

this point that all the battles and bickerings of our day meet and concentrate. Is the Bible a record of revelation? Were the men who wrote it inspired — moved, influenced, acted on

(use what verb you will) — by the immediate presence of God in the Spirit? That is the question of our day. And Dr. Sanday answers, 'They were.'

Apostolic and Critical Teaching on the Position of the Pentateuch.

BY THE REV. E. P. BOYS-SMITH, M.A., HORDLE VICARAGE, LYMINGTON.

IF it is true that history repeats itself, none the less is it the fact that it often does so in very unexpected fashion. Twice in the course of Christian history the position of the Pentateuch in the divine education of the world has become a burning question,—once during the apostolic age, and now again to-day. But so different are the causes which have raised the question on the two occasions, and so unlike the methods which have been employed to answer it, that few people notice the parallel, or realise that the apostles and the critics have given replies which are fundamentally alike.

I.

In the apostolic age the position of the Pentateuch became a question for theology through the pressure of practical difficulties. As soon as baptism was extended to men of foreign blood, there was left no halting-place till the Church made good her claim to catholicity. For many of the Gentile Christians were destitute of Jewish habits, ignorant of Jewish traditions, careless often of Jewish obligations,—in a word, their life was neither moulded nor controlled by the Jewish law. How were Jews zealous for the law to hold fellowship with them as brethren in Christ were bound to do? Every meal was a bar to intercourse; countless points of conventional conduct raised questions of casuistry; and divisions were felt to be deepest in religious rites. Of course there arose the vital question, What is the true relation of the Jewish law to the faith of Jesus Christ and to the Christian life?

Unless the whole position is to be misconceived, it is important to observe that the point at issue was not the relation of Judaism as a whole to

Christianity, but strictly the purpose and obligation of the law. Or to state the matter under another aspect, it was not the relation of the Scriptures of the old covenant to the new covenant of Christ which was in dispute, but only the relation of the Pentateuch to the gospel. The Jews were themselves accustomed to draw a marked distinction between the other sacred writings and the law. The discussions on the limits of the canon were hardly closed in the earlier half of the first century, though its contents were practically determined. To the law supreme importance was ascribed; but the books of the Prophets and the Kethubim were considered of inferior authority. Tradition reached back easily to the time when the Hagiographa were a floating collection of holy writings not marked off definitely from others, and of uncertain number; and in the Jewish schools the dicta of a Hillel counted for as much as the words of an Isaiah. The Pentateuch alone was viewed as the fountain-head of truth. On this 'law' the scribes and Rabbis spent their strength. Round this they drew their 'hedge' of usage and tradition. This they declared to have been kept complete in heaven before being made known on earth to Moses, being in its own nature eternal. Besides this recognised distinction in the schools, there was a real difference in character between the Pentateuch and the other sacred writings which practical men felt. For the Prophets and the other Scriptures deal with moral and spiritual principles without attempting to condense them into a binding system. In them religion is as elastic as life itself. But the Pentateuch consists largely of positive commands and limitations which regulate behaviour often in minute detail. And it

was this code of regulative ordinances—especially as elaborately glossed in the Rabbinic schools—which distinguished so sharply between Jews and foreigners. No Gentile Christian sought more freedom than the prophet already allowed in declaring that God does not require offerings nor compliance with sacrificial rules, but only that a man shall do justly, and love mercy, and walk in humble faithfulness. What seemed so burdensome and so unnecessary to foreign disciples of the Lord Jesus was the code of rules on clean and unclean foods, on tithes and offerings, on purification, on sacrifice and festivals, on sabbatic observance, and the use of statuary. The rigid obligations of the law on these and a multitude of like points of practical behaviour, which to all save Hebrews appeared both useless and unaccustomed, constituted the perpetual difficulties which arose through the association of Jew and Gentile in the early Church. In brief, the problem that presented itself to Christian teachers in the middle of the first century as the one of greatest practical urgency, was the true position of the Pentateuch in relation to that divine revelation which began in the distant past of Israel's career and culminated in Christ Jesus.

Before directly showing how theologians met this problem in those early days, it may be well to point out shortly what had been implied in the teaching of the Lord Jesus on this subject; for though the difficulty did not attain prominence till later, He was repeatedly charged with disparaging or violating the law. He denied emphatically that He was come to destroy the law or the Prophets, declaring they should stand till all should be accomplished. But the last clause showed that the purpose they had in view was of a temporary nature. This aspect of the matter received prominence in His habitual action: 'Suffer it now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness,' expresses the principle which He constantly followed, not at His baptism only, but throughout His ministry. Meantime it was in the words of the Prophets in the past, not in the regulations of the law, that He was accustomed to find the basis for His own teaching. When a point of legal obligation was brought under His notice He met it by a precedent of a purely practical kind, and by a quotation from the prophet Hosea which condemned the legal standpoint of His questioners: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'¹ His quota-

¹ Matt. xii. 1.

tions were made ordinarily, not from the books of the Law, but from the Prophets or the Psalms, or at all events from the great prophetic summary in the Book of Deuteronomy. His first recorded sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth was based on a passage in the great prophet of the Exile, which He declared fulfilled in Himself.² In what St. Matthew treats as His representative discourse, He took up the attitude which the prophets had always taken, quoting the law only to vary and enlarge and enforce with fresh motives commands given within precise limits and under established sanctions. For He spoke not as the scribes who found a standing-ground in the law, but with authority, as all the prophets spoke, claiming to be the envoys of God, and to utter a message direct from Him. That the Lord Jesus was in fact accustomed to regard the prophets as precursors of Himself, while overlooking the law in a broad and summary view of the past, appears from His parable of the vineyard let out by an absentee landlord,³ and from His lament over Jerusalem, the murderess of prophets, when His own fate loomed so near.⁴ All this shows how the Lord Jesus would have dealt with the difficulty, which confronted His servants twenty years later. If it does not amount to a direct answer, this is because the question had not then been definitely raised, and was not ripe for thorough treatment.

When in due course it became necessary that the standing in the Church of foreign believers should be made plain, and this was seen to involve the position of the Pentateuch in the economy of the divine revelation, it fell to the lot of two men primarily to grapple with the difficulty.

The first was Stephen. Moving among the Hellenists who thronged Jerusalem at certain seasons, but who felt the influences and had to face the difficulties of a foreign environment, he was naturally the first to grasp the question which loomed before the growing Church. The general tenour of the answer that he gave it may be gathered from the charges brought against him by opponents: 'We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God;' 'This man ceaseth not to speak words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy

² Luke iv. 16.

³ Matt. xxi. 33-46; Luke xx. 9-18.

⁴ Matt. xxiii. 37-39; Luke xiii. 33-35.

this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered unto us.'¹ Of course these are distortions of the truth, but with allowance for partisan exaggeration they indicate Stephen's attitude. We are not, however, dependent on hostile accounts; we have the apology he offered when arraigned. In this the argument is historical, and it is remarkable how small a place he gives to the law in his review of Israel's career which he held to be divinely ordered in all its stages. For Stephen the starting-point of Israel's vocation was the call of 'Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia'; the covenant was made with him by promise, not in the Sinaitic revelation; and its sign was the rite of circumcision appointed in Isaac's boyhood long before the law was given. When in his survey he comes to Moses, he regards him as a prophet who uttered 'living oracles' by word of mouth, not as a lawgiver who endowed his people with a code; and he quotes his forecast, 'A prophet shall God raise up unto you from among your brethren, like unto me.' Moreover, as if to prevent all doubt about the standpoint from which he read Israel's history, he illustrates his narrative by the strong words of Amos, who denied that the sacrificial practice of the Hebrews in the wilderness was any means of fellowship with Jehovah rather than with the gods of the Semitic heathen. All through his apology Stephen assumes that the prophets were the real links between Israel and God, not the law, which is barely referred to. And the charge in which the whole oration culminates is that Israel from first to last has resisted the Divine Spirit 'which spake by the prophets,' and 'killed them which showed before of the coming of the Righteous One,' till finally it bore the guilt of being His betrayer and murderer. There is no reference to the breaches of the law, with which the past abounded, in this condemnation; only a parting shaft of indignant satire, 'You were the men who crowned this career of crime against God's envoys,—you who received the law as the ordinance of angels [or "envoys"], and kept it not!'

To speak briefly, Stephen regarded the law as incidental in the divinely-led career of Israel, and as an incident of no supreme importance. He traced the right line of Israel's development from Abraham the friend of God, through the long succession of the prophets, who were the intimates

¹ Acts vi. 11, 13.

of the Almighty and His envoys to His people, to Jesus the Son of God, who realised the idea of prophecy as none before, coming as God's ambassador with plenary powers, to which none of his predecessors dared pretend. Thus the answer that Stephen gave to what was fast becoming the vital question of the day, was that the real life of religion had always centred for Israel in Prophetism, not in the Pentateuch.

But Stephen's work was cut short. His masterly apology remains to show what he held to be the position of the Pentateuch, but he was in advance of his contemporaries. They hardly felt the practical pressure of the question yet, and when in a few years time it became a burning question, the Church had to look to others for an answer.

The second man to grapple with the difficulty was Paul. He had listened to the unanswerable defence of the first martyr, and on him it devolved to take up the mantle which fell from Stephen as he was caught away. For his Christian life extended over just that period in which alone the Judaistic controversy was a real danger in the early Church. The persecution that arose about Stephen was its starting-point, and the overthrow of Jerusalem, which shattered the whole fabric of the sacrificial and ceremonial worship in the temple and destroyed Judaism as a living force, involved its close. But these are virtually the limits of Paul's apostleship. On him, then, the burden of this question fell; if Stephen sketched in bold outline the position which Christian theology assigned to the Pentateuch, it was Paul who developed the argument in detail, and gave the complete solution of the difficulty. His answer to the question raised remains in his speeches and his writings, and it was accepted by the whole Church.

The first recorded speech of Paul in which he unfolded 'his gospel' already indicates his view.² His argument from Israel's history recognises the divine education carried on by successive means, by judges, prophets, and kings, to John and Him whom he introduced, so that the 'promise made to the fathers' found fulfilment for their children in Jesus who was raised from the dead. But no reference is made to Moses or the law in this review, except by way of contrast at the close: 'By Him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses,'—and there it is evident that

² Acts xiii. 16-41.

Israel's hope never rested in reality upon what is spoken of only to be set aside as impotent.

But for fuller statement one must turn to the Galatian and Roman epistles; the former gives the decisive argument at the moment when the Judaistic controversy reached its crisis,¹ the latter its maturer expression after four or five years further experience and reflexion. Like Stephen, Paul saw the starting-point of Israel's career in the call of Abraham together with the promise this involved: 'To Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. . . . Now this I say, a covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect.'² And in answer to the inquiry, 'What, then, is the law?' which his previous argument might seem altogether to disparage, he adds, 'The law hath been our tutor unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.'³ The antithesis between 'faith' and 'works,' on which the apostle lays such stress, is in effect nothing else than what appears in the Old Testament as opposition between the spirit of prophecy and the spirit of legalism. The former, according to Paul, had the promise and the potency of salvation; the latter was a discipline meant only to last for a time where men had failed to appreciate or respond to the former. In other words, the main course of spiritual development ran from Abraham who believed, through the prophetic faith of Israel's nobler sons, to Jesus Christ; and the Pentateuch was only needful because of the failure of the people to follow the straight path of its high destiny, which made external control requisite for a time.

The most concise expression, however, which Paul gave to his view on the position of the Pentateuch occurs in the Roman letter. After dwelling on the truth that man's hope of salvation rests wholly on the free grace and love of God, and showing how supremely 'God commendeth His own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,'⁴ he continues: 'And law came in by the way, that the trespass might abound; but where sin abounded, grace superabounded; that as sin held sway in the realm of death, so grace held sway through the realm of righteousness, which issues in life eternal

through Jesus Christ our Lord."⁵ That is to say, the grace of God is the one unchanging foundation on which the divine destiny of man is built. While partially revealed from Abraham's day onward through the prophets, this was shown perfectly in Jesus Christ. But law is altogether outside grace and love. And in Israel's history the law 'came in on one side,' being no part of the divine purpose, but simply a practical expedient used for a time to effect a particular end. This was to carry home to the conscience a conviction of sin and shame when Israel was persistently blind to the graciousness of God, and obstinately irresponsive to His love.

This view may be illustrated by a parallel. The law did for Israel, as a whole, just what the discipline of the wilderness did for one obstinately irresponsive generation of Israelites. They were led almost direct from Egypt to the borders of Canaan, and their right course would have been to enter at once under Moses' leadership and win possession of their promised home. But since they distrusted God their Saviour, they were turned back to journey for a whole generation in the inhospitable deserts, and only then brought back to the very point where they had stood forty years before, and offered a second opportunity. So Israel was led by the prophets to the very borders of that salvation of which it showed itself unworthy. Then it was sent back to undergo the discipline of law, till the sense of sin should be branded on the conscience of the people who should thus be fitted for another opportunity of grace. Thus through the law which 'came in on one side' Israel was brought back to the position to which the prophets had led it before. But the discipline had done its work. Instead, therefore, of another Jeremiah, who like Moses died without entering the land of promise, there came Jesus, the second Joshua, who 'opened the kingdom of God to all believers.'

Besides the teaching of Stephen and Paul upon the position of the Pentateuch, that of other leading minds in the apostolic Church deserves to be studied, but can only be briefly touched on here. No one can read carefully the report of Peter's speech in the council at Jerusalem, held to consider this matter in a practical light,⁶ without seeing that he was in full accord with Paul's view,

¹ Dating it from Antioch in 53 or 54 to S. Galatia.

² Gal. iii. 16.

³ Gal. iii. 24.

⁴ Rom. v. 8.

⁵ Rom. v. 20, 21.

⁶ Acts xv. 7-11.

and also regarded the law as an expedient by the way rather than as an essential factor in God's salvation, and so as needless for Christian men. The author, too, of that striking appeal to Hebrew minds which found it so hard to think of the law as anything else than the very basis and eternal essence of God's covenant, has left in the Epistle to the Hebrews a solution of the problem, which, if original in standpoint and treatment, is the same in general result. Its opening words give his view of the right line of religious development: Of old, God spake by divers portions and in divers manners to the prophets, who were the real precursors of His Son. Throughout the first section (chs. i.-ii.), the mention of 'angels' carries the idea of 'envoys,' or 'malachis,' with which that of 'prophets' is allied and perhaps in part identified; all these Christ outpasses. When the legal standpoint is partially adopted (chs. iii.-vii.), this is to meet Hebrew minds on their own ground; but even so the instance chosen is not a Hebrew priest, but Melchizedek the Amorite, whom the law would not recognise. So, too, the typical argument is not rested on the temple and its order, which maintained the living sway of the law over Hebrew lives, but on the abstract and far-distant tabernacle. Then there is return (chs. viii.-x. 19) to the prophetic covenant (Jeremiah), while the law is treated as a shadow, impotent of itself. And, finally, the prophetic spirit—for faith was always the very essence of prophetism, though the law assigned it no place, and indeed left little room for it—is dwelt upon (x. 20 to end) as the one way which leads to Jesus and to His salvation.

Thus when Christian teachers were confronted in the course of the first Christian generation with the question so practically urgent, 'What is the true position of the law in the divine economy?' the leading minds were agreed in their reply. They held that the law never had been a step in the right line of development into God's kingdom. It was an expedient by the way for a special and temporary purpose, which only Israel's obduracy required. The prophets, not the Pentateuch, they affirmed to be the pioneers of salvation. And as the Church practically adopted this solution, the restrictions which the Pentateuch enjoined were not recognised by Christians, and gradually fell into disuse, even among Jews who embraced the faith of the Son of God.

All this would be more plainly seen and more readily allowed, if it were not that somehow a habit has been formed of overlooking one broad fact. The whole Christian movement was a revival and extension of the ancient power of prophecy. When first John appeared, all men held him to be a prophet.¹ None the less was the *primâ facie* aspect which the Lord Jesus always presented to contemporaries, that of a prophet: 'What sayest thou of Him in that He opened thine eyes? And he said, He is a prophet.'² Herod (whose judgment was warped by a guilty conscience) said, on hearing of Jesus' fame, 'John the Baptist is risen from the dead. . . . But others said, It is Elijah. And others said, It is a prophet.'³ When the Lord asked, 'Who do men say that I am? they told Him, saying, John the Baptist: and others, Elijah; but others, One of the prophets.'⁴ And He recognised this when in the synagogue at Nazareth He anticipated His own rejection there by saying, 'No prophet is acceptable in his own country.'⁵ Again, when the Christian community first drew public attention, Peter explained the spiritual phenomena by citing Joel's promise, 'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and . . . all flesh.'⁶ Paul and others reckoned the 'prophets' as being, after the 'apostles,' the most important order in the Christian body, on which the Church itself was founded.⁷ Indeed, from its dawn till the days of the Montanist heresy near the close of the second century, when the spirit of prophecy, brought into contact with the sensational cults of pagan Phrygia, degenerated into vain ecstasy and wild excess, the whole spiritual upheaval which centred in Jesus and issued in the Christian Church, was one vast prophetic movement. Even its opponents never denied that. Only the Jewish authorities held that the Christian prophets were false prophets, who led the people astray; while the educated Greeks and Romans confounded Christian prophecy with the sorcery and imposture of pagan divination, which they held in just contempt.

II.

To-day Christian theology is again confronted with a question involving the position of the

¹ Matt. xiv. 5, and parallel verses.

² John ix. 17. ³ Mark vi. 14. ⁴ Mark viii. 28.

⁵ Luke iv. 24. ⁶ Acts ii. 17. ⁷ Eph. ii. 20, iv. 11.

Pentateuch. It has been raised in a way certainly very different from that in which it came to the front, in the apostolic age, but in substance it is not greatly changed. And it is remarkable that critics are giving now an answer which is the natural sequel to that given by the foremost intellects and noblest hearts in the Church of those early days.

Among ourselves the difficulty has been felt, not in the experience of practical life and conduct, but in the course of scholarly research. The scrutiny to which the Scriptures of the old covenant have been subjected during the present century is without precedent. The revival of learning in the sixteenth century did indeed put the original books of the Hebrew Bible into men's hands again, but attention was then so absorbed in the rediscovery of the New Testament, and the wide discrepancies found between its teaching and what had been the prevailing traditions of the Western Church through recent generations, that no opportunity was left for thorough study of the Hebrew canon. Scholars were content, for the time, to receive the Massoretic text as irrefragable, and to read it in the sense put upon it in Rabbinic tradition. In fact, it could not be otherwise, for they were dependent for their knowledge upon the help of Jewish teachers. But since the sixteenth century many things have happened, enabling a more searching study of the Hebrew Scriptures to be undertaken. The science of comparative philology has been created, and under its influence the study of other Semitic languages has thrown fresh light of immense importance on the language of the Hebrew Scriptures. An examination of the early versions has shown that the Massoretic text is the result of a very uncritical and high-handed revision. The progress of archæological discovery in the East, and the unlocking of the cuneiform writings which had been sealed, have added fresh materials for the study of ancient times, and have corrected some notions which were traditional. The recent science of comparative religion, coupled with investigation into early Semitic habits and thought, have disclosed an unexpected meaning in many points in the Bible. Above all, a minute study of the older Scriptures themselves has shown that most of the books are composite; that the earlier writings out of which they have been composed may still, in many cases, be distinguished; and that the dates to which Rabbinic tradition

assigned them are often quite impossible. The literary criticism of the sacred writings has necessarily widened out into the historical criticism of these records of Israel's life, and now we are face to face with issues which the practical work of any Christian teacher requires him to handle.

At first the questions which the critical study of the Old Testament Scriptures raised were questions of detail. It mattered little whether the Canticle dated from the reign of Solomon, or from that of Jeroboam II.; whether the last few chapters of Zechariah were of pre-exile or post-exile age; whether the prophecies gathered under Micah's name were the utterances of one prophet, or of two, or of three; whether the visions of Daniel were dreams of the sixth century in Babylonia, or an apocalypse of the Maccabæan times. These and other like questions were of interest to the student, and not without importance for the understanding of the Bible, but they presented no issue of practical importance. Details could be dealt with in the study, they hardly concerned the Church at large. But the progress of critical research has changed the whole position. To-day it is not on minor points that the discrepancy is felt between criticism and tradition, but upon the general course of Israel's history, and the interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures as a whole. For the central question now raised by critical study concerns the position of the Pentateuch. So broad an answer as the critics give upon a point of so much magnitude involves a reconstruction of the history of revelation. It is no longer possible for Christian teachers to evade the issue without becoming guilty of direct dishonesty.

So strong a statement calls for further justification, which must be given as briefly as may be.

In the traditional view which passed over from the Rabbinic schools into the Christian Church, the Pentateuch was regarded as the basis of the Bible. These books were supposed to form the lowest stratum of revelation. They were considered to have been written by Moses' hand, and to contain a law divinely dictated to him on Mount Sinai, embodying God's covenant for all after generations. It is obvious that if this were so, all the later history of God's people, during the thirteen centuries which fell between Moses and Jesus Christ, must have been vitally affected by so sacred a possession. On this view the prophets

are, one and all, later than the complete Pentateuch. They addressed men bound by the ordinances of these books. And their proper function would seem to be little else than that of recalling a heedless generation to its allegiance to God's written law, and assisting it to perceive in the ritual and regulations there provided the promise of a larger hope.

But the critical view is that the Pentateuch, as we have it, is almost the latest stratum in the Old Testament revelation. It is held that these books are by no single author, but can be separated into three principal deposits which can often be subdivided further by a keen analysis. The main narratives which have been overlaid are assigned to widely parted stages of history and thought. Sometimes events are alluded to which happened long after Moses' death; many incidents are rather illustrative precedents for legal purposes than historical facts; some of the laws imply a situation never realised before the monarchy, or not till after the return from Exile. In a word, the Pentateuch is less a Mosaic work than a work of mosaic. It is not, indeed, denied that in many things it enjoins what were very ancient usages, far older in some cases than Moses' day, since their counterpart is met with among other Semitic races. But that Moses himself *wrote* anything of what has passed under his name, unless perhaps the Decalogue in its briefest form with some few other fragments, is not allowed. The earliest stratum is assigned to the ninth century,—say, five hundred years after Moses,—and the latest to the age of Ezra and his followers, about five hundred years later still. Thus the position of the Pentateuch is fixed a whole millennium after Moses.

Now all must allow that if this view be accepted, it involves an entire reconstruction of the history of revelation as previously understood. The ages of rude lawlessness preceding the monarchy, and those of general irregularity which continued to the Exile, are acquitted of the guilt of defiant infidelity to a law which God had given perfect and express. They disclose a natural experience of mingled good and evil, struggling together in the absence of any definite and decisive rule, and growing towards the slow predominance of a higher and better order. In this the prophets stand forth as the pioneers of a nobler faith, whose insight discerned the mind of God where it had received no set expression. They were thus

the builders of all that was moral and spiritual in the later Pentateuch, not like the scribes, its successors and interpreters. The general course of God's revelation did not, therefore, consist in the ancient issue of a religious code complete at once like the Koran, and left to be ignored and disobeyed for a thousand years despite continual protest, only to be superseded by Him who came at last to fulfil it. Rather it consisted in the spiritual education of one representative race from its childhood to maturity, through the personal influence of Moses and the prophets; and only when Israel refused to listen to its teachers was it subjected to the chastisement of exile and placed under the strict regimen of the law, whereby it was led back from truancy—as though under the escort of a *παιδαγωγός*—and sent to school with Jesus Christ. Meantime, the Pentateuch, instead of being the primitive ideal set before Israel in its infancy and enforced under direct sanction of the Lord, includes elements of every date, being in fact the flotsam and jetsam of fifty generations cast up when the fortunes of Israel had suffered shipwreck through the inundation of the great Eastern empires, and painfully gathered and jealously preserved by an age which learnt the value of the prophets' inspiration through its loss.

The interval between the traditional and the critical reading of the Old Testament Scriptures is thus far too wide to-day to be neglected. And in consequence the true position of the Pentateuch has again become a burning question for the Church. For it is pressed to the front less by academic considerations, or by an abstract quest of truth, than by the practical exigencies which are felt by the many. Any teaching on the Old Testament writings cannot fail to carry the implication of either the traditional or the critical view, for the issue is too broad and its ramifications too multitudinous to be evaded. So long as the question is an open one for any mind, it is not consistent with common honesty for such a one to teach authoritatively from the Old Testament in the sense that has been currently received. Any one who resolves to commit himself on neither side has but one course open to him, which is to leave the Old Testament entirely unused. But for all who hold any office or position which involves a responsibility to teach the Bible, or that Christian revelation which is recorded in it, and whose sub-structure consists in the historical experience of

Israel, such a course amounts to a dereliction of duty. And since the number of such persons is so large, and the proportion of them who are experts in biblical science is so small, the question raised becomes one of practical urgency for the Church, and the position of the Pentateuch calls for definition by Christian theology to-day.

III.

It may be true that for Jews who repudiate Christianity, the issue raised to-day is vital. For the Pentateuch is the basis of their belief; and to shift the date of the actual books a thousand years down the course of time, till they stand nearer the close than the origin of Israel's unshattered life, may well seem subversive of their nation's faith. But for Christians it is not so. This is no essentially new difficulty for the Church to meet. We have to deal to-day with the restatement in a literary and scientific form of a question which was settled on its practical side by apostles, when it arose as a problem of Christian conduct in the first century. Then tradition and usage were on the side of the Rabbinic view which maintained the vital importance of the law; but Christian thinkers answered boldly that the law 'came in by the way,' and was non-essential; that it was incidental to God's education of His people; that it was not the basis, nor even an original portion of His covenant, but an expedient in a particular situation to produce a particular result, namely, a deeper sense of sin in a sinning and stiff-necked age. And so far as the practical authority of the Pentateuch legislation is concerned that reply has been held final by the Church, and no serious attempt has since been made to lay on Christian shoulders the yoke of this burdensome system.

But the views of the Rabbis, rejected so far as they bore on Christian conduct, yet passed with little modification so far as they were merely scholastic into the body of accepted ideas among Christian scholars. At the time this could not fail to be so. For the early Church was too intent upon the joy of its new-found treasury of truth, too much occupied with the practical obstacles to holiness in the midst of heathen society, and too fully absorbed in the hope of salvation which waited in readiness to be revealed, to concern itself greatly with the past. 'Forgetting the things that were behind, and stretching forward to the things which were before, it pressed on towards its

goal,—to the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.'¹ Moreover, the very decision of the Church that the law was not obligatory longer turned attention away from any question of its precise position. This threw the balance of power in the Church into Gentile hands, and as the numbers of foreign believers increased, their actual freedom became too well assured to be disputed, and so all reason vanished for scrutinising very carefully the historical antecedents of traditional opinions which were cherished without being enforced by Jewish Christians. The foreign believers were, of course, quite ignorant to start with concerning Hebrew history, and they accepted naturally the assistance, and with this the established tradition, of Hebrew teachers. A Timothy, with a taste for archæology which made a warning against 'giving heed to fables and endless genealogies'² desirable, drank in the pseudo-history of the Rabbis together with their unfeigned faith, from the lips of his grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice.³ And a Jerome, seeking a knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures which could not be gained in the Western Church, went to Palestine and became the disciple of a learned Rabbi. Thenceforward the knowledge of Hebrew died away in the Church, and with it all independent study of Israel's past, till the sixteenth century, when, as has been shown, Christian scholars discovered too much else to occupy their energies for any challenge of views which had been long traditional on the Pentateuch to be for a long time possible. Thus it comes to pass that, while its position as a practical power was raised and decided in apostolic times, its position as a historical record has never been either decided or discussed till the present century.

Now, however, the question is raised under this latter aspect by the progress of critical research; and it must be determined by the present generation. For critical inquiry brooks no bounds, being indeed nothing but trained intelligence brought to bear on a widening field of more accurately observed facts. And it is remarkable that the answer which is being given to-day by critics follows the lines of that given long since by apostles.

This modern corroboration of the attitude taken by the primitive Church becomes the more striking when it is observed that the steps by which the common conclusion has been reached by apostles and by critics are widely different, as their points

¹ Cf. Phil. iii. 13.

² 1 Tim. i. 4.

³ 2 Tim. i. 5.

of view are far apart. The apostles viewed the matter as a question of Christian duty, and they dealt with it on spiritual lines. With historical and literary problems they had small concern; their interest lay in the spiritual life. And by force of remarkable spiritual insight they reached the conviction that 'the law came in by the way,' while the direct line of spiritual development ran from Abraham's call, through the succession of the prophets, to Jesus Christ. In the primitive Church this conclusion rested upon spiritual intuition, and upon that alone. But critics view the matter as a question of history and literature, and they deal with it on scientific lines. They examine the facts as disclosed in the Hebrew records as well as in Eastern archæology and Semitic institutions, they scrutinise the biblical documents with a laborious minuteness never before approached, and weigh their meaning with a freedom from traditional prepossession hitherto unequalled. And the result is, that by means of reasoning on the evidence alone, they reach precisely the same conviction that the Pentateuch legislation and the documents in which it is embodied 'came in by the way' at a comparatively late date, while the direct line of religious evolution ran from pre-Mosaic times, through the prophets, to Jesus Christ, on whom the last of them bent all men's attention.

Surely this result might reckon on finding a warm welcome. Need anyone be apprehensive in prospect of the historical position of the Pentateuch in the course of revelation being determined in such a way as to carry to a logical conclusion the belief of Stephen and Paul, of Peter and the writer

to the Hebrews? Or is it to be considered dangerous if spiritual truth be found to run parallel with scientific fact? But as some whose duty makes them Christian teachers are undecided, shrinking from the critical conclusion, while shirking that thorough study of the whole question which can alone qualify anyone for denying it, a real service may be rendered, and welcome encouragement be given, by showing beforehand that the loss of the traditional view as to the position of the Pentateuch will involve the sacrifice of nothing vital to the Christian faith, but, on the other hand, will bring our modern reading of the Hebrew Scriptures into closer accord with the best mind of the apostolic Church.

If one word of personal feeling and conviction may be allowed in conclusion of the foregoing argument, then I will say that all who, without grudging the toil, will endeavour to master the critical position with regard to the Old Testament, and the Pentateuch in particular, will find their reward. The study must, of course, be made as far as possible at first hand in the writings of the great critics themselves, not by the imperfect and unfair means of looking through 'reviews' and 'refutations.' Whoever will do this with frankness may confidently hope to find that the records of God's revelation in the life-history of Israel grow far more luminous, and far more lovable, and prove to be incomparably more richly instinct with spiritual life and power, when the winding-sheet of Rabbinic tradition is wholly stripped away, and they come out into the light of day from the tomb of their temporary burial, answering to the living voice of the Christ.

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¹ *The International Critical Commentary. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Mark.* By the Rev. Ezra P. Gould, S.T.D. (T. & T. Clark. 8vo, pp. lvii + 317, 10s. 6d.)

Professor Gould belongs to the Protestant Episcopal Church of America, of which we hear much commendation in respect of scholarship. This volume will not make foolish that commendation. For if it is not scholarship, it is nothing. That is to say, neither in textual criticism nor in exegesis does this author rely upon others. He has manifestly made himself master of this subject in all its branches, and he is no less emphatic in stating his conclusions than he is painstaking in reaching them. 'Scriptural commentaries,' says Provost Salmon, 'have a