

**GENERAL INTRODUCTION
TO THE OLD TESTAMENT:
THE CANON, PP. 1-208**

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5-1922

THE CANON

BY

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PREFACE

ANY ONE who addresses himself to the study of the Old Testament will desire first to know something of its character. It comes to us as a collection of books which have been and still are esteemed peculiarly sacred. How did they come to be so regarded? Is it due simply to a veneration for antiquity? Is this a collection of the literature of ancient Israel, which later generations prized as a relic of early ages? Is it a body of Hebrew literature to which sanctity was attributed because of its being written in the sacred tongue? Is it a collection of the books containing the best thoughts of the most enlightened men of the Israelitish nation, embodying their religious faith and their conceptions of human duty? Or is it more than all this? Is it the record of a divine revelation, made through duly authorized and accredited messengers sent of God for this purpose?

The first topic which is considered in this volume is accordingly that of the Canon of the Old Testament, which is here treated not theologically but historically. We meet at the outset two opposing views of the growth of the canon: one contained in the statements of the Old Testament itself, the other in the theories of modern critics, based upon the conception that these books gradually acquired a sacredness which did not at first belong to them, and which did not enter into

the purpose for which they were written. This is tested on the one hand by the claims which the various writers make for themselves, and on the other by the regard shown for these books by those to whom they were originally given. The various arguments urged by critics in defence of their position that the canon was not completed nor the collection made until several centuries after the time traditionally fixed and currently believed are considered; and reasons are given to show that it might have been and probably was collected by Ezra and Nehemiah or in their time.

The question then arises as to the books of which the Old Testament properly consists. Can the books of which it was originally composed be certainly identified? And are they the same that are now in the Old Testament as we possess it, and neither more nor less? This is answered by tracing in succession the Old Testament as it was accepted by the Jews, as it was sanctioned by our Lord and the inspired writers of the New Testament, and as it has been received in the Christian Church from the beginning. The Apocrypha though declared to be canonical by the Council of Trent, and accepted as such by the Roman Catholic Church, are excluded from the canon by its history traced in the manner just suggested as well as by the character of their contents, which is incompatible with the idea of their authors being divinely inspired.

PRINCETON, N. J.,
October 3, 1898.

HISTORY OF INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT¹

INTRODUCTION, as a technical term, is of comparatively modern date, and borrowed from the German. It was introduced as a generic designation of those studies, which are commonly regarded as preliminary to the interpretation of the Scriptures. As a science or a branch of systematic learning, Introduction is of modern growth. The early Christian writers were either not sufficiently aware of its importance, or imperfectly provided with the means of satisfactorily treating it. Their attention was directed chiefly to the doctrinal contents of Scripture, and it was only when the genuineness or divine authority of some part or the whole was called in question, that they seem to have considered these preliminary subjects as at all important; as for instance, when the attack upon the Pentateuch by Celsus, and on Daniel by Porphyry, excited Origen and others to defend them, an effect extending only to the Evidences of Revealed Religion and the Canon of Scripture. The most ancient writings that can be described as general treatises upon this subject are by the two most eminent Fathers of the fourth century, Augustin and Jerome. The four books of the

¹ This brief sketch is extracted from an unpublished lecture of my former friend, preceptor, and colleague, Dr. Joseph Addison Alexander, for many years the ornament and pride of Princeton Theological Seminary. It was written in 1843, and is here inserted as a memento of a brilliant scholar and in humble acknowledgment of indebtedness to his instructions.

former de *Doctrina Christiana* contain, according to his own description, *præcepta tractandarum Scripturarum*, and belong therefore chiefly to Hermeneutics. He was ignorant of Hebrew, but his strength of intellect and ingenuity enabled him to furnish many valuable maxims of interpretation. Jerome's book was called "*Libellus de optimo interpretandi genere.*" It is chiefly controversial and of much less value than Augustin's.

The first work which appeared under the name of Introduction was in Greek, the *Εἰσαγωγή εἰς τὰς Ἱελας γραφάς* of Adrian. Its date is doubtful, and its contents restricted to the style and diction of the sacred writers. An imperfect attempt to methodize the subject was made by Eucherius, Bishop of Lyons, in the fifth century; but the first important advance was made in the sixth century by Cassiodorus, a Benedictine monk, in his work "*De Institutione Divinarum Scripturarum,*" which treats especially the subject of the Canon and of Hermeneutics, and was the standard work in this department through the Middle Ages.

The philological branches of the subject were first treated in detail after the Reformation. The earliest important works of this kind were the "*Officina Biblica* of Walther" in 1636, and Bishop Walton's "*Prolegomena to the London Polyglott*" in 1657, which is particularly rich in reference to Biblical Philology and Criticism. The insidious attacks on the divine authority of Scripture by Hobbes and Spinoza, in the latter part of the seventeenth century, called forth as its professed defender Richard Simon, a Romish priest of great ingenuity and considerable learning, but of unsound principles. His *Critical Histories of the Old and New Testaments* provoked much censure, and gave occasion to the first systematic Introduction to the Old Testament, that of Carpzov, which appeared in 1721,

and is chiefly occupied with the evidences of revealed religion and with hermeneutics.

In the eighteenth century, Introduction rose to great importance, and the writers on it exercised great influence. The principles which Simon had obscurely recommended, were avowed and carried out by Semler and his followers, who introduced a general scepticism as to the canonical authority of some books and the inspiration of the whole. The Bible now began to be studied and expounded as a classic, with reference merely to the laws of taste. Upon this principle the great work of Eichhorn was constructed, the first complete Introduction to the books of the Old Testament, the influence of which has been incalculably great in giving an infidel character to modern German exegesis. The counteracting influence of Jahn, a learned Roman Catholic professor at Vienna, has been lessened by his great inferiority to Eichhorn, both in taste and genius, and his equal want of judgment as to some important points. Another valuable work on Introduction from a Roman Catholic source is that of Herbst, Professor in Tubingen, edited after the author's death by his colleague Welte in 1840, and greatly improved by his sound conservative additions. Eichhorn's work, which first appeared in 1780, and in a fourth edition more than forty years after, is in several volumes; but the same general principles of unbelief are taught in a compendious form with great skill and talent by De Wette, one of the most eminent of living German theologians.¹ His Introduction to the Old Testament, filling a moderate octavo, is convenient as presenting a compendious view of the whole subject, with minute and ample references to the best authorities. His views, however, as to in-

¹ De Wette died 1849.

spiration are completely infidel. Hengstenberg, Professor at Berlin, a leading writer of the Christian or believing school, began a conservative reaction on the Protestant side by publishing at intervals a series of works upon detached parts of the subject; and one of his pupils, Hävernich of Rostock, with the same principles as Hengstenberg, but less clear and judicious, has just finished a systematic work upon the whole of it.

It may be proper to add that most of the works which have been described or mentioned comprehend only a part of Introduction in its widest sense, the application of the name being different as to extent in different systems. Almost all the systematic works on Introduction exclude Antiquities or Archæology, as so extensive and so unconnected with the others as to be treated more conveniently apart. This is not the case, however, with the only comprehensive work in English on the general subject, that of Horne—a work which cannot be too highly recommended for the soundness of its principles, its Christian spirit, its methodical arrangement, and the vast amount of valuable information which it certainly contains. Its faults are that it is a compilation, and as such contains opinions inconsistent with each other, and in some cases even contradictory, and also that the style is heavy, and the plan too formal and mechanically systematic.

Little need be added to this sketch, written more than fifty years ago. The reaction begun by Hengstenberg, was vigorously continued by Keil and Kurtz, and after them by Noesgen. Bleek and Stähelin, who still belonged to the elder school of critics, were disposed to take a moderate position, and to recede from some of the more advanced conclusions of their predecessors. This tendency was suddenly checked, however, by the rise