

Biblical Archaeology and the Higher Criticism.

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BIBLICAL history has been unfairly treated. It has been placed under the microscope, and every minute detail brought into undue relief. On the one hand, there has been a bias, conscious or unconscious, to prove that it is false and unvarnished; on the other hand, there has been a determination to explain away all difficulties and reconcile even the irreconcilable. Evidence which would be considered quite sufficient in the case of secular history, has been condemned when the narratives of the Old Testament are in question, while, conversely, the defenders of the scriptural text have too frequently forgotten the elementary principles of common sense. There is no historical book in the world, much less books which have come down to us from antiquity, which could stand the test of that microscopic examination which requires every word and sentence to possess the definiteness and accuracy of a problem of Euclid; there is equally no work of fiction the veracious character of which could not be demonstrated by the methods often employed by apologetic theologians.

If we are going to study the Bible from a historical point of view, we ought to treat it as we should any other collection of ancient books which profess to contain history. The evidence required by the historian is not the same in degree, or even in kind, as that required by the physicist or mathematician. The evidence is circumstantial and inductive, and the conclusions to which it points are probable only. But in historical inquiry, as in the ordinary affairs of life, a certain amount of probability is equivalent to certainty. This fact has been repeatedly forgotten by critics of the Old Testament Scriptures. Passages have been declared to be contradictory, which are so only if a particular interpretation of one or more of them be adopted; a few inaccuracies in unimportant matters of detail have been declared to invalidate the whole of the narrative in which they are found; and a degree of mathematical precision has been demanded from the Biblical writers, which would not, and could not, be required from the writers of secular history.

But this is not all. The critic has started with certain fixed ideas and prepossessions, which have

made him deny the historical character or early age of all statements and documents which run counter to them. It has been an axiom that writing for literary purposes was of late invention, and among the Canaanites or Israelites, at all events, could not have gone back to the age of Moses. Consequently, none of the books of the Old Testament, it has been assumed, can be earlier than the Davidic period, and the events they profess to record must be myths and legends, or else traditions coloured by the beliefs and conceptions of a later day. So again, intercourse between different parts of Western Asia in the time of Abraham has been determined to be an impossibility, and the account, therefore, of conquests in Palestine by kings of Elam and Babylonia has been pronounced to be a fable. The "higher" critic was better instructed on all these points than the ancient Israelitish writer.

The conclusions of the "higher criticism," as regards the history of the Old Testament, were necessarily imperfect and one-sided. It had nothing with which to compare the earlier narratives of the Bible, no form of contemporaneous evidence which bore upon them, and by means of which their truth could be tested. During the greater part of the period covered by the Biblical records they stood alone, and it was only by the help of internal evidence that their claims to veracity could be examined. The "higher" critic was thus dealing with what the logicians would call a "single instance," and every logician knows that from a single instance no conclusion of scientific value can be drawn. It was only in so far as the "higher criticism" occupied itself with the inner structure and date of the books it dealt with, and with the relation of one portion of the scriptural narrative to another, that it was able to attain to solid results. It could show, for instance, that the Levites occupy a different position in the Book of Deuteronomy from that which is assigned to them in other parts of the Pentateuch, and that the chronological data relating to the lives of the patriarchs are inconsistent and incredible; to go further and maintain that the story of the Mosaic legislation was a fiction, and that Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob were figures of mythology, was to pass beyond the evidence and the limits within which it compelled the critic to move.

The "higher" critic, moreover, like the "apologist," could not help being a theologian. His subject-matter was too straitly confined to a literature, the main interest of which, in the eyes of the majority of Jews and Christians, was religious. Theological controversies had raged, and were still raging, around it, and the critic felt himself bound to take a side. Doubtless he professed to be impartial, but a scholar whose studies are confined to a particular branch of literature cannot help identifying himself with that literature, and thereby with all that it implies. It was with good reason that, in our older Universities, the Chair of Hebrew was associated with theology; the Hebraist can hardly help being a theologian, unless his study of Hebrew is merely the consequence of his earlier study of some other Oriental language. The great Hebraists, like Ewald and Olshausen, were theologians, rather than comparative Semitic philologists.

If, however, our researches into Biblical history are to be free from the charges of bias and unfairness, if they are to end in results of permanent value, which will be acknowledged by all trained historians, they must be pursued in the same spirit and upon the same lines as researches into secular history. We must put aside all theological prepossessions whatever, and examine the narratives of the Old Testament as we should examine the narratives in other ancient books. We must, in short, be archæologists and not theologians.

Thirty years ago such an examination would have been impossible. We were but beginning to recover the past history of the Oriental world from the grave in which it had so long slept. The excavator, indeed, had already been busy, but the meaning and importance of his work were still but inadequately understood, and the monuments which he had found were only beginning to be made to tell their tale. The excavations of Botta and Layard had still to bear their choicest fruit, and the discoveries of Champollion and Lepsius, of Rawlinson and Oppert, were but laying the foundations for future research.

A new era was inaugurated by Dr. Schliemann. He revolutionised the study of early Greek history, and, therewith, of the early history of other nations as well. He showed that when the "higher"

criticism had done its worst, when it had thrown doubt on the antiquity of our literary records, and on the history contained in them, the excavator and his interpreter could step in and reconstruct the fallen edifice. The evidence of material objects—of architectural remains, of pottery and metal work—is more convincing than the most ingenious arguments of the "higher" critic, and the most plausible theories of the scholar.

It has been proved that the story of Akhæan culture and power in the Peloponnesus was no myth, but a sober reality; that the intercourse by sea with foreign lands, which Greek tradition remembered, actually took place, and that the influence of Egypt was strongly felt by the princes of Mykênæ. For a time, indeed, there were some who could not forego their older prejudices and accept the new and startling facts brought to light by the great explorer; and it has been reserved for another great excavator of our century, Mr. Flinders Petrie, to complete Dr. Schliemann's work, and prove from the dated remains of Egypt, that the civilisation revealed by the spade at Mykênæ and Tiryns is really of the age to which Greek tradition referred it. The substantial accuracy of the picture of "prehistoric" Greek culture, sketched for us in Homer and in the earlier pages of Greek historians, has been triumphantly vindicated. Inaccuracies of detail have been shown to be consistent with the trustworthiness of the general fact.

By the archæologist and historian Biblical history and Greek history must be treated in the same way. They must be studied in accordance with the same method, and the canons of evidence which hold good for the one must hold good also for the other. Necessarily, therefore, the study of Biblical history has closely followed the example set it by the study of Greek history. The negative results obtained in the field of Biblical history by the "higher" criticism are but an exaggerated form of the negative results already obtained, or supposed to be obtained, in the field of Greek history. The extreme scepticism of Havet, in regard to the history of the Old Testament, is but a reflection of the scepticism of Sir George Cox in regard to the history of the Greeks, and Havet, it is instructive to remember, was primarily a classical scholar. It is true that the scepticism exhibited in the case of the Old Testament records exceeds that which has been exhibited in the case of the

Greek traditions. Greek writers have been allowed the benefit of a doubt which has been denied to the writers of Scripture. But this has been due to the importation of the spirit of the theologian into the examination of the Biblical books, and an unconscious bias against the popular belief in regard to them.

The reaction against the sceptical school in Greek history produced by the discoveries of Schliemann and other archæologists, is now beginning to be felt in Biblical studies as well. Naturally, however, it is felt by the archæologist and the student of those Oriental civilisations with which the Hebrews were in contact, rather than by the Hebraist pure and simple. It is not to be expected that the adherents of the "higher" criticism will at once surrender the beliefs and assumptions, the ideas and conclusions which they have cherished, or will admit, without a protest, the counter claims of Oriental archæology. The Assyriologist may show, for example, that in the tablets of Tel-el-Amarna, the Canaanitish Asherah is proved to be a goddess by the determinative of divinity which is prefixed to her name; the "higher" critic will still adhere to a contrary assumption, evolved, though it has been, by what the Germans would call a "subjective" process, and supported only by the disputable evidence extracted from the pages of Scripture. That he should do so, however, matters little; the archæologist has no theological position to defend, and he can afford to wait until the evidence derived from facts, which can be seen and handled, has forced its way even into the strongholds of an over-refined philology.

It is not possible here to go in detail through the numerous cases in which the archæological discoveries of the last few years have re-established the credit of the writers of the Old Testament, and dissipated the ingenious objections that have been raised against them. Assyriology, Egyptology, prehistoric archæology, even explorations in Southern Arabia and Asia Minor, have alike been contributing to this result. All that I can do in these pages is to select a typical example of the demolition by the "higher" criticism of the historical character of a chapter in the Book of Genesis, and its successful vindication by recent Oriental research.

From several points of view the fourteenth chapter of Genesis is one of the most remarkable with which the historian is called upon to deal. Pales-

tine and Babylonia are brought in it into direct relation with one another at a period when the geographical knowledge of the Babylonians has been supposed to have been confined within their own borders, and distant expeditions are stated to have been made by Babylonian princes such as we have been accustomed to consider were characteristic of a far later time. Moreover, the veil is lifted for a moment from the earlier history of Canaan; Jerusalem is shown to have been in existence centuries before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, and the mysterious figure of the priest-king Melchizedek appears upon the scene.

The "higher" criticism has long since relegated Melchizedek, along with Abram who paid tithes to him, to the realm of myth. For a time it adopted a more hesitating tone towards the story of the Babylonian campaign. But an article by Professor Nöldeke reassured the waverers; the names of the Canaanite kings were resolved into philological puzzles, and the whole account was demonstrated to be unhistorical. No armed expeditions it was alleged made their way from the banks of the Euphrates or Tigris to Palestine until the days of Assyrian conquest, and the last traces of history that had been allowed to remain in the Book of Genesis were ruthlessly swept away.

But the clay records still existed which were destined to confute the conclusions of German scholarship, and it was not long before the spade of the excavator made them known once more to the world. It was from Babylonia that the light first came. A copy of the annals of Sargon of Accad and his son Naram-Sin was brought to the British Museum, from which we learned that as far back as 3800 B.C., centuries before the age of Abraham, the Babylonian kings were making expeditions to the distant West. Four times did Sargon carry his arms to the shores of the Mediterranean, and on the fourth occasion he erected an image of himself by the side of the sea. A cylinder bearing the name of Naram-Sin has since been found in Cyprus, and the annals of that monarch further inform us that he made war against the King of Midian, a country from which the diorite had already been brought for the ancient Chaldean statues that are now in the Louvre.

It is even possible that the name of one of the Babylonian princes mentioned in Genesis is met with in contemporaneous inscriptions. Bricks exist

inscribed with the name of Eri-Aku, King of Larsa, whereon he calls himself the son of the Elamite Kudur-Mabug, "the father of Palestine." In Eri-Aku of Larsa it is difficult not to see Arioch of Ellasar, more especially as the inscriptions of Eri-Aku indicate the same Elamite suzerainty over Babylonia as that presupposed in the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, while the name of Kudur-Mabug, "the servant of the god Mabug," is of the same character as that of Chedor-laomer—Kudur-Lagamar in cuneiform—"the servant of the god Lagamar."

That "the western land," of which Kudur-Mabug is termed "the father," was really Palestine, as it is in all other Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions known to us, is shown by a text recently discovered by Mr. Pinches. This gives the names and titles of a king who belonged to "the first Dynasty of Babylonia," and reigned about 2250 B.C. In it reference is made to "the Amorite land" of the West of which he is entitled "the king."

But it is the cuneiform tablets found at Tel el-Amarna in Egypt which most conclusively prove not only that Palestine was overrun by the armies of Babylonia long before the days of the Israelitish invasion, but also that Babylonian influence must have been deep and lasting there. The tablets consist in large measure of the letters and despatches sent to the Egyptian monarchs in the century before the exodus by the governors and vassal-chieftains of Canaan. The language of the tablets is Babylonian, and the characters with which they are inscribed are those of the complicated syllabary of Babylonia. If anything else could better prove the profound impression that must have been made by Babylonian culture upon the populations of the West, it would be the Babylonian names of deities and of individuals which occur in some of the letters. Even the god of Jerusalem is assimilated to a Babylonian divinity by its Canaanitish prince. And when we consider the number of places in Palestine which continued to bear the names of such Babylonian deities as Rimmon, and Anah, and Anath, we cannot fail to be struck with the permanent effects of Babylonian intercourse with Canaan. The references to Babylonian conquest in the letters of the priest-king of Jerusalem show of what kind the intercourse was.

The campaign of Chedor-laomer and his allies, therefore, was no "proleptic" reflection of the military expeditions of the later Assyrian kings.

The political condition of Babylonia, moreover, described in the account of it is a condition which, as we now know, answered strictly to the facts. In the north a prince reigned at Larsa, the Ellasar of Genesis, whose name was Eri-Aku, and who acknowledged as his suzerain the Elamite Kudur-Mabug. In the south, in Shinar or Sumer, there was another kingdom whose ruler had also to admit the supremacy of Elam. And the Elamite not only claimed supremacy in Babylonia; he was also "father of Palestine."

The second half of the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, that which recounts the meeting between Abram and Melchizedek, has also received a remarkable confirmation from the clay records of the past. It is from the tablets of Tel el-Amarna that the light in this instance has been derived. Ebed-Tob, the priest-king of Jerusalem, whose letters I have already referred to, represents himself as appointed to his office by "the oracle" of a god. He did not inherit his royal dignity from his father or his mother, or even from his lord and master, the King of Egypt, whose "friend" and ally he was. The name of the god is given as Salim or Salem, the god of "Peace," and is identified with one of the forms of the Sun-god worshipped in Babylonia. Like Melchizedek, therefore, Ebed-Tob was king in virtue of his priesthood, and might consequently be described as priest-king of Salem rather than as king of Uru-Salim, "the city of Salem." Moreover, the god whose temple stood on Mount Moriah was the god of "Peace," to whom accordingly it was fitting that those who had restored peace to Canaan by driving the enemy from its soil should pay their offerings. It is needless to point out what a commentary this is on the narrative which tells us how Abram, after the defeat of the Babylonian invader, paid tithes to Melchizedek, "the priest of the Most High God."

The confirmation thus unexpectedly afforded of the historical trustworthiness of the two narratives in the fourteenth chapter of Genesis opens up a still larger question. It shows that underneath the narratives of Genesis lie historical documents which come down from the age of the events which they record, and possess accordingly all the value of contemporaneous evidence. Whatever may have been the period when the book was compiled, its author or authors made use of written materials, and these written materials were as his-

torically trustworthy as those on which we base our knowledge of the Persian wars with Greece. The history of Canaan before the Israelitish conquest was not a blank to be filled up by the legends and systematising fictions of a later day; it belongs to a period when reading and writing were widely known and practised, and when contemporaneous events were recorded on imperishable clay. The "higher" criticism has been over-hasty in its conclusions; the earlier books of the Bible are not a mere collection of inconsistent myths.

But we too must not be over-hasty in assuming that because Oriental archaeology has verified the statements of Scripture where we least expected such confirmation to be possible, it has been equally decisive in vindicating the historical character of everything that is found in the pages of the Old Testament. The same evidence which has shown that the campaign of Chedor-laomer and his allies was a reality, and that Melchizedek was a historical figure, has shown also that the so-called "historical" chapters of the Book of Daniel are but examples of Jewish Haggadah. The cuneiform inscriptions of Nabonidus and Cyrus tell us explicitly that there was no siege of Babylon and no capture of the city in the time of Cyrus; the siege described in the Book of Daniel has been transferred from the reign of Darius Hystaspis to that of his earlier predecessor. "Darius the Mede" is equally unknown to contemporaneous history. Babylon was entered by the Persian

Gobryas, the general of the forces of Cyrus, and it was Gobryas, the governor of Kurdistan, who was appointed by Cyrus over the other satraps of the realm. Nabonidus, so far from being the son of Nebuchadnezzar, was an usurper, and the dated contract-tablets make it certain that Belshazzar, the eldest son of Nabonidus, never became king. The archaeological evidence which has dissipated the scepticism of the critics in regard to the older history of Israel has confirmed the doubts they have cast on the historical character of the narratives in Daniel.

There are many lessons to be learned from the recent history of the "higher" criticism. Chief among them is a caution against a disposition to draw positive conclusions from a single line of evidence. Let us wait until the object of our studies has been examined from all points of view, and under the light of a variety of facts. Premature conclusions, announced as final, have done more injury to science than all the attacks of her enemies. Let us again be on our guard against making our own assumptions and prepossessions the test of historical truth. Subjective criticism is full of pitfalls, and a single solid fact which can be observed and handled by science is worth more than a dozen brilliant theories. Above all, let us remember that in dealing with Biblical history we must be archaeologists and historians, and not theologians. The theologian's sphere of study is large and important, but history in the true sense of the word lies outside it.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF ST. MATTHEW.

MATT. iv. 1.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

EXPOSITION.

"Then." After the Baptism. The "straight-way" of St. Mark (i. 12) points still more closely to the significant nearness of the Temptation to the Baptism.—CARR. Then, when the Holy Spirit had descended upon Him.—MEYER.

"Was Jesus led up"—up from the lower ground of the river bank to the higher lying wilderness.—MEYER.

"Of the Spirit," or "by the Spirit," that is, by the Holy Spirit, that Spirit which He had received without measure, and to whose guiding influence He had committed Himself.—MORISON.

Each narrator expresses the same fact in slightly different language. St. Luke (iv. 1), "Jesus, full of the Spirit, was led in the wilderness." St. Mark (i. 12) more vividly, "Immediately the Spirit driveth Him into the wilderness." What is meant