

Genesis + Some of its  
critic's  
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## GENESIS AND SOME OF ITS CRITICS.

IT has been remarked that if any of the modern adepts in the destructive criticism of the Pentateuch should happen, after shuffling off this mortal coil, to find themselves in that region, not to be named in the presence of advanced theologians, in which the rich man of the parable is reported to have lifted up his eyes in torment, and if they should have the grace to ask father Abraham to send a missionary to the upper world to remedy the evil they had done, the patriarch would not be able to reply, "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them." He would have to say,— "They *had* Moses and the prophets, but you have discredited them, and with them have discredited Christ." Perhaps in these circumstances he might think it well to send back some of the petitioners to report their experiences.

In default of such an apparition from the other world, my reviewer, Dr. Driver,\* and I may be pardoned for arriving at different conclusions respecting the labours of those advanced critics whom he so vehemently defends. More especially is this likely when we approach the consideration of the subject from two points so diverse as those of literary criticism and the observation of nature. Here I may frankly admit that, if the editor or writer of Genesis was a mere literary forger of comparatively recent date, the reviewer is much more likely than I to understand his ways. On the other hand, if he was as ancient as he professes to be, and more familiar with nature than with books, it is likely that his statements in regard to the world around him or its origin may be better comprehended by a naturalist than by a theologian. I honestly believe that a knowledge of

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nature and scientific habits of thought may in many cases avail more in the interpretation of the Old Testament than mere literary and linguistic skill, though there is no necessity to despise the latter. In any case I am quite prepared to accept the questions raised by my reviewer as grounds of discussion of the antiquity, unity, and genuineness of the early chapters of Genesis, though these questions are after all much less important than many others which are open to inquiry in connection with this ancient book, and which relate to the truths which it teaches. I had much rather regard the subject as affecting our ideas of creation as revealed to early man, than as a mere battle over the character of the sacred books themselves.

I would first disclaim with the greatest sincerity the charge of "superciliousness and contempt" brought against me. A reference to my book might have shown that the expression "reduced to waste paper" had reference to theories of the route of the Exodus based on the reports of unscientific travellers and deductions therefrom, and that the "bookworms and pedants" referred to were not the learned men whom the reviewer names, but those who are weak enough to trust implicitly to their authority and to blazon abroad their dicta as incontrovertible. At the same time I think it right to express with the utmost decision my strong conviction, arrived at by original work, that such processes as those to which the reviewer refers, as establishing "the composite structure of the Pentateuch," in the sense in which he uses the expression, and the conclusion that the second chapter of Genesis is "contradictory" to the first, are unscientific and unreliable.

It is true I am called by my reviewer an "outsider," a term which may be of good or of bad import according to the company in which one is found (Psalm i. 1, 2). The accusation, however, is unfair. Even geologists have souls to be saved, and are interested in the integrity of the only revelation on which they can rely; and this applies to Genesis as well as to the New Testament, since it is patent to all men that the Jesus of the Gospels commits himself to the genuineness and divine authority of Moses and the prophets. Farther, any man who for fifty years has daily studied the Bible with the aid of its original languages, and has during all this time read with care every new treatise which seemed worthy of attention, need not be sneered at by the advocates of a criticism which is of yesterday, and, if it shares the fate of its predecessors, may perish to-morrow, while the word of the Lord endureth for ever. I do not complain of the scanty courtesy of my reviewer. It is precisely what I would expect from the advocate of the men he defends, and what I have experienced too often to be surprised at it. The fact that a Sadducean School may be careful not to identify itself too closely, either with the doctrine of Moses or of Christ, does not render it any

the less contemptuous in its dealing with those "outsiders" who claim the protestant right of judging for themselves, or the scientific right of applying the results of the study of God's works to the explanation of His revealed word.

My present purpose will, however, be best served by taking up, with all due deference to the eminent authorities relied on, some of the illustrations which the reviewer has given me; and first his allusion to that simple and pleasant word "grass," as it appears in the statement as to the creation of plants in our English version of Genesis i. 11. In this I may say he is only a follower of a less cautious critic in the *Academy*,\* who makes my treatment of this verse the occasion of a jest rather more clever than that of my present reviewer. In the Authorized Version of the verse above referred to, we read the divine command:—"Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth." This is the fiat; the following verse gives the result in very similar terms, though with a few slight variations which are not without interest.

Before treating of these words, I would first postulate that the author or editor of the noble compositions contained in Genesis i. and ii., whatever his means of information, whether by direct revelation, vision or otherwise, and still more if with some we regard him as enlightened only by his own genius and penetration, must be credited at least with reason and common sense, and with that ordinary knowledge of nature which comes to men by observation, and which primitive men, judging from the discoveries they made and the works they have left, must have possessed in an eminent degree. It is necessary to insist on this, because my reviewer and those he defends sometimes attribute nothing short of absolute mental imbecility to the, to them, unknown writer of these venerable records.

It is further to be observed that the writer is describing the first introduction of vegetation, and this at a time when, according to his own showing in the following verses, the climatic and even astronomical conditions of the earth were different from what they now are; but that though this vegetation must have been quite different in detail from that of the modern world, and probably did not include any species now extant, he has to describe it, whatever its aspect as appearing to him, in the terms furnished by the common speech of his time. Even to modern science the vegetation which he indicates in a few plain words is as yet known almost exclusively by the beds of structureless carbon which resulted from its interment in the earth's crust, and by inference from the forms and structures of a somewhat later flora growing under somewhat different conditions. The task set before our ancient writer was thus probably much more difficult

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than he could himself comprehend—certainly much more so than is imagined by the reviewer.

He uses three Hebrew words, the first of which, *deshé*, translated grass, is the one in question. That this term cannot in this place mean grass in our ordinary sense of that word appears from the context, since, of the two classes of plants mentioned immediately after it, one, viz., herbs producing seed, includes the grasses, and we can scarcely imagine that the knowledge of grass possessed by this old writer was limited to what he could learn from an Oxford lawn mowed so often that it can never go to seed. It is to be observed, moreover, that the verb used along with *deshé* is derived from the same root, so that if we translate the noun by grass we might read, as some have done, "grass itself with grass;" or, if we prefer to regard the noun as more general, we might read the words with others, "vegetate vegetation." The latter of these extreme views would import that there are only two kinds of vegetation referred to, herbs and woody plants, and that *deshé* is a general and preliminary term covering both. In this case, however, the impropriety of translating it grass would be still more apparent. The first of these views is probably to be preferred, and was that adopted by Rosenmuller, one of my earliest teachers in biblical matters.\* He explains the passage as including three classes of plants:—“(1) *Tenera herba sine semine saltem conspicuo*; (2) *Quæ semen profert majorque est*; (3) *Arbores, sub quibus arbusta continentur.*” His view may seem antiquated to my reviewer, but it still commends itself to my judgment, though we now know more than was known in Rosenmuller's time as to the nature of the event portrayed.

But let us inquire as to the biblical use of the word; and, in the first place, some light is thrown upon this by the expression “*Tadshe deshé*,” where, as already stated, the verb to produce, or bring forth, is allied to the noun. This would seem to indicate that the general sense of springing or sprouting implied in the verb should also be extended to the noun. *Dasha* is an uncommon verb, occurring, so far as I have noticed, only in one other place, in the Book of Joel, which is remarkable for its vivid and simple delineations of nature, and where, from the connection in which the prophet uses the word, he would almost seem to refer to the verse in Genesis:—

“For the pastures of the wilderness do spring,  
For the tree beareth her fruit.”

His prediction is certainly much intensified in force if we suppose such a reference. In Gen. i. 12, the verb *yatza* is used, its significance being to go out, or produce. In the Revised Version the first

\* “Scholia in Gen.,” where also the alternative view of regarding *deshé* and *eseb* as pleonastic is stated.

verb is translated "put forth," and the other "brought forth." I do not know what difference the translators meant to indicate by these phrases, but it seems certain that the original writer intended a nice distinction between the "brairding," as we may call it (to use a good Saxon word still employed by farmers), of the first vegetation and its subsequent development, as if he had himself been a witness of it, and as he may have seen the early vegetation spring up in the desert after the rains. A beautiful example of this process, almost like a new creation, has been recently observed in the clothing of the waste of cinders left by the great eruption of Krakatoa, first with delicate microscopic algaoid plants, and then with other forms of vegetation.

As to the word *Deshé* itself, it occurs only once in the Pentateuch beyond Genesis i., and then in the Song of Moses, Deut. xxxii. 2, in the beautiful passage:—

" My doctrine shall drop as the rain,  
My speech shall distil as the dew,  
As the small rain upon the *tender grass*,  
And as the showers upon the herb."\*

Here the necessity of using the phrase "tender grass" shows that the word implies more than mere grass, and the word for herb is the same used presumably by the same writer in Gen. i. 11. Another passage in the Book of Job,† which is equally remarkable with the Pentateuch for the accuracy and variety of its references to nature, deserves notice.

" To satisfy the waste and desolate ground,  
To cause the *tender grass* to spring forth."

Here the margin of the Revised Version gives "green sward," and the Authorized Version has "bud of the tender herb." In both passages the reference is evidently to the bulbous-rooted vegetation of the desert, and these periphrases and variations show that the English language, as represented by the translators, ancient and modern, must be at a loss for any one word to express the meaning, which is evidently related rather to the act of springing up than to grass as such. In point of fact it is plain that in these places the word does not mean grass, but immature or non-seeding herbage in general. There are eleven other passages in which it occurs, in the majority of which it can be much better rendered by tender or young herbage than by grass.‡ It is further to be observed that the Hebrew has other words to express ordinary grass, more especially *chatsir* and *eseb*, which are more frequently used than *deshé*, though neither is absolutely restricted to plants of the order *Gramineæ*, and the latter is the word rendered herb in Genesis i.

\* Revised Version. In the Authorized Version "tender herb" and "grass."

† xxxviii. 27. The original here has "*motza deshé*"—the former word referring either to the act of springing up or to the locality of it.

‡ The usual renderings in the Septuagint are *botané* and *chloé*.

Returning now to Genesis i., we find that the writer, in picturing the introduction of plants, has before his mind either the ideas of time of introduction or of rank, or both. He may mean to inform us that in the introduction of plants the lower or humbler came first, and the herbs bearing seed and trees bearing fruit in order of rank, or that those seedless plants designated by *deshé* constituted the whole of the first vegetation, to be afterward expanded into higher forms. The difference between these views is only a question of how much of the process was before his mind, and in either case *deshé* must indicate the simpler and humbler types of plants, whether we call them cryptogams or by any other name. But we must bear in mind that there were and are many cryptogams that are trees, so that we should have to say humbler cryptogams in order to be as accurate as our ancient authority. I cannot refrain from noticing here the little touches of pictorial effect given by the trees being over the earth rather than merely upon it, by the emphatic mention of the highest form of vegetation in the seed enclosed in its perfect fruit, and also by the parallelism between the idea of springing up in the indication of the earlier and humbler plants of the land, and that of multiplying abundantly in the lower animals of the waters (verse 20).

The above are a few of the principal points involved in the study of this remarkable verse of Genesis, which, from the standpoint of natural science, has still other bearings, and they are surely sufficient to show how crude is the conclusion of my reviewer—"The common rendering grass is clearly the only one which the word will bear"—in contrast with the profound and accurate conception of our ancient authority.

The reviewer's conviction of the "composite structure" of the Pentateuch seems to have induced him to attribute a composite character to my book, which is really the record of a journey undertaken with a definite object—namely, to study the large collections of prehistoric and Eastern remains accumulated in recent years in Europe, and to employ these in aid of such researches as I could make in Bible lands. I find myself in good company, however, when the idea of composite structure in the Pentateuch is pushed so far as to blame me for supposing that "Genesis i. is not contradictory to Genesis ii." Is not the supposition of such contradiction, at the very first sight of the record, scarcely credible? Whoever the writer or editor, at whatever time, can we imagine him as giving a deliberate and connected statement of the order of creation at the beginning of his book, and immediately following this statement by a contradiction in which the facts are stated in the opposite order of their previously alleged occurrence. This difficulty is not mitigated, but rather increased, by the hypothesis of different documents pieced together; because the compiler could not on this hypothesis have placed the supposed contradictory docu-

ments in such immediate succession without seeing that they were mutually destructive. Is it not in every way more probable that he intended, and supposed that his readers would understand him to intend, to relate in the one chapter events different from those recorded in the other: that, in short, it was his design to place man in his proper place, and without undue details, in the general account in chapter i., and then to begin his special human history by a more particular account of the condition of the earth and its inhabitants when man appeared on it. Thus the magnificent cosmological symmetry of the history of creation in chapter i. is preserved intact, and we are introduced in detail to the earth of the later part of the sixth creative day when man took possession of it. Even if this were more doubtful, any presumably honest writer should have the benefit of the doubt, especially when it can be shown that he has truthfully sketched the condition of the world at the close of the Pleistocene age, when, so far as we at present know, man made his appearance. The objections urged to this view are, for the most part, too puerile to merit serious treatment. One of them, however, deserves a word of notice. It is perhaps not quite certain, notwithstanding the subsequent usage, that in these early records "beast of the field" is precisely identical with the cognate phrase, "beast of the earth;" but, waiving this, I do not know any reason to deny that carnivorous animals existed in Eden. The contrary seems to be stated, and the serpent certainly was there. But that there were animals in Eden similar to those with which Moses threatens the Israelites in Leviticus xxvi. 22, and able to rend Adam—that is to say, large and dangerous carnivora—is entirely at variance with the whole tenor of the record, and with scientific probability as well. It is, however, characteristic of many of the critics whom my reviewer defends, that they are willing to sacrifice consistency and general probability in deference to any merely verbal nicety, more likely to occur to them than to an ancient and concise writer.

A more important question is the site of Eden, a question which I have pretty fully treated of in such light as recent geographical researches have cast on the subject, and which, to my mind, is very satisfactory. The one objection to this urged by your reviewer is that the four heads of the rivers of Eden are really their outlets. No doubt it is possible to find authorities who affirm this, and almost anything else, however fanciful, that can be imagined respecting the rivers of Eden. But the term head, as applied figuratively to any natural object, in Hebrew, as in all other languages, is usually the upper part of it, or the beginning of it, and there is no conceivable reason for understanding it otherwise here, except to favour certain theories as to the site of Eden. Above all, such an idea, or such a use of words, is not likely to have occurred to primitive or early men, familiar with nature

more than with the notions of scholars, whose ideas of the simplest natural facts are often very crude. It is of course impossible to conceive of a river whose outlet is its beginning, or is higher than its head. Besides this, one of the rivers—namely, Pison—must, from the description, have flowed from a mountainous country. There is no warrant for the assertion that the description follows the “downward” course of the stream. The writer merely tells us that the river was in the garden, that it went out or ascended (possibly overflowed) from Eden to irrigate the garden, and that from thence (the garden, not Eden) it divided into four heads. Further, one of these heads, or rivers, was Euphrates, another Tigris, whose junction in the Shat el Arab must have been known to the writer, which at once reduces to a physical absurdity the idea that the heads of these rivers are outlets, and proves that the garden was at or near their confluence. One learned commentator has endeavoured to reconcile the two ideas by making the Tigris and Euphrates meet in Eden and then divide below; but only a few have been so bold as to imagine a single origin or source dividing into four streams, though some have endeavoured to represent the heads as separate canals or streams in a delta. I have not endeavoured to settle the matter by a majority of votes, but if it is the “almost universally accepted” interpretation of any school of critics or commentators that we should understand the heads of rivers to be their outlets, then all I can say is, so much the worse for the critics. Seriously, I think any one who will carefully consider the topographical and geological facts as I have presented them in the work criticized, can scarcely fail to understand distinctly the geographical features described in Genesis, and to see that they accord well with the present structure of the country and with its probable condition in the early modern period.

Finally, I am quite guiltless of the belief that any important share of the discovery of the Egyptian element in the Pentateuch belongs to me. On the contrary, I remember when it was customary with a certain school of objectors to say that Egyptian discoveries had proved that the whole Pentateuch, including its religious rites and its laws, was nothing but an adaptation and abridgment of the Egyptian learning and theology. It now suits such persons to take the opposite side. When we consider the unmistakable early Chaldean affinities of Genesis—the evidence of which discovery is daily strengthening,—the equally decided Egyptian colouring of the other books of the Pentateuch, and the sudden descent to purely Palestinian affairs in Joshua and Judges, we find facts which no theory of composite and late origin can overthrow. That any writer in the times of the Hebrew monarchy or later could have worked out of his own consciousness, or of any fragments and traditions, a whole so coherent and harmonious, and so full of minute touches relating to facts, places,

and customs of which he must have been personally ignorant, would be a miracle of which we have certainly no example in modern times. It is to be observed, however, that while, on the one hand, an inconceivable amount of knowledge and skill must be assumed on the part of the literary forgers to whom we are supposed to owe the Books of Moses, these men are, on the other hand, represented with singular inconsistency to have been careless and silly to the last degree, in admitting palpable contradictions and anachronisms into their work.

If, however, we look at the other side of the question, from an historical point of view, the facts of the exodus are all consistent with the necessity of a leader, lawgiver, and historian like Moses; a collector of his nation's history up to his own time in Genesis; a chronicler of events during the march to Canaan (Exodus xvii. 14, xxiv. 4, 7), probably with the aid of trained Egyptian scribes, of whom there must have been many in the camp of Israel; a legislator whose laws were framed from time to time as exigency required, were incorporated in the narrative of his work, and were finally summed up in that wonderful and most archaic compound of history, law, and poetry which we call the Book of Deuteronomy. No minute and laboured criticisms can ever avail to shake this fabric, any more than paper pellets can sink an ironclad.

One word in conclusion respecting the moral complexion of this matter. A writer in the "Encyclopædia Britannica" thus extenuates the moral obliquity of the compilers of the supposed composite and recent Pentateuch as evidenced by Deuteronomy. The work of the compiler or forger was done, he says, "not in pious fraud, but simply because his object was, not to give a new law, but to expound and develop Mosaic principles in relation to new needs; and, as ancient writers are not accustomed to distinguish historical data from historical deductions, he naturally presents his views in dramatic form in the name of Moses."\* This defence, let it be observed, refers to a book which explicitly says it was written by Moses at a definite time and in a specified place (Deut. i. 1-5 and xxxi. 9).

There was an ingenious workman in England some time ago, who manufactured palæolithic flint implements for sale to collectors. "Flint Jack's" implements were exactly on the model of the old, only adapted to the "new needs" of modern antiquarians, and were disposed of by a "dramatic form, in the name of" palæolithic men, who no doubt made and used precisely similar tools. Flint Jack was of course not inclined to "distinguish historical data" from "the historical deduction" which he imposed upon his customers. But Flint Jack's was a very harmless imposture compared with the forgery of documents intended to influence men with regard to their highest interests, and to subject them to the domination of a priestly caste.

\* Article, "Bible."

Ingenious manufacturers prepare an excellent substitute for butter out of the vilest refuse, and my grocer may not be clearly alive to the difference between the wholesome product of a country dairy and the oleomargarine whose origin and history are different, but which may serve "present needs" as a substitute, although the "historical deduction" as to its origin implied in selling it as dairy butter may be false. I consume my oleomargarine, flattering myself that it is butter and am none the worse, though perhaps it may be a trifle less digestible. The morality of the transaction is not good, but still not quite so bad as that of the imagined falsification of Deuteronomy.

How can men, professing to be servants of Him who came "to bear witness to the truth," have any respect for documents whose authors must have been morally on a level with Flint Jack and dishonest grocers? How can they expect us to go to church and listen to them when reading or preaching from these old forgeries, which we cannot believe if we believe the doctrine of their modern expositors? It is surely time for even "outsiders" to protest against such inconsistency, and especially for Christian naturalists, who find the sacred name of Science prostituted by this pseudognosis, to make their voices heard in favour of fair and honest exposition of the Bible, a book to which they owe so much, and which, in its treatment of nature, is so greatly superior to most other literature. I am not done with this subject, and trust that I may have an opportunity to pursue it further on a future occasion, when I propose to refer to the Antediluvian Age and the Deluge, which may bring up another question in which Science is interested, namely, that of Miracle as related to facts in physical science and to the laws of nature.

J. WILLIAM DAWSON.

MADAME FRANCE AND HER  
*BRAV' GÉNÉRAL.*

THE political problem in France is one of deep interest beyond the borders of the Republic. For it raises anew in the Centennial of the Revolution the great question whether there is or whether there can be in a democratic State any interdict imposed or maintained upon the absolute authority of universal suffrage. In England, politicians have accustomed themselves to regard the clearly expressed will of a majority of the electors as decisive. With us the phrases popular sovereignty, the will of the people, self-government, have come to mean in practice this: that there is no appeal either in the law or the constitution from the will of a majority of the electors as shown at a general election. The British householder is as absolute as the Tzar. As long as he is in doubt, other powers exist. When he has made up his mind, they simply disappear. The utmost that the most fervent partisans of the House of Lords now venture to maintain is that the Second Chamber may interpose for a season in order to place beyond all doubt the fact that the electorate has really made up its mind. But when that mind is made up beyond all doubt its decisions are obeyed.

General elections have come to be more and more of plebiscites, and the voice of the people, as audible at such elections, has come to be regarded as the only English equivalent of the voice of God. The people are a law unto themselves. No law is superior to their will. Their votes are the source of law. When they vote it is in order to declare what laws shall be abrogated or what laws shall be passed. It is becoming more and more impossible, therefore, for Englishmen even to imagine that the will of the voting majority for a time being can be or ought to be subjected to any limitation.

In France, however, the home of the Revolution, where men deal