

Canonical Scriptures; or, on the other hand, the whole process may have been gradual, arising out of the peculiar circumstances of the people (the people of God), with several preparatory stages, and more or less clearly defined periods, leading at last to the predestined goal of a volume of sacred and authoritative Scripture.

The latter hypothesis accords better with the phenomena of the books, and the evidence in our possession than the former, and as it is now generally accepted we need not occupy our limited space with any lengthened discussion of the point. Let it suffice to draw the reader's attention, on the one hand, to the way in which the compiler of the Books of Kings refers to and makes use of older authorities not themselves Canonical, and on the other to the indications of a gradual growth of the Canonical Scriptures to be found in the description of their contents as the law, the prophets, and the sacred writings.

This being the case, it is clear that the existence of a community professing a common religion must precede the selection of books regarded as containing an authoritative exposition of that religion. We are quite familiar with this idea in connection with the Canon of the New Testament. That the Church is older than the New Testament, is a mere commonplace, and there are few more interesting studies than that of the development of the idea of a New Testament Canon as it unfolded itself during the first four centuries of our era.

There is therefore nothing strange in the adoption of the notion of a similar process in connection with the Old Testament, and consequently our first enquiries must be into the beginning of Hebrew Literature with our eyes continually open for signs of writings acknowledged as authoritative in the community of Israel.

We find embedded in the prose of the Pentateuch and of the Historical Books, a number of literary fragments presenting the usual marks of Hebrew poetry, viz., some kind of parallelism of the verses composing the poem. From their very obscurity we should conjecture that they are extremely ancient, and a knowledge of the records of other peoples, justifies the supposition that it was in songs and ballads that the early traditions of the Israelites were enshrined, and at first orally transmitted, but later on committed to writing and collected into a volume. Two such collections are mentioned in the Old Testament—"The Book of the wars of the Lord," (Num. xxi. 14,) and "The Book of Jasher," (Josh. x. 13; 2 Sam. i. 18), from which extracts have been made by the compilers of the narratives.

That these songs, in some cases at least, had a religious purpose, not only agrees with the genius of the Hebrew race, but is distinctly laid down in the case of the song of Moses. "Now, therefore, write ye this song for you, and teach thou it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel,"—Deut. xxxi. 19, and we may, therefore, regard these collections as marking "a step, though it be but a slight one, in the direction of the selection of literature which should more fully and authoritatively reflect the teaching of the spirit of the Lord" (p. 22).

Accepting for the nonce, with Prof. Ryle, the very generally adopted analysis of the Pentateuch, we should next notice the various collections of laws it contains, e. g., the Decalogue, the so-called book of the Covenant, (Ex. xx. 20—xxiii. 33) the Law of Holiness (Levit. xvii.—xxvi), the Book of Deuteronomy, and finally that great body of law known as the Priest's Code. The word by which the whole Pentateuch later on came to be known—Torah,—could be and is used in the Old Testament, for individual decisions in legal matters, or was applied to general instruction, or with even wider application, as in the

opening words of Psalm lxxviii., "Give ear unto my law," or as the R. V. reads in the margin, "teaching"—the Hebrew word being Torah. The point to observe is the notion of authority connected with the word, and so we adduce, in the second place, these collections of laws as preparing the way for the notion of a Canon of sacred writings.

In the third place, we note the very early mention of official historiographers connected with the court. In the list of David's offices given in 2 Sam. viii., we read that Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilud was recorder, or chronicler, and Seraiah was scribe or secretary. It is again clear from several notices in the Books of Chronicles that the task of preserving the records of the Kingdom of God, was assumed by the prophets, and it is evidently from such official chronicles that the Books of Kings are composed. In fact, compilation enters more largely into the composition of the books of the Old Testament than was formerly supposed, and it is interesting to notice that this result of modern criticism is remarkably corroborated by comparison with the methods of another great Semitic people, the Arabians. In the Arabic histories of Tabary, Ibn el Athir, Abulfeda and others, the same passages occur almost word for word in each. That is, they used the same sources and instead of working them up and re-writing them from some special point of view in the manner of a modern historian, they simply excerpt such passages as are suitable for their work. So Driver says: "The Hebrew historiographer, as we know him, is essentially a compiler or arranger of pre-existing documents, he is not himself an original author" (Driver p. 3).

Having noticed the preparatory steps towards the formation of the Canon, viz., the production of a national literature, mainly composed of the *history* of the Kingdom of God, and the *laws* of the Kingdom of God, our next step will be to follow Prof. Ryle, as he traces out the beginning of the Canon itself.

"It is not till the year 621 B.C., the eighteenth year of the reign of King Josiah, that the history of Israel presents us with the first instance of a 'book,' which was regarded by all—king, priests, prophets, and people alike—as invested not only with sanctity, but also with supreme authority in all matters of religion and conduct." (p. 47). It is not proposed here to enter into the vexed question as to the time when this book, the Book of Deuteronomy, was written. Such an investigation is foreign to our purpose. Whatever conclusion might be arrived at it, would not affect the fact that it is from 621 B.C. that evidence is forthcoming that a *book* as opposed to a living voice is produced as containing as authoritative rule in matters of religious observance. And so, 'in the authority and sanctity assigned at this juncture, to a book, we recognize the beginning of the Hebrew Canon,' (p. 61). It is entirely consonant with this result that we find Jeremiah repeatedly quoting (without direct citation) from the book of Deuteronomy, whilst in other passages he refers to the existence of a written law. But we are not to suppose that the book of Deuteronomy was in our sense of the word regarded as canonical. The living voice of prophecy was still heard, and, "by comparison with the force of living utterance the authority of written law would appear weak." (p. 68).

What, now, were the next steps in the formation of the Canon. Here for a time we are in the dark, and Professor Ryle's speculations are thrown out rather as a working hypothesis than as a valid theory. He thinks the publication of Deuteronomy, with its references to older laws and to previous history, would lead to a demand for the expansion of authoritative (we can scarcely yet call it canonical) Scripture. Two of the great historical narratives of the Pen-