

118 The Doctrine of Religious Evolution

that of the late date of the codification of the Mosaic Law, we have already seen; when the ritual code of Babylonia is discovered, it is likely that the 'critical' theory of the priority of the Levitical to the Aaronic priesthood will fare no better than the theory that the Law is later than the Prophets.

In fact, the whole application of a supposed law of evolution to the religious and secular history of the ancient Oriental world is founded on what we now know to have been a huge mistake. The Mosaic age, instead of coming at the dawn of ancient Oriental culture, really belongs to the evening of its decay. The Hebrew legislator was surrounded on all sides by the influences of a decadent civilization. Religious systems and ideas had followed one another for centuries; the ideas had been pursued to their logical conclusions, and the systems had been worked out in a variety of forms. In Egypt and Babylonia alike there was degeneracy rather than progress, retrogression rather than development. The actual condition of the Oriental world in the age of Moses, as it has been revealed to us by archaeology, leaves little room for the particular kind