

INTRODUCTION

THE first book on the Old Testament to arouse my curiosity was that of James Orr,¹ which stood on the shelves of the library in the manse in which I grew up. I was attracted by the bright red colour and gold lettering to finger this volume and dip into its contents from which, though they were far above my head, I gathered this much, that there were some people in the world who chopped up the books of Moses and the prophets and considered much of Old Testament history as composed of myth and legend. It was evident that Dr. Orr was worried about the truth of such critical theories and recoiled from the consequences they had for the Christian faith. He sought to discredit them by showing how they cancelled each other, and he held that archaeology was providing wonderful confirmation for a more conservative view. The subject troubled me enough, however, to wish to get to the bottom of it.

A vast change has come over the world since Orr's book was written. There no longer is any great excitement about the "higher criticism". The barriers he and others sought to raise up against it have been abandoned. Universally it is conceded that Old Testament scholarship has given us a new, realistic and dependable picture of the way in which the literary materials of the Old Testament arose and of what they mean historically.² While the future may bring many corrections, nothing that could be adduced along critical lines could change the situation very much in principle. The passing of the debate over the higher criticism still leaves us with the real problem of the Old Testament: *should it have any authority in the Christian Church and if so how is that authority to be defined?*

Once one has awakened to the commanding importance of this question one will be able to see that it runs through the whole of Christian history like a scarlet thread.³ Yea, more: one can see that much of the difference in theologies springs from the extent to which they build Old Testament ideas or impulses into the primitive Christian patterns. And the latter,

one may discover, differ in themselves already because of the degree of Old Testament influence received. The Old Testament problem, therefore, is not just one of many. It is the master problem of theology. And even for those who regard the first half of the question, as formulated above, beyond debate, the second half still remains in force. All theology that operates in any way with biblical heritage hangs in the air until it is settled.

Informed discussion of the Old Testament problem requires some insight into its history. A particular importance attaches to the genesis of the problem in early Christianity and to the diversity of attitudes and viewpoints concerning it that are revealed there. The relation of the Testaments is commonly studied from the angle: "the Old Testament in the New." The question is not: does early Christianity have strong links with the Old Testament? It is rather: do these links with the Old Testament merely represent the egg-shell out of which Christianity emerged, and which therefore may be discounted? Or, if one refuses to accept that question, then it is this: what part of the Old Testament heritage received by the early Christians is permanently binding for Christianity? We hope to deal with the beginnings of the problem in another volume⁴ and can only stress their importance in passing here.

Our concern in the present book is with the thought on the subject of Christianity and the Old Testament since the Reformation. These studies were undertaken in the desire of garnering the fruits of modern theological history for our subject. Only passing attention can be given to the history of Old Testament scholarship, for we seek something more fundamental: the thought concerning the authority and meaning of the Old Testament for the Christian. Matters of purely antiquarian interest must, therefore, fall by the wayside. The views of many who have dealt in some way with our theme are rehearsed in detail. Our desire has been to make the full weight and range of the standpoints reported discernible. That of course necessitated selectivity. But the information here assembled should give the reader an adequate picture of the more recent phases of what may well be called "the greatest inner-Christian debate".