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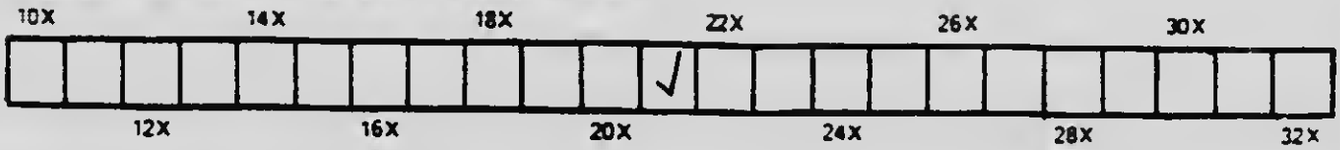

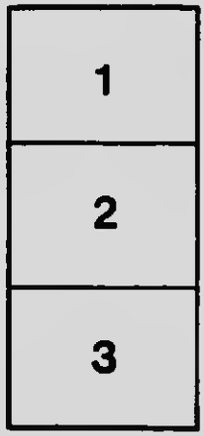

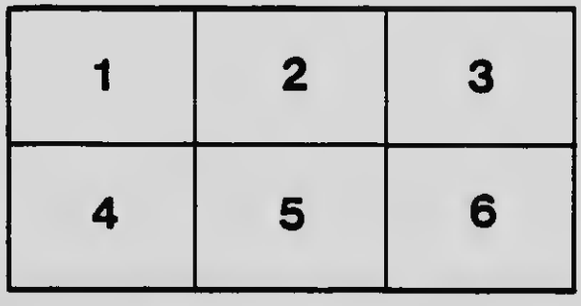

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

BY
GEORGE JACKSON, B.A.

TORONTO
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T. W. MOSHER

TO THE OFFICE-BEARERS AND MEMBERS OF THE SHERBOURNE STREET METHODIST CHURCH, TORONTO.

My Dear Friends,

There are many reasons why I should like to link this little book with you and with the church in which during the past three years we have worshipped together. At your call I came, a stranger from the Old Land, to be your pastor. You found a place for me in your hearts from the first. Your generosity has always been 'to my virtues very kind, to my faults a little blind.' Now, therefore, that I am about to exchange the work of the pastorate for that of the college, it seems fitting that this printed page should bear witness to the gratitude with which I shall always remember your goodness to me and mine.

Yours affectionately,

George Jackson.

Toronto,
June 1909.

PREFACE

This little volume consists of half a dozen lectures delivered this year at an American University. The University is not a Divinity School, and the lectures were not addressed to divinity students; rather, they were designed to meet the wants of a few of that great class to be found in all our Universities and Churches to-day who are deeply interested in Bible study, and who eagerly welcome any honest attempt to mediate the results of modern biblical scholarship.

When a man thus takes upon himself to play the humble, but in these days necessary, rôle of middleman, besides the preliminary qualification of knowing what he is talking about, there are two things which those to whom he speaks have a right to look for at his hands: reverence and candour. If in either of these when I am tried I am found wanting, let me be my own judge.

One further word may be added. Twelve months ago, at another American University, I delivered a similar course of lectures on 'The Fact of Conversion.' I am almost tempted to wish that it had been possible to publish the two courses in one volume and label it 'The Faith of an Evangelist.' There are, I know, loud and confident voices telling us that Criticism and Evan-

gelism are mutually destructive. If that were really so one might well despair of the Church's future. On the contrary, it is in the growing intellectual fearlessness of those to whom God in His providence has committed the perpetuation of the great Evangelical traditions that we may read one of the most encouraging signs of the hour. In Cromwell's Parliament a prayer was once offered 'that they that have zeal may have wisdom, and that they that have wisdom may have zeal.' In the answer to that twofold petition to-day lies the Church's hope for to-morrow.

GEORGE JACKSON.

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I

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND MODERN CRITICISM

LECTURE I

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND MODERN CRITICISM

In beginning this brief course of lectures on the Old Testament, it will be well to indicate at once the lecturer's point of view. I am to speak to you on some Old Testament problems. But if there are any here to whom the Old Testament does not present any problems, who see no reason to revise the faith of their childhood concerning our Hebrew Scriptures, will they please understand that these words are not addressed to them? If, for example—and in a matter of this kind it is best to be definite—any one is quite sure that Moses wrote the Pentateuch, if he finds in the first chapter of Genesis an anticipation of the discoveries of modern science, and in the chapters which immediately follow a trust-

worthy historical account of the beginnings of human life and civilization, if he has no doubt that the Book of Jonah is a sober record of plain fact, and that, generally, the inspiration of Scripture guarantees its absolute freedom from every form of error, scientific, historical or chronological—if, I say, any one is satisfied that these things are so, then for his own peace of mind's sake, he will be well advised to give these lectures the go-by: they are not for him. For I do not believe these things, and I shall not hesitate to say so with perfect frankness. But let me tell you why I do not believe them: I do not believe them, not because I do not believe the Bible, but because I do. I believe the witness which the Bible bears concerning itself, and it is what the Bible tells me about itself, it is the things that are in the book itself, that have made for ever impossible the old, rigid, mechanical conceptions of inspiration in which, like so many, I was brought up. It is no exaggeration to say that probably five-sixths of the difficulties which men feel to-day concerning the Old Testament are due, not

to the book itself, but to the mistaken theories into which, as into an iron framework, we have tried to force it. In these lectures we shall lay aside the framework and let the book speak for itself.

I shall speak, as I have said, with perfect frankness; for the time for frankness has fully come; and also, I trust, with unfailing reverence, mindful that it is God's Word to men whose meaning we are seeking to understand. And while it is, perhaps, inevitable that to some my words should have a negative and destructive sound, my one aim is not to pull down but to build up. The whole purpose of these lectures will be missed unless through them some one is enabled to realize, with a new depth of conviction, that the Bible—the Old Testament—is the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.

And now I turn to the subject of my first lecture: 'The Old Testament and Modern Criticism.'

I

What is criticism? And at the outset we must rid our minds—if need be, we must labour to rid our minds—of the idea that criticism is destruction. Just as we associate the monarch and his sceptre, the scholar and his inkhorn, the shepherd and his crook, so, some suppose, the true symbol of the critic is a pen-knife. And there are even some who appear honestly to believe that modern criticism is a device of the Evil One, invented in Germany and introduced into Britain and America, for the express purpose of destroying men's faith in the Bible. It is a mournful misconception, the responsibility for which must be divided between the critics and their opponents in proportions which I shall not just now attempt to determine. But criticism, once more let it be said, is not destruction. Incidentally, indeed, in the effort to build up the true, it may be necessary to throw down the false; but criticism is not destruction, criticism is judgement; it is the effort of the mind to understand and relate facts which

are brought before it. And biblical criticism is neither more nor less than the effort of biblical scholars to interpret the facts which the Bible itself presents to us.

Suppose that in an anthology of English verse I found printed side by side two extracts—one from the poetry of Spenser, the other from the poetry of Tennyson. Even if no author's name were given, the most elementary knowledge of the English language and literature would enable me to say, without hesitation, that both passages could not be the work of one hand. Now such a decision would be, consciously or unconsciously, the result of the exercise of the critical faculty; it would represent the mind's judgement—in this case, its immediate judgement—on the facts before it. And it is the application of this same critical faculty to the manifold data of the Bible, both literary and historical, which has given us the modern science of Biblical criticism. '"Higher Criticism," rightly understood,' says Dr. James Orr—and I am glad to be able to quote the definition of one who rejects some of the

critics' main conclusions—'is simply the careful scrutiny, on the principles which it is customary to apply to all literature, of the actual phenomena of the Bible, with a view to deduce from these such conclusions as may be warranted regarding the age, authorship, mode of composition, sources, &c., of the different books; and every one who engages in such inquiries, with whatever aim, is a "Higher Critic" and cannot help himself.'[1]

Perhaps, however, I can best illustrate the principles of this biblical science by briefly enumerating some of the definite results to which its application leads us. And those who know the subject best will best appreciate the difficulty of making a statement which is at once summary and sufficient.

(1) To begin with, we are assured that a much greater portion of our Old Testament literature is anonymous than was at one time supposed. The earlier view, which ascribed as many books as possible to a few great names—Moses, David, Solomon, Isaiah—is now everywhere abandoned. There is no

[1] *Problem of the Old Testament*, p. 9.

longer any serious defence either of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch or of the unity of the Book of Isaiah. With similar unanimity Solomon is declared not to be the author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or the Song of Songs. In regard to the Psalms, even so cautious an Old Testament scholar as Dr. W. T. Davison concludes that though ten to twenty Psalms *may* have come down to us from David's pen, the number can hardly be greater and may be still less: 'It cannot certainly be proved,' he says, 'that David wrote any Psalms.'[1]

(2) Again, the critical examination of the Old Testament reveals not only a greater number of hands at work, but also a greater variety of literary form made use of, than was formerly allowed for. We have, of course, always known—though we have not always remembered—that the Bible is not merely a book, it is a library, a literature; and it speaks to us with many voices—law, history, poetry, proverb, prophecy. God spake unto

[1] Art. 'Psalms,' Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*, vol. iv, p. 151.

the fathers in the prophets 'by divers portions and in divers manners.' In a way, I say, we have always known this; but to-day criticism is giving to this great saying a new and wider interpretation. 'It is probable,' says Dr. Driver, 'that every form of composition known to the ancient Hebrews was utilized as a vehicle of divine truth, and is represented in the Old Testament.'[1] Consequently, it need not surprise us to be told, e.g., that Genesis contains not only history, but legend or myth as well; that Job is a

[1] *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, p. xvi.

[2] As the term 'myth' will be used again in these lectures, it may be well to explain what is really meant by it. In popular usage it is often simply a synonym for falsehood. But this is not the sense in which it is used here, nor is this its true meaning. 'A myth,' says Bishop Gore, 'is not a falsehood; it is a product of mental activity, as instructive and rich as any later product, but its characteristic is that it is not yet distinguished into history, and poetry, and philosophy. It is all these in the germ, as dream and imagination, and thought and experience are fused in the mental furniture of a child's mind' (*Lux Mundi*, p. 365). A nation in its infancy clothes its thoughts in a mythical form, just as a little child loves to clothe his in the garb of a story. And just as we use the picture-world of the child to

dramatic poem; that Jonah is a parable; that Esther and Daniel are not so much history as rather what to-day we call historical romance.

(3) Further, we are told that many, probably most, of the books of the Old Testament are composite in their character. What we thought to be the work of a single hand is now seen to be the product of many hands working in different, and sometimes widely-separated, periods. Literary methods are not fixed and invariable. The East has its own ideas of authorship, and we need not wonder if these often sort ill with the ways of the West. The methods of an Old Testament historian have been compared, not inaptly, with those of a worker in mosaic. He took one fragment from here and another from there, joined them together with his own cement, and even in the completed result was at no pains to conceal either the different sources from which his materials were drawn or the means by which

---

teach him, so has God used the primitive ideas of primitive man to teach us eternal truths concerning Himself.

he had made them one. All our Old Testament histories, it is believed, from Genesis to Chronicles, owe their present form to this process of compilation. But it is the study of the Pentatcuch—or, to speak more correctly, of the Hexateuch—that yields the most striking proofs of the critical hypothesis. Just as we have Harmonies of the Gospels which seek to combine in a single narrative the fourfold record of our Lord's life, so, it is believed, the Hexateuch is a combination of four earlier works dealing with the history and the laws of Israel. Over many of the details of the critical analysis there is, of course, much uncertainty. In the very nature of the case it must probably always be so. And one cannot help thinking that the critics would often inspire more confidence in themselves and their methods, if they would be a little less sure than some of them appear to be of their power to assign every verse of the Hexateuch to its original source. We may be fully satisfied of the general soundness of critical principles, but when the analysts summon us to witness the hair-splitting

subtleties with which they are sometimes wont to divert themselves, then, especially if we know anything of kindred problems in literature, we shall with good reason shake our heads and refuse to be convinced. Nevertheless, though the margin of uncertainty be considerably wider than some are ready to admit, this cannot hide from us the fact that the main conclusions of biblical criticism regarding the composition of the Hexateuch have now passed beyond the region of debate, and are accepted without question by practically all the foremost Old Testament scholars in Great Britain, America, and Germany. The four great documents of our Hexateuch, then, are these (for convenience' sake I give the symbols by which they are usually designated):

J and E, the two earliest, always distinguishable from the rest, though not always from each other, and dating from the eighth or ninth century B.C.;

D, the third, being the Book of the Law found in the Temple towards the close of the seventh century, and roughly identical with our Deuteronomy; and,

P, containing a new edition of the history, and a new collection of laws (the Levitical), both originating in the time of Ezra and the Return from the Exile.

Now, it will be readily seen that, of all the results of the critical study of the Old Testament, which have been thus briefly summarized, these regarding the Hexateuch are much the most far-reaching in their consequences. They involve a very considerable re-reading of Israel's history and of the course of the divine self-revelation which through it was made to mankind. To take but one point: if the critics are right, 'the law of Moses' was not a single legislative code given complete by the great lawgiver to the children of Israel in the wilderness; rather it consisted of three distinct strata or groups of laws, belonging to three widely-separated periods in Israel's history. Thus we have (1) the Primitive Legislation, which contains, says Robertson Smith, 'a very simple system of civil and religious polity, adequate to the wants of a primitive, agricultural people';[1] (2) the

[1] *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 318.

law of Deuteronomy, which formed the basis of the reformation under Josiah; and (3) the Levitical Legislation, first promulgated under Ezra.

II

To those who have been trained in older schools of Old Testament interpretation, and who approach the subject almost for the first time, the results which have just been imperfectly outlined may appear very disconcerting; to some they may seem to involve nothing less than the complete reconstruction of all they have been taught to believe concerning the Bible. It should not, however, be impossible to satisfy any reasonable person that however great a readjustment of his old beliefs acceptance of the modern view of the Old Testament may make necessary, and however reluctant he may be to adopt it, there is at least no reason why he should suffer himself to be betrayed into a panic, as though the foundations of his faith were being shaken.

(1) Remember, to begin with, who the men

are who are urging this view of the Old Testament upon us. It may be said that this is a matter with which we have nothing to do, that when we are discussing the truth or falsity of certain doctrines, it is the doctrines alone which concern us, and that it is a sheer irrelevance to drag in either the character or the other beliefs of those who advocate them. In a sense, of course, this is true; but, unfortunately, this line of defence has been rendered necessary by persistent misrepresentations of the real aim and tendency of the critical study of the Scriptures. There is a widespread suspicion, which some speakers and writers diligently foster, that the whole movement is inspired by disbelief in the supernatural, and a resolve at all costs to eliminate it from the biblical records. I have myself heard Christian ministers speak of sceptics, infidels, and higher critics, all in a breath, as though they were but slightly differing species of the same bad genus. Those who speak in this way would seem, indeed, to have the vaguest conception of what they mean by the 'natural' and the

'supernatural.' God is to them a kind of almighty conjurer; they can readily believe that He is at work, provided always that in His doings there be enough of the marvellous and the spectacular; this is, in their eyes, the unfailing hall-mark of the supernatural. Thus, while they may recognize the working of the divine hand in Israel's moral law, or in Micah's great conception of religion,[1] it is to them much more convincingly displayed in Israel's crossing the Red Sea, or Elisha's making the axe to swim. There is no need just now to discuss this curiously juvenile attitude of mind, but it is time to say, with all possible plainness, that any one who speaks of higher criticism as if it were a synonym for anti-supernaturalism is either deliberately throwing dust in the eyes of the public, or he is pronouncing judgement on men of whose writings he is ignorant; and one hardly knows which is the more scandalous offence.

For consider what these reckless charges mean. Twenty years ago Dr. Robertson Nicoll pointed out the steady drift of opinion

[1] Mic. vi. 8. See further on this passage p. 229.

among all Hebrew scholars towards the main views of the critics. 'With the exception of one or two champions who seem determined to die in the last ditch, sword in hand, men of all schools have been in ever-increasing numbers going one way.' Nor has anything happened since these words were written to check the drift. On the contrary, an unending stream of Bible dictionaries, commentaries, handbooks, introductions, all written from the modern point of view, have added fresh volume to the current, and revealed more unmistakably than ever the direction of its flow. At the present time there is hardly a chair of Old Testament literature in the colleges of any of the evangelical churches of Great Britain, from which, in one form or another, critical conclusions are not being daily expounded and enforced. When, therefore, it is alleged that these teachers are covertly denying the divine element in the Old Testament, what is really charged against them is that they are being daily false to their ordination vows, and that their own repeated and unequivocal statements of

personal belief, which in their writings they have given to the world, are not to be believed. The scholars—let it be distinctly understood from the outset—whose words I shall quote, and some of whose findings I shall set before you in these lectures, are Christian scholars. Among them all there is not one who does not repudiate with indignation the anti-supernatural bias which has so often been charged against them. It would be easy to occupy the whole time of this lecture with proof of what has just been said; for the moment, however, it must be sufficient to quote the decisive words of the late Professor Robertson Smith: 'Are there not critics,' he asks, 'who, under form of an attempt to get a consistent view of the Old Testament literature, and of the history it records, eliminate God's revealing hand from the history altogether? No doubt there are; but they effect this, not by what lies in the critical method as I have hitherto described it, but by assuming an additional and wholly alien principle—by assuming that everything supernatural is necessarily unhistorical. This

assumption is so far from being part of my criticism, that I regard it as making true criticism impossible. Eliminate the supernatural hand of a revealing God from the Old Testament, and you destroy the whole consistency of the history; you destroy the very thing on which the possibility of a sound criticism rests.'[1]

(2) And now from the critics themselves let us turn to their doctrines; and for convenience' sake we may refer again to the three points named in the brief summary of critical results which has been already given.

No one, I imagine, is likely to be greatly exercised over the emphatic negatives which criticism pronounces on questions of authorship. We may indeed regret that it is no longer possible to think of Moses as responsible for the whole Pentateuchal law, or to attribute to Isaiah all the prophecies contained in the book which bears his name, or to see the inner

[1] *Answer to the Form of Libel*, p. 40. The pamphlets written by Robertson Smith during the controversy which arose about his teaching are a real contribution to the literature of the subject, and should not be overlooked by the student.

life of David reflected in the Psalms; we may feel as if these great Hebrew personalities had been shorn of something of their old picturesqueness; yet no one can seriously urge that the change involves any real loss. The Psalms, for example, are what they are, whoever wrote them. When we join in the singing of some great hymn in church, it may interest us to know who is the writer of it, but the power of the hymn to utter our own spiritual longings and to bring us near to God is wholly independent of the question of authorship, to which, indeed, we may never give a thought. And the spiritual worth of the Psalms remains wholly untouched by any editorial headlines or footnotes which modern biblical scholarship may attach to them. Nay, indeed, criticism may justly claim that its very negatives have relieved us of some difficulties which, on the older view, were wellnigh insuperable. The psychological puzzle, for example, which is presented by the David of the Books of Samuel, who is at the same time the author of the 139th Psalm, no longer remains to perplex the thoughtful reader of

the Old Testament. Moreover, is not the Book of Psalms, is not the whole of the Old Testament, a larger, diviner book, when we have learned to think of it, not so much as the collected works of a few great souls, but rather as a literature into which the life of a thousand years has poured its noblest thoughts and holiest desires?[1]

Anonymity in the Bible, I say, does not disturb us. It is a more serious matter, however, when we are asked to believe that portions of the Old Testament which we have been in the habit of regarding as sober and trustworthy historical documents are rather to be classed as legend, or parable, or historical romance. But here, again, we must refuse to be stampeded. We are all agreed, critics and traditionalists alike, that there are varieties of literary form within the Bible. The Book of Genesis does not belong to the same class as the Book of Psalms; the Book of Proverbs differs from both. So much is admitted by

[1] For some sensible remarks on the anonymous character of the Hexateuch and other books of the Old Testament see Dr. W. H. Bennett's essay in *Faith and Criticism*, p. 12.

all. If now, in order to include the whole literature of the Old Testament, it is found necessary to increase, beyond our former reckoning, the number of our literary categories, why should any one become alarmed? The question to what particular class a given book of the Bible belongs is, first and last, a question of literary interpretation; it cannot be determined by any *a priori* argument, but only by an examination of the book itself, just as if it were any other fragment of ancient literature which was under discussion. In other words, this is a question concerning which the last word must be spoken by scholarship; and in the hands of scholarship we may be content to leave it: the heavens will not fall even though the final verdict upset some of our traditional ideas. Let things be as criticism confidently declares that they are, and it will not mean that we are less sure that in the Bible we hear God's voice; rather it will mean that He who has spoken to us in history, in prophecy, and in law, has also spoken in myth, in parable, and in story.

Probably, however, it is the composite character of the literature of the Old Testament, concerning which criticism has so much to say, that occasions the greatest difficulty to those who have been trained in non-critical schools of Bible study. It makes short work of many of their old ideas of inspiration—that they can see plainly enough; what it leaves in their stead as yet they hardly know. But once more we must learn to keep our heads cool and avoid all hysterics. The all-important fact concerning this theory of compilation, of which the beginner must remind himself at every turn, is this: it is not a fanciful theory hatched in some higher critic's fertile brain; it is an explanation slowly forced on the student's mind *by the facts of the Bible itself.* Let me try to explain what I mean. I hesitate to make use of individual examples, because the argument in support of the critical hypothesis is cumulative in its character; its strength lies in its totality, and of this individual examples can give no true conception. Nevertheless, for clearness' sake, and with this precaution, I

will run the risk. Here, then, are a few facts of the kind which have led scholars to recognize the compilatory character of many of the books of the Old Testament. The Book of Genesis opens, as every one knows, with an account of the Creation; then, beginning at ii. 4, it tells the same story over again, in another and quite different form. Chapters vi.–ix. relate the story of the Flood. In form the story is a unit; but, as any one may see, it doubles back upon itself, and repeats, and sometimes contradicts itself, in the most extraordinary fashion.[1] In Joshua viii. we have an account of the capture of Ai; but whereas, according to ver. 3, the ambush consisted of 30,000 men, and was sent out from Gilgal by night to take up its post behind Ai, while Joshua and the mass of the host did not leave Gilgal till the following morning (vv. 9, 10), in ver. 12 the ambush consists of but 5,000 men, and is not sent from Gilgal, but detached from the main army after Joshua has

[1] An analysis of the Flood story may be seen in McFadyen's *Old Testament Criticism and the Christian Church*, p. 143.

taken up his position in front of Ai.[1] One chapter (x. 12) of the First Book of Samuel gives one explanation of the proverb, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'; a later chapter (xix. 24) gives another. In chap. xvi. of the same book we read how David came to Saul, and stood before him, and Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armour-bearer; we turn the page and David is an unknown youth of whom neither Saul nor Abner had heard before.

Now what is the explanation of facts like these? Did the author of the Book of Genesis, when he had finished one account of the Creation, immediately go on to write a second which differs from the first in almost every particular? Is the story of the Flood, with its curious involutions and contradictions, the literary product of a single mind? Is one biographer responsible for the twofold account of the ambush at Ai? Did the author of the First Book of Samuel narrate the origin of the proverb about Saul, and the story of David's first introduction to him, and then so com-

[1] *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 133.

pletely forget what he had written that before his short book was finished, he had duplicated the one and contradicted the other? These things cannot be; this is not the way the human mind works; nor were the men who wrote the Old Testament fools. What, then, is the alternative? It is that offered by the compilatory theory of the critics. The Book of Genesis is not all of a piece, the work of a single hand, but a compilation from different sources. Sometimes extracts from the original lie together side by side, as in the case of the Creation narratives; sometimes, without any attempt at reconciling occasional discrepancies, they are interwoven into a single narrative, as in the story of the Flood. A similar explanation accounts for the duplications and contradictions quoted from Joshua and Samuel, and for many others of the same kind to be found throughout the Old Testament.

Once more let me remind you, these things of which I have been speaking are not difficulties for which the critic is responsible. He did not create them, he found them; they are in the Bible; and the sole aim of the critic is

to solve the problem which the Bible itself raises. Moreover, let it not be forgotten that though we may reject his solution, we cannot stop there; the difficulties still remain, and if we are to retain our faith in the Old Testament as the work of sane and serious men, some other explanation must be forthcoming, which will account for the facts. It is just here that we have, I think, reasonable ground of complaint against some of the stalwart defenders of the traditional view. They pound away with shot and shell at the weak places in the critical ramparts, but they do nothing to make more credible their own position; they never grapple with the biblical facts which are the whole *raison d'être* of the critical theory.[1]

Thus far I have said nothing in justification of the analysis of the Pentateuch, which is usually regarded as 'the most important achievement of Old Testament criticism.'[2] The subject is far too large and complex to be dealt with here, and I must content myself

[1] This is, I think, a fair criticism of such a book as Dr. John Smith's *Integrity of Scripture*.

[2] *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 388.

with saying that it is no spirit of petty wilfulness that has led modern biblical scholarship, with practical unanimity, to deny the Mosaic authorship. What possible interest can any one have in spoiling the great lawgiver of the glory which belongs to him? It is simply a question of literary and historical evidence. 'Moses wrote the Pentateuch,' tradition affirms. 'But,' answers criticism, 'read the book for yourself, read the history of the people to whom Moses is supposed to have given the law, and in each you will find a hundred things which declare plainly that Moses did not and could not have written it.'[1] Now again, it is not the critic who has created the facts which cry out against the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch; they are there for all men to see and judge by; what he does

[1] Even a conservative scholar like Dr. Orr admits that the Pentateuch in the form in which we now possess it is not the work of Moses; it shows, he says, 'very evident signs of different pens and styles, of editorial redaction, of stages of compilation' (*Problem of the Old Testament*, p. 369). Other writers of the same school, such as Professor James Robertson and Professor Sayce, make similar admissions.

is to give heed to them and to interpret them as best he can.

(3) Looking back over the discussion as far as we have proceeded, we may perhaps sum up the position in brief by saying that just as the human and the divine meet in the Person of our Lord, so do they in Scripture. And just as we are incapable of determining beforehand what limitations may or may not be involved in the incarnation of the Son of God, but must be content patiently to discover them by the reverent study of the records of His earthly life, so in like manner must we learn through what human forms the truth of God in Scripture has reached us. Now it is with this human element that criticism has to do. And if, on closer investigation, it should turn out to be larger and more human than we once thought, if in its outward form Scripture displays to a certain extent 'the same traces of human workmanship, human compilation, even human limitation and fallibility, as are discoverable in other products of Oriental literature,'[1] we must not raise a hue and

[1] R. L. Ottley's *Aspects of the Old Testament*, p. 18.

cry against criticism as if it were robbing us of our Bible; the facts are not the critic's facts, they are God's; it is He and not we who are responsible for them, and it can never hurt us to know them.

III

The foregoing account of the methods and results of Old Testament criticism, inadequate as it is, may yet have been sufficient, partly through its very inadequacy, to give rise to a number of questions and objections, to some of which we must now seek an answer; and in doing so, we may be able to stop a hole here and there in our exposition.

(1) And, first of all, it will be asked, if the critics are right, how comes it to pass that we have had to wait so long for them? Can it be that for nineteen centuries the whole Christian Church went astray in its interpretation of the Old Testament, and that only when the higher critic arose it began at last to get its feet on the right track? But, as has been repeatedly shown, the science of Old Testament

criticism is by no means the thing of yesterday that some of its assailants would have us believe.[1] Dr. George Adam Smith dates its beginning from the year 1680; the main lines of the analysis of the Hexateuch, which all subsequent criticism has confirmed and developed, were laid, he says, before the middle of the last century.[2] But there is no need to wrangle about dates. After all, the important thing to determine about criticism is not its age but its truth. Its comparative youthfulness no one denies; what is denied is that any man has therefore the right to despise it. Are not many of the physical sciences equally young? If man had to wait long for an exact science of the stars and the rocks, is it incredible that he should have had to wait equally long for an exact science of the Bible? Protestants have not usually had many good words to say for the systems of scriptural exegesis which prevailed throughout the Church in the centuries before Luther; but, as Dr.

[1] See, for example, George Adam Smith's second lecture in his *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament.*

[2] Ib., p. 39.

Sanday asks,[1] if it was the will of God to permit so much fantastic and wasted interpretation as there certainly was between Origen and the Reformation, is it not at least conceivable that He may have allowed wrong ideas to prevail as to the authorship of certain books, for example, down to our own day? And, after all, none of our ideas, right or wrong, ancient or modern, on matters such as these, are the important things we sometimes think them. Critical enthusiasts sometimes speak as if we were learning to read the Old Testament now for the first time. There is a truth in their exaggeration; but it is an exaggeration none the less. They forget that the really essential thing in the Bible is the religious message, the divine word; and *that* the souls of the devout in all ages have never failed to find. As Dr. Sanday says again,[2] the difference between a Bible construed critically and a Bible construed uncritically is far more a difference of process than of results. And perhaps the most that criticism can do for the believer in his devotional study of the Word

[1] *Inspiration*, p. 421. [2] Ib., p. 413.

is to help him to hear the voice that he has always heard, speaking the same eternal truths in more intelligible and living tones.

(2) Again, it is asked, if the conclusions of the critics are well founded, what becomes of our faith in the inspiration of the Old Testament? The Bible, we are in the habit of arguing, is inspired, it is a divine book, and therefore, because it is a divine book, it can contain no trace of human imperfection, it must be without historical spot or blemish, or any such thing. Well, the Bible is inspired, it is a divine book; God is in it as He is in no other literature; the soul hears His voice there as it hears it nowhere else. When we speak thus our feet are on the solid rock; we are but repeating the testimony of our own spiritual consciousness. But when we go on to argue that since the Bible is such a book, therefore it must be free from all human error and imperfections, we have left the rock of certainty for the shifting sands of conjecture. How do we know, if it pleases God to give us a revelation of Himself, in what precise form it will please Him to give it? We cannot know anything of the kind, and all our con-

jectures are only wasted breath. It is not for us to argue how God must have revealed Himself, but patiently to learn how, in point of fact, He has revealed Himself. And if in the Bible we find those things of which scholars speak to us, we must not do violence to the facts to fit them to our theories; we must let out our theories to make room for the facts. All this, of course, is only Butler over again, but it is the truth of truths with which to meet the false rationalism which 'allows *a priori* considerations of human probability to determine what we are to believe about the method and form of God's revelation to His ancient people.'[1] 'After all,' says the great bishop, 'that which is true must be admitted, though it should show us the shortness of our faculties, and that we are in no wise judges of many things, of which we are apt to think ourselves very competent ones. . . . As we are in no sort judges beforehand, by what laws or rules, in what degree, or by what means, it were to have been expected that God would naturally instruct

[1] Robertson Smith's *Adaitional Answer to the Libel*, p. 14.

us; so upon supposition of His affording us light and instruction by revelation, additional to what He has afforded us by reason and experience, we are in no sort judges, by what methods, and in what proportion, it were to be expected that this supernatural light and instruction would be afforded us. . . . And thus we see that the only question concerning the truths of Christianity is whether it be a real revelation, not whether it be attended with every circumstance which we should have looked for; and concerning the authority of Scripture, whether it be what it claims to be, not whether it be a book of such sort, and so promulged, as weak men are apt to fancy a book containing a divine revelation should.'[1]

(3) Probably, however, it is the New Testament itself which is felt by many to interpose the chief barrier in the way of the modern interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Indeed, many who maintain the traditional view do not hesitate boldly to claim that the whole weight of the authority of Christ and His apostles is on their side. It is pointed out that in the New Testament the Pentateuch is

[1] *Analogy*, Pt. II, ch. iii.

repeatedly quoted as the work of Moses, that one Psalm (cx.), which criticism assigns to a much later date, is referred to by our Lord Himself as David's, that Noah and Abraham and Jonah are spoken of as actual historical characters; and it is claimed that, in so far as these conclusions are denied or questioned by criticism, it stands condemned by an authority beyond which there is no appeal.

It is, I think, greatly to be regretted that the question should ever have been urged upon us in this form. Those who urge it can hardly realize what sacred interests they are imperilling. One thing is plain: the critical inquiry must and will go on. To suppose that, at this hour of the day, we can, by an appeal to authority, check discussion on a matter which lies within the realm of literary or historical investigation, is the idlest of idle dreams. A man may not do violence to his intellectual conscience at the bidding of any authority, however august; and such an appeal can accomplish nothing unless it be to discredit the authority itself. Nor, indeed, is the matter quite so simple as those who pursue this perilous course seem to imagine. The

supposition appears to be that wherever a New Testament quotation or allusion implies the traditional view of the authorship of a book, or of the historical character of an incident or person, of the Old Testament, further inquiry is unnecessary; the matter is settled before the critic appears on the ground. This looks, I say, very simple; but will it work? The fact is, as every biblical scholar knows, the New Testament references to the Old, so far from solving our critical problems, add another to them. For example: Jesus and James both speak of the drought in the days of Elijah as lasting three years and six months (Luke iv. 25; Jas. v. 17); but according to the story in the First Book of Kings (xviii. 1) the rain came in the third year of the drought: in this case what do our New Testament references prove? In the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel we have a reference to 'Zachariah son of Barachiah,' who was slain 'between the sanctuary and the altar'; but the prophet who suffered this fate was the son of Jehoiada (see 2 Chron. xxiv. 21); the son of Barachiah was the author of the Old Testament prophecy bearing his name (Zech. i. 1): again

what becomes of our New Testament court of appeal? One Gospel (Mark i. 2) quotes a passage from Malachi as 'written in Isaiah the prophet'; another (Matt. xxvii. 9) attributes to Jeremiah words cited from Zechariah: do these references settle the question of authorship? Moreover, it must not be forgotten that most of the New Testament quotations are made, not direct from the Hebrew, but from the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. On the theory I am discussing this would appear to demonstrate the superiority of the version; yet Hebrew scholars assure us that however imperfect our Hebrew text may be it ranks not below but above the text of the Septuagint.[1] I need not pursue the matter further; enough has been said, I think, to show how vain is the notion that we can settle the problems of the Old Testament by simply invoking the authority of the New.

At the same time it is not difficult to understand how some minds hesitate to accept the findings of modern scholarship where these seem to clash with the judgement of our Divine

[1] See Kirkpatrick's *Divine Library of the Old Testament*, p. 81.

Lord. Christ, for example, assumes the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and the Davidic authorship of the 110th Psalm; modern scholarship denies both. To those to whom Jesus is only a great and wise teacher the contradiction presents no difficulty; to us to whom He is the Son of God and Saviour of the world, it may appear very serious: how shall we meet it? In reply, I will ask you to weigh well the words of two eminent Christian teachers whose loyalty to the faith of the gospel no one will call in question. Speaking of Psalm cx., Dr. James Denney says: 'It is not written by David, nor about David. It is the work of an unknown poet, in a much later time'; but that, notwithstanding, Jesus believed it to be written by David, it is, Dr. Denney thinks, 'impossible for any fair-minded reader to doubt. He lived in a world where there were not two opinions about the matter.' Yet, he goes on, 'it is almost as wicked as it is misjudged to say that "Christ ceases to be an authority at all if David did not write this Psalm,"' because—and these are the words to be emphasized—'*it was part of His true humanity that He should think on such questions as others in His situation*

naturally thought.'[1] From Dr. Denney I turn to the Dean of Westminster, Dr. Armitage Robinson, with whose sober and reverent words this paragraph must close: 'If,' he says, 'it is found that Moses or David did not write certain words attributed to them by the ordinary Jewish tradition, then we may be sure that our Lord did not intend by what He said to decide a question of literary authorship. And if it should appear that He did not transcend the best knowledge of His time in these literary details, we shall learn from this something more of the condescension by which the Son of God in becoming man for our sakes entered into certain of the natural limitations of a human life: we shall learn that in this, as in all points, He was made like unto His brethren, save in so far as their faculties were clouded by sin. We know already that in His sacred boyhood He "increased in wisdom" (Luke ii. 52): we know, for He has told us, that something of the future was hidden from His knowledge (Mark xiii. 32): why should we be unwilling to learn that something of the past as well, which had no obvious bearing on

[1] *Expositor*, fifth series, vol. iii, p. 448.

His earthly mission, should have remained unknown to His human mind?'[1]

IV

And now, as I close, let me ask what is to be our attitude towards this great intellectual movement of our time. Need I say that nothing is to be done by uttering anathemas against it or its leaders? If they are wrong they must be proved to be wrong by arguments sounder than their own; but hard names prove nothing except the bad temper of those who use them. Nor, if we are wise, shall we allow ourselves in mournful prophecies of the general ruin that must follow if this or that conclusion of criticism be admitted. There have been many such forebodings in the past—John Wesley thought that giving up witchcraft was, in effect, giving up the Bible![2]—and we

[1] *Some Thoughts on Inspiration*, p. 46. Opinions similar to those expressed in the text are held by many Christian scholars to-day: see, for example, Sanday's *Inspiration*, p. 415; Driver's *Introduction*, p. xviii; Gore's *Bampton Lectures;* D. W. Forrest's *Authority of Christ*, ch. ii; A. Plummer, *Expositor*, fourth series, vol. iv, p. 1; R. H. Hutton's *Aspects of Religious and Scientific Thought*, p. 224, &c.

[2] *Journal*, May 25, 1768.

know what has come of them. Nor, again, will it avail to seek to shelter ourselves behind ancient traditions, as if that must be true which has been long believed. We are not Roman Catholics, we are Protestants, and the only Pope to whom in matters of this kind we can submit is Pope Fact. In a discussion of the authorship of one of the Psalms in his *Treasury of David*, Spurgeon lets fall this pearl of wisdom: 'Though our hearts turn to David,' he says, 'facts must be heard.' The whole claim of the critical movement, one might say, lies in that sentence: it is an appeal to hear and judge the facts, the facts of the Bible. 'God,' said the venerable Franz Delitzsch, in the last edition of his commentary on Genesis,[1] 'is the God of truth. The love of truth, submission to the force of truth, the surrender of traditional views which will not stand the test of truth, is a sacred duty, an element of the fear of God.' And in the long run, however painful may be the time of transition, criticism will prove itself the servant of faith. In all our Churches there are multitudes for whom the new study of the Scriptures has

[1] Vol. i, p. 55.

come in time to save them from unbelief; what was before a burden has become instead a stay, and the book which seemed to be fast slipping from their hands has been given back again to them, shining with a new light and radiant with a diviner meaning.

May I be pardoned a word of personal testimony? Like most men in middle life I was brought up in a belief in the verbal inspiration, the literal accuracy, of every part of the Bible. To my own unspeakable relief I have parted with that ancient dogma for ever; I could as soon go back to it as an astronomer to the days before Copernicus, or a naturalist to the days before Darwin. And yet I am here to testify out of a full and glad heart that the Bible was never so much to me, it was never so truly 'the fountain light of all my day, the master light of all my seeing'; I was never so sure that God is in it. This is my faith; with all who in a spirit of reverent candour will join in these short studies I will do my best to share it.

II

THE HISTORICAL TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

LECTURE II

THE HISTORICAL TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE historical trustworthiness of the Old Testament: there are some who will resent even the discussion of such a subject. For a Christian, they will say, this is not an open question; the man who really believes the Bible to be the Word of God has no alternative but to accept as true every statement of fact which it contains; the inspiration of the Old Testament is the all-sufficient guarantee of its historical trustworthiness.

This is a position which, as we know, has been often maintained by wise and good men. It is, nevertheless, wholly untenable. For, if the question be urged, 'But how do you know that inspiration is a guarantee of historical infallibility?' there is simply no answer. No man can tell beforehand what inspiration does,

or does not, include; that is only to be discovered by an examination of the inspired book which is in our hands. 'But surely,' men say—and the argument is used both by the literalist on the one side and by the rationalist on the other—'surely if God give to us a revelation of Himself, He will see to it that it is free from all trace of man's imperfection; He will not suffer the fine gold of divine truth to be mingled with the dross of human error.' To which, again, the answer is that we do not know, that we have no means of knowing, that it argues on our part the most amazing 'shortness of thought' (as Butler would say) to suppose that we can know what, under such circumstances, God would be pleased to do. There is, indeed, only one thing that we can do, and that is to find out what God actually has done. And the moment we give up spinning theories of inspiration out of our own heads, and turn to the Bible itself, we find that so far from there being any evidence that its historians were somehow supernaturally provided with the information which other historians have dili-

gently to search for, all the evidence we possess points the other way. The Koran may boast that its fabulous legends were supernaturally conveyed to Mohammed without the use of documents or tradition,[1] but the writers of the Bible put forth no such claim; and when people talk about 'supernaturally communicated history,' they use language which, if it be not wholly meaningless, is incapable of proof, and for which Scripture itself affords not the slightest justification.[2] We are all familiar with the language of St. Luke's preface (i. 1–4) to his Gospel, in which he makes no other claim for himself or his narrative than that he has laboured diligently to prove himself an accurate historian. And when we turn to the historical books of the Old Testament we find them quoting their 'authorities' just like any ordinary historian. Thus, in the Book of Numbers (xxi. 14) we have a reference to 'the Book of the Wars of the Lord'; Joshua (x. 13)

[1] Robertson Smith's *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 141.

[2] See Denney's *Studies in Theology*, p. 218.

and 2 Samuel (i. 18) both quote 'the Book of Jashar'; 1 Kings refers to 'the Book of the acts of Solomon' (xi. 41), 'the Book of the chronicles of the Kings of Israel' (xiv. 19), and 'the Book of the chronicles of the Kings of Judah' (xiv. 29); and in 2 Chronicles the authorities are still more numerous: thus we have, 'the history of Nathan the prophet,' 'the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite,' 'the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat' (ix. 29), 'the commentary of the prophet Iddo' (xiii. 22), 'the acts of Uzziah,' written by Isaiah the prophet (xxvi. 22), and so on. In one word, inspiration, as Dr. Orr says, does not create the materials of its record, it works with those it has received.[1]

[1] *Problem of the Old Testament*, p. 486. Dr. Orr quotes in this connexion a very suggestive note from Matthew Henry on 1 Chron. viii. 1–32. 'As to the difficulties,' he says, 'that occur in this and the foregoing genealogies we need not perplex ourselves. I presume Ezra took them as he found them *in the Books of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (chap. ix. 1), according as they were given in by the several tribes, each observing what method they thought fit. Hence some *as*cend, others *des*cend; some have *numbers* affixed, others *places*; some have historical remarks intermixed, others have not; some are shorter, others longer; some agree with

Now, facts such as these are a direct incentive and challenge to investigation, so that it is manifestly vain to suppose that we can foreclose all inquiry into the historical accuracy of our Old Testament records simply by an appeal to the doctrine of inspiration. These ancient writings are much more than history; but just in so far as they are history they must submit to be judged by the same tests as we apply without hesitation to the histories of Greece and Rome.

I

And when in this way we set about an examination of the history of Israel, what do we find? Our reasons for asking this question

other records, others differ; some it is likely, were torn, erased, blotted, others more legible. Those of Dan and Reuben were entirely lost. This holy man wrote as he was moved of the Holy Ghost; but there was no necessity for the making up of the defects, no, nor for the rectifying of the mistakes of these genealogies by inspiration. It was sufficient that he copied them out as they came to hand, or so much of them as was requisite to the present purpose, which was the directing of the returned captives to settle as nearly as they could with those of their own family, and in the places of their former residence.'

and our means of answering it are both very different from what they were a generation or two ago. Of the whole of that ancient world, in which Israel was but one nation among many, our only record until quite recently was the Old Testament. The last century, however, has witnessed a veritable romance of the spade. In Assyria, Babylonia, Phoenicia, Egypt, the excavator and the scholar have been busy unearthing and deciphering buried tablets and inscriptions 'which not only afford us the most ample material for testing the chronology of the Old Testament, and defining the exact nature of many of the historical events in it, but which have uncovered to us the civilization and religion of the tribes who were Israel's neighbours and Israel's kinsmen according to the flesh.'[1] Palestine itself, it is surprising to learn, has furnished little or no monumental literature;[2] but from the nations around, from the long-buried and silent civil-

[1] G. A. Smith's *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 57.

[2] See Ottley's *History of the Hebrews*, p. 4; Kent's *History of the Hebrew People* (the United Kingdom), p. 16.

izations of the Nile and Euphrates valleys, a multitude of new witnesses have arisen, and now, as Professor Friedrich Delitzsch, the eloquent Berlin Assyriologist, says, 'the walls that formed the impenetrable background to the scenes of the Old Testament have suddenly fallen, and a keen invigorating air and a flood of light from the Orient pervades and irradiates the hoary book, animating and illuminating it the more as Hebrew antiquity is linked together from beginning to end with Babylonia and Assyria.' [1]

And what is the net result of all this upon the historical records of Israel? How do these ancient writings bear the searching cross-lights which have been thus suddenly turned upon them? I speak entirely without first-hand knowledge, and merely as a reporter of the findings of others; but those who are competent to judge tell us, in effect, that while 'the witness of the monuments' puts further away than ever any claim to historical infallibility—a claim, be it noted, which the writers of the

[1] *Babel and Bible*, p. 3 (Eng. trans.: Open Court Publishing Co.).

Old Testament never once make for themselves—on the other hand, it confirms us in our belief that the Hebrew histories are the work of honest and, in the main, trustworthy writers. Take, for example, this summary of the bearing of the Assyrian annals on the history of the Kings of Judah and Israel: 'The earliest Hebrews named on the Assyrian monuments are Omri and Ahab; from them onward we have, among others, the names of Benhadad, Ahab's Syrian contemporary, of Jehu, Hazael, Pekah, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Pestilences and eclipses are recorded, the tremors of which vibrate through the early prophetical books. We have an account of the invasion of Palestine by Tiglath-Pileser, *when he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Napthali, by the way of the sea across Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;* the overthrow of Samaria by Sargon; Sennacherib's invasion of Syria, his appearances before Jerusalem, the tribute he exacted, and his disappearance northwards.'[1]

[1] *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 65.

Professor Delitzsch's lectures, from which I have already quoted, illustrate in very striking fashion the new light which the excavator is able to cast upon some of the personalities and incidents of the Old Testament. In Isaiah (xx. 1), for example, mention is made of an Assyrian king named Sargon, who sent his marshal against Ashdod; and when, in 1843, the French consul Botta began his excavations on Mesopotamian soil, the first Assyrian palace to be unearthed was that of this same Sargon, the conqueror of Samaria. Again, the Second Book of Kings (xviii. 14) tells how Sennacherib received tribute from Hezekiah in the city of Lachish in southern Palestine. Now, a relief from Sargon's palace in Nineveh shows the great Assyrian king enthroned before his tent in sight of a conquered city, and the accompanying inscription reads: 'Sennacherib, the king of the universe, king of Ashur, seated himself upon the throne and inspected the booty of Lachish.' Again—to take a third and last illustration—in the prophecy of Nahum we read: 'Art thou (Nineveh) better than No-

amon (i.e. Thebes) that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about her? . . . Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains' (iii. 8–10). Until recent times, says Professor Delitzsch, these words were a puzzle; no one knew to what they referred. But the mystery was solved by the discovery at Nineveh of a magnificent ten-sided clay prism which reports that Asurbanipal, pursuing the Egyptian king, reached Thebes, conquered it and carried away its inhabitants, together with immeasurable booty, to Nineveh the city of his dominion.[1]

Facts of this kind must be taken for what they are worth. They are certainly of great interest to the Bible student. At the same time one would not have them minister to that feverish eagerness with which some snatch, as if for their very life, at any and every supposed

[1] *Babel and Bible*, pp. 6, 78. On the subject of this paragraph see especially Driver's essay in *Authority and Archaeology*, edited by D. G. Hogarth.

'confirmation' of the truth of Scripture. The Bible would be in a poor way indeed if it could only be made to stand with the help of these little external props by which fearful hands seek to shore it up. Nevertheless, facts like those of which I have spoken have a very real value in bringing home to the Bible reader a new sense of the reality of Hebrew history, and in assuring him that, at least in its main outlines and general course, that history is as certainly known to us as the history of our own, or any other nation.

This general conclusion is still further confirmed by another consideration to which I may briefly call your attention. It has already been pointed out in the previous lecture that the methods of Oriental historians differ essentially from those in use among ourselves. With us an historical writer collects and masters his authorities, and then, re-telling the story throughout in his own words, produces an entirely new work. This is our way, but it is not the way of the East. An Eastern historian, like the monkish chroniclers of the Middle Ages, boldly incorporated the authorities of

which he made use, with no more change in the language than his purpose rendered necessary.[1] And, as we have seen, there are indubitable evidences of the use of this compilatory method in the historical books of the Old Testament. The method, doubtless, has its drawbacks, but from our immediate point of view it has also great and obvious advantages. In the first place, it brings us, as perhaps no other method of historical writing could have done, into direct contact with the actors and events described, and gives to a comparatively modern book the freshness and colour of a contemporary narrative. This point was admirably brought out in a speech, delivered in his own defence, by the late Robertson Smith, before the Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, in 1880, and I cannot do better than reproduce his words: 'The earliest extant historical and traditional collections for the life of Mohammed,' he said, 'were written some two centuries later than the events they record.

[1] See Kirkpatrick's *Divine Library of the Old Testament*, p. 15; Sanday's *Inspiration*, p. 158; and W. R. Smith's *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 328.

Yet in these writings older books now lost have been so conscientiously copied, and genuine reminiscences of the prophet's contemporaries have been handed down so exactly in the words of the first narrator, that many of Mohammed's sayings and doings stand before us as exactly and vividly as if we had been eye-witnesses of the events. I believe it was in this way that our present historical books [of the Old Testament] came together. Every impartial reader who allows the narrative to produce its own impression on his mind must observe that we have one continuous story from Genesis to the end of 2 Kings (Ruth, of course, occupying a separate place in the Hebrew Canon). The narrative, therefore, in its present form, as it came from the hand of the last editor, is not older than the Exile. But its historical value is vindicated by the observation that the work is really due to a succession of writers acting upon the same method which has secured for us an authentic record of the profane history of the East. The successive writers, one coming after the other, although they might have something to

add, actually quoted in their own words the older historians; and in no other possible way can so accurate and so contemporary a record for remote antiquity be obtained as that gives.' In the second place, this method of writing history means that, not infrequently, instead of one, we have two or more witnesses to the truth of the same biblical story. 'Almost all the important incidents in early Hebrew history,' says Professor McFadyen, 'are attested by three sources—the two prophetic documents (J and E) and the priestly (P). Even if the evidence of the priestly document is weakened by the fact that it is late, it is still a powerful witness to the tenacity of the popular belief, and reinforces the twofold testimony of the older sources.'[1] It is with good reason, therefore, I repeat, that we maintain the substantial accuracy and general trustworthiness of the historical narratives of the Old Testament.

[1] McFadyen's *Old Testament Criticism and the Christian Church*, p. 129.

II

Such, then, in briefest outline, is the general result of the critical inquiry into the character of Hebrew history. Now it is necessary to supplement, and in part to qualify, what has been said, by reference to a few points of detail. And, at the outset, it must be frankly conceded that it is impossible any longer to maintain the equal historical value of all the Old Testament narratives. Some of us may have been in the habit of supposing that one biblical statement is as good as another, for no other reason than that it is a biblical statement, and we may be very reluctant to admit the idea of varying degrees of historical trustworthiness, but until we do, it is as idle to hope for a rational interpretation of Old Testament history, as it is to talk of applying to it ordinary historical tests. Two or three illustrations will suffice to make this plain, and at the same time to furnish the necessary qualifications of the general statement which has already been made.

One striking fact confronts us the moment we look into the Old Testament : the presence in it, namely, of two partly parallel and yet wholly separate historical narratives. There is, first, the story which runs through portions of the Pentateuch and Joshua, which in Judges and the books which follow becomes a continuous narrative, until, at the end of 2 Kings, it closes with the Babylonian Captivity. This is what is generally known as the *prophetical* narrative. Then in Chronicles a second story opens. It also begins with Adam and in part passes over the same ground as the former story ; but it moves more quickly, it deals only with the southern kingdom of Judah, and until the time of David is occupied almost wholly with genealogies ; but whereas the former story ends with the Captivity, this, continuing through the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, relates the return of the exiles to Jerusalem and the re-establishment of the Temple-worship there. This is what is generally known as the *priestly* narrative. Now the fact to be observed concerning this double and partly parallel narrative is that its

two sides do not always agree.[1] We must not exaggerate the differences; as we have already seen, they are not of such a nature as to leave us in any doubt concerning the main outlines of Israel's history; but neither can we ignore them. What, then, shall we do? Clearly this is a case in which we must apply the ordinary tests of historical credibility; in other words, we must inquire into the relative value of our conflicting authorities. Now the prophetical narrative is, as any modern text-book will make plain to us,[2] some two or three centuries older than the priestly. Not only so, but 'the Book of Kings is largely made up of verbal extracts from much older sources, and for many purposes may be treated as having the practical value of a contemporary history.' Obviously, therefore, unless we are prepared to say that the recognized canons of historical study do not apply to the history of Israel it is impossible to claim for the Books of

[1] For a comparison of the two narratives see *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 140; R. F. Horton's *Inspiration and the Bible*, p. 143.

[2] See, for example, Driver's *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, p. 486.

Chronicles the same degree of historical trustworthiness as belongs to the Books of Kings. And, lest any one should imagine that this is the mere fancy of some novelty-seeking higher critic, I may add that it was likewise the deliberate judgement of Martin Luther, four hundred years ago.[1]

Again, as was mentioned in the last lecture, it seems probable that the Books of Daniel and Esther belong rather to the realm of religious romance, or to the borderland of romance and history, than to history proper. Their authors are not so much historians as story tellers; history supplies the raw material, imagination weaves the finished fabric. For the grounds on which this judgement is based I must again be content to refer you to modern biblical text-books. I may mention, however, that so reverent and conservative a scholar as Dr. Sanday frankly declares that in his judgement, the critical view has won the day in regard both to Esther and Daniel. In the case of Esther, he thinks that the interval between the composition of the book

[1] Lindsay's *History of the Reformation*, vol. i, p. 466.

and the events of which it treats must have been considerable, and 'in that interval there was time for a nucleus of tradition to assume the rounded literary shape in which it is presented to us.'[1] The author of Daniel, he says, 'may have had written materials before him—probably he had; but what he sat down to write himself was not history, but a homily addressed to the patriots [during the Maccabaean struggle of the second century B.C.] to strengthen their courage and faith under the trials to which they were exposed.'[2]

Further, even in books that are unquestionably historical in character, we shall find fragments of poetry which must be interpreted as poetry, and not as we interpret the prose narratives in which they are embedded. There is no more familiar and no better illustration of this than in the old puzzle about Joshua bidding the sun and the moon to stand still. The Revised Version has now made it plain to every reader that Joshua's words are a snatch of poetry from 'the Book of Jashar'—a book of ballads in praise of old

[1] *Inspiration*, p. 213. [2] Ib., p. 218.

Hebrew heroes. Once that simple fact is realized the mountain heaps of controversy that have gathered about those few verses become mountain heaps of irrelevance; all talk of 'reconciliation with science' becomes meaningless and absurd. Astronomy has no more to do with these words than with the singing together of the morning stars, or the fighting of the stars in their courses against Sisera.[1]

Another illustration of the varying character of the historical narratives of the Old Testament is furnished by the Book of Judges. Every one will recall the familiar formula within which its striking stories are bound together: 'The children of Israel did that which was evil and served the Baalim. And they provoked the Lord to anger, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies. And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, He raised up a saviour who saved them, and the land had rest so many years.'

[1] On the subject of this paragraph see some excellent remarks in McFadyen's *Old Testament Criticism and the Christian Church*, pp. 254–67.

Now, as Dr. A. B. Davidson says,[1] this regular movement of apostasy, subjugation, penitence, and deliverance is hardly strict history. It is rather the religious philosophy of the history. The truth would seem to be that the book consists of two parts: (1) A number of brief personal histories, and (2) a framework which bound the whole together, and in which the religious judgement of a later age found expression.

It is, however, when we turn to the Book of Genesis that the problem we are considering presents itself in its acutest form. Passing over for the moment the first eleven chapters of the book, which will form the subject of the following lecture, what are we to say of the patriarchal narratives, those old-world stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph, which have delighted the childhood and instructed the manhood of sixty generations of Christian believers? May we still continue to regard them as genuinely historical records? The difficulty is this—and it is no use shutting our eyes to it; difficulties cannot be got rid of

[1] *Expositor*, third series, vol. v, p. 48.

in that way—that even if we admit the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch—a gigantic and wholly impossible concession — there still remains between Abraham and Moses a gulf of more than a thousand years. In other words, there intervenes between the times of the patriarchs and our earliest records concerning them a period longer than that which separates us from the Norman conquest, and more than twice as long as that which separates us from Columbus. In face of a fact like this, for which we are in no way responsible, but which it would be dishonest to ignore, we have no alternative but to ask what degree of historical trustworthiness belongs to these narratives.

Nor are we left wholly without materials with which to bridge this gulf of a thousand years. There is, first of all, the fact to which reference has already been made, that the stories of the patriarchal period do not hang by a single thread. We have, as Dr. Driver points out, two narratives of this period, one written, in all probability, in Judah, the other in the northern kingdom; 'and these, though

they exhibit discrepancies in detail, still on the whole agree; . . . in other words, they show that on the whole the traditions current in the north and south kingdoms agreed with one another. They thus bear witness to the existence in ancient Israel of a "firm nucleus of consistent tradition."'[1] Further, it must not be forgotten that to the Oriental memory —'comprehensive and tenacious beyond conception'—many things were possible which to us to-day, with our habitual reliance on other means, seem wholly incredible. It is to this fact, it is said, that we owe the preservation of so much Arabic poetry. In those far-off days, 'the publishing medium was found in a class of persons called Rawis or Reciters. These wandered about the country, and recited to listening crowds around the evening-fires of the tribes, when the darkness had fallen, and the last tinkle of the bells of the flocks had been heard, the poet's stirring words of love and war. One of the most noted Rawis, Hammad by name, is said to have been able to recite 3,000 long

[1] *Genesis* (Westminster Commentaries), p. xliv.

poems, all of the time before Mohammed.'[1] It may be fairly claimed, too, that the patriarchal narratives are themselves a witness to their own truthfulness. When we remember the age of the world to which they belong, when we contrast them with other stories of the legendary heroes of antiquity, it is impossible not to be impressed with the sobriety, the freedom from fantastic extravagances, the air of reality, and, above all, the moral and spiritual beauty, which characterize the stories of the Book of Genesis.

Nevertheless, when all has been said, the thousand years of which I have spoken still remain a difficulty which the present state of our knowledge does not allow us to surmount. 'But,' some one will ask, 'could not God Himself have bridged the gulf, and have made known to the sacred writers the things that had happened in the past history of their race?' This is a question which I must respectfully decline to discuss: abstract arguments concerning what God can or cannot

[1] A. B. Davidson's *Biblical and Literary Essays*, p. 268.

do in this matter do not help us forward a single inch. We have to deal with plain facts, and the facts are these: that there is not the smallest vestige of evidence that God did aid the biblical writers in the way suggested; that none of them anywhere claims to have received such aid; and that all the evidence we possess would lead us to suppose that in the collection of the materials of their stories they followed the usual methods of ordinary historians. Unproved and unprovable assumptions of this kind, therefore, can do nothing to provide an escape from a difficulty which the facts of the Bible itself have created for us; and we have no alternative but to admit, however reluctantly, that concerning the patriarchal period we do not and cannot possess the same kind of certainty as is afforded by the ampler evidence of the age of the prophets and the later years of Israel's history.

To many minds this is naturally a most unwelcome conclusion, and it is not surprising that attempts are often made to parry it by an appeal to the witness of archaeology. One

is loth indeed to speak a word in discouragement of those who cling to the belief that Abraham and Joseph are as surely known to us as Isaiah and St. Paul; but the truth, however unwelcome, must be faced, and the truth, so far at least as our present knowledge goes, seems to be that archaeology turns a deaf ear to our appeal to certify the reality of the heroes of the Book of Genesis. Here, again, I can but report the findings of others. I will quote the words of two distinguished Christian scholars, whose names you will often hear in these lectures, and whose writings are equally conspicuous for their ripe scholarship and for their reverent handling of the Word of God. 'No contemporary monumental corroboration of any of the events mentioned in Genesis,' says Dr. Driver, 'has at present been discovered.' With one doubtful exception, 'the *first* event connected with Israel or its ancestors which the inscriptions mention or attest is Shishak's invasion of Judah in the reign of Rehoboam, and the *first* Israelites whom they specify by name are Omri and his son Ahab. Upon the history and civilization of Babylonia,

Egypt, and to a certain extent of other countries, including Palestine, in the centuries before Moses, the monuments have indeed shed an abundant and most welcome light; but nothing has hitherto been discovered sufficiently specific to establish, either indirectly or inferentially, the historicity of the patriarchs themselves. Thus contemporary inscriptions, recently discovered, have shown that there were Amorite settlers in Babylonia, in, or shortly after, the age of Hammurabi (i.e. about 2300 B.C.), and that persons bearing Semitic names identical, or nearly so, with those of some of the patriarchs were resident there in the same age: but these facts, interesting as they are in themselves, are obviously no corroboration of the statements that the *particular* person called Abraham lived in Ur and migrated thence to Haran and afterwards to Canaan, as narrated in Genesis xi. 29–31.'[1] Professor George Adam Smith reaches the same conclusion: 'While,' he says, 'archaeology has richly illustrated the possibility of the main outlines

[1] *Genesis*, p. xlviii. Cf. *Authority and Archaeology*, p. 149.

of the Book of Genesis from Abraham to Joseph, it has not one whit of proof to offer for the personal existence or characters of the patriarchs themselves. Where formerly the figures of the "Father of the Faithful" and his caravans moved solemnly in high outline through an almost empty world, we see (by the aid of the monuments) embassies, armies and long lines of traders crossing, by paths still used, the narrow bridge which Palestine forms between the two great centres of early civilization; the constant drift of desert tribes upon the fertile land, and within the latter the frequent villages and their busy fields, the mountain-keeps with their Egyptian garrisons, and the cities on their mounds walled with broad bulwarks of brick and stone. But amidst all that crowded life we peer in vain for any trace of the fathers of the Hebrews; we listen in vain for any mention of their names. This is the whole change archaeology has wrought: it has given us a background and an atmosphere for the stories of Genesis; it is unable to recall or certify their heroes.'[1]

[1] *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 101. 'Of course,' as Dr. Driver adds, 'it is

III

Such, then, are some of the facts which call for frank recognition on the part of the student who is seeking to form a true estimate of the

impossible to forecast the future. The century which is now closing [written in 1899] has seen many archaeological surprises; and the century which is approaching will, in all probability, see more. Many mounds in Babylonia and Assyria are still unexplored; there are others elsewhere in the East; there are many even in Palestine itself. The hopes of the future rest on systematic excavation. . . . What the bearing of the results thus obtained upon present opinions may be cannot of course be foreseen: to the open-minded lover of truth, whether they correct or confirm them, they will be equally welcome' (*Authority and Archaeology*, p. 151).

It may be further pointed out that though the facts referred to above necessarily leave us in doubt as to the precise degree of historical trustworthiness belonging to the patriarchal narratives, they by no means warrant us in dismissing the patriarchs themselves to the realm of the unreal. Professor Kirkpatrick, of Cambridge, states the case with his usual sobriety of judgement in a recent sermon: 'It may well be the case that the story of Abraham, like the legends of other primitive peoples, only took shape gradually, and in many points represents the conceptions of a later age. But the event attests the fundamental fact of Jehovah's choice of Abraham, and His covenant with him; and if the details of the story are in large measure due to national imagination, they serve rightly to impress the truth of the fundamental fact upon our minds' (*Cam-*

historical trustworthiness of our Old Testament Scriptures. And once more, be it observed, it is not criticism, it is the Bible itself that is responsible for them. To blame the critic for pointing out the literary character of the Book of Daniel, or the discrepancies between Kings and Chronicles, or the gulf that divides the times of Abraham from their earliest written record, is like blaming the astronomer for calling our attention to the spots on the sun. He is not responsible for what he finds in the Bible; he is responsible for observing it, and giving what explanation he can of it. Inasmuch, however, as the whole aim of these lectures is to show that the frankest recognition of the facts still leaves us with a book unimpaired in its spiritual value and divine authority, let me go on to point out, in conclusion, that the things of which I have spoken, though they may modify our conception of the historical character of the Old Testament, need cause no uneasiness, and still less alarm, to any Christian mind.

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bridge Review, Feb. 4, 1909). See also Bishop H. E. Ryle's article on Abraham in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*.

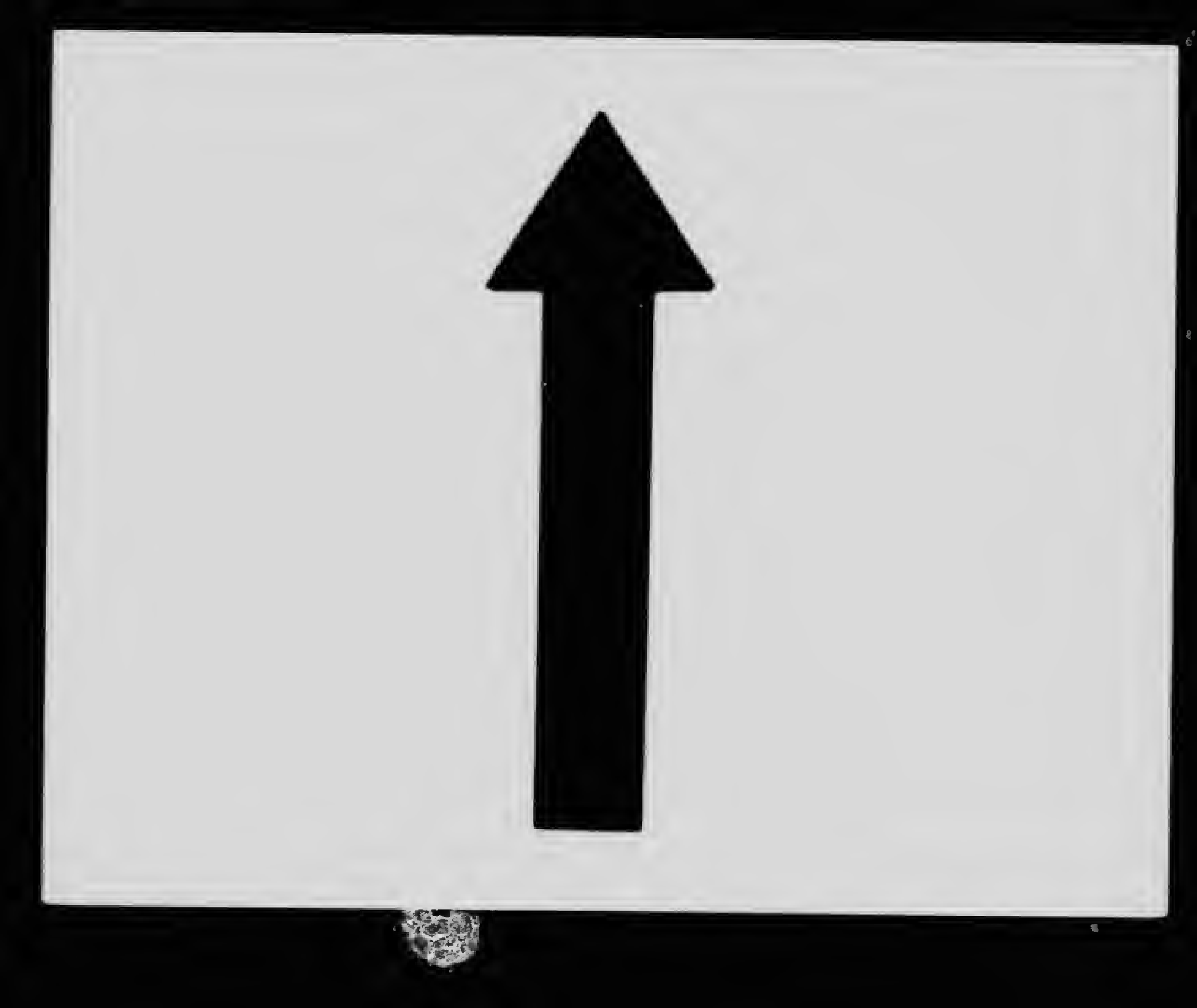
Are we not often in danger of attaching a wholly fictitious value to certainty touching every matter which lies within the wide field of biblical history? It is necessary to distinguish. Christianity is, without doubt, an historical religion; in other words, the great Christian ideas and emotions have their roots in certain great historical events; destroy the credibility of these, and you destroy the flowers and fruits which are nourished by them. But this does not mean that everything in the gospel history, and still less everything in the history of the Jews, is of equal value, or stands in the same vital relation to Christian life and faith. Suppose, for example, intellectual honesty compels us to admit that it is impossible to feel the same assurance concerning the details of the life and times of Abraham as our fathers enjoyed, what vital interest of faith is thereby in the smallest degree imperilled? The position is this: God has so made us that we cannot intelligently believe any statement of historical fact, in the absence of adequate evidence. In all matters of this kind we can only be as sure as the evidence

allows us to be. To believe in the absence of evidence is a sign not of faith, but of credulity. For all the things that really matter we may boldly claim that the evidence is sufficient; and if concerning these early periods of biblical history certainty is not attainable, we can only conclude that God does not count such certainty among the things essential to faith. Of this, at least, we may be sure—that no man is one whit the worse in God's sight for refusing to believe in the absence of evidence.

'But,' it is urged, 'if we cannot be certain here, how can we be certain anywhere? If the ground gives under our feet in Genesis, may not the same thing happen in the Gospels? If we begin by doubting Abraham, may we not end by doubting Jesus?' This is a form of questioning that one hears so often that one cannot but believe it represents a real difficulty. Yet the answer is surely very simple. In passing let me say that it is very unfortunate that objections to the results of historical inquiry should be thrown into this form. The inquirer very naturally resents what looks like

an attempt to warn him off his own province by an appeal to the fear of possible consequences. 'Historical questions,' it has been truly said, 'must be settled by the study of history, and not by appeals to fear.'[1] In this case, however, the fear turns out to be wholly groundless. 'If'—so the question runs—'if we cannot be sure of Abraham, how can we be sure of Christ?' But this is not the way in which we argue when we are dealing with the non-biblical history. In the early dawn of every nation, not of the Jews only, there are dim figures whose outlines we can but faintly descry through the thickening mists of the past; but does our uncertainty concerning these make us any less certain concerning the men who stand out plain and clear in the broad daylight of history? Because King Arthur is a shadowy figure, do we doubt the reality of Queen Elizabeth? Because we cannot be sure of Romulus and Remus, do we shake our heads at the name of Julius Caesar? Why, then, should we allow any uncertainty

[1] W. G. Jordan's *Biblical Criticism and Modern Thought*, p. 62.



about Abraham and Joseph to affect the certainty which is justly ours in regard to the essential facts of the gospel story? Professor Huxley truly says there is no such thing known as an historical work which is throughout exactly true; 'the most acute and learned of historians cannot remedy the imperfections of his sources of information; nor can the most impartial wholly escape the influence of the "personal equation" generated by his temperament and his education.'[1] And yet, with a wrong-headedness that is simply bewildering, the moment the professor comes to deal with the history of the Old Testament, he insists that unless it be in every part absolutely without flaw, the whole fabric of Christian belief comes to the ground. Surely, as Paley says, it is an unwarrantable rule to lay down concerning the biblical history what was never laid down concerning any other, that either every part of it must be true, or the whole false.[2] If we hesitate to accept as historical many of the details of the patriarchal narra-

[1] *Science and Hebrew Tradition*, p. 205.
[2] *Evidences*, Part III, ch. iii.

tives, we do so because, as we have seen, our earliest written records are more than a thousand years later than the events they describe. But when we come, for example, to the resurrection of our Lord, the conditions are entirely changed; here we have first-hand contemporary evidence sufficient to satisfy any reasonable man. The very same tests of historical trustworthiness that cause us to hesitate in the case of Genesis inspire us with confidence when we turn to the Gospels. Let us abandon our wholly baseless idea of the exact and equal historical truth of every part of Scripture, and mix with our reading of the Bible a little common sense, and we shall see that to argue that since we cannot be sure of Abraham, we cannot be sure of Christ, is as truly a sign of a foolish and unthinking mind as it would be to allow our doubts about King Arthur to shake our belief in Queen Elizabeth.

There is one further fact to be kept in mind that we may do justice to these old Hebrew histories. The distinction which we are accustomed to draw between the historical

and the prophetical books of the Old Testament, in the Hebrew Bible does not exist at all; both are classed with 'the Prophets,' the one (i.e. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) being known as 'the Former Prophets,' the other as 'the Latter Prophets.' So that to the Hebrews themselves, those of their sacred writers whom we name historical were rather prophets, interpreters of the divine will as that will had expressed itself in their nation's past. Have we not in this fact the key to the interpretation of their writings? Their supreme interest is not history, as we understand it to-day, but religion. Their supreme concern is not man and his doings, but God and His providence. They are not mere recorders, they are preachers; and what they give us is 'not so much history as homily, with a profusion of historical illustration';[1] their purpose is 'not so much to tell us what happened, as to emphasize for us the lesson of what happened.'[2] And the result is what

[1] W. H. Bennett in *Faith and Criticism*, p. 26.

[2] R. F. Horton's *Inspiration and the Bible*, p. 173. 'So far,' says Dr. Orr, 'we must agree with the

might have been anticipated. The biblical writers are often careless about details; they have none of that passion for accuracy, that sense of the value of fact as fact, which are so conspicuous in our great modern historians. But if, through the adoption of the prophetic standpoint and method, there is a loss to history, how great is the gain to religion! In details of chronology our biblical records may have sometimes to yield the palm to the Assyrian annals; but who would purchase a whole cityful of Assyrian or Babylonian tablets at the price of a single page out of

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critics when they remind us that t[illegible]istory in the Bible is *religious* history—that is, not bare narratives of outward occurrences, as an ancient chronicler, or a modern newspaper reporter, might set them down, but history written from a religious standpoint, for purposes of edification, and reflecting in its story the impression on the mind of the beholder and on the writer, as well as the objective fact. As respects the early periods . . . it is evident of itself, that what we have to do with is, for the most part, not contemporary narrative, but history in the form of *carefully preserved tradition* . . . having the rounded, dramatic character which narratives naturally assume as the result of repeated telling, recorded in the form in which they finally reached the literary narrator' (*Problem of the Old Testament*, p. 87).

the story of Joseph? 'The great pre-eminence of the Bible history is that in it God speaks.'[1] Its narratives may sometimes disappoint us as history; they satisfy us as religion. The seeker after dates and facts and figures may often be sent empty away; but the hungry for God is filled with good things. And it is because in and through these ancient writings the soul can still find God and be found of Him, that we believe them to be the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.

[1] Robertson Smith's *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 8.

III

THE EARLY NARRATIVES OF GENESIS

LECTURE III

THE EARLY NARRATIVES OF GENESIS

To those who have been brought up in the traditional interpretation of Scripture, and who have at the same time some acquaintance with the results of modern science, there is probably no part of the Bible which presents so many seemingly insuperable difficulties as the early chapters of the Book of Genesis. It is, indeed, hardly less than cruel to allow young men and women to grow up in the belief that these chapters are literal history, and afterwards to send them to a University. There are, doubtless, many who manage, with more or less of stress and storm, happily to readjust the old faith to the new; others, again, are content to let old and new lie together in their minds, side by side, but unrelated; while yet others are never troubled because they never think. But besides these there are

multitudes who have felt themselves driven silently and sadly to surrender the faith of their fathers, because that faith has always been presented to them bound up with doctrines concerning man and the universe which they now know to be false. If, therefore, the Church is to have any gospel for such as these; if she is to keep the sons she has, and recover those she has lost, she must learn to re-state her faith in terms that will not clash with that wider knowledge into which the Author of all truth is to-day leading men.

Nor can it be denied that, at least so far as our present subject is concerned, the materials for such a re-statement lie ready to our hand. In theological colleges throughout Christendom, and in Bible handbooks without number, accredited Christian scholars are every day saying concerning these early narratives of Genesis things which, if they were but more widely known, would make impossible some at least of the mournful tragedies of unbelief. What is needed is that truths which are the commonplaces of the professor's desk, and of the books which every minister keeps at his

elbow, should be patiently and judiciously expounded to the youth of our Sunday schools and of our Churches.

I am not blind to the difficulties and, occasionally, even the perils by which such a task is beset. It has somehow to be made plain that these chapters are not science, and are not history, and that consequently the student must not be surprised, nay, he must expect, to find in them many things with which neither science nor history can be made to agree. But, unfortunately, there are many in all our Churches who still confuse the inspiration and divine authority of Scripture with scientific and historical accuracy; and it seems impossible to speak as truth and candour demand we should speak without causing anxiety and pain to them. Amid this conflict of interests, what is the Christian teacher to do? His position is difficult and sometimes critical, and calls at all times for the utmost tact and good sense. The man who under such circumstances does not show at every step his patient regard for the prejudices of the weak and the uninstructed, who simply

drives a ruthless share through every obstacle, only proves his utter unfitness for his sacred work. On the other hand, the policy of reserve may easily be pushed too far. The prejudices of the traditionalist, while they are to be respected, may not be the teacher's sole concern; he is debtor to the wise as well as to the unwise;[1] he must strive by all means to make his faith reasonable to reasonable minds; and he may be sometimes driven to ask whether his own lack of candour is not itself in some degree responsible for the scepticism over which he mourns.[2]

This is the point of view from which this lecture is written: my aim is to meet, as far as I may be able, the case of those upon whose faith these early chapters of Genesis lay a burden that is no longer to be borne. But before I pass on let me seek in one word to allay any groundless fears which may be ex-

[1] See Dean Church's great sermon on 'The Two-fold Debt of the Clergy' in his *Human Life and its Conditions*.

[2] See a paper by Dr. Marcus Dods, 'How far is the Church responsible for Present Scepticism?' in the *Expositor*, Third Series, vol. viii, p. 297.

cited in others. As I pointed out in my last lecture, we must avoid attaching wholly unreal values to any particular interpretation of these ancient narratives. That a man may believe that the world was created some six thousand years ago, that some of the patriarchs lived to be nearly a thousand years of age, that all the differences in human speech may be traced back to the building of the Tower of Babel—that a man may believe all these things and yet be a good Christian, no one for a moment doubts. Why should we doubt his loyalty to Christ though he believe no of them? A precise theory of the origin of the universe and of man is surely no essential part of the Christian faith. Why, then, should we listen with doubting ears when one assures us, in all sincerity, that though he can no longer interpret the Book of Genesis after the fashion of his fathers, the faith of the gospel is still as precious to him as it was to them?

I

And now let us turn to the narratives before us and examine them somewhat in detail.

What is their true character? As I have said already, they are not history and they are not science; 'they contain no account'—such is the sober summary of Dr. Driver's reverent pen—'of the *real* beginnings either of the earth itself, or of man and human civilization upon it.'[1] This is by no means to say that these chapters are worthless, or are out of place in our sacred Scriptures. Of their incomparable religious worth I shall have something to say presently. But in view of the mistaken assumptions with which friends and foes alike have so often approached them, a few plain negatives have become a necessary preliminary to their right interpretation.

Now if we could somehow manage to lay aside our theological prepossessions, if we could forget that the first eleven chapters of Genesis are a part of the Bible, and could allow them to make their own natural impression upon us, it is difficult to believe that they would not at once and irresistibly suggest in what manner they are to be interpreted. If, for example, we read in any other book

[1] *Genesis*, p. xlii.

that a serpent talked with a woman in a garden, that in that same garden God Himself walked in the cool of the day, that the sons of God took unto them wives of the daughters of men, and that as a result the earth was peopled with a race of giants—if, I say, we read things like these in any other book, we should never dream of taking them as the sober record of actual facts, we should say at once, 'This is not history; this is myth, legend, allegory.' It is interesting to observe the impression produced by these early biblical narratives on the mind of one who was both a great historian and a good churchman. 'I hold,' writes Professor Freeman—'and I see nothing in our formularies to hinder me from holding—that a great part of the early Hebrew history, as of all other history, is simply legendary. I never read any German books on those matters at all, but came to the conclusion simply from the analogies supplied by my own historical studies."[1] And such, it seems to me, is the impression which these narratives naturally produce on an unbiassed

[1] *Life and Letters*, vol. i, p. 345.

mind. And when, further, we examine them in the light of modern knowledge, we see at once how impossible it is to treat them as real sources of science or history. This is what, very briefly, we must now seek to do.

(1) We begin with the story of the Creation. We are all more or less familiar with the attempts—the well-meant but wholly mistaken and fruitless attempts—which from time to time have been made to demonstrate the identity of the order of the Creation as it is given in the Book of Genesis with that revealed by modern science. And this at least will be readily conceded even by those who regard all the efforts of the 'reconciler' with the most hardened scepticism, viz. that of all the cosmogonies which have come down to us from the ancient world, that of the Bible approaches nearest to the conclusions of science. When, however, not content with this, we go on to claim that the secrets which the mind of man is slowly spelling out from the rocks and the stars were revealed to the writers of Genesis centuries ago, science simply

laughs us to scorn. There is no need to repeat the facts which have been so often adduced to illustrate the incompatibility of the biblical and scientific accounts of the Creation. Christian scholars on all sides now frankly recognize that the efforts of the 'reconcilers' were based on a fundamental misconception, and that the apparent harmonies which they succeeded in establishing were only obtained by adopting a system of exegesis which, if it were applied throughout, would end in making the Bible mean anything the individual interpreter wished it to mean.

Here, too, the narrative itself furnishes the best clue to its interpretation. It has been pointed out that the six days of the creation record fall into two parallel sets of three, whose members present a remarkable correspondence. 'The first set presents us with three vast empty tenements or habitations, and the second set furnishes them with occupants. The first day gives us the sphere of light; the fourth day tenants it with sun, moon and stars. The second day presents the realm of air and water; the fifth day

supplies the inhabitants—birds and fishes. The third day produces the habitable dry land; and the sixth day stocks it with the animals and man.'[1] Now it is inconceivable that a literary symmetry so complete and beautiful should be merely accidental; it is obviously a part of the author's design. Is it not equally inconceivable that a narrative moulded on such a plan should present that perfect agreement with the discoveries of modern science that has so often been claimed for it? Let us lay aside all *a priori* theories of what the contents of the Bible account of the Creation ought to be, let us learn what they actually are, and we shall need no further persuasion to follow no more in the footsteps of the 'reconcilers.'

(2) Closely associated with the creation narratives of Genesis is the question of the antiquity of man. As every Bible student is aware, our chronological data for the beginnings of Old Testament history are extremely

[1] Professor W. G. Elmslie, in an article on the first chapter of Genesis, reprinted in the memorial volume bearing his name.

uncertain; the figures given in our Bible agree neither with those of the Samaritan Pentateuch nor with those of the Septuagint. But even if we take the figures most favourable for our purpose, it is impossible to push back the creation of man more than about seven thousand years from the present time. Yet this is a limit which science to-day with all her many voices unhesitatingly rejects. Assyriologists tell us that long before B.C. 4000 the beginnings of civilization are to be found in Babylonia. In the galleries of the British Museum there are many objects and inscriptions marked with a date 4500 B.C. Egyptian exploration tells the same story. And when we listen to the students of language, of race, and above all, of man himself, we are assured with even greater emphasis that the date of man's first appearance on the earth must be pushed back to a time distant from ours not by thousands but by tens of thousands of years. Now of all these things it is needless to say that the Bible story knows nothing; it not only gives no account of them, it leaves no room for them. We have, therefore, no

alternative but to conclude with Dr. Driver 'that the vicissitudes through which the human race passed have been far more diversified, and must have occupied a far longer period to accomplish, than is allowed for by the biblical narrative.'[1]

(3) What is to be said of the remarkable longevity which these early narratives attribute to the patriarchs? Did Methuselah really live to be nine hundred and sixty-nine? Had Noah a son born to him when he was five hundred years old? It is, to say the least, extremely difficult to take such statements seriously. In the case of Methuselah, for example, it is as if we should be asked to believe that a man who was already over a hundred years old when William the Conqueror landed in Great Britain could be alive to-day. If it be urged that differences in the structure of the human body, or in the conditions of human life, may once have made possible what is

[1] *Genesis*, p. xxxi. The above paragraph is little more than a summary of Dr. Driver's careful discussion. Dr. G. A. Smith reaches a similar conclusion, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 90.

now impossible, the answer is, of course, that neither physiology, nor any other record of man's life in the centuries before Abraham which we now possess, afford us any warrant for supposing that such differences ever existed. Various futile efforts have been made to smooth away the difficulties of the biblical record. It has been suggested, for example, that a year does not mean a year but some shorter period of time, or that the names of the patriarchs represent tribes rather than individuals. But this is not exposition, it is imposition; be generous enough in the application of such a method of interpretation, and in the end, as I said before, the Bible can be made to mean anything that one wishes it to mean. How, then, is the difficulty to be met? It is to be met by once more admitting frankly that these early chapters of Genesis contain not history but tradition, and that Hebrew tradition, while in some respects—as we shall see presently—it far outsoared its contemporaries, in other matters—the length of the lives of prehistoric man being one of these—shared the beliefs which were common

to the traditions of many races of the ancient world.[1]

(4) There remain for consideration, in order that we may complete our hasty survey, the stories of the Fall, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel. On the story of the Fall it is unnecessary to dwell, because even the most thorough-paced literalist hesitates to treat its picturesque details as sober prose. I only refer to this subject at all because it has seemed to some that, unless we can establish the historical reality of Adam and Eve and their doings in the garden, we have lost one of the chief corner-stones of Christian doctrine. If the story of the Fall is only a type or an allegory, says Professor Huxley, 'what

[1] See Ryle's *Early Narratives of Genesis*, p. 85. 'It is worth while observing,' adds Bishop Ryle, 'that just as the Israelite and the Greek narratives pass from the stage of pre-historic tradition to that of national memoirs, so the span of life is reduced from that of fabulous length to that of normal duration. The ante-diluvian Patriarchs are credited with lives from 700 to 969 years; the post-diluvians lived from 200 to 600 years; in the days of the Israelite monarchy the length of life (Ps. xc. 10) did not differ from that which we now enjoy.'

becomes of the foundation of Pauline theology?'[1] If the Professor is not writing with his tongue in his cheek, if he really means us to take him seriously, this is a truly astonishing question. Our need of redemption does not depend upon what Adam was, but upon what man is, and, so far as we have any knowledge of him, always has been. If we admit, as probably we must, that of the origin of sin we know nothing, that does not mean that we are any less certain of the fact which the New Testament everywhere assumes and asserts, that all men are sinners in need of the mercy of God. And it is this universal need, and not (as Professor Huxley would have us suppose) any particular reading —not even the Apostle's own reading—of the narrative of Genesis which is the foundation fact of the Pauline theology.[2]

[1] *Science and Hebrew Tradition*, p. 236.

[2] See an admirable note on the subject of this paragraph in Sanday and Headlam's *Romans* (International Critical Commentary), p. 146. I quote the closing words: 'The need for an Incarnation and the need for an Atonement are not dependent upon any particular presentation, which may be liable to correction with increasing knowledge, of the origin of sin. They rest,

(5) Into the almost interminable discussions which have gathered about the story of the Flood, I have no time now to enter. Suffice it to say that this also belongs to the world of Hebrew legend rather than of history. That some terrible local cataclysm which once overtook the original seat of the Semitic race lies behind our Old Testament story is probably true; but the narrative as it stands is plainly unhistorical. Probably no intelligent person now believes in a universal deluge which submerged the tops of the highest mountains over the whole earth. But even the substitution of a partial for a universal flood does not carry us far along the road to credibility. Egypt, we

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not on any theory or on anything which can be clothed in the forms of theory, but on the great outstanding facts of the actual sin of mankind and its ravages. We take these facts as we see them, and to us they constitute an abundant explanation of all that God has done to counteract them. How they are in their turn to be explained may well form a legitimate subject for curiosity, but the historical side of it at least has but a very slight bearing on the interpretation of the New Testament.' See also Dale's *Christian Doctrine*, pp. 215, 325; Denney's *Studies in Theology*, p. 78; and Ottley's *Aspects of the Old Testament*, p. 59.

know—to say nothing of other countries—was the seat of civilized life long before the time of Noah. But a flood which spread from Babylonia to Egypt presents practically the same physical impossibilities as are presented by the supposition of a universal deluge. If, on the other hand, Egypt was not overtaken by the disaster, what becomes of the plain statement of the biblical writers that all mankind, save Noah and his family, were swept for their wickedness from off the face of the earth?

(6) With regard to the story of the Tower of Babel, I shall content myself with repeating the explanation of Bishop Ryle. It was natural, he says, that at a very early date men should begin to speculate concerning the origin of the great diversity of language. 'The familiar story of the Tower of Babel supplied to such primitive questionings an answer suited to the comprehension of a primitive time. . . . Just as the Greek fable told of the giants who strove to scale the heights of Olympus, so the Semitic legend told of the impious act by which [illegible] of

men sought to raise themselves to the dwelling-place of God, and erect an enduring symbol of human unity to be seen from every side.' But, obviously it is vain to seek at such a source for any real knowledge of the origin of the different languages of mankind. Indeed, so far is it from being true that at the time of the 'confusion of tongues' 'the whole earth was of one language and of one speech,' we possess, says Dr. Driver, inscriptions dating from periods much earlier written in *three* distinct languages. Once again, therefore, we conclude that the early narratives of Genesis are not science and are not history.[1]

II

Thus far, it will be observed, our results have been mainly negative. It now remains for us to ask: if these things are so, what is the true character of these Bible stories, what is their worth to us, and, above all, why have

[1] On the subject of this and the preceding paragraphs the reader is referred to the volumes by Ryle and Driver which have already been named, and to the relevant articles in Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*.

they a place in our sacred scriptures? But before seeking for an answer to these questions, let me call your attention to two facts which may tend to relieve the apprehension with which some, perhaps, have listened to the results just briefly set forth.

In the first place, it should be distinctly understood that these statements are in no sense of the nature of concessions extorted by the violence of unbelief from the reluctant hands of faith. They are believing men who say these things. With the help of that science of literary and historical criticism which is one of God's best gifts to the intellectual life of our generation, they have examined anew this ancient Hebrew literature, and now 'This,' they say, 'is what the Bible really means'; but this is not concession, it is interpretation. Moreover, it is well known to every one who is in touch with the best religious literature of our times that conclusions such as those which I have outlined above are accepted, not only by 'higher critics,' but by men whose praise is in all the Churches for their exposition and defence of

the Christian gospel. It would be easy to multiply illustrations; I content myself with two. The late Dr. Dale of Birmingham was, perhaps, the foremost of orthodox evangelical English theologians during the last century, and this is how, in his *Christian Doctrine*, he speaks of the stories in the early part of the Book of Genesis: they are not ordinary myths, he says, 'for an ordinary myth is the growth of the popular imagination uncontrolled by divine revelation. But,' he goes on, 'these stories have a mythical form. They may have been constructed from popular myths still more ancient than themselves. They belong to the same class of literature. They have to be interpreted in the same way.'[1] From Dr. Dale I turn to Dr. Denney of Glasgow. I meet, by the way, with a good many ministers who find Dr. Denney's theology too orthodox for them; for myself, I confess I find it almost wholly satisfying. Well, here is Dr. Denney's judgement on the matter before us: 'No one,' he says, 'who knows what science or history is, can imagine that either science

[1] P. 323. (One sentence has been transposed.)

or history is to be found in the first three chapters of Genesis. . . . The plain truth, and we have no reason to hide it, is that we do not know the beginnings of man's life, of his history, of his sin; we do not know them historically, on historical evidence, and we should be content to let them remain in the dark till science throws what light she can upon them.' [1]

Nor must it be supposed—and this is the second reassuring fact to which I invite your attention—that our uncertainty about the early biblical narratives in any way affects the trustworthiness of the genuinely historical portions of the Old Testament. The truth is, as Dr. Denney points out, there is a stage through which the human mind passes in all races, a stage at which, long before it is capable of science or history, man both asks and answers questions to which only science or history can give the true answer. That stage we call the mythological; we know that other races pass through it; why should it surprise us to find the Hebrews sharing in this respect

[1] *Studies in Theology*, pp. 78–9.

the common intellectual lot of mankind? 'But,' cries some timorous soul, 'if some part of my Bible is mythical, how do I know that any of it is historical?' To which, once more, the simple answer is, we must use our common sense. We must do as we do, for example, when we are reading English history. Mr. J. R. Green, in his *Short History of the English People*, tells us that few of the many stories concerning the good King Alfred 'are more than mere legends.' Now when we come upon a saying like that, do we immediately give ourselves up to universal scepticism? Do we argue that, unless we can be sure of Alfred and his cakes, we cannot be sure of anything, not even the Spanish Armada, or the battle of Waterloo? Of course we do not; we know that there are myths and we know that there is history, and we refuse to allow the certainties of history, which rest upon their own proper evidence, to be in any wise affected by the uncertainties of mythology. And the same common-sense method of judgement which we apply to the history of England we must apply also to the history of Israel.

III

Now let us return to take up the questions which, a few minutes ago, I stated but left unanswered: what is the true character of these early Bible stories, what is their worth to us, and, above all, why have they a place in our sacred scriptures?

I said just now that there is a stage at which, long before he is capable of science or history, man begins to ask himself questions concerning the origin of the world, and life, and human society. It was so with the Hebrews; these chapters reveal to us the working of the Hebrew mind in the presence of its own early questionings; they embody in popular form the traditions of their race concerning the beginning of all things. Further, it is now a well-recognized fact that these traditions were not the peculiar possessions of the Hebrew people, but were more or less common to the whole family of the Semitic nations to which Israel belonged. Recent discoveries have proved that the Babylonians also had their stories of the

Creation, the Fall, and the Flood, stories so closely resembling in many details the narratives of Genesis, that it is impossible to believe that they can be independent of each other. There is no time now to illustrate these striking parallels—they may be studied in any good commentary—but the conclusion to which they point is irresistible, and it cannot be better stated than in the words of Dr. A. B. Davidson: 'The creation and the flood narratives,' he says, 'are not the inventions or imaginations of Hebrew writers; neither are they what might be called immediate revelations to the minds of the writers. They are reproductions of traditions and modes of thought common to a large division of the human race. They are part of the heritage of thought which Israel brought with it from its cradle in the East.'[1]

[1] *Biblical and Literary Essays.* In Hastings' *Bible Dictionary* (vol. i, p. 503) will be found a diagram illustrating the ordinary conception of an ancient Semite respecting the universe in which he lived. It is a striking fact that the writer who prepared this diagram (Prof. Owen C. Whitehouse) from a study of numerous Old Testament passages, afterwards discovered that a German scholar had already published another diagram almost identical in character, descriptive of the universe

Such, stated in briefest and most summary fashion, seems to be the nature and origin of these ancient narratives. But, as you will see, our most urgent question still remains unanswered. If this is all there is to be said for these early chapters of the Bible, why are they there at all? 'Why,' some one may bluntly ask, 'should we any longer load our Bible with this antiquarian lumber? Why not throw it over without more ado, and let the book begin with chapter twelve and the call of Abraham?' But most emphatically, this is not all there is to be said for these early narratives. If it were, we may be quite sure they would not be in our Bible to trouble us to-day; the common sense of mankind would have made short work of them centuries ago. It is one of the golden rules of all criticism, that whatever has been long respected is probably respectable; and the very fact that these chapters still stand where they do—the gateway to the world's greatest treasure-house of literature and religion alike—ought in itself to be sufficient to silence the

according to Babylonian conceptions, and based purely upon the data of the cuneiform inscriptions.

sorry jests with which so often dull witlings have assailed them. Why, then, while frankly declaring that these chapters have no value as scicnce or history, do we still insist that, ncvertheless, they are an integral part of that Word which God has given for the guidance and instruction of His children on earth?

The answer, in one word, is their supreme religious worth. Let us boldly submit the whole matter to the test of experience. In so far as men have gone to these chapters for science they have been misled, and the lessons thus learned have had subsequently to be unlearned; but when instead, they have gone to them for religion, and for religion only, all future teaching, though it has had much to add, has had nothing to take away. It is a simple matter of fact, to which multitudes in all ages have set their seal, that these old-world stories have put men into the possession of truths concerning God, to the power and reality of which all experience bears witness. Indeed, Dr. Denney does not hesitate to say that the man who cannot hear God speaking to him in the story of the Creation and the

Fall will never hear God's voice anywhere. It is not possible to go through these narratives in detail; if it were we should find that each in turn would yield its own deposit of abiding truth. Thus, the story of the Creation sets forth the sovereignty of the Creator. That is its great theme. 'It is one long, adoring delineation of God loving, yearning, willing, working in creation. Its interest is not in the work, but the Worker. Its subject is not creation, but the Creator. What it gives us is not a world, but a God.' [1] Closely linked with this is the doctrine of man's own inherent dignity and greatness: formed from the dust of the earth, he is thus far one with the rest of nature; made in the likeness and image of God, he is lifted immeasurably above all other created beings. Then in the story of the Fall we learn how by sin man is deceived and God's fair handiwork marred, and the garden of life left desolate. 'And sin'—and this is the lesson of the story of the Flood—'when it is full grown, bringeth forth death.' And it is for the sake of these

[1] *Prof. Elmslie, D.D.*, p. 322.

great religious truths—not for their own sakes—that these old-world traditions are reproduced by the writers of Scripture; 'in order,' as Dr. A. B. Davidson says, 'that those who read them may take up a right religious attitude towards the world, find their bearings, as it were, when contemplating creation, and nature, and the beginnings of human history.'[1]

And, further, it is when we study them from this point of view—the religious point of view, that is—that we see by how immeasurable a height these narratives are cut off from the old Babylonian cosmogonies to which, in their outer framework, they are so closely akin. Scholars to-day are in the habit, very naturally, of emphasizing the striking resemblances which exist among the members of that family of traditions to which, as we have seen, the biblical narratives belong. Nor have we any reason to complain, for the resemblances only tend to throw into sharper relief the still more striking diffcrences. Let any one who has read a

[1] *Biblical and Literary Essays*, p. 303.

translation of the Assyrian Creation tablets, deciphered in the seventies by Mr. George Smith, imagine what it would mean were one to substitute that for the sublime chapter with which our Bible opens. The absurdities, the grossness, the polytheism of the one find no place in the other; the chaff of hurtful error has been winnowed away, and there remains only the wholesome grain of divine truth. Just as Shakespeare would take the coarse, hempen fibre of some old Italian tale or English chronicle, and with magic fingers weave from it his own shining cloth of gold, so did the sacred writers transform and transfigure the traditions of the past until, though not destroyed, the poor earthly raiments of Semitic thought became white and glistering, 'so as no fuller on earth can white them.'

To some minds, however, it will seem a thing incredible that God should make use of myths in making known His will to mankind. Dr. Goldwin Smith, for example, in an essay on *The Church and the Old Testament*—an essay which, mournful reading as it is, may at least serve one useful purpose, in pointing

out how at every turn the literalist plays into the hands of the rationalist—takes for granted that, of course, inspiration can have no concord with myths, that if you admit the one you must rule out the other.[1] But this is an entire misconception, and no one can know better than Dr. Smith that the contempt with which some people are wont to look down upon myths is really radically unscientific. There is, as a Greek historian [2] has pointed out, a period in the development of a people's intellectual life when myths constitute its entire intellectual stock; they are the sole literary form through which at that period the mind of the age is able to express itself. Why, then, should it surprise us to find that Hebrew literature presents another illustration of a practically universal phenomenon? And if, as was pointed out in a former lecture, probably every form of literary composition known to the Hebrews was utilized as a vehicle of divine truth, and is represented in

[1] *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*, p. 52.

[2] Grote. The words are quoted both in *Lux Mundi*, p. 356, and in Ottley's *History of the Hebrews*, p. 21.

the Old Testament, why should not the mythical also find its place side by side with the rest? And, still further, 'If the poems of Homer were an educational force in ancient Greece, why should it be deemed incredible that legends of primitive history and idealized traditions of national heroes, only inspired by a higher and purer religious spirit, and exemplifying not the conflicts and jealousies of gods and goddesses, but the purposes and character of the One God, and His dealings with His children, should exert a similar power in Israel, and should be incorporated by the prophets and teachers of the nation as a treasured heirloom in their sacred books?'[1]

IV

And now, if you have followed me through this somewhat lengthy discussion, you will not fail, I think, to appreciate the great and immediate advantages which are secured by adopting the standpoint from which the whole discussion has proceeded. To begin with, this

[1] Driver's *Genesis*, p. lxvii.

method of interpretation makes wholly superfluous and irrelevant those unhappy devices by which good men have so often sought to bridge the imaginary gulf which divides the conclusions of science on the one hand from the teachings of Genesis on the other. It is a sight to move one to tears to see a devout scientist like Philip Gosse, unable to shut his eyes to the plain testimony of the rocks, yet resolved that geology should not get the better of Genesis, and in his despair hazarding the suggestion that when, six thousand years ago, the world came from the Creator's hands, the fossils lay ready-made in the strata of the rocks![1] It is perhaps not wise to prophesy in these matters, and yet it seems safe to say that we shall never again see a champion of the Church like Mr. Gladstone defending the Bible with the rusty weapons with which he fought his famous duel with Professor Huxley. Gladstone was a prince of controversialists, but his defenceless position left him at the mercy of his wily foe.

On the other hand, the modern interpretation

[1] See Mr. Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son*, p. 114.

of the Old Testament completely cuts away the ground from under the feet of the scoffer. It is a significant fact that neither Charles Bradlaugh in England, nor Colonel Ingersoll in America, has had any successor. Again, it is safe to predict they never will. And why? Because our changed methods of interpretation have robbed them of the miserable wares which formed their whole stock-in-trade.

Nor is this all. Read in the new light which modern scholarship has given us, the Book of Genesis will be no more a burden to the young, thoughtful, sensitive mind. The student at the university will no longer torture himself with the fear that through loyalty to truth he may become recreant to his father's faith. Henceforth we may say to him, boldly and with good conscience: 'Welcome all truth as God's truth; be sure that, since God is one, what He has taught in one place can never contradict what He has taught in another.' This is the service which, in the providence of God, biblical criticism is doing for the modern mind; it is helping us to see

how this which we feel must be true is really so.

Last, and most important of all, we are learning with a new emphasis that the great message of Genesis, and indeed of the whole Bible, is—God. As long as we busied ourselves among the little by-paths of the Bible, there was a danger that we might miss the broad highway; as long as we thought of it as a kind of 'Inquire-within-upon-Everything,' it was always easy to allow ourselves to be distracted by the merely curious and trifling. The Bible is, indeed, a manifold book, as wide in its outlook as human life; but its supreme message, first, last, everywhere, is God, God, always God. And just as men cut down the trees to let in the sunlight, so the strong hands of scholarship, which is God's servant and ours, are clearing away the thick undergrowths of human tradition, that henceforth, when we lift up our eyes, we may see nothing and no one save God only.

IV

THE BOOK OF JONAH

LECTURE IV

THE BOOK OF JONAH

THERE is, perhaps, no book of the Bible which has suffered so much at the hands of its readers as the Book of Jonah. Brief as it is, it is probably no exaggeration to say that it touches the high-water mark of Old Testament revelation. To those whose eyes have not yet been opened to its real greatness this may seem a hard saying; yet nothing has impressed me more in reading about it than the unanimity with which biblical scholars accept and confirm this judgement regarding the book. 'The truth which we find in the Book of Jonah,' says Dr. George Adam Smith, 'is as full and fresh a revelation of God's will as prophecy anywhere achieves.'[1] 'The Book of Jonah,' says Dr. Dale, 'is one of the most wonderful books of the Old Testament.'[2]

[1] *Book of the Twelve Prophets*, vol. ii, p. 494.

[2] *Expositor*, fourth series, vol. vi, p. 1.

'In some ways,' says Professor McFadyen, 'it is the greatest in the Old Testament.'[1] 'In no other book of the Old Testament,' says Bleek, 'is the all-embracing fatherly love of God which has no respect for persons or nations, but is moved to mercy on all who turn to Him, exhibited with equal impressiveness, or in a manner so nearly approaching the spirit of Christianity.'[2] Most striking of all, perhaps, is the testimony of Professor C. H. Cornill, of Königsberg: 'I have read the Book of Jonah,' he says, 'at least a hundred times, and I will publicly avow, for I am not ashamed of my weakness, that I cannot even now take up this marvellous book, nay, nor even speak of it, without tears rising to my eyes, or my heart beating higher. This apparently trivial book is one of the deepest and grandest that was ever written, and I should like to say to every one who approaches it, "Take off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."'[3]

[1] *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 196.
[2] Quoted in Driver's *Introduction*, p. 303.
[3] *Prophets of Israel*, p. 170.

And yet one has to confess with sorrow and shame, the story of Jonah is for most people only a subject for merriment. For flippant scoffers, like Colonel Ingersoll, Balaam's ass and Jonah's whale form a large part of their working capital. Even a man like Professor Huxley, who ought to know better, must have his sorry jest at what he is pleased to call Jonah's 'anticipatory experience of submarine navigation.'[1] And what is strangest of all, even Christian men and women, to whom the Bible is the Word of God, seem for the most part unable to find anything else in this book save a gigantic difficulty over or round which they must get as best they can. 'This,' as some one has well said, 'is the tragedy of the Book of Jonah, that a book which is made the means of one of the most sublime revelations of truth in the Old Testament should be known to most only for its connexion with a whale.'[2]

Our failure to appreciate the book is due, of course, to our failure rightly to understand it.

[1] *Science and Hebrew Tradition*, p. 237.

[2] Quoted by Dr. George Adam Smith, p. 429.

The miserable literalism which will persist in reading the poetry of the Bible as if it were prose has ended here, as it always ends, in adding new burdens to belief at the same time that it is making sport for the unbelieving Philistines. Our first aim, therefore, must be to learn how the book is to be interpreted.

I

When we are seeking the interpretation of a book, whether a book of the Bible or any other book, one of our first questions must be: to what class of literature does the book belong? For, obviously, if we apply to a work of poetry the canons of interpretation which are valid only for a work of history the inevitable result will be misunderstanding and confusion. Now, as was pointed out in a previous lecture,[1] one of the most conspicuous of the services which modern scholarship has rendered the student of the Bible has been its demonstration of the great variety of literary form of which the sacred writers make use;

[1] See p. 19.

with this result, that we now know that there is in the Bible less prose and more poetry, less history and more allegory or parable, than we once thought. It may take some time for some of us to readjust ourselves to the changed point of view, but if we will be patient with ourselves, if we will sternly refuse to allow ourselves to be pushed to the brink of the precipice by foolish persons who tell us that to surrender the historical character of any portion of the Old Testament is to surrender the worth of the whole, we shall find, when the readjustment has been made, that while we have lost nothing, we have been relieved of many of the difficulties by which for so long the mind of the Church has been burdened.

To what class of literature, then, does the Book of Jonah belong? Suppose the question were asked concerning some other, non-biblical, writing, how should we set about answering it? By an examination of the writing itself. The work might be anonymous; the author might nowhere have stated in so many words that what he had written was prose or poetry,

history or romance; and yet even in the absence of such information we should confidently expect that the work itself would furnish sufficient evidence to enable us without difficulty to classify it. We are constantly, and often unconsciously, making such classifications for ourselves. For example, the story of the terrible massacre by Indians of the garrison at Fort William Henry, during the long struggle between England and France in North America, has been told by Francis Parkman in his *Montcalm and Wolfe*, and by Fenimore Cooper in his *Last of the Mohicans*. The former work we call a history, the latter an historical romance. Why? There is nothing on the title-page of either book to warrant us in making such a distinction. We make it, confidently and correctly, because in each case the character of the contents reveals the class of literature to which each belongs. And in the same self-evidencing way the Book of Jonah declares itself to be not history but parable; its author is not a recorder, he is a romancer; he is not writing history, he is telling a tale. That there was a prophet in Israel

named Jonah, the son of Amittai, we know from the Second Book of Kings (xiv. 25); thus far we are upon firm historical ground—unfortunately, it is no more than a foothold that the historian gives us, for his record is limited to a single verse—but the *book* of Jonah (which is his only in the sense that it is about him, not by him) belongs plainly to the realm of imagination, not of actual historical fact. The abrupt termination of the story as soon as the moral is reached; the absence from it of the kind of details that we should naturally look for in an historical narrative; the extreme improbability of such a city as Nineveh renouncing its idols with such suddenness and completeness;[1] the incidents of the tempest and the gourd—do not all these things, apart altogether from the story of the great fish, suggest that it is the imaginative discourse of a prophet with which we have to do rather than the narrative of an historian?

[1] 'It is remarkable,' says Dr. Driver, 'that the conversion of Nineveh, if it took place upon the scale described, should have produced so little permanent effect; for the Assyrians are uniformly represented in the Old Testament as idolaters' (*Introduction*, p. 303).

It is a further confirmation of this conclusion to find that the place assigned to this book is not with the histories but with the prophecies of the Bible.

'Then,' some one will ask, 'is the Book of Jonah not true?' But what do you mean by 'true'? If you mean *historically* true, the answer is: No, it is not, and it was never meant to be, and when we so read it we are misinterpreting the writer's own evident intention. But is there no kind of truth save historical truth? Is *The Pilgrim's Progress* true? Again we must ask, what does the question mean? If it means, did there once live a man whose name was Christian, who dwelt in the City of Destruction, and fell into the Slough of Despond, and fought with Apollyon in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, all of which places you may find on a map?—if this is what the question means, then, of course, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is not true; but as a symbol of the soul's experience in its quest for light and peace, it is true, eternally true. Is the parable of the Good Samaritan true? If you go to Palestine your

dragoman will show you the house where the Good Samaritan lived! But does any one for a moment suppose that the worth of the parable for us to-day depends in any wise upon whether or not there once lived some man of Samaria who did the things of which our Lord speaks? And as we interpret Christ's parable or Bunyan's allegory, so must we learn to interpret the Book of Jonah. Truth in the sense of literal historical fact it does not contain; but spiritual truth, truth concerning the mind and heart of God, truth precious and eternal, there is in it for us all, and it is 'truth embodied in a tale.'

I come now to what is felt by many to be the crux of the whole difficulty: I mean, of course, our Lord's reference to the story of Jonah. If this book had stood alone, if there had been no reference to it in the New Testament, if Christ had not said: 'As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,' [1]

[1] Matt. xii. 40. In the parallel passage (Luke xi. 30) there is no reference to the three days in the whale's

the method of interpretation suggested above, even if it had not seemed the most natural and obvious, could at least have presented no serious difficulty. But our Lord's words, which I have just quoted, have seemed to many to leave us no option in the matter; they put, so it is affirmed, the stamp of divine authority on the record, they guarantee its actual historical character. Indeed, there are not a few who do not hesitate to say plainly that to deny such a character to the story is to deny the authority of our Lord as a divine teacher. Dr. Pusey, for example, in his great commentary on the Minor Prophets, says, 'Our Lord says, "Jonah *was* three days and three nights in the whale's belly," and no one who really believes in Him dare think he was not.'[1] Thirty years later a similar statement was made by Canon Liddon from the pulpit of

belly, and some scholars—including Professor Sanday (*Bampton Lectures*, p. 433)—incline to the view that the words in Matthew formed no part of the original saying, but were added by the author of the Gospel. I have thought it best, however, to discuss the question on the supposition of their genuineness.

[1] p. 257.

St. Paul's Cathedral.[1] Still more recently, during a mission conducted in Edinburgh by a well-known American evangelist, the missioner stated in response to a question, that the story of Jonah and the story of the Resurrection must stand or fall together; if the one is allegory, it is impossible, he said, to maintain that the other is history. And after these comes a man like Professor Huxley, who believes neither in Jonah nor in Jesus, and he slaps our ultra-orthodox friends on the back: 'You're the men for me,' he says, 'that's the way to interpret Scripture — none of your higher-critical nonsense; of course you are right; of course the Book of Jonah is history, and if you don't believe in that fish story, of course you can't believe in the Resurrection of Christ either.'[2] And as the Professor does not

[1] In a sermon entitled *The Worth of the Old Testament*, and preached on December 8, 1889.

[2] The language, I need hardly say, is not Professor Huxley's, but mine. Any one who will read his essay, 'The Lights of the Church and the Lights of Science' (*Science and Hebrew Tradition*, pp. 201–38), may judge for himself whether or not I have fairly represented his attitude.

believe in the Resurrection, he is only too thankful to find he can get men like Pusey and Liddon and our American evangelist to join him in throwing another obstacle in the path of those of us who do. How much longer, one wonders, is this kind of thing to last? How much longer will our friends the literalists be content to fetch and carry for the Goliaths of rationalism? Does it never make them uneasy when they see that it is they who provide the grist for the sceptic's mill, that it is out of their arguments and their interpretations that some of faith's most inveterate foes are forging their deadliest weapons against the religion of Christ?

The counsels of logic and the practical experiences of life alike warn us of the peril that lurks in the use of the dilemma. In the 'all-or-nothing' form in which it is sometimes urged by religious teachers, it can hardly be too severely discouraged. To make Christianity answer with its life for the historical character of everything that is recorded in the Old Testament is the most fatal unwisdom. Even were the case for the literal interpretation of the

Book of Jonah a hundred times stronger than it is, we should still have no right, in a matter of this kind, to seek to push an objector into a corner from which his only way of escape is by a denial of the Christian faith. To argue as Dr. Pusey does is to do to souls that are in doubt the most cruel disservice. The interpretation of the Book of Jonah is really a literary question, to be determined by the ordinary laws that apply in such matters, and we must steadfastly refuse to allow it to be exalted into a question of faith.

'But,' it is urged, 'we cannot help ourselves. In this case it is Christ who is responsible for the dilemma. We might have been content to let the question remain an open one; but His words force us to a decision: either Jonah's story is true, or Christ is mistaken.' But here, too, the argument is false, and for the usual reason: the familiar '*either—or*' does not include all the possible alternatives. Why did our Lord refer to Jonah? For the purpose of illustration. But will not allegory serve the purpose of illustration equally as well as history? In the sixteenth chapter of St. Luke's

Gospel I read that Jesus said, 'There was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day: and a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.' The statement is very definite, and there is nothing to indicate that Christ is not narrating an actual history. But if a preacher were to choose these words for a text, and were to begin by saying that obviously this was not history but parable, would any one be so foolish as to insist that only a literal interpretation would save Christ's credit for truthfulness? Preachers frequently illustrate their sermons by allusions to *The Pilgrim's Progress*; they tell what befell Christian in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, how Faithful was done to death in Vanity Fair, how Mr. Valiant-for-Truth went down to the river-side. But when they thus speak do they thereby commit themselves to the historical reality of Christian, and Faithful, and Mr. Valiant-for-Truth? I notice that Professor Huxley himself, in one of his delightful *Lay*

Sermons,[1] makes a reference to Wordsworth's Peter Bell: 'I do not suppose,' he writes, 'that the dead soul of Peter Bell of whom the great poet of nature writes—

> A primrose by the river's brim,
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more,

would have been a whit roused from his apathy by the information that the primrose is a Dicotyledonous Exogen, with a monopetalous corolla and central placentation.' Now, what would any one think if, with these words before me, I were gravely to argue that they leave us no alternative but to admit either the historical reality of Peter Bell or the untrustworthiness of Professor Huxley? The fact is, of course—and I am almost ashamed to have spent so long in expounding the obvious—that this way of speaking, for the purpose of illustration, of imaginary characters as if they were historical, is common to us all. In Christ's reference to Jonah He is but employing

[1] p. 78. I am indebted for this illustration to Dr. Washington Gladden's *Who Wrote the Bible?* p. 96.

one of the most ordinary forms of human speech; nor is there in anything that He says one word that can fetter the Bible student to-day in his effort to discover, by every means within his power, in what sense this ancient narrative is to be interpreted.

II

I turn now to the second part of my task. Assuming that we have secured right of way for the allegorical interpretation of the Book of Jonah, we have still to ask: What is its meaning? What did the writer intend to teach by it?

To answer these questions we must briefly recall the divine purpose concerning Israel, and the actual course of Israel's history. 'You only,' God said, 'have I known of all the families of the earth.' But why? Not for their own sakes simply, but that they might be God's messengers to all mankind, that through them might flow to all the nations the knowledge of the one true God. Israel's election was an election to privilege, only that

it might be an election to service. 'I will bless thee and make thy name great'—so ran the ancient promise to Abraham—'and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' This was the divine purpose—to fit the few for the salvation of the many. And some at least there were who did not fail to read aright the true significance of their nation's calling. But for the most part—and this was the tragedy of Israel's history—the people's eyes were holden that they could not see it. 'Us only hath God known of all the families of the earth'—of that they were sure; of that they made their boast all the day long. But of the duty which was the other half of their privilege they thought nothing. God was their God and theirs alone; if He had any dealings with the nations around it was only in the way of judgement. Then came the tremendous experience of the Exile, when Israel was

> Heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipt in hissing baths of tears,
> And battered with the shocks of doom
> To shape and use.

But not all the sorrows of exile, nor even the

teaching of the great unknown prophet of those days (Isa. xl.–lxvi.), availed to bring home to Israel God's purpose to the nations through it. And to the strength of its stubborn exclusiveness there was added the fire of its passion for vengeance upon the peoples that knew not God and that had lifted up their hands against His chosen.

Such was the prevailing national temper when the author of the Book of Jonah took up his pen to write; and it was against this temper that his book was a protest. Why he should have chosen Jonah as the figure around which to weave his little parable we do not know;[1] but this is of no consequence; the essential fact to grasp is that, under cover of this ancient prophet's imaginary experiences, he is uttering a rebuke against the narrowness of Israel's outlook. To him had been granted a larger knowledge of the ways of God with men, and the single purpose of his writing was to urge the truth which he had seen upon the prejudiced and reluctant minds of his people.

[1] See Dr. G. A. Smith's *Book of the Twelve*, vol. ii, p. 504.

Jonah fleeing from Nineveh and duty is a picture of Israel's long unwillingness to fulfil her divine mission to the heathen. The disasters that overtook the faithless fugitive are a symbol of what the faithless people had endured at the hands of their cruel oppressors. And just as even the prophet's deliverance had left him still reluctant and unconvinced, still unwilling to believe that to the Gentiles God had granted repentance unto life, so neither the gloom of the Babylonian prison-house, nor the gladness of a restored Zion, had availed to quicken in Israel's dull heart and brain the larger thoughts of God for the salvation of the world.

When the interpretation of the Book of Jonah is sought for along this line, it becomes obvious at once that the difficulties which have so often taxed the ingenuity of commentators simply cease to exist. We know now that in the story of the great fish our author was thinking not of the fate of an individual but of a nation; it is his pictorial way of describing the lot which Israel suffered at the hands of her Babylonian captors; so that we are no

longer under the humiliating necessity, in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of Scripture, of collecting doubtful stories of sailors swallowed by sharks and afterwards vomited out alive. It is, of course, still open to the hypercritical to argue that the use of such a figure, so clumsy and grotesque, is an offence against good taste. But this is an objection of an entirely different character, and I do not feel called upon to treat it seriously. It may, however, be pointed out, in the first place, that, it is manifestly unjust to apply our modern standards of literary taste to an ancient Hebrew writing; and, in the second place, that, unnatural and uncouth as the prophet's imagery may seem to us, it was not so to him. Throughout the whole of the Old Testament, as Professor Robertson Smith points out,[1] the figure of the leviathan, or great fish, is the usual figure for the world-power oppressing the Church. 'One prophet explicitly describes the Exile of Israel as the swallowing of the nation by the monster, the Babylonian tyrant, whom God forces at last to disgorge

[1] See *Note* at the end of this lecture.

its prey. Israel says: "Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon hath devoured me and crushed me—he hath swallowed me up like the Dragon, filling his belly; from my delights he hath cast me out." But Jehovah replies: "I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed."[1] But whatever may be our judgement on what is, after all, a mere matter of literary form, no detail of this kind should be suffered to hide from us the divine meaning of this wonderful book. What should we think of a student of art who could make merry over the rude frescoes of early Christian painters and yet miss the soul of truth which shines through and transfigures the clumsiest design of the artist? John Bunyan, we all know, is one of the great masters in the world of letters; but Bunyan's imagery wears at times, it must be admitted, a very odd look. Thus, for example, he tells us how one of his pilgrims, turning out of the right way, was '*led into a wide field full of dark mountains*, where he stumbled and fell and rose no more.' Bunyan,

[1] *Book of the Twelve*, vol. ii, p. 525.

it must be remembered, was born among the flat fields of Bedfordshire; probably he had never seen a mountain in his life, and had little idea what one was like.[1] Again, what should we think of a student of literature who, when others spoke of the greatness of Bunyan, could only laugh at the 'wide field full of dark mountains'? But in what better case are we, with our paltry jests about Jonah's whale, while yet we remain blind and deaf to the divine gospel which through this book is revealed to us?

And what is that gospel? In a word it is this: that God cares for the sinners of Nineveh as well as for the saints of Jerusalem; that little children and even dumb cattle are dear to Him; that His tender mercies are over all His works.

> There's a wideness in God's mercy
> Like the wideness of the sea.

Let me again read the words with which the book closes, and which are the sum of all its

[1] See note in Venables' edition of Bunyan, published by the Clarendon Press, p. 446.

unknown author has to teach us: 'And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. And the Lord said, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night and perished in a night; and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city; wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?' Where in all the Old Testament is there so moving a parable of the love of God? Is not this the very tone and temper of Jesus Himself? 'Out there, beyond the Covenant, in the great world lying in darkness'—this was the truth our author told into the prejudiced faces of his people—'there live, not beings created for ignorance and hostility to God, elect for destruction, but men with consciences and hearts, able to turn at His Word, and to hope in His Mercy—that to the farthest ends of the world, and even in the high places of unrighteousness, Word and Mercy work just

as they do within the Covenant.'[1] And so this little book, which to some of us, perhaps, has seemed little more than a strange fairy-tale, or a riddle of which we had lost the key, 'opens out like an exquisite rose till we find in the heart of it the glowing crimson of the love of God.'[2]

And now, perhaps, you will begin to understand and to sympathize with the enthusiasm of the writers whose words I quoted at the beginning of this lecture. When first I read them they may have sounded to some like the language of hyperbole or even of hysteria; now, I hope, we are beginning to see in them the words of soberness and truth. For, indeed, it *is* the truth that no book comes nearer to the spirit of the New Testament than the Book of Jonah. It is a witness to the catholicity of divine grace; it is the Old Testament counterpart to 'God so loved the world.' As Dean Stanley says, Jonah was the first Apostle to the Gentiles;[3] and in these days of missionary

[1] Dr. G. A. Smith, in loco, p. 533.

[2] *God's Lantern Bearers: the Story of the Prophets of Israel for Young People*, by R. C. Gillie, p. 421.

[3] *History of the Jewish Church*, Lecture xxxiii.

revival we may cherish the hope that the misunderstanding and worse from which in the past this book has suffered are now at an end, and that at last this Old Testament plea for Missions will come to its own.

It is teaching so lofty and noble as this book contains which makes one so wholly impatient of the wild and foolish things which even intelligent people still sometimes suffer themselves to speak concerning the God of the Old Testament. Take this, for example, from the pen of one of our most accomplished living writers: 'I thought,' he says, 'of the terrible God of my childish days. In the Old Testament which we used to read, He seemed to be always doing fierce, harsh, furious things; He was silent, invisible, severe, listening round corners, staring at one in the darkness, always ready to disapprove and to punish, only thinking that one was well employed when one was attending dreary services or reading the Bible.'[1] Really? One wonders in what Bible he had read. Was there no Book

[1] A. C. Benson's *The Gate of Death*, p. 214.

of Jonah in it? Did he never read of Jehovah's pity for little children and dumb cattle?

The truth is that there are many of us, Christians though we are, who still lag far behind the gospel of this book in our thoughts of God and man. With what a fine contempt do we of the English-speaking race sometimes look down upon the rest of mankind! That God should be concerned about what happens to us Britons and Americans is quite a credible doctrine; but to say that He has an equal concern, say, for the Russian or the Spaniard, is wellnigh as hard as it was for Jonah to believe that He cared for Nineveh as well as Jerusalem. Look at the history of the white man's dealings with the coloured races of the world. The red man has now nearly vanished from North America; say, if you will, that civilization demanded, that Providence decreed, his going; but what about the manner of it? For generations we treated the negro as if he were created and predestined to be the white man's beast of burden. Even yet some of us seem to have but two ideas

about the 'Chinaman'; that he wears a pig-tail and takes in our washing—which is, we suppose, what he was made for.[1] And although we have had good reason, of late, to modify our opinions about the Jap, we are still not quite sure that he is a brother man, with equal rights before God. Now it is against all such stupid prejudices, such insularities of heart, whether deliberate or unthinking, that the Book of Jonah is a protest: 'Should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city?'

> For the love of God is broader
> Than the measure of man's mind,
> And the heart of the Eternal
> Is most wonderfully kind.

This is the lesson of the Book of Jonah; to teach it is the work which it still has to do in the world. Will any one any longer ask why such a book should be given a place in our Bible?

The general principle of interpretation which has been followed throughout this lecture to many of you needs no commendation; the

[1] See R. L. Stevenson's striking paragraphs on 'Despised Races,' in his essay *Across the Plains*.

necessity for it is self-evident; it is called for by the character of the book itself; literalism here leads straight to the precipice. On the other hand, there may be some who have listened with feelings of uneasiness and distress. They have been trained in an older and different school, and it is not easy now, perhaps it is not possible, for them to change their point of view. It may be, indeed, that they have no desire to change; they are satisfied that the old is better. It is not—in fairness let it be said—that they cling to the historical character of Jonah's story as if it were a matter of vital importance for its own sake; they do it because they see no other way of shutting the door on methods of interpretation which seem to them to turn the knife against the Bible's very heart.

To answer such objections would be, of course, to re-argue the whole question, and I must be content to let what has already been said stand for what it is worth. But I will ask them to believe me when I say that the change which many of us have felt compelled

to make in our interpretation of Holy Scripture does not spring from a diminishing regard for the sacred Word, or from any vain desire to excise the miraculous from its pages; rather it is, as some one has said, a part of a larger movement involving what we believe to be a clearer view of the upward course of revelation, and a more correct and sympathetic appreciation of the varied forms of Hebrew literature through which that revelation has come to us.[1] The significance of that movement is as yet but partially understood; by some it is grievously misunderstood. For the present, perhaps, it is inevitable that it should be so. Meanwhile, therefore, let us learn to be patient, let us refuse to allow that which is secondary to exalt itself to the level of that which is primary and essential, let us honestly accept each other's honest assurance of faith regardless of what *we* think to be the logic of their position, and through all the tumult

[1] Professor W. G. Jordan's *Prophetic Ideas and Ideals*, p. 314. I gladly take the opportunity of directing the reader's attention to this thoughtful and thought-provoking little book.

and turmoil of controversy, let us remember that though some things be shaken and removed, we have received, through the mercy and grace of God, a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

NOTE

THERE is perhaps no biblical scholar in either Great Britain or America whose name is so honourably identified with the modern interpretation of the Old Testament as that of the late Professor Robertson Smith. His published works, however, do not, so far as I remember, contain any discussion of the subject of the foregoing lecture. I think, therefore, that many will be glad to have the opportunity of reading the following extract from a speech delivered by him on October 27, 1880, at a special meeting of the Commission of the Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland:—

'I have not,' he said, 'tied myself to a theory, nor do I wish to tie myself or the Church to any theory of the Book of Jonah; but this I may say, that the theory of Jonah as a parable is a current theory. It is held by many moderate scholars, and it would be well for this Church to try and see whether there is anything dangerous in knowing that it is so. There are, as far as I am aware, two

main objections taken to the supposition that the Book of Jonah may be parabolic. In the first place, it is said that our Lord testified to Jonah as a real person by the allusion to tho fact that the men of Nineveh repented at his preaching. I concede this, and I will also say that wo know from other sources that Jonah was a real historical person. He is mentioned in tho Book of Kings. I nover said that Jonah was not an historical person, but that it is a custom in thc Haggada to attach parables to historical names. I do not deny that Jonah was a prophet, and I do not deny that he went to Nineveh; but I affirm that the history of Jonah, as we have it in its details, is treated by most critics now as parabolical, and that for several reasons, of which I will only give one. By taking the Book of Jonah as a parable, we are able to understand what our Lord meant by the "sign of the prophet Jonah" in a way that the ordinary way does not enable us to do. I am not, mark you, going to make myself responsible for this; but I say that it is an argument which has force to my mind, at least to the extent of making me think that we ought not to tie ourselves down to the idea that we must not even breathe above our lips the fact that anybody takes the Book of Jonah as a parable. Our Lord, in speaking of His resurrection, applied to it "the sign of the prophet Jonah." According to the ordinary interpretation, there was no pertinence in this sign beyond the simple fact of the three days and the three nights. Now, there are a great many cases in Old Testament Scripture in which the three

days and three nights are spoken of, as, for example, in the sixth chapter of Hosea, where it is said, "After two days will He revive us; in the third day He will raise us up." But our Lord chose the instance in the Book of Jonah, which suggests the inference that He saw in "the sign of Jonah" something of special instructiveness. Those who take Jonah as a parable explain that in this way. They say: The children of Israel came back from Babylonish captivity; they came back to repeople Jerusalem, encouraged by many great and bright prophecies. They were to be lords over many nations, and they were to be avenged on their enemies. The people waited and watched, but these things did not come; and, as they read the prophets, they were very apt (as appears most clearly from the Book of Malachi) to reproach the Lord, and to say that His promise had not been fulfilled. These people, however, forgot another thing, that it was a condition, or part, of Israel's glorification that she should be a missionary nation to spread God's truth to the ends of the earth. It appears to many that the Book of Jonah was an answer in a parabolical form to these murmurers, who, while they thought nothing of their missionary duty, thought much of avenging themselves. Jonah, appointed the messenger of God, was the parable or type of the rebellious nation Israel. He was called to proclaim God's truth, but this he did not do, fleeing rather from the presence of God. Thus he was overtaken by the judgement of God, and swallowed by the great fish. Throughout the whole of the Old Testa-

ment the figure of the leviathan or great fish is the usual figure for the world-power oppressing the Church (Isa. li. 9; xxvii. 1; Ps. lxxiv. 13, 14). Israel was swallowed up by the world-power, and remained in misery because it had refused its missionary vocation; and the rising of Jonah on the third day was the rising of the nation to its missionary functions. Now, when did Israel, which had not received and had not obeyed God's promises and prophecies, when did it rise to that vocation? Not the Israel of the flesh, but the Head—the ideal Israel—the Lord Jesus Christ Himself—He it was who, having risen victorious from the grave on the third day, became Himself the Head of that missionary Church which is now fulfilling the duty laid upon the Church by the prophecies of Isaiah, and which now is going forward, as we believe, to receive the victory and the reward when that task has been accomplished. Surely in such an interpretation, whether it be right or whether it be wrong, there is nothing impious. There is much rather of a deep and instructive line of thought in it, enabling us to see precisely how the type of Jonah, and none other, occurred to our Lord as a fitting sign to foreshadow the change which would be introduced into the position of the Church after His resurrection from the dead.'

V

THE MORAL DIFFICULTIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

LECTURE V

THE MORAL DIFFICULTIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

EVERY one who has had any experience as a religious teacher, in however humble a capacity, must have become almost wearisomely familiar with the subject of this lecture. From the days of Marcion in the second century until now, the moral difficulties of the Old Testament have been made a ground of objection against Christianity. True, the objectors have been met, if not fully yet sufficiently, and as fully, perhaps, as the nature of the case admits. Inasmuch, however, as they still go on urging their difficulties, it still remains necessary, even though one may have nothing new to say, to go on answering them, and seeking to remove stumbling-blocks from before the feet of the unwary.

I

To what, exactly, is it that we refer when we speak of the moral difficulties of the Old Testament? I am anxious to deal with the matter fairly, and therefore, before I open the case for the defence I will ask you to hear counsel for the prosecution. Let us listen to Dr. Goldwin Smith. In his essay on *The Church and the Old Testament*, to which I referred in a previous lecture,[1] he writes as follows: 'Such examples as the slaughter of the Canaanites, the killing of Sisera, the assassination of Eglon, the hewing of Agag in pieces by Samuel before the Lord, Elijah's massacre of the prophets of Baal, the hanging of Haman with his sons commemorated in the hideous feast of Purim, have had a deplorable effect in forming the harsher and darker parts of the character which calls itself Christian. They are responsible in no small degree for murderous persecutions, and for the extinction or oppression of heathen races.' 'The writer heard the other day,' he goes on, 'a very

[1] See p. 125.

beautiful Christian sermon on the purity of heart in virtue of which good men see God. But the lesson of the day read before that sermon was the history of Jehu.' Then follows a recital of Jehu's bloody deeds. 'At the end of this series of atrocities the Lord is made to say to him, "Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab all that was in my heart, thy children unto the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel."' Then comes the inevitable sneer at David, 'the man after God's own heart,' though guilty of murder and adultery, 'both in the first degree,' and, finally a fling at the imprecatory Psalms, which, he declares, 'it is shocking to hear a congregation reciting, still more shocking, perhaps, to hear it chanting in a church.' It is these things, and things like them, Dr. Goldwin Smith says, which have made the Old Testament a millstone round the neck of Christianity which it ought now boldly to fling off.[1]

The volume from which these sentences

[1] *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*, pp. 68–77.

are copied was published in the year 1897, when its distinguished author was already past seventy years of age. How far his facts warrant his conclusions it will be our business to determine in a moment. But I cannot withhold an expression of surprise at finding, at this hour of the day, a man like Dr. Goldwin Smith able to write as he has done concerning the Old Testament. His words have about them an air of intellectual innocence which we could understand in a youth in his teens or his twenties, but which is very perplexing in one of his ripe years and wisdom. Moreover, it is not impertinent to say that once at least Dr. Smith knew better. Nearly fifty years ago he wrote two pamphlets—one entitled, *Rational Religion*, the other, *Does the Bible sanction American Slavery?*[1]—about which, perhaps, it is enough to say that if their author would consent to their re-

[1] I am, unfortunately, not able to speak of these pamphlets from first-hand knowledge, as hitherto I have wholly failed to obtain copies of them; but some account of them and of their author from the competent pen of Dr. W. Robertson Nicoll may be found in the latter's *Return to the Cross*, p. 310.

publication we should find that the best man to reply to Dr. Goldwin Smith is just Dr. Goldwin Smith himself. Since, however, this reply is not forthcoming, we must do what we can to find one for ourselves. For it is not a question merely of meeting Dr. Smith. The things of which he writes are the things, the miserable things, that have been made to do duty on a hundred secularist platforms, that are flung in the teeth of young men who believe, and that darken and perplex the minds of multitudes who read and love the Bible. 'It has been my privilege,' says the biographer of Henry Drummond, 'to go carefully through the correspondence of one who, probably more than any of our contemporaries,' was consulted by persons whose faith had suffered shipwreck amid the clash of problems presented by the Old Testament. 'One and all tell how the literal acceptance of the Bible—the faith which finds in it nothing erroneous, nothing defective and (outside of the sacrifices and the Temple) nothing temporary—is what has driven them from religion. Henry Drummond was not a

biblical scholar; he was not an authority on the Old Testament. But the large trust which his personality and his writings so magically produced, moved men and women to address to him all kinds of questions. It is astonishing how many of these had to do with the Old Testament: with its discrepancies, its rigorous laws, its pitiless tempers, its open treatment of sexual questions, the atrocities which are narrated by its histories and sanctioned by its laws. Unable upon the lines of the teaching of their youth to reconcile these with a belief in the goodness of God, the writers had abandoned, or were about to abandon the latter; yet they eagerly sought an explanation which would save them from such a disaster.'[1]

Here, then, is our problem. How shall we solve it?

II

Now, at the outset, it must be frankly admitted—and herein lies so far the justifica-

[1] G. A. Smith's *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 27.

tion of Dr. Goldwin Smith's judgement—that Christians in their attitude towards, and in their use of, the Old Testament have been often singularly unhappy. They appear to have acted upon the prineiple that beeause a thing was reeorded in the Bible, or because it was onee believed to be according to the will of God, therefore it was right and lawful for us to-day; and thus they have made the Old Testament responsible, as Dr. Goldwin Smith says, for some of the worst erimes that have stained the annals of mankind. This is a ehapter in Christian history on whieh naturally we do not now care to dwell; and yet, mournful reading as it is, it may not bo unprofitable to turn over one or two of its pages.

'Polygamy,' says Dr. Alexander Whyte, 'is just Greek for a dunghill.' Yet, beeause Abraham and some others of tho Old Testament worthies had more than one wife, men have been ready to plead the authority of the Word of God for their own polygamous praetiees. It is written in the Book of Exodus, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch [or, a soreeress]

to live' (xxii. 18); and behind that solitary text some of the foulest atrocities of which man was ever guilty have sought to shelter themselves.[1] The Book of Joshua records the extermination of the Canaanites, and the Book of Samuel the slaughter of the Amalekites; and with these things before them the Church of Rome justified the devildoms of Spain and the Inquisition, Oliver Cromwell put to the sword Roman Catholic garrisons in Ireland, Scottish Covenanters slew without mercy enemies who had fallen into their hands.[2] And even in our own day, within the memory of men still living, we have seen American divines trying to 'clothe the naked villany' of slavery 'with old odd ends stolen out of Holy Writ.'[3]

[1] See Lecky's *Rise and History of Rationalism*, ch. i.

[2] I may refer to a shocking passage from the work of a Covenanting historian, quoted by Sir Walter Scott in his notes to *Old Mortality*. It is not necessary to endorse Sir Walter's judgement on the Covenanters—he was probably constitutionally incapable of doing them justice—but the words he quotes are a terrible example of the way in which good men may misuse the Bible.

[3] See, for an example, A. V. G. Allen's *Life and Letters of Phillips Brooks*, vol. i, p. 461.

Nor is this all. Men who had themselves too much of the mind of Christ to allow any example to set aside in their own lives the law of Christ have, nevertheless, often felt that it was somehow incumbent upon them at all costs to defend the men of the Bible, for no other reason than that their names and their deeds were recorded there. And so, unwilling to believe that good men, men who had been honoured with some special revelation of the divine will, could be guilty of grievous sin, they set themselves to excuse, or to explain away, the trickery of Jacob, the treachery of Jael, the lust of David, the revenge of Esther. But this was a line of defence which, obviously, could not be maintained. Indeed, it was thoroughly bad; for, though it might succeed in saving the credit of Jacob and David for a time, it did so only by imperilling far graver interests, the interests of morality itself. To all such special pleading healthy-mindedness could make but one answer: 'No,' it said, 'this will never do. Black is black, and white is white; but to argue after your fashion is to play fast and

loose with moral distinctions; you are not merely perverting the reason, you are debauching the conscience.' And so far, of course, the objector is wholly in the right. If a thing is wrong it is wrong, and the mere fact that it is recorded in the Bible cannot make it right, nor can it alter the character of our moral judgement concerning it. So far, I say, the objector was in the right; but he immediately put himself in the wrong likewise when he went on to argue, as he so often did, that the book which contains, and sometimes sanctions, these things which our conscience to-day unhesitatingly condemns, cannot therefore be the record of the revelation of the divine mind and will. The true position—the position which in this lecture I shall seek to maintain—is rather this: that while, on the one hand, we must frankly admit the undoubted imperfections and immoralities which were incident to the earlier stages of divine revelation, on the other hand—and here we join issue with Dr. Goldwin Smith and all whom he represents—we yet maintain that the presence of these things in no wise

invalidates the high claim which the Christian Church has always made for the Old Testament Scriptures. As for the deeds of infamy which have so often been wrought in its name, they must be charged, not against the book itself, but against its misguided interpreters.

III

The problem presented by the defective morality of the Old Testament is, undoubtedly, a large and difficult one; but it is not quite so large as some, in their eagerness to discredit the Old Testament, represent it to be. Our first aim, therefore, must be to reduce the problem to its true dimensions.

(1) Some of the alleged difficulties simply do not exist, and their supposed existence is due entirely to an almost wanton misreading of the facts. Of this there is no better illustration than the familiar story of David. 'The man after God's own heart,' writes Dr. Goldwin Smith, 'he might be deemed by a primitive priesthood to whose divinity he was always true; but it is hardly possible he

should be so deemed by a moral civilization.' This is an excellent specimen of those oracular judgements which are always so easy as long as you ignore the facts. To hear the way in which this phrase, 'a man after God's own heart,' is quoted, one would suppose that, in the Old Testament, it stood side by side with the record of David's double crime. What are the facts? In 1 Sam. xiii. 14 we read (Samuel is the speaker): 'The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and the Lord hath appointed him to be prince over His people.' That is to say, David is called a man after God's own heart while as yet Saul is upon the throne, and he himself is an innocent shepherd youth keeping his father's flock. Except in Paul's quotation in his address at Antioch (Acts xiii. 22), the phrase is nowhere else to be found in Scripture. Now when do we hear of David's great transgression? Not until nearly a lifetime later in the history (2 Sam. xii.). Where, then, is the difficulty? Why should not a man, in the purity of his youth, be judged 'a man after God's own heart,' even though in long

after years he fell into grievous sin? Nor let any one imagine that it was left to our latter-day moralists to find out the greatness of David's sin. Nathan's tremendous rebuke reveals that even thus early in its history God had trained the best minds in Israel to a keenness of moral insight and judgement that has not lost its edge even for us to-day.

(2) Again, there are other difficulties which, if they do not wholly disappear, at least assume a much less formidable aspect, when confronted by the facts. Take, for example, what are called the vindictive Psalms. Probably many of us will be disposed to sympathize with Dr. Goldwin Smith in his protest against their use in Christian worship.

> Let his days be few;
> And let another take his office.
> Let his children be fatherless,
> And his wife a widow.
> Let there be none to extend mercy unto him:
> Neither let there be any to have pity on his fatherless children.
> Let the iniquity of hie fathers be remembered with the Lord;
> And let not the sin of his mother be blotted out (Ps. cix. 8, 9, 12, 14).

These, surely, are not fitting strains to put into the lips of a congregation of Christian men and women to-day; and one would imagine that to many of our brethren, both clergy and laity, in the Anglican Church, it would be a great relief to be delivered from the necessity, which at present rests upon them, of having to make use of such Psalms at regular intervals in their public worship. But let us strive to be just even to the fiercest of these cursing Psalms. They are by no means the unmitigated savagery some would have us believe. 'The person or personality,' says Dr. A. B. Davidson, 'who imprecates God's judgements in the Psalms, is the community; and the personality on whom they are imprecated, is often persecuting heathen powers or apostate parties, traitors both to God and His people. It is doubtful if anywhere there be imprecation by an individual against another individual.'[1] Any one who has listened to a really adequate rendering of Gounod's interpretation of the 137th Psalm ('By the rivers of Babylon') will never again

[1] *Biblical and Literary Essays*, p. 314.

hear in that psalm only the shrill cry of some little, vindictive soul, thirsting for vengeance on a personal foe; it will be to him rather as the throb of a nation's heart, the exceeding bitter cry of a wounded and outraged patriotism.[1] Even this, it is true, does not Christianize the fierceness of the language, nor render it suitable for use in public worship, but at least it does something to remove the ugly personal vindictiveness which has seemed to many its worst and most repellent feature.

(3) Lastly, the moral difficulties of the Old Testament may be still further reduced by the use of the methods of modern criticism. Dr. George Adam Smith gives as an example David's charge to Solomon, when the days drew nigh that he should die: how he, a dying man, commanded his son not to let the hoar head of Joab, his lifelong comrade and lieutenant, go down to the grave in peace; and, in spite of the oath by which he had

[1] Perhaps I may be permitted the pleasure of saying that these words were written after hearing the rendering of Gounod's anthem by Toronto's now famous Mendelssohn choir.

generously forgiven Shimei, to slay that spiteful and cowardly person. 'Behold, there is with thee Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjamite of Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim: but he came down to meet me at Jordan and I sware to him by the Lord, saying, I will not put thee to death with the sword. Now, therefore, hold him not guiltless, for thou art a wise man; and thou wilt know what thou oughtest to do unto him, and thou shalt bring his hoar head down to the grave with blood. And David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.'[1] These, as Dr. George Adam Smith says, are horrible words to be the last of such a life: horrible words clothing a horrible spirit. On many grounds, however, Dr. Smith thinks the passage is open to doubt. 'It is,' he says, 'a late passage; it betrays the temper as well as the dialect of a legal school in Israel, which enforced the extermination of the enemies of the pious. We have much reason, therefore,' he concludes,

[1] 1 Kings ii. 1–10.

'to let it go, and letting it go, we remove from the most interesting of Old Testament stories of character a termination which saddens every charm and blights every promise revealed by its previous progress.'[1]

It must be confessed, however, that this way of getting rid of the difficulty is not likely to meet with universal acceptance. Even on critical grounds Dr. Smith's conclusion is perhaps open to question;[2] while to the uncritical mind it will seem as if he had cut the knot rather than unloosened it. Nevertheless, here as elsewhere, criticism does prove itself a very real help in time of trouble. Let us take another and less doubtful illustration—the story of Jael and Sisera. Sisera's fate, you will remember, is recorded twice in the Book of Judges: first in the prose narrative of the fourth chapter, and, secondly, in the stirring war-song of Deborah, which immediately follows. Nor can the two accounts be

[1] *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 80.

[2] See the article 'David,' in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. i, p. 57.

made exactly to agree. According to the prose narrative, Jael kills Sisera in his sleep. But in the poem we read:[1]

> He asked water, and she gave him milk:
> She brought forth sour milk in an ample bowl.

Then, while Sisera, still standing, buried his face in the bowl, and for the moment could not watch her actions, Jael struck him a smashing blow on the temples, so that he fell down dead at her feet:

> She put her hand to the peg,
> And her right hand to the workman's hammer;
> And she hammered Sisera, and broke his head,
> And crushed and pierced his temples.
> Between her feet he sank down, he fell, he lay:
> Between her feet he sank down, he fell:
> Where he sank, there he fell overcome.

Thus we have here another of those double narratives to which reference was made in the

[1] I adopt Robertson Smith's translation and follow his exposition (*Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 132). In Deborah's words which follow 'all is perfectly plain,' he says, 'if we note that according to the manner of Hebrew parallelism, "she put her hand to the peg," or pin, i. e. the handle of the hammer, means the same thing as "her right hand to the hammer."'

first of these lectures. But, obviously, they cannot both be accurate; and since, by the universal consent of Hebrew scholars, Deborah's song is of much earlier date than the prose story, and is indeed a contemporary document, we have every reason to accept its account of what happened. And when we do so the story is immediately relieved of some, at least, of its darker features. The prose narrative, every one must feel, gives our moral sense an ugly jolt, and we are not at all disposed to join in Deborah's shout of praise: 'Blessed above women shall Jael be.' But interpreted in the manner just suggested, Jael's act ceases to be an act of cowardly treachery done a sleeping man, and becomes instead the daring deed of a courageous woman who sought by one cunning blow to deliver Israel from a tyrant's rule. More than this it is not necessary to say in defence either of Jael or Deborah. Their moral standard was not ours, and when we remember all that Israel had suffered at Sisera's hands it is not perhaps difficult to understand either the cunning strategy of the one or the fierce exultation of the other, far

removed as they may be from the spirit of Christ which is the rule of our life to-day.

These, then, are some of the ways in which, without any resort to apologetic sophistries, by an honest and legitimate interpretation of the biblical data, the problem presented by the moral difficulties of the Old Testament may be reduced to more manageable dimensions. Nevertheless, when all deductions have been made, a problem, real and serious, still remains. How shall we deal with it?

IV

What is wanted is a more intelligent—if the word may be allowed—a more scientific use of the Bible. In one sense, and that a very wide sense, the Bible is a very simple book; it shows to men the way of life so that all that will may find it; it reveals to babes things that are often hidden from the wise and understanding. But the Bible is also a very difficult book, and requires for its right use 'much judgement, much spiritual insight, the power of appreciating its general scope, and of

bringing the drift of the whole to bear upon the interpretation of the parts';[1] and unhappily these are just the qualities in which so many who take upon themselves to be the censors of the Old Testament seem to be wholly wanting. One naturally hesitates to charge a writer like Dr. Goldwin Smith with ignorance, but it must needs be said that objections such as his which were quoted above, and which are repeated in the latest booklet from his pen,[2] have no more weight against a true and reasonable interpretation of the Old Testament than falling feathers. 'When you come to examine them' —of all such objections Principal Fairbairn's words are not too severe—'they turn out to be the mere creatures of ignorance, formed out of a theory of the Bible and its religion more akin to childish simplicity than to masculine intelligence. Before a true theory of its origin and meaning these difficulties could no more live than a man could breathe in a vacuum.'[3]

[1] A. B. Bruce's *Apologetics*, p. 324.
[2] *No Refuge but in Truth.*
[3] *Religion in History and in Modern Life*, p. 104.

The all-important fact to be kept steadily in mind in this connexion is that the Bible is not throughout at the same moral and spiritual height. It is the record of a progressive revelation the later stages of which supersede its earlier. Our way of seeking to prove a doctrine, or enforce a duty, by quoting a 'text,' really proves nothing until we know from what part of the Bible the text comes. In theory we may not admit, we may even strenuously deny, this doctrine of the different value of different parts of Holy Scripture; but in our devotional use of the book, at least, we both believe and act upon it. If we were to examine an old and well-thumbed copy of the Bible which had been the daily and life-long companion of some devout believer, we should find that here and there—at the twenty-third Psalm, the thirteenth of First Corinthians, the fourteenth of St. John's Gospel—the page was thin and brown with use, elsewhere—at Leviticus, Chronicles, and some of the 'minor' prophets—the marks of use were comparatively few. What does this mean? It means that what-

ever theory of the Bible he may have hidden away in some corner of his brain, there is a sure instinct of the saint which tells him that all Scripture is not of equal value, and does not speak with equal authority. 'Every Scripture inspired of God' is indeed 'profitable,' but it is not equally profitable, and the profit that is in it we can only fully make our own when we know how to use it. But when we put Genesis on the same level as the Gospels, when we quote a precept of the Old Testament as if it belonged to the Sermon on the Mount, we show plainly that we do not know how to use it. God spake unto the fathers in the prophets a preliminary and preparatory word; in His Son He has spoken His full and final word. And therefore the right place for the Old Testament is not in front of, nor even by the side of, but behind the New. The Son of Man is Lord also of the Old Testament; and the servant is not greater than his Lord; indeed, he is without authority at all, save in so far as his word is endorsed and re-affirmed by the Master Himself.

What the Old Testament shows us is the

process by which God was educating the Jewish people for the supreme revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ. Here, as elsewhere in God's world, evolution is the law of the divine working. Throughout the Bible we can trace a twofold development: (1) in the idea of God, and, corresponding to it, (2) in the ideal of human character. The more worthily man learned to think of God, the more worthily he learned to think of himself. 'Duty' took on a new significance for him whose God was 'exalted in righteousness.' When God was once realized as holy—holy, i. e. not merely ceremonially, but ethically—sooner or later the inference was certain to be drawn: if God is holy His people must be holy likewise. But the idea, like most great ideas, was a long time in taking root, and a still longer time in bearing fruit. Yet to a generation which has grown familiar with the slow and painful process by which the physical life of man has been built up, there can surely be no difficulty in understanding how, even among a peculiarly privileged people like the Jews, the stages of man's moral growth should be marked by

struggle, pain, and failure. That the moral movement is not consistently forward and upward, that it hesitates and halts, and sometimes even retreats, that when a higher stage has been reached, traces of the lower often still remain—all this is but what the analogy of nature would lead us to expect.

Nor is this idea of moral evolution a fanciful theory, framed in the interests of an embarrassed apologetic, and forced on the Bible from without; it is that which the Bible itself plainly demands. For example: the Decalogue is without doubt one of the great landmarks in the history of morals; yet who will measure the moral interval between the Ten Words of Israel and the Sermon on the Mount of Jesus? Take the Book of Judges, the Book of Psalms, and the Four Gospels: are these not, so to speak, the 'deposit' of periods in the moral life of mankind as distinct from each other as are the earliest and the latest periods in the physical life of the world, to which the records of the rocks bear witness? It is the contents of the Bible itself, I repeat, which force this kind of discrimination upon

us. The revelation which it contains is progressive, so that the later stages revise and correct the earlier. One or two illustrations will serve to make plain what is meant.

We heard just now of the horror with which Dr. Goldwin Smith listened in church to a recital of the bloody deeds of Jehu, and the apparent approval pronounced upon them by Jehovah Himself. Nor can there be any doubt that in the eyes of Elisha, Jehu's revolution, violent and bloody as it was, needed no apology. But if Dr. Smith had turned over the pages of his Bible until it lay open at the prophecy of Hosea, he would have found that almost the first words of the prophet were a condemnation of the crime on which the very existence of the reigning dynasty rested. 'That Hosea judges thus of a revolution accomplished with the active participation of older prophets . . . places in the strongest light the limitations that characterize all Old Testament revelation. It shows us that we can look for no mechanical uniformity in the teaching of successive prophets. Elisha saw and approved one side of Jehu's revolution.

He looked on it only as the death-blow to Baal-worship; but Hosea sees another side, and condemns as emphatically as Elisha approved.'[1]

Or, look at the Old Testament references to the subject of human sacrifices. Though to us to-day nothing could be more wholly unthinkable, Abraham really believed that it was according to the will of God that he should offer up his son Isaac. Jephthah definitely contemplated such an offering when he prayed to Jehovah for victory over the Ammonites;[2] and though in the end to keep his vow meant the sacrifice of his own and only daughter, nevertheless, we read he 'did with her according to his vow which he had vowed.' Nor is there one word of disapproval in the narrative either of the vow or of its fulfilment; on the contrary, the incident is introduced with the statement that 'the

[1] Robertson Smith's *Prophets of Israel*, p. 184.

[2] Judges xi. 31: 'Whosoever' (R.V. marg.—not 'whatsoever') 'cometh forth out of the doors of my house to meet me,' &c. There can be no doubt that a human victim was intended; see Moore's *Judges* (International Critical Commentary), p. 299.

spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah.' When, however, we come down to the times of Ahaz and Manasseh,[1] we see in the horror with which the historian relates that they caused their sons 'to pass through the fire' the changed estimate in which such practices were now held. And when in that magnificent dramatic fragment preserved for us in the Book of Micah,[2] which sets forth the Lord's controversy with His people, the people ask, 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? . . . shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?' this is the prophet's answer: 'He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly before thy God?'

But, above all, it is (as Dr. George Adam Smith has pointed out[3]) our Lord Himself

[1] 2 Kings xvi. 3; xxi. 6.
[2] vi. 1–8.
[3] *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 20.

who 'has set us the example of a great discrimination' in our reading of the Old Testament. 'He came not only to do the law, but to judge the law; and while there are parts of it which He renounced by simply leaving them silently behind Him, there are other parts upon which He turned with spoken condemnation.' This attitude of our Lord toward the earlier dispensation is so familiar to every reader of the Gospels that it is unnecessary to do more than refer to His teaching concerning meats and divorce, and to the great paragraphs in the Sermon on the Mount, in which, over against that which was said 'to them of old time,' He sets His own loftier and more exacting law.[1]

All this is, indeed, elementary and commonplace enough. And yet it is not too much to say that it is our failure to recognize the

[1] Mark vii. 14, 15, 19; Matt. xix. 8; v. 21–48. The wholly futile attempt of a recent writer (Rev. Hugh McIntosh, in his *Is Christ Infallible and the Bible True?*) to limit Christ's words to a condemnation of 'the traditional perversions and misapplications of the Old Testament,' is sufficiently met by a glance at the marginal references of the Revised Version.

progressive character of divine revelation which is responsible above most things for our misunderstanding of the Old Testament. We are sometimes told by those who watch with fearful eyes the progress of the modern critical study of the Bible that it is slaying its thousands. Well, since the world began, it has always been so: new truths have to be paid for; every step forward costs. But if we are to reckon up our losses at all, we must reckon them up on both sides; and if it has to be said that modern criticism is slaying its thousands, then it must also be said that the doctrine of the equal authority of all parts of Scripture is slaying its tens of thousands, and that the day has fully come when loyalty to truth and the interests of the Church alike demand its complete and unequivocal disavowal.

V

Once the progressive character of the revelation which is contained in the Bible has become clear to us we shall have little difficulty in

knowing how to judge the moral immaturities which are incident to its earlier stages. On the one hand, we shall declare plainly that the morality of the Old Testament is rudimentary, and, therefore, necessarily imperfect. As (to borrow an illustration from Dr. A. B. Bruce) the caterpillar is defective inasmuch as it is not yet a butterfly, and as the universe is an incomplete and comparatively meaningless thing till the evolutionary process has culminated in man, so the Old Testament is defective in so far as it comes short of Christ. This is the fact which heretofore the Church has been too slow to recognize. 'It has been much more alive to Christ's presence in the Old Testament than to His absence. . . . It has so read Christ into the Old Testament that the caterpillar becomes a butterfly before the time, and all sense of development, progress, growth in revelation is destroyed.'[1] Yet the development is there; the Bible itself throughout, as we have seen, bears witness to it. When, therefore, we refuse to recognize the imperfect character of Old Testament

[1] *Apologetics*, p. 325.

morality, when we seek to apologize for it, to justify it, or to transfigure it, when we insist that it must be what it is not and could not be, we are not only guilty of a false reverence for the Word of God, we are refusing to accept the plain teaching of Jesus Himself.

But while, on the one hand, we insist on the rudimentary character of the Old Testament revelation, on the other hand we must likewise insist that because it is rudimentary, it is not therefore not of God. The test of a progressive revelation, as Mozley long ago pointed out, is the end;[1] its true morality, the morality by which it must be judged, is not that with which it starts, but that with which it concludes. In human affairs it is accounted the highest wisdom to accommodate instruction to the imperfect knowledge of the learner, provided that at the same time you

[1] *Lectures on the Old Testament.* It is interesting to observe with what regularity writers on Old Testament morality go on quoting or paraphrasing Mozley. The present writer is no exception to the rule; the sentences which immediately follow in the text are only Mozley and water.

implant a *seed* of more perfect knowledge. Were we judging of any human scheme of education, the great question by which we should seek to test its results would be, not so much, 'Where do you now stand?' as rather, 'How far have you come and which way are you going?' And it is by this same test that we must judge the divine education of Israel. A divine dispensation could adopt an imperfect moral standard only on condition that in doing so it undertook the responsibility of educating the people up to a true standard. But this is just the thing that was done. It is easy for us to-day to find fault with the Old Testament; but, as Chrysostom pointed out, this is the very merit of the Old Testament, that it has taught us to think things intolerable, which under it were tolerated. 'Their highest praise,' he says, concerning its precepts, 'is that we now see them to be defective. If they had not trained us so well, so that we became susceptible of higher things, we should not now have seen their deficiency.'[1] In a word, the Old Testament shows us

[1] Quoted in *Lux Mundi*, p. 329.

the earlier stages of a movement whose end and crown is Christ Himself. And if this be the end, what need have we of further witness to justify the steps that led up to it? The boldest among us may well hesitate to sit in judgement on a revelation whose last word is Christ, even though its first beginnings be as crude and imperfect as our Hebrew Scriptures show them to have been.

Throughout this lecture I have spoken, it will be observed, as if on the question of its morality the Old Testament were on its defence. And, indeed, defence was the object with which I set out. It should not be forgotten, however, though I may not dwell upon it now, that there is another side to the subject. Men speak of 'the morality of the Old Testament' as if it were no more than a problem to be solved, a burden to be got rid of. Perhaps when we come to understand it aright we shall see that in all the Old Testament there is nothing that should so touch our souls with awe, nothing upon which we may so freely stake the whole issue of a divine revelation to Israel, as the white wonder of its moral law.

Take these Hebrew writings back to the time when they were written; set them among the people to whom we owe them; contrast them with the laws and ideals of the nations around; and after that what more has criticism that it can say or do? Through all the long and varied schooling of which the Old Testament is a record, 'there is one thing common to all its stages, one thing always growing in depth and strength and purity—the passion for righteousness, the hatred of iniquity.' And even to this day, except for the words of Jesus and His Apostles, there is still no voice in all the world to bid men seek the thing that is good like this which speaks to us through the lips of the lawgivers, the prophets, and psalmists of Israel.

'O Christian souls, on whom the ends of the world are come, who inherit the experience, the treasures, the memories, of a thousand generations, shall that great passion fade and grow dim out of *our* lives? Shall it burn less brightly and purely in us, possess us more feebly and more doubtfully, now that we have seen the true image of God restored to man

and in man, and perfect righteousness fulfilled in Him who has come to take away the sin of the world, and by the power of His Spirit to make all things new?'[1]

[1] R. W. Church's *Discipline of the Christian Character*, p. 78.

VI

DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT CONTAIN A DIVINE REVELATION?

LECTURE VI

DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT CONTAIN A DIVINE REVELATION?

In the previous lectures of this course I have endeavoured to set forth and illustrate some of the results of the application of modern critical methods of study to our Old Testament Scriptures. In all that has been said there is absolutely nothing that is new, nothing that is not already thoroughly familiar to every biblical student who has taken the pains to keep himself informed of the progress of knowledge in his own department. But to those whose minds have not been prepared by previous thought and reading, it is not difficult to understand how even conclusions so guarded and reasonable as those of the previous lectures may fairly claim to be, should seem disquieting and perhaps even perilous to the last degree. If, they will ask, if these things really are so,

if the early narratives of Genesis are not science and are not history, if even in the later records we cannot always be sure that the ground is firm beneath our feet, if the Pentateuchal law is not the work of Moses, if the story of Jonah is only a parable, what becomes of our faith in the reality of a divine revelation to Israel?

I may remind you that in what has already been said this question has by no means been ignored. I have failed indeed if I have failed to convince you of at least my own unswerving faith in the certainty of revelation, amid all the uncertainties of interpretation through which we have been seeking to thread our way. 'God of old time spake unto the fathers in the prophets'—*that* great fact has never been called in question; on the contrary, it has been assumed and asserted throughout. Nevertheless, it is well that in this closing lecture I should endeavour to set forth, in greater detail than has hitherto been possible, the ground upon which this conviction rests.

I

And, in the first place, it should be clearly understood, that the biblical scholars, some of the results of whose long and patient study of the Word I have sought to put before you, one and all believe that (to quote the words of one of them) 'in the religion of Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament, there is an authentic revelation of the One True God.'[1] There is, we all know, a wild-cat criticism which rends and tears, and to which nothing is sacred; a criticism which does but bring out in its conclusions the negative results which were tacitly implied in its premisses; a criticism which takes for granted, without discussion, that the religion of Israel is but one religion among many, 'nothing less, but also nothing more.'[2] But this is not the criticism with which here we have anything to do. We are concerned, first and last, wholly and solely, with *Christian* scholars, and with the results

[1] G. A. Smith's *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 126.

[2] The phrase is Kuenen's.

of *Christian* scholarship. Among all the men for whose labours I have been seeking to secure sympathetic considcration, therc is, I repeat, not onc whosc bclief in a genuinc revelation of God in the Old Testament does not rcmain 'rock-fast.' Truc, if their reading of the course of Israel's history be correct, we shall need, as we havc secn, to revise many of our traditional conceptions; but God Himself is just as rcally and as fully in the reconstructed history as He was in thc old. Christian criticism docs not touch the fact of revelation exccpt to sct it in a clcarcr light; its chief concern is with thc form through which the fact has reached us. This has, indeed, already been pointed out in a previous lecture,[1] but the rcal facts are still so little undcrstood that, at thc risk of some rcpetition, it is worth while trying once more, with the aid of one or two pcrsonal refercnces, to let the truth be known.

I will take first the name of the late Professor William Robertson Smith. Robcrtson Smith was one of thc early pioneers of the

[1] See p. 25 *seq.*

critical movement in Great Britain. His volume, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*—consisting of a course of lectures, delivered in 1881, after he had been deposed from his chair in the Free Church College at Aberdeen—is probably still the best introduction to the study of the Old Testament problem. But in 1877, when the controversy in his Church began, Smith was a generation ahead of his time, and though to-day the views which he held prevail almost universally in Scotland, at that time the Church was taken unprepared, and at last the controversy had to be closed, as Dr. Stalker once said, not by answering the questions, but by ejecting the questioner. Now, what was the effect of Smith's critical theories on his attitude to the Bible? Did he cease to regard it as the Word of God, and as the only perfect rule of faith and life? Was he any less sure that in it is our only record of the redeeming love of God? He shall answer for himself. In a pamphlet issued at the beginning of the controversy he says: 'Criticism may change our views of the sequence and forms of Old Testament revela-

tion; but its whole work lies with the "sundry times and divers manners" of God's declaration of His will, and it cannot touch the substance of that living Word which shines with the same divine truth at all times and under every form of revelation.'[1] Again, in the first of the lectures to which I referred just now, he says: 'Of this I am sure at the outset, that the Bible does speak to the heart of man in words that can only come from God—that no historical research can deprive me of this conviction, or make less precious the divine utterances that speak straight to the heart. . . . Historical study may throw a new light on the circumstances in which they were first heard or written. In that there can only be gain. But the plain, central, heartfelt truths that speak for themselves and rest on their own indefeasible worth assuredly remain to us.'[2] And in that conviction Robertson Smith remained unshaken to the last. In 1889 he was appointed Burnett Lecturer to the University of Aberdeen, and

[1] *Answer to the Form of Libel*, p. 42.
[2] *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* p. 19.

delivered three courses of lectures. The first of these is contained in his volume, *The Religion of the Semites;* the others, unfortunately, have never been published. A few short extracts, however, were printed in the *British Weekly* by Dr. Robertson Nicoll, under the title of 'A New Defence of the Old Testament'; and a writer in the *Scotsman*, at the time of Robertson Smith's death, declared that these unpublished lectures contained the most magnificent defence of the Old Testament as a divine revelation that he had ever seen.

From Robertson Smith I turn to Canon Driver, who is perhaps the leading English representative of that band of Old Testament scholars of whom I am speaking. Dr. Driver's work needs no commendation; his books, exegetical and linguistic, are text-books in all our colleges; every Old Testament student is his debtor. And this is how he defines the relation of criticism to inspiration: 'It is not the case,' he says, 'that critical conclusions, such as those expressed' in the volume from which I am quoting, 'are in conflict either with the

Christian creeds or with the articles of the Christian faith. . . . They do not touch either the authority or the inspiration of the Scriptures of the Old Testament. They imply no change in respect to the divine attributes revealed in the Old Testament; no change in the lessons of human duty to be derived from it; no change as to the general position (apart from the interpretation of particular passages) that the Old Testament points forward prophetically to Christ. . . . Criticism in the hands of Christian scholars does not destroy the inspiration of the Old Testament: it *presupposes* it; it seeks only to determine the conditions under which it operates, and the literary form through which it manifests itself.' [1]

Another English biblical scholar to whose words I will ask you to listen is Dr. Sanday, of Oxford. Dr. Sanday's labours have been, for the most part, outside the Old Testament field, but his life-long study and defence of the Gospels, which have given him not only a national but a European reputation, justly

[1] *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, pp. xv, xix.

entitle him to a hearing. Like the overwhelming majority of modern biblical scholars, he believes that the cause of criticism is 'the winning cause.' 'It is,' he says, 'impossible to resist the impression that the critical argument is in stronger hands, and that it is accompanied by a far greater command of the materials'; but, he continues—and these are the words I desire to emphasize—the critical conclusions have not deprived the Old Testament of any of its value. 'On the contrary, stumbling-blocks have been removed; a far more vivid and more real apprehension of the Old Testament both as history and religion has been obtained; and the old conviction that we have in it a revelation from God to men is not only unimpaired but placed upon firmer foundations.'[1]

Now, explicit testimonies of this character ought to have weight with us; and they ought not to have less weight because, perhaps, we are unable to follow the intellectual and spiritual processes which have led up to them. In face of statements such as those which I

[1] *Inspiration* (Bampton Lectures), pp. 117, 122.

have just read—and their number might be multiplied almost indefinitely [1]—it is grossly unjust to go on saying that criticism is taking away our Bible. The real truth is that criticism is giving back the Bible to multitudes who were in danger of losing it. That we do not see how this should be so is no good reason for denying the witness of other men's experience that it is so. I may not be able to find the reconciling point between the new doctrine and the reality of revelation; but if another tells me that he has found it, and that in the re-edited and re-arranged Bible which criticism has given to him, he still finds God drawing near to man in Christ Jesus, and declaring to us, in Him, His will for our salvation, what right have I to question either the sincerity of his words or the reality of his experience?

But, of course, the matter cannot end here.

[1] See, for example, G. A. Smith's *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 115 (footnote); J. E. McFadyen's *Old Testament Criticism and the Christian Church*, pp. 29, 118; Ryle's *Holy Scripture and Criticism*, p. 75; Harper's *Deuteronomy* (Expositor's Bible), p. 35.

The critic's personal assurances are of much interest, and for those who have neither the time nor the inclination to search out the matter for themselves they ought to be sufficient to allay anxiety and remove suspicion. But there are many among us who will rightly refuse to be satisfied with the assurances of another; we want to share in the critic's conviction of the unimpaired spiritual worth of the Bible; we want to see for ourselves that God is as truly in this re-arranged Bible as He was in the old. The desire is a very natural and legitimate one, only we must not expect to meet it by listening to an hour's lecture, or even to a course of such lectures. The critic's own convictions are the slowly garnered fruits of years of thought and reading, and we who are but beginners must not be surprised if at first our sense of loss seems to outweigh our sense of gain; let us be patient, and time and thought will quickly readjust the balance. In a single lecture such as this, all that one can hope to accomplish is to indicate some of the lines along which we may seek to assure ourselves that in our Old Testament Scriptures

we have the record of God's self-revelation to His ancient people Israel.

II

The first fact to which I would call your attention is the remarkable *unity* of the Old Testament. This has been often emphasized, and I have nothing new to add to what has been said so often and so well. Yet it is worth while to make the effort for oneself to realize what this unity is and what it means.

We think and speak of the Old Testament as if it were a book. And yet, of course, it is not so much a book, as rather a collection of books, a national literature, with something like a thousand years between its earliest and its latest contents. Not only so, its various writings—law, history, prophecy, poetry—are practically the whole surviving literature of the nation during this long period. Further, among the various contributors to this literature there is nothing that can be called collaboration; no one writes conscious of the future whole of which his own work is by-

and-by to form a part. And yet observe what happens. You bring together these seemingly casual writings, produced at widely-separated intervals, the work of men unknown to each other, and what is the result? A whole, a living whole, that draws itself together, that looks you in the face, and insists on being taken as a whole; a unity whose parts are so closely knit by a single purpose and fused by a common hope that for centuries men have instinctively thought and spoken of it not so much as a literature but as a book. To say that this is a phenomenon without parallel in the world's literature is, of course, true, but it is not enough; we seek some explanation, some cause adequate to account for such an effect. This unity of the Old Testament, so much deeper than the unity of a common language or of a common national origin—whence came it? These diversified products of individual minds, how came they to combine, 'so as to be no longer detached units, but articulated members in a connected and coherent scheme'? Is not the answer of faith likewise the answer of reason,

that behind the individual minds another and larger Mind was at work, 'that central Intelligence which directs and gives unity and purpose to the scattered movements and driftings of men?'[1] Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως ('in various parts and in many forms') was ancient Israel's literature, but through all its manifold variety God spake unto the fathers in the prophets.

III

From the unity of the Old Testament it is but a short step to its *uniqueness*; indeed, its unity might be regarded as one aspect of its uniqueness. To the study of this complex fact, in some other of its many manifestations, we must now give our most careful attention. A very hasty survey of a very wide field is all that is here possible, yet even this may perhaps be sufficient to show that the Psalmist's words—'God hath not so dealt with any

[1] Sanday's *Inspiration*, p. 402. Cp. Westcott's eloquent words, *The Bible in the Church*, p. 14.

nation'—are not merely a poet's imagining, but the sober summing-up and verdict which the facts demand.

(1) Think, in the first place, of the part which the people of the Old Testament have filled in the world's history. True, the Jew has fallen on evil times; 'now none so poor to do him reverence.' To the Christian man of business, he is a crafty, long-fingered financier, with a genius for taking care of himself; to the Christian child, he is an odd dishevelled creature, uttering discordant cries upon our streets. And yet what a place the Jew fills in history! How much our civilization owes to him! Big, bustling nations have trodden upon him, they have pushed him into a corner, they have demanded the whole stage for themselves; to-day they are dust and silence, but the Jew is still here. For myself, I will confess, I never pass that uncouth figure on our streets, but St. Paul's words are in my ear, 'Whose is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom

is Christ as concerning the flesh,'[1] and I feel I should raise my hat and give him the side-walk. For this is the supreme glory of the Jew, a glory that nothing and no one can take from him: he is the world's greatest teacher of religion. There would seem to be in the divine programme an election of races to special ends; and as it was given to the Greek to teach men art, and to the Roman to teach men law, so to the Jew it was given to teach men religion. Art, law, religion, these three; but the greatest of these is religion, and the Jew is its greatest teacher. None but a fool would belittle our debt to Greece and Rome; but when the sceptre had fallen from the hand of Rome, and the bright promise of Hellenism had faded, then was seen that 'astonishing spectacle,' as Matthew Arnold truly calls it,[2] when men of all languages and nations took hold of the skirt of him that was a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.' 'In the history of the Hebrew people,'

[1] Rom. ix. 4, 5.

[2] *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 96.

says Professor Kent, 'one may follow the unfolding of these great religious ideas which have become the mainspring of humanity's progress, and which have determined the nature of the faith of more than half mankind. For, crystallizing, they became the religion of the Jew; being perverted, they degenerated into Mohammedanism; and, expanding, they developed into Christianity.' [1]

(2) From the Jew himself let us turn to glance for a moment at his literature. Now, in a way, of course, we all knew that the Bible is unlike any other book; but, unhappily, our easy-going indifference, which languidly takes the fact for granted, prevents our realizing *how* unlike it is. Robert Louis Stevenson once said of the Gospel according to St. Matthew that he believed it would move and startle any one who would make a certain effort of imagination and read it freshly like a book, not dreamingly and dully like a portion of the Bible. And it is just that effort of imagination which is needed in

[1] *History of the Hebrew People* (The United Kingdom), p. 5.

order to make real to us the uniqueness of our Old Testament literature. Let us get what help we can from one or two illustrations.

Take the Book of Genesis. From whatever sources it may have been compiled, 'there is no other nation,' says Dr. Driver, 'which can show for its early history anything in the least degree resembling it. There is nothing like it in either Babylonia or Egypt, or India or Greece. The mythology of Greece is indeed a wonderful creation of the human mind, and an abiding monument of the intellectual genius of the nation which produced it, but the Book of Genesis stands on a different plane altogether; and even though it be not throughout what our fathers understood it to be, a verbally exact record of actual fact, this very difference, which distinguishes it so strikingly from the corresponding literature of any other nation, remains still the strongest proof of the inspiration of its authors.'[1]

Or, suppose we turn to those sections of the Old Testament in which the average reader

[1] *Genesis*, p. lxix.

to-day finds least to interest or edify him—its legal codes; and here I am content to quote the judgement of two writers whose natural bias would certainly not dispose them to take a too favourable view of the biblical data. 'It is now clearly shown,' says Mr. Lecky, 'that the Levitical code was in a high degree hygienic, and even anticipates some of the discoveries of modern physiology. Prescriptions about forbidden kinds of food, and about the mode of cooking food, which only excited the ridicule of Voltaire, have a real hygienic value in the eyes of Claude Bernard and of Pasteur.'[1] A much more important fact is emphasized by Professor Huxley: 'The Bible,' he says, 'has been the *Magna Charta* of the poor and of the oppressed; down to modern times no State has had a constitution in which the interests of the people are so largely taken into account, in which the duties, so much more than the privileges, of rulers are insisted upon, as that drawn up for Israel in Deuteronomy and in Leviticus; nowhere is the fundamental truth that the welfare of the State, in the long

[1] *Historical and Political Essays*, p. 121.

run, depends on the uprightness of the citizen so strongly laid down.'[1]

But it is in the writings of the prophets and psalmists that we find the most convincing proof of the uniqueness of Israel's literature. Robertson Smith has shown[2] that Hebrew prophecy is a thing without parallel in the history of the world. There is not, he tells us, the slightest historical evidence that anything the least like Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah was produced by any other Semite nation, or that any branch of Semites outside Israel ever rose to a religious condition in which such productions could have been possible. Even more remarkable is the fact that it is in the language learned from Hebrew prophets and psalmists that we still both think of God and pray to Him. If it were not that long use and wont had sealed our eyes to the wonder of it, we should never cease to marvel that this little Hebrew Psalter, with its hundred and fifty sacred poems, has been teaching the

[1] *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 57. Cp. A. M. Fairbairn's *Religion in History and Modern Life*, p. 127.

[2] *British Weekly* report of Burnett Lectures. See also *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 297.

world, dictating to the world its prayers and its praises, ever since it was first composed.[1] In this book, men and women in all ages have found the fullest expression of the deepest things in their spiritual experience. The sense of sin, the joy of forgiveness, the soul's hunger for God, its awe in the divine presence, all find speech for themselves here. Dr. Goldwin Smith once had the boldness to declare that 'Judaism never reached the religious elevation of some chosen spirits among the ancient world, such as Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and Epictetus.'[2] But if this be so, why, we may fairly ask, has no one compiled from their works a book which can speak both to and for the heart of man, like this book of the despised Jew?

(3) From the literature we turn naturally to the religion which inspired it, and from which it cannot be separated. And if we seek in vain for a parallel to the literature, equally vain is our search for a parallel to the religion. Take its great ruling conceptions of God and

[1] Sanday's *Inspiration*, p. 198.
[2] *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*, p. 80.

man, and where, until you come to the teaching of the New Testament, in which they are embodied and transcended, will you find anything to set by their side? Jehovah of Israel is holy, exalted in righteousness. To us to-day that sounds the most elementary commonplace. 'Of course,' we say impatiently, 'of course God is holy'; we cannot so much as conceive a religion which has not a holy Being for its source. But men did not always argue thus. Go back to the days when the Old Testament was taking shape, to the nations around Israel, and you will find deities as dark, as cruel, as lustful, as the men who imagined and worshipped them. Into the heart of Israel alone, among those ancient peoples, there entered the idea of a moral deity. And with that new idea of God there came ultimately, if not immediately, a new idea of man. If God is holy, man must be holy likewise; and thus, as the new idea passed into his history, 'all the energies of religion came to be moral energies for the making of moral man.' In that great conception of the character of its God is the key to

the indubitable progress which Israel was making while all the rest of the world was morally stagnant.[1]

I have been driven to pack into a paragraph an argument that might well be expanded into a volume; and lest any one should think that in a statement so summary I have been betrayed into the language of a partisan, I will ask you to listen again to the words of Professor Huxley: 'In the eighth century B.C.,' he writes, 'in the heart of a world of idolatrous polytheists, the Hebrew prophet put forth a conception of religion which appears to me to be as wonderful an inspiration of genius as the art of Pheidias or the science of Aristotle. "And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" If any so-called religion takes away from this great saying of Micah, I think it wantonly mutilates, while, if it adds thereto, I think it obscures, the perfect ideal of religion.'[2]

[1] See A. M. Fairbairn's *Religion in History and Modern Life*, p. 114; and G. A. Smith's *Book of the Twelve Prophets*, vol. i, p. 19.

[2] *Science and Hebrew Tradition*, p. 161. 'As long

Here, then, are a few facts, gathered from Israel's history, literature, and religion, to illustrate what is meant by the uniqueness of the Old Testament. Must it not now be obvious to any fair-minded inquirer, that we are in the presence of a phenomenon of moral and spiritual separateness which is wholly unaffected by any inaccuracies, obscurities or immoralities, presented by individual narratives in the book? How shall we account for it? How came this little nation, ignorant of the arts and sciences, 'which could neither compile a grammar nor invent a metre,' the shuttlecock of its powerful neighbours—how came this nation to accomplish the miracle

as the world lasts, all who want to make progress in righteousness will come to Israel for inspiration, as to the people who have had the sense for righteousness most glowing and strongest; and in hearing and reading the words Israel has uttered for us, carers for conduct will find a glow and a force they could find nowhere else. As well imagine a man with a sense for sculpture not cultivating it by the help of the remains of Greek art, or a man with a sense for poetry not cultivating it by the help of Homer and Shakespeare, as a man with a sense for conduct not cultivating it by the help of the Bible!' (Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma*, p. 42).

of creating the speech which has been the spiritual mother-tongue of the saints of sixty generations? Why were its early traditions so wholly unlike those of other nations? 'Where,' we ask ourselves, as we read the Book of Psalms, 'where, in those rough, cruel days, did they come from, these piercing, lightning-like gleams of strange spiritual truth, these magnificent outlooks over the kingdom of God, these pure outpourings of the love of God?'[1] What was it that made the religion of Israel to differ from that of all the peoples about her? How came it to pass that while they gave themselves up to unclean and cruel rites, Israel alone was able to possess herself of a pure and ennobling faith? Whence, amid the debasing polytheisms of the centuries before Christ, came that great prophetic conception of religion which still stirs the cold heart of an unbelieving scientist, like one of the supreme works of human genius?

I should not omit to remind you that recent study of the world of the Old Testament has

[1] R. W. Church's *Discipline of the Christian Character*, p. 57.

revealed a much larger common stratum underlying the Jewish and all Semitic systems of worship than was formerly supposed. Thus, for example, the ritual of Israel is, we are told, 'full of exact analogies to the ritual of Semitic sanctuaries from Cyprus to Southern Arabia. The sacrifice of certain animals at certain seasons of the year, the smearing of lintels and other objects with blood; the anointing of pillars in honour of the Deity; the presence of human sacrifices with as much infrequency and sense of the awful crisis that demands them as elsewhere in the Semitic world; the worship of images by Jacob's family, by David's, and at the sanctuaries of the Northern Kingdom; the discovery of the Deity's will through dreams, in ecstasy, or by lot; the attestation of the divine word by physical signs accompanying it; circumcision; the law of blood-revenge and its mitigation by the rights of sanctuary; the sacrifice of the spoil of war to the Deity,—all these things have not only for the most part the same names as in other Semitic languages, but they are the same as among other Semites in intention and details

of execution.'[1] But all these similaritics, together with as many more as further study of the subject may reveal, do but lend fresh emphasis to the question which still remains to be answered: whence amid all these resemblances came the infinitely greater differences? And why, while the religions of the nations around were perishing and coming to nought, did the religion of Israel alone remain in ever-growing purity and power?

To say, as has sometimes been said, that Israel's religion was simply a natural growth, 'the flower of the natural religiousness of the Semitic peoples,' is no answer at all; first, because it ignores the fact that the Semites were a race of polytheists, and, secondly, because it fails to explain why, assuming their 'natural religiousness,' it only flowered in the soil of Israel. There is, I am persuaded, but one cause which can really explain the facts before us, and that is the immediate influence of the Spirit of God on the minds of the prophets and leaders of the chosen people. If, then, I

[1] G. A. Smith's *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 129.

am asked how I account for the gulf which separates the Book of Genesis from the early traditions of other races, I answer with Dr. Driver, 'the operation of a spiritual agency differing specifically from that which was present when the mythology of Egypt or Babylonia, or India or Greece, was in process of formation.'[1] Or, if again I am asked how I account for a spiritual phenomenon like the Book of Psalms, I answer with Dean Church that 'here is something more than the mere working of the mind of man'; these Psalms 'repeat the whispers of the Spirit of God, they reflect the very light of the Eternal Wisdom.'[2] The only explanation which alone can do justice either to single facts like these, or to the whole range of facts which together demonstrate the uniqueness of the Old Testament, is still that given of old: 'God spake unto the fathers in the prophets.'

Nor let any one imagine that this is a conclusion which criticism—the criticism of which I have been speaking in these lectures—shrinks

[1] *Genesis*, p. lxix.
[2] *Discipline of the Christian Character*, p. 57.

from drawing. On the contrary, its own processes lead up to it and necessitate it. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the application of the historical method to the study of the Old Testament has put into our hands a new apology for the Bible, as superior to the old as our modern weapons of warfare are superior to those of a century ago. On this matter I am content to quote the judgement of Dr. James Orr: criticism, he declares, 'has brought out, as never before, the absolutely unique and marvellous character of the religion of Israel. . . . The efforts of the critics have resulted in a magnificent demonstration of the immense, and, on natural principles, the inexplicable difference between the religion of this obscure people and every other.'[1]

IV

But one word remains to be spoken. It may be thought by some that the foregoing argument, however valid and valuable it may be, is too intricate and detailed for the average

[1] *The Problems of the Old Testament*, p. 10.

Bible-reader, that it assumes for its full appreciation a certain historic sense, on the possession of which it is by no means always possible to count. What is needed, it may be urged, in face of present-day uncertainties, is something more simple and direct, something that will go straight to the heart of the common people, telling them that whatever things be shaken the foundation of God still standeth sure. I wonder, indeed, if we do not care more than is meet for these short cuts to certainty, these convictions-made-easy. In any case there is nothing in the argument which has been outlined in this lecture which cannot be readily followed by any person of ordinary intelligence and attainments.

Nevertheless, there is another and a more direct argument in defence of the divine character of the Old Testament which must not be overlooked, and the worth of which each may test for himself: I mean, its direct appeal to the spirit of man. After all, what was it that first gave to these writings their place in the Canon of the Old Testament? 'The mass of the Old Testament books gained

their canonical position because they commended themselves in practice to the experience of the Old Testament Church and the spiritual discernment of the godly in Israel.'[1] Proved spiritual worth, that is to say, was the great principle of selection; and 'all that the Scribes had to do, when late in the day they turned their attention to the subject of the Canon, was to recognize the verdict already pronounced by the voice of God's people.'[2] But the test which was applied by the spiritually-minded in Israel may be applied still. 'If I am asked,' said Robertson Smith, 'why I receive Scripture as the Word of God, and as the only perfect rule of faith and life, I answer'—and let every one who is in doubt or difficulty concerning the Old Testament bind these words about his neck and write them upon the table of his heart—'I answer with all the fathers of the Protestant Church, *Because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near*

[1] *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 162.
[2] A. B. Bruce's *Apologetics*, p. 316.

to man in Christ Jesus, and declaring to us, in Him, His will for our salvation. And this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul.' [1] And this, not the peddling infallibility of the literalist, which dots all its i's and crosses all its t's, an infallibility which nobody ever did or ever could prove, this is the true inspiration, this is the real miracle of the Old Testament.[2] The great aim and purpose of the Bible is to lead me to God; if it does not do that for me, it matters nothing, and less than nothing, that I believe every syllable of it to be infallibly true. If it does bring me to God, equally little does it matter what opinion I hold touching the outward fashion of it; it has accomplished the great purpose for which God put it into my hands.

[1] *Answer to the Form of Libel*, p. 21.

[2] This, too, is of course the answer to Huxley's shallow taunt that modern apologetic effort devotes itself to keeping the name 'Inspiration,' while carefully emptying it of any definite sense (*Science and Hebrew Tradition*, p. vii.).

It may still remain something of a problem to some to understand how one who speaks as I have done throughout this lecture should yet feel free to say what I have said in earlier lectures concerning certain portions of the Old Testament. But the apparent contradiction resolves itself and wholly disappears, once the point of view has been gained for which all that I have said has been a plea. Meanwhile, I can only ask those who view these things with different eyes from mine to believe me when I say again, alike for myself and for the Christian scholars at whose feet I have learned what I have tried to tell to you, that criticism has not taken away our Bible; rather it has opened its sealed pages, it has lighted its dark ways, it has removed the stones from our feet, it has made the rough places plain and the crooked straight; the Bible is still ours, a larger and diviner book than before we knew.

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