

THE CANON.

According to Mr. MacInnes of New South Wales.

BY REV. HENRY GRACKY, GANANOQUE.

In a previous paper we spoke of Mr. MacInnes' views on the subject of Inspiration. He also deals in the same address with the Canon, and inclines as he discusses it; to throw a doubt upon the reliability of the Scriptures.

He tells us "the Canon may be said to have begun with the promulgation of Deuteronomy, by King Josiah in the 7th century B.C." And he gives as his authority for this statement 2 Kings xxiii: 3. "Then in the 5th century B.C., Ezra and Nehemiah added Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers." His authority for this is Neh. viii: 1-9. Such was the beginning of the Canon according to Mr. MacInnes. With regard to the rest of the O. T., he says: "After their time the prophets were gradually added through popular use, though they were still regarded as inferior to the law, and were not written on the same rolls. The Psalter was added owing to its use in the temple service; and finally before 100 B.C., the Hagiographa were added on grounds that are unknown."

This in brief is his account of the O. T. Canon. With reference to it we may say that it is to a large extent conjectural. He points to 2 Kings xxiii: 3, as authority for the statement that the first part of O. T. Scripture came to light in the time of Josiah and consisted of the book of Deuteronomy.

But this passage gives only very slender support to this theory. The whole story about the finding of the book of the law as given in 2 Kings xxii, does not prove that Deuteronomy alone was discovered. That is a conjecture of the critics. So far as the story in Kings goes, the whole Pentateuch may have been found, and if so the Canon did not begin in Josiah's time with the Book of Deuteronomy only. Nor would we gather from the record here that there was any formal settling of a Canon on the occasion referred to. It was rather the discovery of an old record that had long existed, and had been recognized as the Canon in David's time, who sang of "the blessedness of the man whose delight is in the law day and night." It was also the Canon in Joshua's time. (Josh. xxiv: 26.) Of course this does not go down with the School of Higher Criticism, because it does not fit in with their theory of the late and composite origin of the Pentateuch. Hence it must be set aside as "the traditional view." Yet it is the only view that has any basis of fact and historical truth to rest on. The theory of the growth of the Canon, that Mr. MacInnes gives us, is pure conjecture through and through. There is no authority for it in the sacred records themselves; there is no authority for it in the apocrypha. And there is absolutely no contemporary literature that has come down to us from Ezra's time from which we might get an account of the formation of the Canon; nor is there any literature within 200 years' of Ezra's time that will throw any light upon the subject, except what we have in the sacred volume itself.

Now if we turn to Neh. viii: 1-9, the other proof text quoted, we look in vain for any account of the settling of a Canon. There was no council assembled for this purpose. We find in this passage an account given of a people gathered to hear the authentic law read—not to decide what the authentic law shall be. Ezra may have settled the O. T. Canon, indeed he is generally supposed to have done so. But this passage does not say so, nor does any other passage say so. Hence the statement that "he added the other books of the Pentateuch to Deuteronomy," is simply a conjecture without the faintest shadow of proof. Then as to the additional information about adding the Prophets, the Psalter and the Hagiographa we fear that we must receive it all *cum grano*. Mr. MacInnes does not give us his authority for the reason, simple and sufficient, that he has none to give.

We are further assured that the O. T. Canon was not finally closed till the end of the first century of the Christian era. And in connection with this important statement, he gives us the following tooth-some bit of Talmudic gossip. "Rabbi Hananin in the time of Christ got 300 measures of oil for his decision in favor of admitting the Book of Ezekiel into the Canon." The reason for presenting this story in this connection is no doubt to discredit the O. T. Canon, indeed, his remarks are all in sympathy with those who have very little respect for it. His statements about the manner of receiving the various books into the sacred collection are fitted to leave the impression that it was not completed or decided upon until after the time of Christ.

Here we may say that the O. T. Canon must be received on faith. We have no means of learning how it was collected or settled. All the evidence is *ex post facto*. No records have come down to us explaining the time or the manner of finally deciding upon the books which constitute the sacred volume. A few sentences from Hodge vol I p 152, will set forth the case as it stands. "Protestants contend, so far as the O. T. is concerned, that those books and those only which Christ and his apostles recognized as the written Word of God, are entitled to be regarded as canonical. This recognition was afforded in a two-fold manner. First, many of the books of the O. T. are quoted as the Word of God as being given by the Spirit; or the Spirit is said to have uttered what is therein recorded. Secondly, Christ and his Apostles refer to the sacred writings as being what they claimed to be the Word of God. When Christ or His Apostles quoted 'the Scriptures' or the 'Law and the Prophets,' and spoke of the volume then so-called, they gave their sanction to the divine authority of all the

books which that volume contained. All therefore that is necessary to determine for Christians the Canon of the O. T., is to ascertain what books were included in the 'Scriptures' recognized by the Jews of that period. The Jewish Canon of the O. T. included all the books, and no others, which Protestants now recognize as constituting the O. T. Scriptures. Hence the apocryphal books are refused a place in the Canon. They were not admitted by the ancient Jews, and Jesus never sanctioned them."

This in brief is the argument for the Canon of the O. T. There are other facts which corroborate this position. Mr. MacInnes tries to undermine it by saying that "the Canon was not finally closed till the end of the first century of the Christian Era." If this be true, then our argument from the action of Christ and His Apostles is weakened, because we cannot be sure how far their sanction extended, or what books were excluded when it was given. If the book of Ezekiel was not finally admitted until the equivocal decision of Hapaniah, already referred to, we are not sure whether Christ and His Apostles included Ezekiel in the "Prophecy" or not.

But is it the case that the O. T. Canon was in such an undecided and chaotic condition at the time of Christ? We ought to have pretty clear evidence in a matter involving such important issues. What are the facts as far as we can learn them? (1) Josephus gives an account of the books of the O. T., which, so far as we can make out, agrees with what we now have. He wrote after the time of Christ, but he speaks of the sacred volume as a well-known and venerable collection of authentic writings. He says:—"We have not thousands of books, all discordant and contradicting one another; but we have only twenty-two which comprehend the history of all former ages, and are justly regarded as divine. (Herne i: 30). The sacred collection is also spoken of by Josephus as comprising three classes of records, the law, the prophets and the hymns of God or Paulins, which division corresponds with what we find in the time of Christ.

(2) About fifty years before the time of Christ, Targum of Onkelos on the Pentateuch, and that of Ben-Uzziol on the Prophets were prepared. And they follow the Jewish classification of the Books of the O. T.

(3) Jesus the son of Sirach, author of the Book of Ecclesiastes makes evident reference to the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, mentioning these Prophets by name. He speaks also of the Minor Prophets. From other references it is inferred that the prophets and other ancient books were extant in his time which was about 230 B.C.

(4) Fifty years before Jesus, son of Sirach, who lxx. was made at Alexandria, the books of which are the same as in our Bibles. Hence we conclude that our version of the O. T. is the same as that possessed by the ancient Jews, 300 B.C.

Such is a brief statement of the external evidence for the O. T. Canon. The internal evidence is equally decisive and incontestible. When therefore the whole case is considered we do not receive the O. T. Scriptures with doubt and misgiving, but with confidence. Those who accept Jesus as the great teacher sent of God, will gladly take his testimony as settling for them at any rate, the reliability of the O. T. Canon. And no ingenious quibbler about this book or that being questioned, nor any plausible fictions as to how the Canon was settled will shake their faith, or dissipate their reverence for that volume which they esteem for its own sake as well as on the testimony of Christ.

Mr. MacInnes in this address throws as much doubt and discredit upon the O. T. collection of sacred writings as he can. He says, "The process of forming the O. T. Canon was a two-fold one of selection and rejection of books, and the agents were the Scribes. On their judgment the O. T. as it stands is received by Christians as containing inspired Scriptures and nothing besides."

This is decidedly not true. Christians base their faith in the O. T. Scriptures on the testimony of Jesus and His disciples, and not on the judgment of the scribes.

To say, as Mr. MacInnes does, "The only guarantee that will suit the Verbal Theory is the inerrancy, infallibility and inspiration of the whole tribe of Scribes, including Rabbi Akiba, a supporter of Bar Kokhba, the false Messiah, and including those very Scribes and Pharisees who made the tremendous blunder of rejecting the Christ," is surely putting the case in a very extreme way against the reliability of the O. T. Canon. It is certainly putting it in a much stronger way than that in which common fairness would attempt to put it; or an ordinary regard for probable truth would dare to put it.

When it is asked "What is the guarantee that the Scribes did not make mistakes?" We may be unable to give such a history of the case as will satisfy every objector, for we have not a detailed account of the process by which the O. T. Canon was settled. We cannot show just how it was guarded at every point against error. But on the other hand nothing can be brought forward by objectors that throws discredit upon the work of the compilers. If the state of the case prevents us from defending by a reference to history, it equally prevents others from attacking by a reference to history. In these circumstances, those who stand by the O. T. Scriptures defend their position. (1) By referring to such *Evidences* or facts as have come down to us, showing the extraordinary veneration of the Jews for their sacred writings, which would itself be a protection against the easy introduction of questionable material into the collection. (2) The state of the Canon in the time of Christ, and in the centuries immediately before His time, as compared with what we have now. (3) The contents of the sacred collection as compared with apocryphal books that have come down, and judged by their intrinsic merit. This argument—

(Concluded next week.)