

## Our Contributors.

### CONCERNING MEN WHO RIPEN SLOWLY.

BY KNOXIAN.

Not long ago we heard an eminent member of the Toronto Bar say of a brother barrister who stands at the head of his profession that he had "ripened slowly." In early life his attainments were respectable, in middle life he was considered high legal authority, at sixty he stood on the very highest rung, took what business suited him and earned his hundred dollars a day. He ripened slowly but so surely that he is one of the acknowledged leaders of his profession, with rivals perhaps in certain lines, but still an eminent and acknowledged leader.

Did any man ever get upon the top rung in anything and stay there who hadn't ripened slowly? If so, how many? Spurgeon is the only exception we can think of. He was a prodigy from the first. But in a very important sense it may be said of even Spurgeon that he ripened slowly. It is quite true that he got the public ear in a marked manner from the first but drawing a crowd is not the main thing in preaching. In the matter of culture Spurgeon has perhaps ripened more than any living preacher. As he ripened he lopped off a good many things that were more or less offensive to many readers and though his theology fortunately never changed his mode of presenting truth distinctly improved.

But supposing it could be shown that Spurgeon came to the height of his magnificent power before he was twenty-five what of it? There is only one Spurgeon in the world. It would be a strange thing if a world as large as ours could not produce one prodigy. The point is that, as a rule, men eminent for usefulness and influence ripen slowly and are an apparent or even real exception to that rule proves nothing more than that any rule may have exceptions if it proves even that.

We doubt very much if there is one minister in the Presbyterian Church in Canada to-day, with influence extending beyond his own parish or his own professorial chair who did not ripen slowly. How many of the men who, humanly speaking, control the destinies of "this great Church" (the General Assembly is coming on and this phrase should be brought out again and warmed up) were prodigies in their youth? We can think of but one exception and perhaps that exception is more apparent than real. No doubt the majority of our most useful men were good little boys though possibly some of them were not conspicuously so. No doubt they were fine young men, good students and all that, but not one in twenty of them was a youthful prodigy. They grew, they ripened slowly. Their attainments and influence increased year by year until they became what they are. The same is true of every Church in the world. Chalmers grew from Kilmarnock, Guthrie from Arbirlot, and Norman McLeod from London. It is a grim commentary on popular election that Dr. Marcus Dods had some difficulty in finding a place to grow in. Dr. Candlish came very near being planted in Dundas. What the great Free Church leader would have ripened into had he come to Dundas is a nice question. Probably he would have spent his days in that beautiful village. Perhaps he would have become Principal of Knox College. No doubt he would have ripened into something decidedly useful and influential but at this time of day there is not much use in guessing at that something.

If the most useful men in every line ripen slowly why do we attach so much importance to juvenile precocity in this country? Why do we do a thousand other foolish things? What is the use in asking why people do foolish things? Don't we all do foolish things every day? The most foolish man in the human family is the man who stoutly maintains he never did a foolish thing. The parents of a man like that owe the world an apology.

What becomes of all the youthful prodigies? In every class in every school and college there are a number of young people who are certain to take the world by the ears the moment they get out. Where do they all go? If all or nearly all the really eminent men have ripened slowly what becomes of the distinguished people who ripened at school? Some of them may have died young but the great majority perhaps remained pretty much what they were when they left school. They ripened quickly for a time and stopped ripening suddenly. This, we venture to say, is the history of many a youthful prodigy who started out to startle the world in some line but never startled more than a few people on one of the back concessions.

May it not be true that as a rule the best Christians ripen slowly. Robert Murray McCheyne may be quoted as an exception just as Spurgeon was quoted in another connection. But there is seldom more than one McCheyne in a generation. Even McCheyne ripened as everyone knows who remembers some of the youthful incidents recorded in his biography. Of course divine power could make a convert with a love like John's, a zeal like Paul's, a patience like Job's and a faith even stronger than Abraham's. Omnipotent power could create loaves, and full grown trees, and men six feet high with full-grown beards on their faces, but that is not the usual way in which the power works. What the power could do and what the power usually does do are two different things. Generally we think it will be found that the most useful, most influential and most trustworthy Christians are the men that ripened slowly. They fought many a hard battle with sin, resisted

many a fierce temptation, subdued many a doubt, were purified by passing many times through the furnace and the result was a slow but a glorious ripening.

Of course it is possible for a Christian to ripen too slowly. No good man will be glad because the ripening is slow either in himself or others. A little experience, however, with some of the people who profess to have ripened into Abrahams in one night will convince any reasonable man that it is a great thing to ripen even slowly.

### CONCERNING THE PENTATEUCH—IS IT A COMPOSITE PRODUCT?

BY REV. S. HOUSTON, M.A.

The subject just announced is much too large to allow us to go into details. Happily it is not needful to do that. The brethren present may be assumed to be familiar with the theories put forward on this subject. The word Pentateuch has been of late discarded, inasmuch as Joshua is made a continuation of the five books of Moses. The fashionable word in these days is Hexateuch.

A word or two will suffice as to the history of the discussion about the middle of the eighteenth century. A writer put forward a theory as to documents inserted, especially in Genesis. These documents were marked in various ways. There is, for instance, the phrase: "These are the generations," which occurs a number of times and which stands at the beginning of a fresh document, or it may be of a subject. Then again there is the use of names of the Supreme Deity. In some the word Elohim is used either exclusively or predominantly, in others the word Jehovah, or, as modern scholars are fond of saying, Jahveh, and in still others a combination of the words just referred to. The marking of the Masoretic text shows that long ago the Jewish critics were not wholly ignorant of such points. To return, however, for at least a century and a half past there has been a discussion going on over the composition and authorship of the early books of the Bible. There was the fragmentary theory and then the document theory. When once the analytic process was entered on as might be expected it was by some run into the earth. Letters of the alphabet were used by the various critics to designate the various authors and it seemed at one time as if letters might fail, there were so many traces of different writers. At first there was the Elohist, and then the Jehovist, and then the final Redactor, but when a difficulty arose about any verse or part of a verse the solution was found in bringing in a new writer. Hence there was the Elder Elohist and the Younger Elohist, the Deuteronomist and I don't know how many more, with the Redactor, who gave the final touching up, working all in with more or less skill or with more or less clumsiness. Some of these were dry annalists, some were priestly in their lives, some were prophetic, and some had a hankering after king-worship. Of late years there has been a tendency towards greater simplicity, and it may be that ere long the view that is now regarded with contempt, what is styled traditional may reassert its authority with general consent. Just now one is almost ashamed to be known as orthodox; the fashion is all on the other side. None of us likes to be sneered at as destitute of scholarship, as slaves of tradition, as in bondage to creeds, as objects of pity by the combined and unanimous scholarship of the age to which we belong. However, to be called contemptuous names or to be sneered at need not hurt us so very much.

There is a lamentable lack of uniformity among the critics themselves both as to methods and results. In laying down dates there are variations, and the order in which the alleged writers stand to one another there is wide differences. Moreover there are men like Kuenen and Wellhausen on whom the doctrine of inspiration sits very lightly, who do not hesitate to speak of pious frauds, and there are men like Robertson Smith and others who in principles and methods go as far as the men just named, but who claim to be loyal to the Confessional standards of their Churches so far as inspiration is concerned. How to reconcile their processes and results with their professions is a problem to many, as great a problem in its way as the Pentateuchal problem is, and that is saying not a little. A word will show how things vary at different times and in different quarters. At one time we find the earlier books to be assigned to a comparatively old date, if not to the time of Moses at least a few hundred years later, while Deuteronomy is put down as late as the exile, or perhaps later. At another time Deuteronomy, or at all events the substratum of it, is made to be the earliest of all in the field.

Now we may go on to examine some of the grounds on which the alleged theory rests, some of the main buttresses that support such an elaborate structure.

Some of the popular objections to the Moasic authorship of the Pentateuch need not detain us long. There is nothing new in them; they are stale *ad nauseam*. They are not new or original, they are not even striking except to children or raw boys from the country. We are told forsooth that Moses could not have written the account of his own death as we have it in the last chapter of Deuteronomy. A great deal is made of the objection respecting the praise given to himself on the traditional assumption that Moses was the writer. The statement is made that he was the meekest man, and that no such man had risen as he was either before or since. Observe what the question is that is raised here. The truth is not ques-

tioned of what is said; what is questioned is that a man would say this of himself, that a man with any self-respect could say such a thing of himself. Now, in the first place the critics that make so much of this objection are ever crying out that we must not expect men of the olden time to conform to the canons that prevail now. When we say that when a man living centuries after another writes a book or works over a book with a good deal of new matter in it and gives it to the world under the man's name who for centuries has been in his grave we are grievously staggered at calling such a book inspired. We are told that our notions of what makes honest authorship are very different from the notions that prevailed two or three thousand years ago, and we are not to judge of authorship by the canons of our day, but by those of those days. Very well, why not apply the same rule to what is proper or improper for a man to say of himself? If such a principle holds good in the one case may it not hold good in the other case? In an age characterized by simplicity in its true sense, by candour, by transparency, when men spoke out what was in their thoughts, when they used language not to conceal thought as is sometimes done in these days, may it not have been perfectly proper for a man to speak so of himself when it was the truth? I know that men in these days would go about it in another way, but they would go about it just as effectually and they do. It is not the fashion nowadays for a man to say: Now Sir A. B. is the most exalted, most far-seeing statesman of the age or of any age that has preceded, or that C. D., speaking of himself, is the only scholar of weight in the country, or he is one of the few first-class men, but if they do not say it in the candid open way that Moses did, they say it in another way. They say what they say with an *ex cathedra* air that means all that and more, they say it in depreciating all that do not see as they see, and that will not swear by their theories. Then we are told of names found in the Pentateuch, and these names are of later origin than the time at which Moses lived. Then we are told that the legislation in the Books of Exodus and Leviticus does not harmonize in all particulars with that found in Deuteronomy. And yet again we are told that the history of the succeeding centuries bears the clearest evidence of practices that were in opposition to the legislation found in the Pentateuch, hence it is clear that such legislation could not have been penned in the days of Moses, but at a date subsequent to such practices. Here, for instance, is the ground that is taken. The legislation of the Pentateuch provides for but one place where the worship of the true God may be carried on, one place and one alone where sacrifices could be offered, while all along in the history there are altars through the land and high places and yet these are not condemned. It is inferred that such a law requiring one centre of worship could not have been in existence during the time of the kingdoms; it must have been the product of the age at or about the time of the exile or later. It is held that the book of the law found in the time of Josiah is our Deuteronomy, and so published in the seventh century before Christ, while the priestly code came out in the form we now have it in the fifth century before Christ—that is to say in their full form they were published then, not before. Now let us look at this argument for a moment and see the consequences involved. The history of every country shows cases of legislation which is not faithfully carried out. Nay, the History of Christianity itself is crowded with instances of an analogous kind. A familiar instance will suffice as an illustration. Suppose a writer a thousand years hence comes to study the social condition of the age in which we live. He finds, let us say, Christianity in one form or another dominant in Great Britain, Canada and the United States, with copies of the sacred books widely diffused in the hands of the people generally. He finds in these sacred books denunciations against unchastity, he finds drunkenness condemned in the strongest possible terms, such a statement among others that no drunkard shall inherit the kingdom of God. And when he studies closely the social state of our times he finds that houses of ill-fame are winked at, in some cases licensed, and he finds houses for the sale of drink licensed. Nay, more, he finds in our sacred books legislation against the use of images in worship, yet he reads of millions of people that call themselves Christians and they have images and pictures in their churches and defend the use of them, nay, more, than that, they affirm that they and they alone are the only true Christians in the land. What will a writer in the year 2900 infer from this? Will he not infer that the sacred books that condemn such practices were composed after this age of ours? Why not? If the arguments that many higher critics lay so much stress on are worth anything they will warrant such conclusions as those I have indicated.

Now we come to look for a little at the literary canons that buttress the elaborate theory. If in one thing the critics are confident above another it is in literary matters. And yet if we are to lay any stress on what the history of our own language sets plainly before us the advocates of a late date for the completion of the Pentateuch as we now have it do not stand on a firm foundation. From the days of Moses to the exile was as long a period as it was from the days of King Alfred until now. There is a vast difference between the language that was in use in the days of Alfred and the language we use now. There must have been a corresponding difference between the language of the days of Moses and that in the days of the exile and still greater if we pass on to the time of the Restoration, and the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. This is not a speculative question; we know there is a great