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THE
CHURCHMAN

MAY, 1892.

ART. I.—MODERN OLD TESTAMENT CRITICISM.

No. III.—KUENEN.

DR. ABRAHAM KUENEN, whose recent death has called forth many expressions of sympathy, is a learned and laborious critic. He belongs to that school among the Jews which, as in the case of Ewald and others, has emancipated itself from the traditions of the elders, and has subjected the Old Testament Scriptures to a treatment as free as that of their Christian confederates. We do not, it is true, find the same irreverence of tone in Kuenen as in Wellhausen, nor does he go quite to the same extent in boldness of assertion. But we find the same tendency to dogmatic assertion, the same repetition of assumptions made by others in the place of scientific demonstration. As it is on the general agreement of critics like these that the new English criticism is content to rest its case, some instances of Kuenen's method will now be placed before the reader, that he may be able to decide for himself on the weight to be attached to his authority.

In the discussion of the standpoint from which he approaches the question of the religion of Israel, he frankly admits that a belief in the supernatural origin of their religion is common to Christians and Jews. But then, as he goes on to observe, the adherents of other religions are animated by the same convictions in regard to their religious systems. And "if we look upon those other religions as so many manifestations of the religious spirit of mankind, are we not," he asks, "bound to examine the Israelite and the Christian religions also from the same point of view?"¹

¹ "Religion of Israel," p. 6.

This question he answers in the affirmative. He regards the modern view of the equality of all religions in regard to Divine inspiration as "the natural fruit of knowledge and development, of the entire intellectual work of Europe during the last century."¹ Now, of course, this is a perfectly fair position to be taken up by an inquirer *ab extra*. It is even the duty of every believer in Christ who has leisure and opportunity for the task to investigate the claims of Judaism and Christianity to the unique position they profess to occupy—to the possession of "truth in a sense entirely special and peculiar."² But in these days we need to be specially reminded that this is altogether an inquiry from without. It is an inquiry in which the Christian himself, when he feels it his duty to undertake it, places himself for the time on the same platform as the unbeliever. It is altogether distinct from the development of the Jewish and Christian idea, which, as Kuenen himself admits, involves as a fundamental postulate the claim for their religious systems of a special supernatural origin. Let it not then be forgotten that these critics, as has been observed in the first of this series of papers, start with a denial of one of the fundamental principles of all Christian theology, that which asserts that God in a special way spoke by Moses and by Jesus Christ.³ We are bound to scrutinize very closely any system which is built upon the agreement of critics like these. We do not deprecate the fullest possible inquiry into the evidences of Christianity. But when, satisfied of the justice of its claims, we proceed to investigate critically the phenomena of Holy Scripture from the standpoint of Christian faith, we cannot assume as postulates the assertions of men who reject the foundation on which our investigation proceeds. We cannot at once investigate Scripture from a Christian and a non-Christian standpoint. We cannot, for instance, at once admit and reject the possibility of miracles, or the accuracy, on all essential points, of a narrative supposed to be inspired. It is here, it would seem, that the arguments of our English critics are vitiated. They are built upon the conclusions of men who start from axioms which Christians deny. And it is the endeavour to accept those conclusions, while the principles on which those conclusions are reached are not formally accepted, which constitutes the danger of the new tendencies in English theological thought—a danger to which, in their recoil from the narrow literalism of past days, many excellent

¹ P. 7.

² *Ibid.*

³ "If we must go down to the root of the matter, we are compelled to affirm that, wittingly or unwittingly, critics have been influenced by a growing disinclination to regard the Bible as *unique*."—Girdlestone, "Foundations of the Bible," Preface, p. v.

men among us are not yet sufficiently awake.¹ Kuenen tells us plainly that the "belief in Israel's selection" to be the special repository of Divine truth is not "in harmony with the experience we have accumulated for centuries."² Now this belief of the uniqueness of Judaism and Christianity, be it observed, does not rest on criticism alone. It rests on a large induction from the past and present moral and spiritual condition of the world. Our "present knowledge of lands and nations" leads us to conclusions the exact opposite of Kuenen's. Thus the argument from criticism must be far more thorough and convincing to compel our adhesion, who have been led on other grounds to form a strong opinion in regard to the supernatural character of the revelation which the Scriptures enshrine, than will be required by men who have no antecedent convictions of that kind with which to part. The "general consent" of critics who assume the falsehood of the principle which Kuenen admits to be a fundamental one in our "sacred records," and whose whole system is based on that assumption, will therefore of necessity be an object of suspicion to us who start with an hypothesis the exact opposite of theirs. And the position of those excellent but, we must believe, mistaken men, who admit the supernatural character of the Jewish and Christian revelation, and then proceed to investigate the documents which contain it on the principles of those who deny that supernatural character altogether, cannot possibly be very secure. The Christian, we repeat, may investigate the Scriptures from the unbeliever's point of view in order to

¹ What those dangers are we may learn from German lips; not, it is true, those of a professor, but of a practical man. Herr Wurm, addressing the members of the Evangelical League at Stuttgart in 1887, says: "Aber gibt es nicht unter unsren evangelischen Theologen eine Partei, welche dieses Wort nicht stehen lassen will, sondern mit dem Messer der Kritik nach menschlicher Willkur daran schneidet, und ihm keine höhere Autorität zuschreibt, als irgend einem alten heidnischen Religionsbuch?" He goes on to depict the results of this cutting and carving of the Bible with the knife of criticism, this bringing it down to the level of the religious books of the heathen—the laity estranged from the Church, believing the only advantage of Protestantism over Romanism to be the freedom to believe in nothing, and to excuse one's self from taking any interest in Church matters—while Rome, with her disciplined organization, is enabled by the indifference of some, and the mutual dissensions of others, to push her way towards unquestioned political supremacy. "With mere negations," he says, "nothing can be done." But while he points out how the Higher Criticism plays into the hands of infidelity and Rome, he tells us how the younger clergy and the mass of the more earnest laity, though brought up in an academical atmosphere, throw off their academic illusions when they come face to face with the stern realities of life, and their souls thirst for truth and for the living God. These words, in the "present distress," may be a consolation to some among ourselves.

² P. 8.

satisfy himself of their claims on his allegiance. But this preliminary inquiry must not be confounded with the principles of investigation he adopts when he is satisfied of the justice of those claims. Such a man will not readily admit the force of arguments which may easily satisfy an unbeliever in regard to the comparatively late date of important portions of the Hebrew Canon, or the existence of grave mistakes in our present histories as to the nature and scope of the original Mosaic revelation, and as to the relation of the early religious history of Israel to that of the neighbouring tribes. He will regard Kuenen and others of his school as dominated by prepossessions which disqualify them for forming a fair opinion on the subject, and will be inclined to say to those who ask him to accept their general agreement, "Give me proofs, and not the assertions of men who hold a brief against a supernatural revelation."

Since Kuenen starts with a denial of the supernatural character of Judaism and Christianity, we shall not be surprised to find that he deals very freely with the phenomena they present. The books of the Old Testament, he tells us, when asserting the Divine origin of the religion they teach, are "at variance with each other" as to "the how and the when."¹ So he goes on to investigate the "sources" of the books as they now stand. The "concatenated narrative" they contain he declares to be separated, as far as the Exodus is concerned, "by a period of *more than five centuries*"² from the events recorded. The reader would naturally expect a detailed proof of this assertion. As usual, he will fail to find it. The assertion, as the manner of the critical school is, rests upon other assertions. The Old Testament narratives present "all sorts of phenomena which forbid us to recognise them as historical. We shall often," Kuenen goes on, "have to admit that the connection of occurrences can be established in more than one way, but we shall frequently arrive, in any case, at this position: such and such *cannot* have been the sequence of the facts."³ In other words, while the believer in revelation would be inclined to adopt one solution of a difficulty, a critic who disbelieves it will be predisposed to adopt, and, if we do not misrepresent Kuenen, to *assume* another. "We have a perfect right to ask," he goes on, "whether things *can* have happened as they are reported to us."⁴ Undoubtedly, as long as you are inquiring into the evidences for religion, but as certainly *not* when you have accepted those evidences as satisfactory. When you have settled in your own mind the principle that the relation of

¹ P. 11. ² P. 17. ³ P. 19. ⁴ P. 20.

miraculous events in a narrative does not necessarily deprive it of credibility, you have no reason whatever for hesitating to accept it as historical. One of our complaints against the English disciples of this school is that they mix up what are really inquiries into the evidences of religion with their criticism of volumes supposed to be inspired. If the narratives are essentially inaccurate, their inspiration cannot be maintained. But if on solid grounds we have reason to believe them to be an inspired record, then we cannot assume their inaccuracy on account of the miraculous nature of their contents. Kuenen, however, like Ewald and Knobel and Dillmann, assumes the antecedent incredibility of miracles. "When Ezra and Nehemiah relate to us what they themselves did and experienced, their statements do not present a single deviation from the usual order of things." But in "the narratives which are separated by a longer or shorter interval of time" from the events narrated, "such deviations are very numerous." Of course *if* the occurrence of a miraculous event in a narrative is sufficient proof that the narrative that contains it was separated by a long interval of time from the events it professes to record, such reasoning is irrefragable. But this is the precise proposition which a believer in inspiration finds it impossible to admit. He is therefore compelled to reject Kuenen's postulate, and with that the whole argument falls to the ground. Thus Kuenen's authority, alleged in common with that of a string of others of similar convictions, is simply of feather weight in the eyes of those who reject the principle on which their conclusions are based. And it would seem once more that the position of the English critic who professes a belief in inspiration, and yet bases an argument on the opinion of Kuenen and others, is insecure. He must either abandon his critical authorities or the belief in miracle. He cannot consistently pin his faith to both.

It is true that Kuenen's arguments are fairer than those of most writers of his school. He admits the possibility of miracles, but urges that it is more likely that the supernatural events related should have been the gradual accretions of tradition, than that they should have occurred as represented in the sacred page.¹ But he does not make sufficient allowance for the fact that many of these alleged supernatural occurrences may admit of natural explanations. There are many events in modern history in which the hand of a superintending Providence is as clearly marked as in the story of the Exodus or the wanderings in the desert. Yet no one thinks now of explaining them by the "suspension" or

¹ P. 21.

"modification" of natural laws. It is a far more violent expedient, by a good deal, to reconstruct the whole history according to the fancy of the critic, than to maintain its general accuracy, and to suppose that what to the Israelite of the fourteenth century B.C. appeared miracle pure and simple, may be capable of explanation by natural causes.¹

The eighth century B.C. is, according to Kuenen, the earliest period at which we find the conceptions of Israelite history which meet us now in the pages of the Old Testament. That is to say, between six and seven hundred years elapsed between the events of the Exodus and the earliest record of them which has come down to us.² The only argument adduced to prove this contention is "insoluble chronological difficulties."³ The other considerations, namely, those drawn from the "religious ideas ascribed to the patriarchs," and from the "familiar intercourse" said in them to have taken place between the patriarchs and the Deity, are rather assumptions than arguments. Indeed, the latter consideration, so far as it is unique in the Old Testament, and is characteristic of an early rather than a late stage of religious thought, suggests conclusions exactly the opposite of those drawn by our author. To these he adds the consideration that the theory of the origin of nations maintained in Genesis is one which "the historical science of the present day rejects without the slightest hesitation."⁴ Nations, he says, arise from conquest, from combination, from the occasional blending of "very heterogeneous elements." He does not see how thoroughly

¹ Kuenen disputes the possibility of the forty years' wandering in the desert (p. 21) on grounds independent of the miraculous supply of manna. The contents of the books named after Moses and Joshua "must be rejected as in their entirety impossible" (p. 22), on the ground that the writers were so far removed in time from the events they describe. But it is obvious that this assumption once more rests on another, the impossibility of the miraculous. Then we are told that the "principal element" of these histories "is legend," which, "transmitted by word of mouth, has lost its accuracy and precision." These legends were "handed in conformity with the point of view" of the writers, and "according to their idea of the wants, of their readers." So obvious is this "influence of the narrators' opinions, that their narratives admit of easy separation into priestly and prophetic, according to the spirit which they breathe" (p. 23). No proof of this statement is given, save that the reader is invited to compare 2 Kings xi. with 2 Chron. xxii. 10, xxiii. 21. But it is obvious that these writers had many sources of information open to them which are no longer accessible to us, and that the writer in Kings may have selected the secular, the writer in Chronicles the ecclesiastical, details in his account.

² P. 103.

³ P. 108. It is obvious that the chronological question is quite a minor one. The numbers in the Bible, from whatever cause, are in great confusion.

⁴ P. 110.

consistent the whole history of Israel, as contained in the Scriptures, is with the idea that in Israel at least no such fusion with other families or races took place. From the eighteenth century B.C. to the nineteenth century A.D. the Israelite race has preserved an almost miraculous purity from foreign admixtures; and the Israelite of to-day may be discerned in the Egyptian monuments with characteristics altogether unchanged. Is there any other race in history of which the same fact can be alleged?

Then the silence of the historian as to the thirty-eighth year of wandering in the desert is regarded as "surprising," and the whole account of the conquest of Canaan as "astonishing."¹ We cannot believe that the twelve tribes could be united under Moses and Joshua, and "suddenly spring asunder" after the conquest. The empires of Alexander and Charlemagne and the careers of Jenghiz Khan and Tamerlane might occur to us as illustrations of the more than doubtful character of such an argument. We cannot stop to consider the other suggestions of improbability, such as the difficulty of believing that so vast a host was in reality maintained in the desert and the like, though we may remark that the career of every hero is antecedently improbable, and that the history of Christ and the Christian Church is perhaps *a priori* the most improbable of all.²

Kuenen regards the course of development of the Jewish religion from the same point of view as Wellhausen. There was a *popular* view of religion, which regarded Jahveh only as one among other gods; and a *prophetic* view, which taught that there was no other God but Jahveh. The Law "must be regarded" as a compromise between the two.³ Some ingenious difficulties are raised about the construction of the ark and the connection of the cherubim with it; but they are a little too slender to support so weighty a conclusion as that at which Kuenen arrives from them, namely, "that the Pentateuch gives us a later conception of the ark, which cannot have been completed until after the Babylonish exile."⁴ "Jahveh," he goes on to say, "was worshipped in the shape of a young bull,"⁵ and he infers thence "an original relationship between Jahveh and Molech."⁶ The Scriptures say that this worship of the golden calves was a grafting of the idolatrous worship of Canaan upon the pure spiritual worship prescribed by Moses. This view has the support of the Second Com-

¹ Pp. 131, 132.

² We are concerned, be it remembered, not with the accuracy of every detail in the narrative, but with its general credibility. As has already been remarked, the *numbers* in the Bible cannot always be relied on.

³ P. 230.

⁴ P. 233.

⁵ P. 235.

⁶ P. 236.

mandment—almost universally admitted to be one of the original precepts of Moses himself. It is needless to say that no definite reasons are given why we should reject the Scripture account, which is in itself more natural and reasonable than that which Kuenen substitutes for it. The tendency to worship the visible rather than the invisible is inherent in human nature to this day; but it remains to be shown how the pure and spiritual worship of the one true God, which on all hands is admitted to be characteristic at least of the later Judaism, could possibly have been developed under the conditions of Israelite politics, thought, and morals between the reigns of David and Josiah. There have been many assertions about this development, but no account of the evolution of the moral idea and of the spiritual worship of God has yet reached us rational enough to be accepted as a substitute for the Scripture account of a revelation of them by Moses at the moment when Israel began to exist as a separate nation.

But we must hasten to a close. The story of the Levite Jonathan—who was unquestionably the grandson of Moses, and not of Manasseh, as the present text of the Hebrew Bible makes him out to be—has been supposed by some to show that Moses was not opposed to image-worship. A similar conclusion is drawn from the worship of the brazen serpent in the time of Hezekiah. But Kuenen, with great fairness, disputes these inferences.¹ Yet he rejects as “unhistorical” the accounts of conflicts in the wilderness between the Jews and their leader, and thinks that it was “only a step” in the direction of the worship of Jehovah which they took under his guidance.² In the Book of Judges we are told that the historians “start from suppositions which are contradicted by the very documents from which they take their accounts,”³ and this because “at that time there existed but a small portion at most of the so-called Mosaic Law, and even that little had by no means become the property of the multitude.” He insists, like other writers of his school, on the certainty that “no one had yet thought of confining the worship of Jahveh to a single spot.”⁴ But he forgets that the utter disorganization of Israel in the days of the Judges may have made it impossible to obey literally the command to sacrifice only at the tabernacle. In days of confusion like those, when the ark was in one place and the tabernacle, which should have contained it, in another, the only alternative left to Samuel may have been to violate the letter or the spirit of the Law. Coming to a later age, we are told how the traditional view of

¹ P. 288.² Pp. 293, 294.³ P. 295.⁴ P. 299.

the palmy days of David and Solomon "lost its supports one by one," until it became "quite certain that the author of the Books of Chronicles rewrote the history of Israel before the exile in a sacerdotal spirit, and in so doing violated the historical truth throughout."¹ Instead of being the "time when pure Jahvism most flourished," it was "a period of preparation." Thus we see that Kuenen is one of those who would advocate a free handling of historical documents, and rewrite the whole history from the standpoint of internal criticism alone. It cannot be too often repeated that this is not the way in which the history of other countries is written. Authorities are weighed and criticised; the statements of one are balanced against those of another; statements wildly improbable, or obviously dictated by prejudice or partisanship, are set aside; but no theory of history has as yet been accepted, or stands the remotest chance of being accepted, which evolves a narrative in direct defiance of recorded facts, by a method in which the distinct statements of the authorities are altogether set aside, and the history remoulded according to the predilections of the critic.²

Nevertheless, one is disposed to take leave of Kuenen with some regret. The absence of the flippancy and arrogant dogmatism which offends us in Wellhausen has been already remarked. Though Kuenen is not free from the characteristic tendency of the new criticism to base argument on assumption rather than fact, he is still, on the whole, candid, laborious, and reverent. The earnest student of Scripture—if he be on his guard against the undue tendency to assertion which he will find in his pages—may learn much from them. If we cannot accept his view that the Law, in many of its most essential features, was post-Mosaic, we can, at least, learn something from him concerning the practical acquaintance with its precepts possessed by Israel at large. Whatever may have been the case in the reigns of David and Solomon, there can be little

¹ Pp. 321, 322.

² The most instructive contrast between the methods of the ordinary historian and those of the new criticism, to which the attention of the reader can be invited, is the study of Professor Freeman's careful and candid investigation of the struggle between the regulars and seculars during the reigns of Edward and Edgar, as compared with the treatment of Old Testament history by critics such as Wellhausen and Kuenen. The phenomena are identical. There is a conflict between rigorists and anti-rigorists in both cases. The miraculous is not absent. There is but little information to be had. Prejudice and party spirit have strained what there is to the utmost. But there is no conjectural reconstruction of history in the hands of a master like the Professor, whose unexpected and lamented death has taken place since these lines were penned. There is only a patient attempt to discover a solid basis of fact from the conflicting assertions on both sides.

doubt that under the Judges, and in the days of the more unprincipled of the kings, the people at large knew but little of the provisions of the Law of Moses, and that even a large proportion of the priests had but a slight acquaintance with its contents.

J. J. LIAS.

ART. II.—THE SERVANT OF CHRIST.

NO. V.—OBEDIENCE.

ONE of the most beautiful and Divine characteristics of our Lord's human nature was His submission to the will of His Father. When His bodily appetite was craving for food in the desert after His long fast, and the tempter was urging Him to turn the stones into bread, He chose to trust rather to the Almighty Power which was with Him and in Him, and to reply that obedience to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God was the true life. When He was preaching to the Jews, He avoided every topic and opportunity of asserting Himself; He repeatedly assured them that "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do; for whatsoever things He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." "I can of Mine own self do nothing." "I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me." "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." "I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." When He was in the garden on the fatal night, in the agony of making up His mind to go forward and die, and His whole body and soul shrank from the horror of what was about to befall Him, and He cried, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," He immediately ended, "Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done." He obeyed the call of the Baptist, and was plunged in the Jordan: "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." He knew that as the Son of God He was Lord of the Sabbath, yet He punctually and faithfully kept all the feasts and ceremonies of the Law of Moses. He knew that as the Messiah it was not His business to recognise the taxes of the Romans, yet He took special means to provide the tribute at the proper time. In all things He was obedient, and restrained Himself from the exercise of self-will. He was obedient to His Heavenly Father, obedient to His mother and her husband, obedient to the Roman Emperor, obedient to the Law of Moses, obedient to the Jewish authorities. This is one of the qualities which, after His removal from among them, struck His Apostles most, in