

**THE MODERN READER'S BIBLE, A
SERIES OF WORKS FROM THE
SACRED SCRIPTURES PRESENTED
IN MODERN LITERARY FORM.
DEUTERONOMY**

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The Modern Reader's Bible, a Series of Works from the Sacred Scriptures Presented in Modern Literary Form. Deuteronomy by Richard G. Moulton

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The Modern Reader's Bible



Deuteronomy



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IN MODERN LITERARY FORM

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DEUTERONOMY

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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INTRODUCTION

IT is not an exaggeration to say that no work of literature which has ever appeared has produced a greater sensation than the *Book of Deuteronomy*. Every one knows the romantic episode of its first appearance in history — a discovery, or a rescue from oblivion which would be the equivalent of a discovery. King Josiah with youthful fervour is meditating a repair of the temple; the treasury is cleared out, and in it is found 'a book.' Whether this was *Deuteronomy* itself, or a larger roll including it, we have no means of determining; but it was certainly the contents of *Deuteronomy* which produced the effect that followed this discovery. The book was read before the king; he rent his clothes as he listened; a thrill of horror went through the nation at the denunciations of woe against idolatry coming to light when the idolatry was fully established in the land. There ensues the most sudden reformation movement in all history. First there is the great gathering in the temple, "all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both

small and great." The book is read before them; they enter into covenant with the Lord, the king leading them from his lofty platform. Then they turn to a fury of purging zeal: there is breaking of idolatrous vessels, shattering of obelisks, defiling of high places throughout the land and slaying of their priests. Then with a recovered sense of national purity the people feel able to keep the feast: "surely there was not kept such a passover from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah."

From an external reformation the masses of the people soon fell away. But the effect of *Deuteronomy* was not transient. It henceforward became the chief religious literature of the people of Jehovah. Every true Israelite recited one of its chapters as his daily devotion. The most spiritual of the prophetic writers are deeply imbued with its thought and its expressions. Alike the polished Amos and the rugged Hosea reflect the influence of *Deuteronomy*; Isaiah and Ezekiel show traces of it; the writings of Jeremiah are saturated with it through and through. When, centuries later, the great prophet of Nazareth appeared, even to him *Deuteronomy* was the great book of the law. Its phraseology weaves itself into his speeches, and it is almost invariably from this one book of the law that he quotes. Sentences of *Deuteronomy* rise instinctively to his lips as weapons with which to repel the tempter. And when he sums up the whole

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of God's law to his chosen people in two words, it is the central sentence of *Deuteronomy* which he cites as "the first and the great commandment."

In the critical discussions of our own day it is again *Deuteronomy* which is the chief storm centre around which controversy rages. And here I should like to say that this book affords a specially clear illustration of the principles of treatment underlying the Modern Reader's Bible. I have explained in previous volumes that this series excludes, not only theological questions and religious dogma, but also questions of historic criticism. To this last objection has been taken: it has been pronounced unsound to dissociate literature from history. Of course, in one sense of the term no one proposes to separate them. No one suggests that an individual reader, because he takes an interest in a purely literary treatment of a work, should therefore be debarred from also taking an interest in its history. No one disparages the importance of historic criticism: the questions of history raised by biblical criticism are not so much important as inevitable. I do not even say that historical investigations into ancient documents are without results on purely literary appreciation, though I do believe that this particular element of literary study has been overestimated. Historic criticism deals with questions of authorship, and with the connection between a work of literature and its age. But I have long been of the opinion — though it is an unfashionable one — that it