

## THE EDITOR'S COMMENTS.

## THE TRUTH OF THE HEXATEUCH.

Theories concerning the holy Scriptures are much like fashions; they change. Old ones give place to new, which in their turn become obsolete, but amid the changes and variations, the Word of God remains, the ever unimpeachable witness to the eternal truth—a monument of the dealings of the Almighty with His children.

In late years learned criticism has been engaged with the first six books of the Bible, endeavoring to show that they are not what they purport to be, not an authentic history of one of the most important periods of the Hebrew race, but something on a par with Greek or Scandinavian mythology. To a close observer the arguments adduced for this supposition, notwithstanding their formidable array of alleged facts, resemble closely Mr. Donnelly's laborious plea for the Cryptogram in Shakespeare; that is they appear sublimely absurd, but they have gained ground gradually and perhaps also shaken the faith of many. The process of criticism applied to the "Hexateuch," it has been well understood, is a flank attack upon the Gospel of Christ, because it is a denial of His authority when appealing to the Law and the Prophets as the Word of God. Hence the supreme importance of the controversy.

There is a change coming. Modern criticism has about exhausted its ammunition, and the other side is again claiming to be heard. Dr. Bartlett, professor of Dartmouth college, has recently published a volume on the veracity of the Hexateuch, in which he defends the biblical theory of the first six books of the Bible against the modern critical attacks. His position, briefly stated, is that the date of the writing of those books must be close to the events themselves, because the minuteness of the narrative, as for instance in the account of the spies, the crossing of the Jordan and various battles, cannot reasonably be accounted for on any other supposition. The portrayal of character, as for instance that of Joshua, is as much beyond the invention of late Judaism as it was above the common level of his own time, and finally the newly discovered documents prove that writing, in an elaborate form, was prevalent in Joshua's time, and add confirmation to the historical statements of the first books of the Old Testament. Among these ancient documents are the tablet found at Tel-el-Hesi in Palestine and 320 tablets unearthed at Tel-el-Amarna in Egypt.

The Literary Digest of Nov. 27 publishes a few extracts of the volume which are interesting. On the crossing of the Red sea the author says:

"Extensive shoals extend far out in a southeasterly direction and a long narrow sand-bank reaches toward them from the eastern shore, being at low tide a small channel some 780 feet wide and from three and a half to five and a half feet deep. But at high tide the width is about three miles, and the elaborate map of the Suez Canal company gives the difference between the highest and lowest known seas as ten feet and seven inches. Here are the conditions for the safe crossing of the Israelites and the drowning of the Egyptians. The statement of the Scripture narrative that the Lord 'caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all night' conforms to the fact mentioned by the travelers Wellsted, Schubert and Tischendorf—namely, the great effect produced on

the height of the waters by a long-continued northeast or southeast wind in connection with the tide."

Dr. Robinson makes a computation to show the feasibility of the passage of two millions, moving at the rate of only two miles an hour, within the allotted time; a dry space of half a mile or more would admit a thousand persons abreast, and a column two thousand in depth, two miles or more from front to rear; this would require an hour for the entire column to enter the channel, and two hours more to move over the distance of three or four miles, making, on this last supposition, two hours and a half in all. It may be added that if, on account of the flocks and herds, we suppose the time to be doubled, the interval between sunset and sunrise in April, being about twelve hours, would still allow ample time for the safe passage of Israel, and, when the waters were driven back in full volume, for the destruction of the pursuing host. It would undoubtedly be a difficult movement to arrange and execute with such a great company as the Israelites, but a Moses or a Napoleon would be capable of effecting it."

The construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness furnishes Dr. Bartlett another strong argument in favor of the early date of the books in which the record of the work is found. He says:

"Now as an actual record of a transaction of the times, a transaction of sacred and central significance to the chosen people, this singular minuteness and voluminousness of details is perfectly accounted for; but as an alleged fabrication of after-ages in regard to a fictitious affair a thousand years obsolete, it involves the supposition of a stolid and aimless industry and a laborious and superfluous trifling not credible in priest or layman."

"This is not all. Such a specification of details involves an amount of accurate knowledge of historic facts not supposable, yes, not possible, in any late writer of fiction. In fact, in the earlier part of the present century such scholars, not merely as Von Bohlen and Vater, but even De Wette, could declare that the construction of the tabernacle and the priest's garments implied a cultivation of the arts and an abundance of costly materials which we could not expect of the Israelites when they left Egypt, and that the whole description of the tabernacle therefore belongs, not to history, but to fiction. This bold statement now shows the impossibility of its being a fiction. It was in their day necessary even to argue the case with the most learned men that the art of writing was practiced so early as the exodus. It is undoubtedly safe to say that from before the time of Ezra the priest till well on in the present century no human being could have ventured on such a detailed account of the materials and processes without blundering at every turn."

"It remained for the explorers of the present century to find ample evidence of all this skill prevailing in Egypt, at and long before the time of the exodus. The very finest of fine linen has been found there. Spinning and weaving by hand is delineated in the paintings, and bright colors were employed. The whole process of working gold is delineated in the tombs at Beni Hassan as early as the twelfth dynasty; goldsmiths are often mentioned, and even 'the chief goldsmith to the king.'"

"Now for any writer in after-ages,

eight hundred or a thousand years later, to pass safely through all these liabilities to mistake, snares, and pitfalls at every step, maintaining his accuracy even in the minutest points of difference between the lands and the ages and the circumstances, and with no collection of antiquarian hooks or museum to guide him, there can be no hesitation in saying is absolutely out of the question."

On the question of the deluge the author seems to be a little more timid. He proves that a tradition of that great cataclysm has been found in not less than eighty-seven widely scattered tribes or races, and more than half of this number on the American continent, yet, he argues against the universality of the flood, suggesting that it may not have covered any greater area than Palestine.

A great many biblical scholars have taken the same view, because they believe that to be the less difficult to account for. To others it is altogether unsatisfactory. How could the water for about a year cover a small area of land without seeking its level and in so doing forming rapids and cascades the irresistible force of which would have made a floating craft an impossibility? And then again, if the flood were not universal, what necessity was there for building an ark at all, since emigration to some neighboring highland would have answered the purpose better?

The difficulties of believing in a universal flood are rather fancied than real. Michaelis in his comments on Genesis suggests there that in the interior of the earth's crust must be vast cavities, filled with water, being in fact oceans much larger as to the volume of water than any on the earth's surface. He believes that there is communication between the oceans and these immense subterranean reservoirs, and that the latter by electric forces might be made to "boil over," forcing the vast deep to overflow and in comparatively short time submerge the earth's entire surface. When the forces that drove the oceans beyond their bounds ceased to operate, the water would again gradually subside to the recesses below. This grand theory seems to be in perfect harmony with the narrative in Genesis and contains, as far as known, nothing contrary to the geological science.

## BLISS UNRESTRAINED.

The New York Voice, a vigorous, clean-cut and generally reliable prohibition organ, has in a recent instance allowed its wits to go wool-gathering, or it has been absurdly imposed upon by one Rev. Dr. Bliss. The latter is referred to in the Voice for Nov. 18 as the "financial agent of the Salt Lake College, Salt Lake City, Utah," and it is stated that he "preached a sermon on Mormonism in Boston last Sunday." Mormonism in Boston would hardly, we think, furnish the gentleman much of a theme; doubtless we may safely assume that the paper means he preached in Boston, and that his subject was Mormonism. But if this was the paper's carelessness as to diction, what shall be said of the preacher's own carelessness as to fact? Hear him:

"About a year ago the president of the Mormon Church, Mr. Partridge, in the Church organ, printed in Salt Lake City, said that if polygamy had been abandoned because their fathers had changed their opinions, God had not changed His opinion, and still held to the truth. That was as much as to say it would be resumed later. If polygamy is dead, why do the leaders