

This mass of material, as an ostensible body of recorded tradition, might seem to have some claim upon our attention; but we have included it in this survey mainly to emphasize its essentially unhistorical character and the fact that Talmudic training tends to block the path of historical criticism. In the first place, in spite of all the vast literature on the Talmud - and no text has ever been studied with more intensive zeal - it has not received that "higher criticism" which has led us at last to appreciate the historicity of the biblical narratives. Largely because of the very fact that the Talmud was so long oral tradition, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to determine the origin and first setting of the central texts. In any case this work has not yet been done, and the Talmud remains a practically sealed book to historians, who can use its wealth of descriptive and illustrative material - the Talmudists claim that its texts can meet every possible exigency in life - only in the most general way.

Higher criticism re the O. T.

p. 107 In contrast with the product of Egypt or Babylonia, the Bible stands out as an epoch-making achievement. A composite work of many centuries, filled with much that the historian rejects, it yet embodies the first historical work of genuinely national importance which has come down to us. Modern criticism has robbed it of its unique distinction as a special revelation of Jehovah, denied the historicity of its account of the Creation, and destroyed the claim of the legends of the patriarchs to be regarded as authentic; the great name of Moses disappears as the author of the Pentateuch, and that of David from the book of Psalms; the story of Joseph becomes a romance, the Decalogue a statement of late prophetic ideals; the old familiar books dissolve into their component parts, written at different times and by different hands. In short, a national record, of varying value and varying historical reliability, has replaced the Bible of the churches, of stately uniform text and unvarying authority. Nevertheless, it is possible to claim that, judged as historical material, the Old Testament stands higher today than/p.108 when its text was protected with the sanctions of religion.