of two verses in Genesis, of two verses in the first and third chapters of Deuteronomy, and also of the closing chapter which records the death of Moses, and which he attributes to Joshua. But with these exceptions both maintained that Moses wrote the books usually ascribed to him. The Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy, as well as of the rest of the Pentateuch, was held by all the fathers of the Christian Church, so far as we know; although a few Gnostic heretics held different opinions. On the whole it may be safely affirmed, that with such trifling exceptions as have been indicated, no writer, Jewish or Christian, since the time of Ezra, when the Old Testament Canon was completed, till after the Reformation in the sixteenth century, is known to have questioned the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and particularly of the Book of Deuteronomy. Since the revival of learning, however, and the time of the Reformation, all kinds of ancient writings have been subjected to severe critical tests. The result has been, that several writings, formerly supposed to have been genuine, have been proved to have been forgeries. For example: several letters attributed to Ignatius, one of the Apostolic Fathers, and to Clement and succeeding Bishops of Rome, have been proved to have been either complete forgeries, or grossly interpolated. These seem to have been forged for the purpose of giving countenance to doctrines and practices for which no warrant could be found in the Scriptures, or in the genuine writings of the early Christian Fathers. The Scriptures themselves did not escape the severest criticism, especially on the part of Atheists, infidels, and heretics of various kinds. Thus the famous Pantheist Benedict Spinoza, turning his attention to a critical examination of the Old Testament Scriptures, arrived at the conclusion that all the historical books were written by but one author, probably Ezra, and that Deuteronomy was the first of the books he wrote. He thought also that perhaps the "Books of Moses" received this name because they recorded the life of Moses—a view which was also held by the celebrated English infidel, Thomas Hobbes. The Remonstrant theologian John Le Clerc propounded the theory that the five books ascribed to Moses were written after the captivity of the ten tribes, by that Israelitish priest who was sent from Babylon to teach the new inhabitants of Samaria the manner of the God of the land. To this writer a convincing reply was written by the Calvinist theologian, Harman Witsius; and Le Clerc afterwards not merely retracted his views, but wrote a

defence of the Mosaic authorship of the whole Pentateuch, with the exception of a few verses which he supposed were interpolations of a later age. A new theory respecting the authorship of the Pentateuch was published in 1753 by a French physician named Astruc. From the occurrence or non-occurrence of the names of God—Elohim and Jehovah—in particular portions of Genesis or Exodus, he imagined that there were two previously existing documents which were interwoven by Moses in his narrative. This theory has been adopted, modified, or elaborated by later writers, who have applied it to Deuteronomy and other books, the imagined original writers being known as the "Elohist" and the "Jehovist." According to later theorists, there was an earlier and a later Elohist, as well as a Jehovist, none of whom wrote till long after the death of Moses, whose authorship of the Pentateuch is entirely set aside. Thus DeWette, a distinguished professor of philosophy and theology at Berlin and Basle, endeavored to prove that none of the books of the Pentateuch was written before the time of David, and that the latest written was the book of Deuteronomy, whose composition is assigned to the time of King Josiah. But a still more extraordinary theory respecting the Book of Deuteronomy was propounded by Ewald, another distinguished scholar, and Professor of Exegesis in Gottingen and Tubingen. According to Ewald this book was written by three distinct writers, one of whom lived in the time of Uzziah or Jotham, the second in the second half of the reign of Manasseh, and the third probably in the time of Josiah. The second writer is supposed to have lived in Egypt, and to have belonged to the Kingdom of Judah.

Although the denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch seems plainly enough to lead to the rejection of its Divine inspiration and authority; and although, as a matter of fact, virtual infidelity has, in many cases, either prompted or resulted from such a denial; yet the supernatural inspiration and Divine authority of the Pentateuch are professedly maintained by some who question or reject its Mosaic authorship. Thus, for example, it has been held that, although the Book of Deuteronomy was written long after the time of Moses, by some one who put his work into the mouth of Moses, yet, in doing this the real writer was guilty of no pious fraud; that he merely adopted a literary device common to ancient Eastern writers; that in the dramatic use of the name of Moses he was guided by the same prophetic spirit as wrought through Moses himself; and that therefore the laws of Deuteronomy are to be regarded as authoritative developments of the laws supernaturally made known to the Israelites at Sinai. In other words, we are asked to believe that the real writer of Deuteronomy, who may have lived in the time of Josiah, was directed by the Spirit of God to suppress his own name, and to represent his exposition of the moral, civil, and ceremonial law as the work of the great Jewish lawgiver who had died long centuries before it was written.

As the extraordinary views respecting the authorship of Deuteronomy which have been recently promulgated, however harmless they may appear to their authors, appear to me to be exceedingly dangerous, so to the special consideration of this subject I have thought it proper to devote this lecture. I do not intend to consider in detail the various motives or reasons which may have induced some writers to call in question the almost universal belief of Jews and Christians that the Book of Deuteronomy was written by Moses. This I will endeavor to some extent to do. It will be my first and chief endeavor to exhibit some positive proofs, which can be alleged, of the Mosaic authorship of the book. This I think it better to do, because the positive proofs, which are of the most convincing kind, are in danger of being lost sight of, or of not receiving due attention; while a disproportionate measure of attention is being directed to the consideration of mere trifling, groundless, or imaginary difficulties. In conducting the discussion I shall feel myself called on to argue, not so much with avowed atheists and infidels, as with those who profess to believe in the Christian religion and in the truthfulness of the sacred Scriptures. I may further explain that I do not feel called on to prove the Mosaic authorship of the last chapter of Deuteronomy, which records the death of Moses, and which may have been written by some other servant of God. From the nature of the case the evidence of the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy is to be found mainly in the Scriptures themselves. Little help can be found by disputants on

either side of the question from extra-Scriptural writings. By a careful examination of the Scriptures the controversy must be decided. For such an examination no very profound scholarship is absolutely required. A diligent, judicious, devout student of a good English translation of the Scriptures is fairly competent to discuss and pronounce a decision on the controversy, and is just as likely to arrive at a right conclusion as are those who make a great parade of scholarship, and who seem to speak with contempt of the opinions of those who pretend not to be profoundly versed in Oriental literature.

I. Turning then to the Scriptures, let us first examine what may be gathered from the Book of Deuteronomy itself respecting its authorship. Here it may be observed, at the outset, that there is at least a likelihood that Moses did actually deliver such discourses as are recorded in this book. He had been the leader of Israel for forty years, and he knew that his life and ministry were soon to close. Was it not likely that, before closing his labors, he would take occasion to explain and inculcate the law he had received at Sinai, and under Divine guidance to adjust it to the new circumstances in which the Israelites were soon to find themselves? And is it not, moreover, likely that, if Moses did deliver such a recapitulation and enforcement of the law as are attributed to him, he would take care to commit them to writing, rather than leave the many minute directions he gave to be handed down from generation to generation by mere oral tradition? The theorists who attribute the authorship of Deuteronomy to a writer of a much later age virtually admit this likelihood, for it cannot be supposed that any writer would have put his thoughts into the mouth of Moses, and have represented him as committing them to writing, unless there was at least some likelihood that the real Moses might have spoken and written as the imaginary Moses is made to speak and write. It is further to be observed that the writer of this book was evidently well acquainted with the history and geography of Egypt; with the history, laws, manners and customs of the Israelites; with the wilderness of Arabia, with the countries and inhabitants of both sides of the Jordan. But no writer can be named who was so likely to possess all this knowledge as Moses, who resided forty years in Egypt, and was skilled in all the learning of the Egyptians; who lived for eighty years in the wilderness, and was the lawgiver of Israel; and who, from personal observation, as well as the information received from his immediate ancestors, might have obtained extensive and accurate knowledge respecting the other countries and peoples referred to in this book. So strongly does this consideration point to Moses as the writer of Deuteronomy that Ewald, who rejects its Mosaic authorship, is constrained to adopt the supposition that one of its authors, at least, must have been a Jew who resided in the land of Egypt. It is still further to be observed that in the Book of Deuteronomy there is no reference except in prophetic form to events which occurred in times later than those of Moses. For example, there is no reference to the disruption of the Hebrew monarchy, no reference to the building of the Temple, no reference to events in the times of Saul or David, or to events of the still earlier times of the Judges. The whole contents of the book harmonize with the supposition that it was written before the times of the Judges and Kings, and particularly that it was written by Moses. Nothing to the contrary has ever been proved, although something of this kind has been attempted.

Such considerations as these I have indicated point so plainly to Moses as the writer of Deuteronomy, that in the absence of any express information on the subject we might be as well assured that Moses wrote the book as that the history of the Gallic war was written by Julius Cæsar. But the Book of Deuteronomy is not an anonymous production whose authorship is a matter of inference or conjecture. It contains distinct statements that the discourses which it contains were really spoken by Moses. Thus we read in the first chapter that "it came to pass in the fortieth year in the eleventh month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him in commandment unto them, after he had slain Sihon the king of the Amosites, which dwelt in Heshbon, and Og, the King of Bashan, which dwelt at Ashtaroth in Edrei; on this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying," etc. Again, we read in the commencement of the fifth chapter that Moses called all Israel and said unto