

MONUMENT FACTS

AND

HIGHER CRITICAL FANCIES

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

THE Old Testament is a collection of ancient literary works, and it was written by Orientals. These are two facts which will be admitted by every one, but they are facts, nevertheless, which once admitted, seem to be immediately forgotten. Students and critics, commentators and readers have united in interpreting or criticizing the books of the Old Testament as if they were the production of modern Europeans. Whether the object of the writer has been to defend or to undermine their authenticity and trustworthiness, the same method has been employed, the same point of view adopted, the same principles unconsciously followed. Critic and commentator

have agreed in transforming the old Hebrew authors into men like unto themselves, the representatives of an age of printing, of libraries, and of books of reference, with centuries of European thought and prejudice behind them, and imbued with all the intellectual and spiritual prepossessions of a European race.

We cannot, however, understand the literature of the Orient aright without becoming Orientals ourselves, or interpret the history of the past without divesting ourselves as it were of our modern dress. It is not what we think ought to have happened which has really happened in the ancient East, nor has the history of it been recorded in the manner that seems to us most natural and fit.

There is only one way in which our studies are likely to end in true results, and that is by excluding from them as far as possible what the Germans would call 'the subjective element.' As in natural science, so, too, in the study of the Old Testament, what we want are not theories, however ingenious, but facts. It is true that a fact necessarily embodies a theory, but if it is really a fact the theory embodied in it is merely secondary and

rests on a foundation of tangible evidence. That the bronze age followed the stone age may indeed involve not only the theory that the bronze and stone implements which characterize them have been made by man, but also that where two strata lie one below the other the uppermost indicates a later period of deposition; but the theories are subordinate to the evidence, and none but a madman would think of disputing them.

It is only where the evidence is imperfect, where more than one conclusion may be drawn from it, that the theoretical side of the fact assumes undue proportions, and renders the fact itself provisional only. With the increase of evidence, and the accumulation of fresh data, the provisional nature of the facts tends to disappear, and the fact itself to stand upon solid ground.

Let us now apply these truisms—for truisms they are—to the ancient history which has been traditionally handed down to us. It is clear that there is only one test of its truthfulness which is scientifically acceptable. That test is contemporaneous evidence. The evidence may be of various kinds; the facts of which it con-

sists may be literary and epigraphical, or of a more or less material nature. The more material they are, indeed, the more certain are the conclusions to be derived from them. Literary evidence may be explained away or misinterpreted, inscriptions may be broken and imperfect, but the evidence of potsherds and forms of art is evidence which, once acquired, is acquired for ever, and constitutes a solid foundation of fact upon which to build. In other words, the more archaeological and the less philological our evidence is, the greater will be its claim to scientific authority.

The reason of this is obvious. It is archaeology and not philology that has to do with history. The study of language and the study of the past history of mankind belong to different departments of thought. We cannot extract history out of grammars and dictionaries, and the attempt to do so has always ended in failure. In the early days of the science of language comparative philologists fancied that they could construct the primitive history of a hypothetical 'Aryan family' upon the fossilized relics of Indo-European speech, but the idyllic picture which they painted of the

‘undivided’ Aryan community has long since been shattered by anthropology.

For the purposes of history philology can be only accidentally of service, only in so far as it throws light on the meaning of a literary record or assists in the decipherment of an ancient inscription. It is the linguistic sense of the record, and not the history it embodies or the historical facts to be drawn from it, with which alone philology is properly concerned. We must not go to it for dates or for the history of the development of civilization and culture.

Still less can we look for help to what has been called ‘literary tact.’ ‘Literary tact’ is but another name for a purely subjective impression, and the subjective impressions of a modern European in regard to ancient Oriental history are not likely to be of value. It is quite certain that an ancient Oriental author would not have written as we should write, or as we should have expected him to write; and consequently the very fact that an ancient Oriental document does not conform to our modern canons of criticism is an argument in favour of its genuineness. A document written in accordance with the critical require-

ments of a German professor can never have come to us from the ancient East.

In the eyes, therefore, of inductive science there is only one admissible test of the authenticity and trustworthiness of an ancient record, and that is an archaeological test. So far as the historical side of the question is concerned the philologist pure and simple is ruled out of court. It is the archaeological evidence of Egyptology or Assyriology, and not the philological evidence, which can alone be applied to the settlement of historical disputes.

This fact is often forgotten, and it is assumed that every Egyptologist or Assyriologist is equally a judge of historical questions. But there are students of Egyptian and Assyrian who have devoted themselves only to the philological side of their subject; and where archaeology is involved the opinion of such students is consequently just as valueless as that of any other philologist in other fields of research. Doubtless wherever literature or inscriptions are involved philology supplies part of the material of an archaeological fact; the question, for example, as to the existence of the name of a god Yahum or Yahweh in

Babylonian contracts of the age of Abraham, is primarily a philological one; but the appreciation and historical application of the fact—if fact it be—falls within the province of archaeology.

So, too, it is for philology to decide upon the meaning of a passage in an ancient inscription; the historical bearing and date of the passage must be determined by archaeology.

Of recent years, however, criticism has endeavoured to bolster up the weakness of the philological method by an appeal to the doctrine of evolution. But again, as in the case of 'literary tact,' the appeal is to subjective impressions and beliefs rather than to scientifically established facts. That evolution has been a potent factor in the history of man no sane thinker will deny; the precise line along which it has moved, still more the line along which it ought to have moved, is a totally different matter.

In many instances the process of evolution is clear, the links of the chain are practically preserved, and we can point out the orderly sequence in which they have succeeded one to the other. But in many instances this is

impossible ; fragments only of the chain have come down to us, and we have to supply the missing links as best we may. Sometimes we can do so with certainty ; at other times our hypothetical chain is a possibility only.

But in all such cases the existence of some, at any rate, of the links is presupposed. The facts are there ; all we have to do is to connect them together. Where art or archaeology informs us which is the earlier and which the later link, it is not difficult to bind them into a single chain. But as soon as we leave the sure ground of material facts and phenomena we pass into a region of purely subjective speculation.

That there is evolution in the world of thought and ideas as well as in the world of material objects is undeniable, but to trace the evolution generally needs more knowledge than we possess. Dr. Newman's epoch-making book on *The Development of Christian Doctrine* convinced its readers that there is such a thing as development in dogma ; when it went on to assert that the development must have taken place in a particular direction, those only were persuaded who were already disposed to be so.

When we are told that the development of religious ideas in Israel or elsewhere must have followed certain lines, we need only point to the recent archaeological discoveries which have shattered similarly subjective theories of development in Egypt and the early Greek world. Unsupported by the archaeological facts which indicate what is older and what is later in the process of development, all theories about the evolution of ideas, whether religious or otherwise, are absolutely valueless. There is no single line of growth along which they must necessarily have moved, and, apart from the archaeological evidence, we can no more say that a particular phase of faith or thought has been evolved out of another than, apart from physiology, we can say that a particular form of life has a special ancestry. So far as the criticism of ancient history or ancient documents is concerned, whatever scientific value there may be in the application to them of the doctrine of evolution is derived from archaeology.

In dealing with the history of the past we are thus confronted with two utterly opposed methods, one objective, the other subjective,

one resting on a basis of verifiable facts, the other on the unsupported and unsupportable assumptions of the modern scholar. The one is the method of archaeology, the other of the so-called 'higher criticism.' Between the two the scientifically trained mind can have no hesitation in choosing.

The value, indeed, of the method of the 'higher criticism' can be easily tested. We may know the tree by its fruits, and nowhere is this truer than in the domain of science. There is a very simple test which can be applied to the pretensions of the 'higher critic.' More than once I have challenged the advocates of the 'critical method' to meet it, but the challenge has never been accepted.

In both England and France books have been published of late years which we know to have been the joint work of more than one writer. The novels of Besant and Rice and of Erckmann and Chatrian are familiar instances in point. They are written in languages which are both living, which embrace vast literatures, and with which we believe ourselves to be thoroughly acquainted. And yet there is no Englishman who would undertake to say where

Besant ends and Rice begins in the novels which they wrote together, and no Frenchman who would venture to do so in the case of the two French novelists.

How then is it possible for the European scholar of to-day to analyse an old Hebrew book into its component parts, to lay down with mathematical accuracy what section of the same verse belongs to one writer, what to a second, and what to a third, and even to fix the relative dates of these hypothetical authors? Hebrew is a language that is very imperfectly known; it has long ceased to be spoken; only a fragment of its literature has come down to us, and that often in a corrupt state; and the meaning of many of the words which have survived, and even of the grammatical forms, is uncertain and disputed. In fact, it is just this fragmentary and imperfect knowledge of the language which has made the work and results of the higher criticism possible. The 'critical' analysis of the Pentateuch is but a measure of our ignorance and the limitations of our knowledge. What is impossible in the case of modern English or French novels must be still less possible in the case of the Old Testament

Scriptures. With fuller knowledge would come a recognition of the futility of the task.

But there is yet another test to which we can subject the results of the 'critical' school. There are cases in which recent archaeological discovery has enabled us to put them to the proof. The most striking of these is the account of the Deluge contained in the Book of Genesis. Here, if anywhere, we should seem to be justified in inferring the existence of a composite narrative, in which at least two stories of the Flood have been mixed or combined together. But it so happens that a Babylonian story of the Flood, which goes back in its present form to the age of Abraham, has been preserved in the Chaldean epic of Gilgames. When we compare this story with the account in Genesis, we find that it agrees not only with the so-called Elohist version, but with the so-called Yahvistic version as well.

It thus presupposes an account of the Deluge in which the 'Elohist' and 'Yahvistic' elements were already combined together. And since it was written some centuries before the birth of Moses, there are only two ways of accounting for the fact, if the narrative in

Genesis is really a composite one. Either the Babylonian poet had before him the present text of Genesis, or else the 'Elohists' and 'Yahvists' must have copied the Babylonian story on the mutual understanding that the one should insert what the other omitted. There is no third alternative.

It follows from all this that the 'critical' method is scientifically unsound, and its results accordingly will not stand the application of a scientific test. It is quite as much an artificial creation as was the Ptolemaic system of the universe, and like the latter requires for its support an ever-increasing number of fresh hypotheses and complicated qualifications. With its disappearance will disappear also the historical conclusions that have been derived from it.

The varying dates assigned to the hypothetical authors of the Pentateuch, the successive strata of religious belief and custom supposed to be discoverable in it, the denial of the historical character of the narratives it contains, must all alike go with the foundation of sand upon which they have been built. An edifice reared on the subjective fancies and assumptions

of the modern European scholar is necessarily a house of cards.

If we are to refuse credit to the narratives of the Old Testament, it must be for some other reason than a belief that we can analyse its documents into their component elements, can fix the age and object of each, and can be sure that ancient Oriental thought must have developed in one particular fashion and in no other. There is only one kind of evidence which can be admitted for or against the history that has been handed down to us, and that is the evidence of archaeological facts. If they support it, we can safely disregard the speculations of the 'higher critic'; if their testimony is adverse, we have something more substantial to go upon than 'literary tact' or a Massoretic counting of words.

In default of facts 'criticism' has been fond of appealing, in support of its negative conclusions, to the absence of documentary evidence. The story of the campaign of the King of Elam and his allies against the Canaanitish princes, we have been told, must be pure myth or fiction, since there was no record of Babylonian expeditions into Palestine in the patriarchal age.

But ‘the argument from silence’ is essentially unscientific. To make our own ignorance the measure of historical credibility is to adopt the subjective method in an extreme form. If there is one fact which above all others physical science is constantly impressing upon us, it is how little we know of the material universe wherein we live ; and the same lesson is taught by archaeology in regard to the history of the past. Time after time the most positive assertions of a sceptical criticism have been disproved by archaeological discovery, events and personages that were confidently pronounced to be mythical have been shown to be historical, and the older writers have turned out to have been better acquainted with what they were describing than the modern critic who has flouted them.

As we shall see, the campaign of Chedor-laomer and his allies has proved to be no myth or fiction, but sober fact ; the very names of the kings who took part in it have been recovered, and we now know that the political situation presupposed by the narrative corresponds exactly with the actual requirements of history. It was the critic who was mistaken, and not the writer in Genesis.

Hardly half a dozen years ago the 'critic' assured us that Menes, the founder of the united kingdom of Egypt, and his immediate successors of the First Dynasty were the creations of etymological invention, 'semi-fabulous' personages, belonging to a 'prehistoric' period, of which no record could ever have existed. The spade of the excavator has rudely dissipated all such dreams. So far from being 'semi-fabulous' and 'mythical' the kings of the First Dynasty of Egypt turn out to have lived in the full blaze of culture and history, at a time when the civilization of Egypt was already old, when its art was highly advanced and its political organization complete. The hieroglyphic system of writing was already perfected; an alphabet had been formed out of it, and even a cursive hand developed. A careful chronological register was kept, and, as in Babylonia, the events of each year were officially recorded. Even the tombs of the 'semi-fabulous' beings of the critic's imagination have been discovered, and the bones of Menes himself are now in the Museum of Cairo.

If we turn to Babylonia, the same story awaits us there. There, too, we were told that

Sargon of Akkad and his son Naram-Sin were creatures of myth, and that the description of their campaigns in Syria and Canaan, and of the empire they established in Western Asia was altogether 'unhistorical.' But once more the excavator has been at work; the monuments of Sargon and Naram-Sin have been found, and written tablets have been disinterred dated in the years when Syria, 'the land of the Amorites,' was conquered. Wherever archaeology has been able to test the negative conclusions of criticism, they have dissolved like a bubble into the air.

The criticism of the Old Testament, which has ended in negation and preferred the results of its own subjective theorizing to the external testimony of tradition, had a twofold basis. It started on the one hand from Wolf's assumption that the use of writing for literary purposes was unknown before the classical period of Greek history, and on the other hand from Astruc's inference that the employment of different names for the Deity in the Book of Genesis indicated diversity of authorship.

It was in 1795 that Wolf's *Prolegomena* to Homer was published, and the foundations laid

for that critical separation of ancient books into their hypothetical elements which has since become such a favourite pastime in Germany. It was obvious that neither the text nor the contents of a literature which had been handed down orally and not committed to writing could lay any great claim to accuracy, and it was probable that the tradition which assigned it to a single author was merely a popular illusion. If writing was practically unknown before the age of Peisistratus and Solon in Greece, tradition might safely be thrown aside, and a wide field was opened for the labours and theories of the critic.

The *Conjectures sur la Genèse* of Jean Astruc, the French Protestant physician, were published anonymously in Paris in 1753. Astruc himself did not dispute the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. But he maintained that the use of Elohim in some passages of Genesis and that of Yahveh (Jehovah) in others pointed to a duality of sources, and that the book must have been written by Moses in four parallel columns, which were afterwards mixed together by ignorant copyists.

This second theory was soon abandoned, if indeed it had ever been adopted by other

students, but the first theory shared a different fate. The existence of two names for God is a fact which, once pointed out, cannot be gainsaid, and Astruc's explanation of it became for 'criticism' the only one. It was assumed that a difference in the use of the Divine Name must imply a difference in authorship; and when to this was added the further assumption of the late introduction of the art of writing, the future march of criticism was assured. Tradition, even the best attested, had to make way before it, theory was piled upon theory, and a time came at last when hardly any fragment of ancient literature had escaped the knife of the critical dissector, and the whole of ancient history, as it had been handed down to us before the age of Cyrus or the capture of Rome by the Gauls, was wiped out with a sponge.