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# THE READING OF THE BIBLE



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*By the Same Author*

THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

EDUCATION, SCIENTIFIC AND HUMANE

EDUCATION, SECONDARY AND UNIVERSITY

THE TESTIMONY OF THE NA

VALUE OF CLASSICAL S

# THE READING OF THE BIBLE

*As History, as Literature and as Religion*

By

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CHAPTER I  
PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY

**B**IBLE reading has been a notable characteristic of the English-speaking peoples from the Reformation to the end of the Victorian Age ; and its decline in the present century is a serious loss to the moral and cultural equipment of the nation to-day. Familiarity with the Bible has left an indelible mark on our literature and on our common speech : it has established moral and religious standards which cannot be shaken without grievous detriment. The Bible came to the people of England in their own language as a main weapon in the warfare which aimed at sweeping away the abuses that had befallen the Church in the Middle Ages. With the broadcast issue of the Great Bible in 1539 it became their common property ; and when the Authorised Version of 1611 set the final seal on the great work of William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale, they possessed the Bible in the incomparable dignity of beautiful language, and in a translation as faithful as the scholarship of the day admitted. Thenceforward it was the book of all classes. The Puritan movement carried it into the homes of the poorest people, to many of whom it was almost the only book with which they were acquainted. Its authority was unchallenged, and from its utterances there was no appeal. It was the one book which would be found in almost every house.

With the revival of religious life at the end of the eighteenth century the habit of Bible reading became intensified, and reached its height in the Victorian Age. Family prayers and the daily reading of portions of Scripture were common practices, and a general knowledge of the Bible could be presumed as part of the equipment, not only of the well-educated man but of the peasant and labourer. It was not a critical knowledge, for the age of criticism was then only dawning ; but it involved an acceptance of the Bible

as an unchallengeable guide to right thinking and right living.

How then did this position come in fact to be challenged just when it was apparently at the height of its power? The reason is to be found in the immense growth of knowledge which characterised the nineteenth century, and the dissemination of its results through the spread of education in all classes of the people. The Bible no longer stood alone. Its statements with regard to physical nature were challenged by the discoveries of natural science; its history was brought into comparison with the newly discovered histories of the nations with which Palestine was in frequent contact. A critical spirit was characteristic of the period. It showed itself in dealing with the ancient classical literatures, and it inevitably attacked the traditional interpretation of the Bible. Learned scholars asked questions and raised doubts, which shallower men were eager to follow up in order to show their independence of mind. It became a sign of advanced thinking to question the authority of the Bible; and criticisms which might be valid against its historical accuracy were converted into attacks on its moral authority. At the same time a vast half-educated class came into existence which could read and think and discuss, and was not prepared to accept the traditional beliefs of its predecessors. The authority of the Bible was shaken by scientific and archæological criticism, and the habit of reading it declined.

It is this situation which has to be met to-day by those who believe that it is not the essential value of the Bible, but only the validity of a particular view of it, that has been shaken. In the study of the Bible, as in the study of history, or of literature, or of natural science, the available evidence and the background change from age to age. The point of view differs; the amount of illustrative material varies; what one age finds it easy to believe, another age finds difficult or impossible. We have to recognise that we do not know everything, and that as knowledge grows, points of view must be adjusted. What was honestly believed in one age must with equal honesty



be set aside in another. It is a part of the progressive education of humanity.

In this recognition of the progressive nature of our understanding of the Bible, there is no condemnation of those who in the past have offered different explanations or held (often with much obstinacy) different views. It has been just the same with the history of science. The Ptolemaic theory of the universe was the best attempt that ancient astronomers could make with the information available to them; when Copernicus, with the aid of the telescope, produced a better explanation, men of science accepted it, often with some reluctance. It is no reflection on Newton that Einstein, with new data open to him through continued study and improved instruments, has been able to make modifications in his theory. The story of the theory of evolution offers an even closer parallel. Darwin's statement of it encountered fierce opposition at first, even among some scientists; then it was generally accepted and regarded as fully established doctrine; then further study led scientists to modifications of it, without affecting its general validity. It is therefore quite in accordance with the normal methods of our advance in knowledge, if from time to time our view of the teaching of the Bible, and of God's methods in the education of mankind therein revealed, should undergo modifications. The process of readjustment may sometimes be difficult, and new views must be tested by criticism; but the process itself is natural, and new views should not be considered as necessarily hostile views. Readjustment does not involve the shaking of foundations.

Most of us are naturally wedded to the ideas in which we were brought up, and resent, sometimes bitterly, being asked to reconsider them.

On the other hand, those who are critically disposed, or who by temperament are rebellious, are inclined to reject "the traditions of the elders" with hostility and contempt. The extremists on the one side do not recognise that their views by no means always coincide with those of previous generations; and the extremists on the other side often lack

humility and do not recognise that their own opinions are not necessarily the last word in truth or wisdom, and may in time to come themselves have to be cast aside as outworn. Charity and modesty are useful ingredients in criticism, especially in dealing with beliefs which have become endeared by time, and which touch the inmost springs of action.

It is, however, mere matter of historical fact that methods of interpretation of the Bible have varied from time to time during the history of the Christian Church, and that the literalistic, uncritical views so prevalent in the Victorian Age have not always been held by the leaders of Christian thought. Origen, the father of Christian exegesis, explicitly affirmed that Scripture has a different force for different ages and different readers, according to their circumstances and capacities. He recognised also that the literal or historical interpretation of the Old Testament could not always be accepted for the guidance of later ages. To meet this obvious difficulty he propounded the theory of a threefold interpretation of the Bible, literal, moral, and mystical ; and this theory had a far-reaching effect on the exegesis of the Middle Ages, so that in the hands of many commentators the allegorical interpretation far outweighs the literal. In the hands of such writers the interpretation of the Scriptures not infrequently becomes fantastic and grotesque, infinitely far from what we can believe to have been the intention of the authors.

On the other hand, the nineteenth century inherited the literalistic and piecemeal application of the Bible characteristic of the Puritans, to whom the English Bible came in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a new light for their guidance direct from God. Since the Bible was the word of God, every part of it must be accepted as literally true ; errors in statements of fact were no less inadmissible than errors in moral teaching. If its authority was shaken in any one particular, it was shaken in all. Moreover, any words of the Bible might be wrested from their context and applied as universally valid in any sense which the words might seem to bear. Hence the common prevalence of "verse-hunting," in which the expressions of Scripture were

interpreted without any reference to their original meaning or to the ordinary canons of criticism.

Underlying all these varieties of interpretation of the Scriptures were the theories of Inspiration held, explicitly or implicitly, by successive generations of Christian thought. Certain books—ultimately those included in the authoritative canons of the Old and New Testaments—were accepted by the Church as peculiarly “inspired,” as prompted and filled by the Spirit of God for the guidance and instruction of mankind. From this the step was easy to the position that every word in these books was equally the direct word of God, in which the possibility of error was inadmissible. In the illuminated service-books of the Middle Ages an evangelist or prophet is frequently represented as writing with an angel whispering in his ear and dictating what he should write. The final step to the belief in the verbal inspiration of the particular form of the Scriptures known to the disputant was not difficult to the uncritical or the half-educated; and on the other hand, those who could not shut their eyes to manifest errors and inconsistencies, or to moral standards no longer acceptable, were driven to theories of allegorical or mystical interpretation which more realistic ages found impossible and grotesque.

It is not easy to realise how recent is the acquisition of the knowledge which enables us to study the Bible in a truer perspective, and how modern is the growth of the critical spirit. Throughout the Middle Ages the Bible stood on a pedestal by itself, with no available standard of comparison. Even Latin literature was little known, and Greek much less. Other literatures were not known at all; other religions were known only as the beliefs of the heathen, to be shunned as corruptions of the truth and the works of the devil. Even when the Renaissance had let in the light of Greek thought and had kindled the spirit of enquiry, it was long before this bore much fruit in either the search for knowledge or the application of scientific criticism. It was not until the nineteenth century that these two powerful engines of education came into full use. On the one hand, scholars attacked the

prevalent opinions on the ancient literatures, whether classical or Biblical, with the acids of sceptical enquiry, which in turn called forth the defensive scholarship of those who held the traditional beliefs to be substantially sound ; and on the other, the archæologist set to work with his spade to reveal the monuments and records of the nations that immediately surrounded and were most closely associated with the Bible lands.

The first impact of this new knowledge and this new spirit of criticism was to shake confidence in the unchallengeable authority of Holy Writ. The second was to call forth a school of defensive criticism which applied the improved methods of scholarship to the sceptics' own views, and utilised in a conservative spirit the results of archæological research. What is now needed, and has been forthcoming, more or less, in many books of the last generation, to which this is only an addition, is a consideration of the results of this conflict of criticisms, and to see how far a new theory of inspiration emerges, which may reconcile the new knowledge and the new spirit of criticism with the authority of the Bible as a guide of life. It is an enquiry which must be conducted in the spirit of all modesty ; for it implies that knowledge is progressive, that we know more than our predecessors, but also that our successors will know more than us ; that each generation must form its own synthesis by the application of its best powers of criticism to the knowledge available to it, and realising that, if it obtains for itself a light sufficient to walk by, its conclusions are but provisional, and that later generations will be able to walk in a brighter light, derived from a fuller knowledge.

At bottom, this is only to substitute the idea of a progressive revelation for that of an absolute revelation ; and a strong argument in its favour is its analogy with God's methods in His other dealings with mankind. It might have been His will to place man in a world where all was already perfect, where sin did not exist, where change, effort, progress were not required ; a world such as is imagined in Browning's poem "Rephan" :

There, all's at most—not more, not less ;  
Nowhere deficiency nor excess.

No want—whatever should be, is now :  
No growth—that's change, and change comes—how  
To royalty born with crown on brow ?

Nothing begins—so needs to end :  
Where fell it short at first ? Extend  
Only the same, no change can mend !

None felt distaste when better and worse  
Were uncontrastable : bless or curse  
What—in that uniform universe ?

No hope, no fear : as to-day, shall be  
To-morrow : advance or retreat need we  
At our stand-still through eternity ?

All happy : needs must we so have been,  
Since who could be otherwise ? All serene :  
What dark was to banish, what light to screen ?

But into this peaceful, monotonous world comes the yearning  
for change, for effort, for progress :

How did it come to pass there lurked  
Somehow a seed of change that worked  
Obscure in my heart till perfection irked ?

Till out of its peace at length grew strife—  
Hopes, fears, loves, hates—obscurely rife—  
My life grown a-tremble to turn your life ?

And so

You divine the test.  
When the trouble grew in my pregnant breast,  
A voice said, “So wouldst thou strive, not rest,

“Burn and not smoulder, win by worth,  
Not rest content with a wealth that's dearth ?  
Thou art past Rephan, thy place be Earth.”

In the sphere of morality, it is clear that this world is a place  
of trial, where on man is placed the responsibility of using

the talents and powers with which he is gifted, where progress only comes with effort, and mistakes are possible. Why should it be otherwise with regard to the utilisation of the means placed at our disposal for our guidance in ascertaining and interpreting God's will? He might have made a revelation to mankind which was absolute, imperative, leaving no room for variation or progress or differing interpretations, which mankind must follow without possibility of uncertainty or advance in standards, where the aborigine of Australia would be on the same level of moral apprehension and achievement as St. John or St. Francis. But it is evident that it is not so, that the need for effort, the possibility of progress, are no less necessary in the interpretation of His will than in the interpretation of His universe. In our reading of the book of nature we have progressed from the astronomers of Chaldæa, the philosophers of Ionia, through Ptolemy and Copernicus, Newton and Einstein; and the end is not yet. Why should it be otherwise with our reading of the Bible? Should we not expect, by analogy, to have to use our intellectual faculties for its interpretation, to advance in knowledge, to make progress in interpretation, without at any time derogating from its ultimate authority as a guide to life? If the essence of the message remains unchanged, we may naturally look for human weaknesses in its transmission. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels.*"

It thus seems to be in accordance with the general dispensation of the world in which we live that the revelation which we believe to be enshrined in the books of the Bible should bear the marks of the human channels through which it has come; that its interpretation should be different in different ages; that it should be differently understood, and therefore differently adapted to their own generations by Abraham, Moses, and Samuel, by Amos, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, by Paul and John, by Origen and Augustine, by Anselm and Aquinas, by Luther and Melancthon, by the scholars and

divines of the eighteenth century and of our own age. There is therefore no disloyalty in the attempt to review our methods of Bible study in the light of modern knowledge, not because absolute certainty is any more obtainable now than in the past, but because it is incumbent on each generation to take stock of its intellectual possessions, and to make sure that the credit of divine truth is not impaired by the imperfections of human expositions of it, or discredited by a lethargic adherence to views, once reasonable, which have ceased to be compatible with modern knowledge.

When once the question is fairly faced, it is quite clear, both that the Scriptures have not been handed down to us without suffering from the ordinary defects of human transmission, and that their authors were not unaffected by the conditions of the ages in which they lived. The extreme form of the anti-critical view is that of a belief in the "verbal inspiration" of the Bible, which maintains that every word in the Bible was the outcome of direct inspiration by the Holy Spirit, and that no change is admissible. Of this it is not necessary to say much. The question at once arises, What is this verbally inspired and immutable Bible? To the English reader, it is the Authorised Version of 1611; to the Roman Church, it is the Vulgate, a translation made by Jerome about A.D. 380-400 and variously modified since; to the Greek Church it is the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, made in the third and second centuries B.C., differing considerably from the Hebrew text accepted by the Jews, and a text of the New Testament which took form somewhere about the tenth century, and which differs in not unimportant details from the texts of the earliest manuscripts now known to us. For 2,200 years from the days of Amos and Isaiah, for 1,400 years from the days of St. Paul and the Evangelists, every copy of every book of the Bible was written by hand, and no two were precisely alike. There is therefore no text of the Bible which can be pointed to as immaculately correct, none to which a doctrine of verbal inspiration can be applied.

And if once the presence of human imperfections in the Bible as we now have it is admitted, the extent of the presence

of such imperfections is no longer a question of principle, but of intelligent scrutiny of the facts. We have to ascertain, from a careful study of the books themselves, whether there is *prima facie* reason to believe that the authors were liable to error, and then whether such errors at all affect the essential value of the books. The answer to the first question may well be, Yes, and yet the answer to the second, No.

Here, again, a first examination shows that it is not possible to maintain that there are no errors or inconsistencies in the narrative, and no variation of moral standards throughout the period covered by the two Testaments: and if some errors and some variations are admitted, it is merely a matter of critical investigation to ascertain, to the best of our ability, the character and extent of them. With regard to errors in the narrative, even quite trivial ones are sufficient to establish the principle. Thus in 2 Kings xxiv. 8 it is said that Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, but in 2 Chronicles xxxvi. 9 it is said that he was eight years old. Both statements cannot be true.

In one of the narratives out of which the early chapters of Genesis are composed (Gen. vi. 19), it is said that God commanded Noah to bring into the ark two of every sort of living thing; in the other (Gen. vii. 2) the Lord commands him to take clean beasts by sevens, unclean by twos. In Genesis xxxii. 3, Esau is said to be already living in the land of Seir or Edom when Jacob returns from Padan-aram to Canaan; but in xxxvi. 6-8 Esau's removal to Mount Seir is attributed to the expansion of Jacob's possessions in Canaan, so that the land was not large enough for the two of them. Many discrepancies in detail in the story of the Israelites in Egypt are noted by Driver (*Exodus*, 1911, pp. xx.-xxiv.), which it would be useless to recapitulate here.

There are similar discrepancies in the story of David: in 1 Samuel xvi. 21, 22 he is well known to Saul, and serves as his armour-bearer, while in xvii. 55-8, he is quite unknown to him. In the parallel passages, 2 Samuel xxi. 18-22, and 1 Chronicles xx. 4-8, there are several small discrepancies: the first battle is at Gob in the one account, at Gezer in the



other, and the "son of the giant" slain by Sibbechai is variously named Saph and Sippai; in the first narrative Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim slays Goliath the Gittite (the words "the brother of" inserted in the A.V. are not in the original Hebrew or in the Septuagint), in the second Elhanan the son of Jair slays Lahmi the brother of Goliath. These are all small and quite unimportant variations of detail, but they are sufficient to show that no theory of the complete inerrancy of Scripture is tenable, and that account must be taken of human fallibility and imperfections in the tradition, the extent of which can only be determined by the use of normal critical methods—themselves, no doubt, not infallible.

So also it is certain that there are variations of moral standard during the period covered by the books of the Bible, which forbid the indiscriminate application of its teaching in our own age. The most obvious example is the polygamy of the patriarchs, which is in no way discouraged or reprehended.

The slaughter of enemies, including women and children, though often cited as authority by combating Christians, and especially by our own Puritans, is plainly not in accordance with New Testament morality, and would be repudiated by all civilised communities to-day. It is not necessary, however, to labour this point; for it is common ground among Christians that the revelation of the New Testament is an advance on that of the Old, and there is therefore nothing unreasonable in holding that the revelation of the prophets shows an advance on that of the patriarchs. All that it is material to note for our present purpose is that the principle of a progressive revelation is both in accordance with Christian doctrine, and is supported by the evidence of the Scriptures.

If, then, it is once admitted that the tradition of the Bible text has been subject to the human conditions affecting the transmission of ancient literature in general, that there is evidence in the several books of a varying level of inspiration and a progressive development of moral instruction, it is plainly incumbent on each generation to consider how the interpretation of the Bible is affected by the continual increase of knowledge. The results of research (often very dubious)

must be discussed by the experts, who may take some time to assess their real value, and who from time to time may find reason to vary their assessments ; but as agreed results appear to emerge, they should be made known to the general public, which should be prepared to give them full consideration.

The following chapters are an attempt to sum up the present results, or apparent results, of recent study and research in connection with the interpretation of the Bible, from three different points of view. In the not very remote past the tendency was to regard the Bible as a single book, of uniform value as history, as literature, and as the fountain-head of religious instruction. It will be useful to separate these points of view, and to study the individual books, or groups of books, separately. It will be easier so to set out the results of recent research, and to distinguish the human element from the Divine, and in the end to see in what light the Book of Books presents itself in this mid-twentieth century of our era.

CHAPTER II  
THE BIBLE AS HISTORY

(a) OLD TESTAMENT

IF we look at the books of the Old Testament from the point of view of history, we find that they include (a) the earliest traditions of the Hebrew race, beginning with the Creation, the Fall of Man, the Flood, and the lives of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, from whom the Israelites claimed descent, down to the time when Jacob and his children and grandchildren settled in Egypt (Genesis); (b) the residence of the tribe in Egypt, and its removal thence, an event which left an ineradicable mark in the historical memory of the Jewish people (Exodus to Deuteronomy); (c) the entry of the people, now much multiplied, into Palestine, its partial conquest of the tribes then occupying it, and the vicissitudes of its history under a succession, broken and fitful, of administrators known as judges (Joshua to Ruth); (d) the establishment of a royalty and the history, first of an undivided kingdom under Saul, David, and Solomon, and then of the separated kingdoms of Israel and Judah, down to their extinction, the first by the power of Assyria in 722 B.C., the second by that of Babylon in 586 B.C. (Samuel, Kings, Chronicles); (e) the return from the Babylonian captivity (Ezra, Nehemiah); to which may be added, from the books accepted by the Grecised Jews living in Egypt, though not included in the Hebrew canon of Scripture, (f) the story of the rising of the Jews against the domination of the Seleucid kings of Syria, and the rule of successive members of the house of Maccabaeus (Maccabees). All these are narrative books, purporting to give a straightforward history of the Israelite people from the earliest times to the return of a portion of the people from Babylon and their re-establishment in Judaea. To these may be added

such historical details as can be gathered from the writings of the religious teachers, known to us as the Prophets, who from time to time, from the eighth century to the fifth, strove to direct the moral, and sometimes the political, course of the people.

What, then, is the value of these books, regarded merely as historical narrative? How is it to be tested? What is the verdict of sober and scholarly investigation with regard to its trustworthiness?

Suppose a visitor from another planet, with no religious prepossessions, but merely anxious to discover the true course of events in the ancient history of the inhabitants of our earth, were to come upon these records, how would he set about the study of them, and to what conclusions would he be likely to come? If we can satisfy ourselves as to the character and value of these narratives considered merely as historical records, we can then proceed to consider the bearing of our conclusions as to their value from the point of view of the history and authority of our religion.

The first step would naturally be to inquire what other records there are which deal with any part of the same subject, and with which the records of the Hebrews may be compared. Palestine, the home of the Hebrews, was in touch with Egypt on the south-west, with Syria to the north and north-east, and with the empires of Assyria and Babylonia further to the east. It also had a frontier on the Mediterranean Sea, which might bring it into connection with nations to the west. It is natural to ask whether we have knowledge of any records of these adjoining peoples, which may be compared with those which we find in the Old Testament.

Until about a century ago, and for the most part until a much more recent date, the answer would have been almost wholly negative. There were the sketches of the Egyptian, Assyrian and Persian empires given by Herodotus, Ctesias and Diodorus, and references in other Greek writers; and scraps of information derived ultimately from native sources had come down in fragmentary extracts from the Greek histories of Egypt by Manetho and of Assyria by Berossus,

both compiled in the third century B.C. But these contained little that had any bearing on the history of Palestine. To all intents and purposes the records of the Old Testament stood alone and unchallenged, and they were naturally accepted at their face value by nearly all writers, from the earliest Christian Fathers down to our own day.

The position has been materially changed by the discoveries due to archaeological research since the excavation of Nineveh began in 1843, and the gradual decipherment of the hieroglyphics of Egypt and the cuneiform script of Mesopotamia. We now have masses of records of the peoples surrounding Palestine on every side, from Egypt, from Babylonia, from Assyria, from the Hittites, Canaanites, Hurrians, and other nations inhabiting the country to the north. It will be worth while to see what these records amount to, how they compare with those of the Hebrews, and in what respects they throw definite light upon them. Let us take them in turn.

1. *Egypt.* The literature of Egypt, as now known, is very plentiful, partly in the form of written rolls of papyrus, partly in inscriptions carved upon slabs of stone. A large proportion consists of works of religion, notably the famous Book of the Dead, which describes the adventures of the deceased man in the other world, and other books of ritual. But besides these, which contain no history, there is a considerable quantity of narrative, either true, like the story of the journey into Syria of the priest Wen-amen to obtain timber for the sacred boat of Amen-Ra, towards the end of the twelfth century B.C., or frankly fictitious, like "The Tale of the Two Brothers" or stories of the magicians. Of history, in our sense of continuous objective narrative, there is none. The nearest approach to it (and our principal means of reconstructing Egyptian history) is made on the one hand by annals such as the lists of kings on the Palermo Stone or the Turin Papyrus, and on the other by the self-laudatory inscriptions set up by individual kings to record particular achievements. Thus the Palermo Stone notes in a given year a raid into the Sudan, the building of certain ships, and the height of the Nile; while long inscriptions describe

the campaigns of Thothmes II in the Sudan or Thothmes III at Megiddo. Fullest of all, and nearest to history, is the great Harris Papyrus, which narrates the achievements of Rameses III, the character of which may be illustrated by a few extracts :<sup>1</sup>

I enlarged all the frontiers of Egypt, I conquered those who crossed over them in their own lands, I slaughtered the Tanauna in their islands ; the Thakra and the Purastau were made into a holocaust. The Shartanau and the Uasheshu of the sea were made non-existent ; they were seized by me at one time and were brought as captives to Egypt, like the sand in the furrows. . . .

I made a very large well in the desert of Aina. It had a girdle wall like a mountain of basalt, with twenty buttresses, and its height was thirty cubits and it had bastions. . . . I cut out large sea-going boats, with smaller boats before them, and they were manned with large crews and large numbers of serving men. . . .

I despatched inspectors and overseers to the turquoise desert of my mother, the goddess Hather, the lady of the turquoise . . . and there were brought unto me most wonderfully fine turquoises, real stones, in large numbers of bags, and laid out before me. The like had never been seen before, since kings began to reign.

I caused the whole country to be planted with groves of trees and with flowering shrubs, and I made the people to sit under the shade thereof. I made it possible for an Egyptian woman to walk with a bold step to the place whither she wished to go ; no strange man attacked her, and no one on the road.

It is thus evident that annals were kept, and that the power of narrative was present, but history seems never to have got beyond the stage of personal laudation. Critical history from an outside point of view, such as we find in the books of Kings in the Old Testament, makes no appearance in Egyptian literature. It is therefore not surprising that little or no light is thrown upon Hebrew history from this source. The residence of the children of Israel in Egypt was an unimportant episode from the Egyptian point of view, and their departure reflected no such credit that it was likely to be recorded in the inscriptions of the reigning Pharaoh. The only mention that we have of the Hebrews from the Egyptian

<sup>1</sup> Taken from Budge, *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians* (1914), pp. 112 ff.

side is the inscription of Merenptah, discovered in 1896, which, among other triumphs of the king, records that "Israel is desolated, her seed is not; Palestine has become a defenceless widow for Egypt"; and the reference of this is obscure. But Egypt has produced, in the Tell el-Amarna Letters, a group of documents with direct information about Palestine. These are a group of tablets written in cuneiform script and the Babylonian language, found at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt in 1887, and comprising letters written by officials in Syria and Palestine to the kings Amenhotep III and IV, in the first half of the fourteenth century B.C. They are largely filled with pleas for assistance to deal with the inroads of invaders—Hittites, Amorites, and others—and representations of the disorder and ruin that are falling on the land. Appeals of this kind come from the governors of Byblus and Megiddo in the north, from Askalon, Gezer, and especially Jerusalem in the south; and among the invading peoples in the south are mentioned the Habiru. It is tempting to equate this name at once with "Hebrew," and to see in these letters a picture of the invasion of Palestine by the children of Israel under Joshua. It may be so; but the name Habiru is found in Babylonian and other documents in a much wider connotation, and at periods much earlier and later, and scholars are still much divided in opinion as to the date of the Exodus, some accepting the first half of the fourteenth century and others preferring the second half of the thirteenth. With further discoveries it may be hoped that these pieces in the puzzle will fall into their place; at present one can only say that the light to be derived from Egyptian sources for the Old Testament history is small in quantity and doubtful in interpretation.

2. *Mesopotamia.* From Mesopotamia, on the other side of Palestine, we have many thousands of documents, from the third millennium B.C. downwards, written in cuneiform characters on clay tablets and cylinders. The earlier ones come from southern Mesopotamia or Babylonia, where the Sumerians had established a highly literate civilisation before the end of the fourth millennium. This has been brought to

light by excavations in the course of the last sixty years at such sites as Telloh (Lagash), Nippur, and Ur, which have yielded whole archives of documents, mainly of a business or commercial character, but including a notable number of literary texts. The most remarkable of these are the stories of the Creation and the Deluge ; but there are also lists of rulers, going back to the remotest mythical times, which show that here, as in Egypt, some system of annals was maintained. These no doubt provided the basis on which Berossus, a priest of Babylon in the third century B.C., formed his Greek history of Babylonia and Assyria, of which some scanty quotations have been handed down by Eusebius and Syncellus. Of direct historical narrative there is nothing ; but of materials for history there is a very valuable contribution in the Laws of Hammurabi, discovered in 1901 at Susa, whither the slab on which they are inscribed had evidently been carried as a trophy from Babylonia. The date of Hammurabi, king of Babylon, is now placed about 1792-50 B.C., somewhere, more or less, about the time of Abraham ; and though the similarity of these laws to those of the Pentateuch has often been exaggerated, they are unquestionably a proof of the existence of elaborately written legislation long before the time of Moses.

The records of the kingdom of Assyria, derived from the excavations of Layard, Rassam and others from 1843 onwards, principally on the sites of Nimrûd (Calah) and Kuyunjik (Nineveh), come much nearer to the character of direct history. The libraries of the temple of Nebo at Nineveh (from about 722 B.C.) and of Ashur-bani-pal (669-626 B.C.), besides containing religious texts (notably a later form of the Creation and Deluge story, incorporated in the legend of the hero Gilgamesh), included also chronological lists of kings and of eponymous officials (known as *limmu*, who gave their names to the year, like archons at Athens and consuls at Rome), covering the period from the ninth to the seventh century. Far more detail, however, comes from the cylinders which it was customary to place in the foundation deposits of temples and palaces. These contain chronicles of the founders'



reigns or of portions of them, and we have such cylinders of the Assyrian kings Tiglath-Pileser, Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashur-bani-pal ; also of the Babylonian sovereigns Nabopolassar, Nebuchadrezzar and Nabonidus, and the Persian Cyrus. Like the inscriptions of the kings of Egypt mentioned above, these are not objective history but self-laudations of particular sovereigns ; but they contain much historical detail, which (with a proper discount for the omission of unpleasant incidents) can be accepted. Some of it, moreover, directly touches on the history of the Hebrews ; notably the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser, which records his defeat of Hazael, king of Syria, and the tribute paid by Jehu, king of Israel, and the cylinder in which Sennacherib describes his invasion of Judaea and the humiliation inflicted upon Hezekiah (but not the subsequent destruction of the Assyrian army).

Here, therefore, we get some cross-lights on Hebrew history, but not much ; and what we do get is not in the form of professional history. We have no continuous history of Babylonia or Assyria from native sources, and have no reason to suppose that any such existed except in the form of annalistic chronicles.

3. *The Hittites.* It is only since 1884 that the existence of the Hittites as a great empire in eastern Asia Minor has been made known by the discoveries and writings of Sayce and Wright, and at first the evidence consisted solely of sculptured monuments. But in 1906 a great record office of clay tablets was unearthed by Winckler at Boghaz-keui, from which something of its history has been recovered. Some of the tablets were in Babylonian script and language, which could be read at once ; others in cuneiform script but Hittite language, which have been slowly and laboriously deciphered by Hrozny, Forrer and others ; others again in Hittite hieroglyphs, which still await interpretation. These records established the identity of the Hittites, mentioned in the Old Testament, with the people referred to as Hatti in Assyrian documents and as Khita in Egyptian, and (in conjunction with the monuments) show that they occupied a large territory

with its capital in Cappadocia, and were a leading power in the Near East from the early part of the fourteenth century B.C. to about 1200, with a fluctuating authority over parts of Syria, and westward towards the coast of Asia Minor. Its power declined after the incursion of the mysterious "Peoples of the Sea," about 1194, but a loose Hittite confederacy continued to exist, with its centre at Carchemish, until its final suppression by Sargon in 717.

The Hittite documents include treaties with Egypt, and give us a number of place-names and names of kings; but there is nothing of the nature of continuous historical narrative among them. They add to the proofs that documents providing material for history existed plentifully in the lands adjoining Palestine from a period before the entry of the Hebrews into that land; but they offer no parallel to the historical looks of the Old Testament.

4. *The Canaanites.* The same may be said of the Canaanites of north Syria, of whom not only a record office but a royal library has been recovered by the French excavations at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit), near Alexandretta, from 1929 up to the outbreak of the present war. The date of these documents, most of which are written in a hitherto unknown alphabet of cuneiform characters, is in the first half of the fourteenth century, contemporary with the Tell el-Amarna letters and (if the earlier date for the Exodus be accepted) with the invasion of the Israelites under Joshua. Indeed, one of the texts, of a semi-historical character, describes the mission of Keret, king of the Sidonians, to oppose an invasion of the Negeb (southern Palestine) by a host of Terachites, whose name recalls that of the father of Abraham. But this narrative is plainly semi-mythical, and of direct history there is nothing. The great importance of the Ugarit library lies in its religious texts, which for the first time give us a picture of the Canaanite religion at the time of the Israelite invasion. They tell us of El, the supreme god, and of his son Baal, and in their worship we see the rival influence against which the servants of Jehovah were contending throughout the period of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. They furnish us, as

nothing else has yet done, with the immediate background of the religion of the Old Testament, and show how great was the advance achieved by the prophets and teachers of Israel.

5. *The Hurrians.* Still more recently, French excavations in the neighbourhood of Kirkuk, east of the middle Tigris, have brought to light records of the Hurri, or Hurrians, who are mentioned in Egyptian, Hittite and Canaanite documents, and who appear to be identical with the Horites or Hivites of the Old Testament. Here again there is no formal history, but there are a number of laws, some of which show remarkable parallels with the legislation of the Pentateuch. The Hurrian laws are about contemporary with Moses, and show that the elaboration of the Mosaic legislation is not in itself any ground for questioning its antiquity. The Hurrian laws, like the code of Hammurabi, prove that law-making in great detail was practised by the peoples adjoining Palestine at least as early a date.

We have now surveyed the literatures of the nations adjoining Palestine, as at present known to us, and can now compare them with the historical books of the Old Testament. And the first striking point is that nowhere among the surrounding peoples do we find true historiography, such as we find among the Hebrews and, later, among the Greeks. The Sumerians and Egyptians had annals and lists of kings, and their rulers from time to time celebrated their own achievements in self-laudatory narratives; but of continuous objective history we find nothing, still less of critical history, such as is provided by the books of Kings, where the writer comments unfavourably on the character and conduct of the rulers described. Traces of annals, similar to those of Egypt and Babylonia, may be discerned in the book of Judges; to these may be attributed the mention of such unimportant rulers as Tola, who judged Israel for twenty and three years, and after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years (Judges x. 1-3), and Ibzan and Elon and Abdon (Judges xii. 8-15). Into such an annalistic framework are inserted the longer narratives of Barak, Gideon, Jephthah

and Samson, which may have been handed down by oral tradition. But when we reach the time of Samuel, leading up to the foundation of the kingdom, we enter upon an ordered and continuous narrative, corresponding to our general idea of history, to which we find no parallel in the chronicles of Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Another characteristic, besides objectivity, distinguishes the Hebrew histories from those of the surrounding nations. This is the fact that they are written entirely from the point of view of religion. The writers are little concerned with the greatness of their nation; what interests them is its conformity with the will of Jehovah. It is a record of backslidings and recoveries. Its rhythm is expressly described at the beginning of the book of Judges (ii. 11 ff.) :

And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baalim : and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves down unto them ; and they provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, . . . and they were sore distressed. And the Lord raised up judges, which saved them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they hearkened not unto their judges, for they went a-whoring after other gods.

Similarly, in the history of the kingdom, we find (except in the case of Solomon) no emphasis laid upon material wealth and magnificence; the story is predominantly one of religious failure on the part of both kings and peoples. In the annals of Judah, the kings who wholeheartedly upheld the worship of Jehovah are a minority—Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah; the commendation of some others is qualified, and others are definitely condemned, as are all the rulers of Israel. There is no such critical history, whether from a religious or a secular standpoint, among the literatures of Egypt, Babylonia, or Assyria.

Greek history, on the other hand, while at least equally

objective, has not the religious character of the Old Testament. It is definitely secular, a human narrative from the human point of view, with a personal author who from time to time expresses his own views. His criticisms at times have a moral character, but the will of God is not the standard of judgement. It is in the Greek historians, in Herodotus and still more in Thucydides, that we find the beginnings of history as it is written in our own day ; but in objectivity, in narrative skill, and in criticism from their particular point of view, the Hebrew historians show a very marked superiority to their contemporaries and neighbours.

We can now pass on to consider what literary criticism has to tell us of the composition of the historical books of the Old Testament. It has long been recognised that the Pentateuch is a compound of a number of different elements. It is obvious to the most superficial reader that Deuteronomy is distinct in style and language from the other books ; and only a little study of the other books is necessary to show that in several places (notably in the narratives of the Creation and the Flood and the carrying of Joseph into Egypt) different accounts of the same event have been combined or juxtaposed. The analysis of these component parts of the Pentateuch has occupied many scholars during the past century, especially since the publication of Wellhausen's work on *The Composition of the Hexateuch* in 1876. The differences between scholars in detail are many, and discussion is by no means at an end ; but there is general agreement on the framework, which can be briefly indicated as representing the present conclusions of scholarship. Underlying the first four books of the Pentateuch are two narratives, the composition of which can be assigned to a date about the ninth century B.C., with 900 and 750 as outside limits. These must have been based on earlier materials, the dates of which cannot be certainly fixed ; what is known as the Book of the Covenant (Exod. xx.-xxiii.) would appear to be the earliest nucleus of legislation. These two narratives are known by the initials J and E, which may indicate either the two names of God (Jehovah and Elohim) which partially characterise them, or the two

kingdoms (Judah and Ephraim) in which they would appear to have respectively composed. Two other substantial elements are to be found in the book of Deuteronomy (D), which is generally believed to be in the main the Book of the Law discovered by Hilkiah in the Temple in the reign of Josiah (621 B.C.), and what is sometimes known as the Book of Holiness (H), the code of laws contained in Leviticus xvii.-xxvi., which is assigned to about the same date. At a later date all these materials were set in a framework which from its insistence on the importance of the priesthood is generally known as the Priestly narrative (P); this is assigned to the time, and perhaps to the actual handiwork, of Ezra (398 B.C.), though it is recognised that it incorporates material of much earlier date.

There is nothing in this analysis which need in any way disquiet the modern reader of the Bible. It is an analysis which emerges from the examination of the books themselves. With regard to the later historical books, those which we call 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings are in fact a single continuous work, the present division being due to the Greek Septuagint version, where (probably to suit the normal dimensions of a papyrus roll) it is divided into four books, designated as 1-4 Kingdoms. Its composition must, of course, be subsequent to the latest event recorded in it, which is the release of Jehoiachin from imprisonment in 560 B.C. It thus covers a period of nearly five hundred years, and must have been derived from materials of different dates and values. The books of Chronicles are a later rehandling of the history of the kingdom of Judah from the date of the accession of David.<sup>1</sup>

Proceeding backwards, the books of Joshua and Judges cover the period from the invasion of Palestine to the birth of Samuel, with a narrative which is obviously incomplete

<sup>1</sup> The latest study of Chronicles, by Dr. A. C. Welch (*The book of the Chronicles*, British Academy Schweich Lectures for 1938), distinguishes two strata; (1) the work of the Chronicler, who was one of the remnant left in Judæa at the Captivity, about contemporary with Ezekiel, and (2) additions by an annotator, one of the returned exiles, with a different view of the history of the temple.

and sometimes inconsistent with itself. It is evidently a compilation of materials of varying characters and values strung together on an annalistic framework. It may owe something to "the book of the wars of Jehovah" (Num. xxi. 14), which may have included the invasion of Palestine as well as the previous fights with the Amorites and Midianites. Since the writer evidently had knowledge of the establishment of a kingdom of Israel (Judges xvii. 6 ; xviii. 1 ; xxi. 25), its date cannot be earlier than the age of Saul, and may more probably be later. For the Pentateuch, the analysis given above shows that what matters is not so much the date of its composition in its present form as the date of the materials of which it is composed. Until recently it was maintained by extreme critics that it could have rested on no documentary materials earlier than the period of the kings, because writing was not known earlier. Now it is clear, not only that writing was in common use many centuries before the date of David, but that elaborate legislation existed among the neighbouring peoples before the time of Moses. The books of the Pentateuch may therefore rest upon contemporary written records, and it is the task of criticism to discern and discuss them.

Thus, if we once accept the position that *we have this treasure in earthen vessels*, we can give an intelligible presentation of the character of the historical books of the Old Testament, regarded purely as history. The narratives of the Creation and Deluge and of the lives of the patriarchs may well have been handed down orally long before they were written down. In the households of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and during the residence of the growing tribe in Egypt, it is not likely that there was any call for written records. But when we reach the age of Moses, we must take into account the general knowledge of writing and the compilation of codes of laws among the peoples of the Near East. The histories of the Hebrews may well have grown up much as the early chronicles of our own country, when one chronicler freely incorporated whole masses of his predecessors' works, and passed on the composite result to be utilised by his successors. So the authors of the histories which we know as J and E (see

p. 23), writing in the ninth or eighth century, would have utilised written materials (codes of laws, narratives, and the like) from the time of Moses downwards, and their works would then have been available for the historian or historians whom we know as P, who at the time of the Exile or Return set himself to compile the history of his people. Similarly, the author of the work which we know as the books of Samuel and Kings, writing after 560 B.C., had materials of earlier date, such as the lament of David for Saul and Jonathan, which he took from the book of Jasher, narratives of fact extracted from various annals ("the book of the acts of Solomon," "the chronicles of the kings of Judah," and the like), or the account of Sennacherib's campaign against Judah which is found in Isaiah xxxvi. and xxxvii.

The formulas which recur at the beginning and end of each reign (e.g. "In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel reigned Asa over Judah, and forty and one years reigned he in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Maachah, the daughter of Abishalom. And Asa did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, as did David his father. . . . The rest of all the acts of Asa, and all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And Asa slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father; and Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead") suggest that the compiler had before him an annalistic record of the successive reigns, to which he added fuller narratives when they were available. Thus the detailed account of the reign of Ahab with the acts of the prophets Elijah, Elisha, and Micaiah, is evidently derived from some non-official source, possibly from records kept by the corporation known as "the sons of the prophets."

Thus we have only to examine the books themselves to see that they are made up from materials of different dates and characters; and it will appear that we can apply to them the ordinary methods of literary and historical criticism without in the least affecting the moral teaching embodied in them, which is what gives them their value for us to-day.



The critics who have elucidated the method of their composition should, for the most part, be regarded as friends who illustrate the Bible, not as enemies who destroy it.

The general result, therefore, of the modern study of the Bible is, on the one hand, to supersede the old uncritical view which regarded the Old Testament as an unerring narrative of fact from first to last, in which the story of the building of the Tower of Babel stood on the same level as that of the sack of Jerusalem by Nebuchadrezzar ; but, on the other, to reveal it as a human composition, subject to human frailties, but resting on good authorities of early date, conveying an intelligible record of the progressive development of the Hebrew people, of the surroundings among which they lived, of their backslidings and their return to a purer religion, down to the time of the overthrow of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and the removal of the bulk of the population to places of exile in Mesopotamia. During the latter part of the period, from the ninth century onwards, the religious history of the Hebrews is illuminated by the writings of the prophets ; and the value of this we shall find is not diminished by modern historical criticism, but rather is heightened by being put into its proper perspective and shown in its true relation to the progressive education of the people of Israel as the special receptacle of God's message to mankind.

#### (b) NEW TESTAMENT

The historical character of the New Testament is very different from that of the Old Testament. It is not the history of a people, but of a movement, and it covers a period of less than a hundred years, instead of more than fifteen hundred. It consists of a biography in four different forms, followed by a narrative covering some thirty years, which in turn is illustrated by a number of treatises in the form of letters and by one apocalyptic composition. It differs again from the Old Testament in the fact that the documents of which it is composed are approximately dateable, and come very near to the events to which they relate ; but dealing as they

do with events which at the time would have attracted very little general interest, we cannot expect to find very much in the way of outside sources that bears upon them.

In these circumstances, the function of historical criticism is mainly to consider the date of the documents of which the New Testament is composed, and to see what can be learnt from an examination of them as to the manner of their composition, and what light, if any, is thence derivable with regard to their credibility. On the subject of the dates and authenticity of the books, the tendency of recent criticism has been very much to reduce the area of controversy. In the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century both the authenticity and the traditional dates were the subject of strong attack by hostile critics. This criticism may be said to have begun with the Tübingen school of F. C. Baur in 1831, to have reached its peak in this country in the anonymous work *Supernatural Religion* [by W. R. Cassels], published in 1874-7, to have been greatly checked by Bishop Lightfoot's searching examination in 1889 and by the work of other English scholars, and to have been finally discredited by Harnack's declaration in 1897 (in his *Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur*) that the earliest literature of the Church is, from a literary-historical point of view, trustworthy and dependable, and that the traditional chronology is in the main to be accepted. Recent discoveries have entirely confirmed this view. The interval between the dates of composition of the New Testament books and the earliest extant manuscripts of them has been greatly reduced. Whereas our textual evidence formerly began with the great vellum codices (the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus) of the first half of the fourth century, we now have considerable portions of a papyrus codex of the four Gospels and the Acts which may be assigned to the first half of the third century, and another containing the Pauline Epistles at least as old and perhaps earlier. These are among the Chester Beatty papyri discovered in 1931. Still more striking is the discovery, announced in 1935, of a small fragment of the Fourth Gospel which on palaeographical grounds can be confidently assigned to the first half of the

second century. Small as it is, it is sufficient to prove that a copy of this Gospel was circulating in Egypt between, say, A.D. 120 and 150; and if that is so, the traditional date for the composition of the Gospel, in the last decade of the first century, cannot be far wrong. And since it is just this Gospel that the critics most confidently placed far down in the second century, it is satisfactory to have this decisive demonstration of the falsity of their arguments.

We come back, therefore, with confirmed confidence to the traditional dates of the New Testament books, which may be stated as follows. First come the letters of St. Paul, ranging between A.D. 51 (Thessalonians) and 64 (the latest date for the Pastorals, if St. Paul was martyred in that year). The Epistle of James and 1 Peter belong to the same period. Next come the three Synoptic Gospels, of which Mark is generally placed between A.D. 65 and 70, Matthew and Luke between A.D. 70 and 80. Acts follows shortly after Luke, perhaps about A.D. 75. Between that date and the end of the century come the Epistle of Jude, Revelation and the Gospel and Epistles of St. John. The second epistle bearing the name of Peter is now believed to be of later date, the name of the apostle being given to it as it is to the apocryphal Gospel and Apocalypse of Peter, or as the names of James and Thomas are attached to other apocryphal works.

Of all these books, only Acts can properly be termed historical, and it is a history of a community, coupled with a biography of one of its principal members, not the history of a nation. In details it occasionally touches on the history of the Roman Empire, and here it meets all the demands of accuracy. There is no sound reason for questioning its trustworthiness as a record of the events to which it refers, written by one who was closely associated with the latter part of the period, and at times an eye-witness. The judgement of nearly all scholars estimates very highly the accuracy of the record in Acts.

The Gospels are the biography of our Lord, but it is not always realised how small a portion of His life they actually cover. They record only isolated actions and discourses

between the opening of His ministry and His death, to which in Matthew and Luke are prefixed some particulars of His nativity and childhood. They leave it quite uncertain how long the ministry actually lasted. It is now generally agreed that Mark is the earliest of the three Synoptics ; that his work was utilised by Matthew and Luke ; that the two latter also used a collection of discourses, commonly referred to as Q ; and that (as stated in the preface to Luke) there were other narratives of our Lord's life, not now preserved or identifiable. It stands to reason that there must also have been much oral tradition, to which may be assigned some of the sayings which have been handed down in early writings other than the Gospels. In general, it may be said that the Synoptics represent the evangelistic teaching of the apostles and early missionaries of Christianity. The Fourth Gospel is obviously of later date than the Synoptics, though it claims to have been written by an eye-witness and contains much vivid detail. Its credibility as a work of history has been vehemently assailed, but it may be said with confidence that the general trend of recent criticism has been to confirm its authenticity and reliability.

The trustworthiness of the Synoptics has also been very variously estimated, but the adverse criticisms have, as a rule, enjoyed only short periods of popularity. The Tübingen theory, already referred to, had a considerable vogue on the Continent, with some adherents in this country. It assigned all the Gospels to the second century, and based its whole view of early Church history on a theory of an internecine feud between the followers of St. Peter and St. Paul respectively. Besides the Gospels, it denied the authenticity of all the Pauline Epistles except Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Galatians ; also of Acts and the Catholic Epistles. It thus denied the historicity of nearly all the New Testament, and interpreted the little that was left in its own unhistorical way. It is now, however, completely discredited, and is mentioned here only as a warning against the ready acceptance of even confidently asserted views of able scholars. They must be tested by time and counter-criticism before

they can take the place of established conclusions of scholarship.

Quite recently a theory has had some vogue, to which the name of “ Form-history ” has been given, and of which the main exponent is Professor Martin Dibelius. It seeks to determine the character of the materials out of which the Evangelists composed their Gospels—in itself a very legitimate subject of inquiry, but one in which, from the nature of the case, the conclusions must be largely conjectural. Professor Dibelius distinguishes three different types of narrative, collections of which he believes to have been available for the use of the Synoptics, and on which he believes them to have drawn. To these he gives the following names (the reasons for which are not very obvious) : (1) “ Paradigmen,” narratives intended for homiletic purposes in discourses to Christian audiences ; e.g. Mark ii. 1 ff. (the sick of the palsy), iii. 1 ff. (the man with the withered hand), x. 13 ff. (the little children), xii. 13 ff. (giving tribute to Caesar), xiv. 1 ff. (the incident of the box of ointment), etc. (2) “ Novelle,” mostly miracle-stories, more addressed to the outer world, and therefore more literary in form ; e.g. Mark i. 40-45 (the healing of the leper), iv. 35-41 (the calming of the storm), v. 1-20 (the Gadarene incident), vi. 35-44 (the feeding of the five thousand), vii. 32-7, viii. 22-6, and ix. 14-27 (healing the dumb, the blind, and the demoniac child), etc. (3) “ Legende,” more sophisticated narratives, written up with a view to edification ; e.g. the Nativity story in Luke ii. 4 ff., the Nazareth narrative in Luke iv. 16 ff. (the Nazareth narrative in Mark is a “ paradigm ”), Matthew xxvii. 3-8 (the repentance and death of Judas), xxvii. 19 (the dream of Pilate’s wife), etc. To each of these categories Professor Dibelius attributes an almost stereotyped pattern, to which the facts have been adapted, and considers that when the evangelists sat down to write their Gospels, they drew upon collections of such kinds of narrative in an almost mechanical way—so many of one kind and so many of another, according to taste, until the required space was filled.

It seems strange that such a representation should have gained so much popularity as it did. It is characteristically German in preferring mechanical theory to human probability. There is only an interval of some thirty-five years between the Crucifixion and the probable date of the earliest Gospel. For the greater part of this period no need of written records would be felt, because of the expectation of the Second Coming in the near future. This leaves a very short period for the writing down of narratives, for the establishment of stereotyped forms, and for the gathering of groups of each category into collections available for the use of authors, like the *exempla* accumulated over a long period of years for the use of mediaeval preachers, and for the dissemination of copies of such collections, so that they were available for evangelists writing in different parts of the Roman world. Nor does such a mechanical method of composition accord with what we know of the earliest Christian generation. It is not in the least likely that an apostle or the companion of an apostle, desirous of leaving on record a narrative of the Master's life and teaching, would sit down in cold blood to select so many "paradigms" from one source and so many "novelle" from another, and to write up some of them into "legende" with a view to edification. Such sophistication of the material is conceivable in later generations, but hardly in the life-time of those who had known the Lord.

It does not seem probable that so artificial a theory as this will enjoy a long popularity. There is more human probability in the traditions of the early Church, which said that Mark based himself mainly on the preachings of St. Peter (of which we have examples in the early chapters of Acts), while Luke would naturally have drawn on the preachings of St. Paul. The three Synoptists, therefore, represent the oral instruction given to the converts of the first generation, gradually crystallising into written records, of which these three, with their apostolic basis, achieved predominance, and were eventually accepted as the official documents of the Church. To them was subsequently added the personal reminiscences of St. John, partly going over the same ground,

but supplementing the simple evangelistic story with recollections of more intimate and profound discourses, embodying some of the deeper teachings of the Master. The Acts of the Apostles carries on the narrative after the Resurrection and Ascension, to describe the first preachings to the people of Jerusalem and the extension of the message to the Gentiles, up to the arrival of the great missionary apostle at Rome, the centre and capital of the civilised world.

CHAPTER III  
THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

NO one will deny that, quite apart from its religious value, the Bible is a collection of one of the great literatures of the world, and one which, through the medium of the Authorised Version, has had a vital influence on the development of our own literature. In the form of the Latin Vulgate, it was pre-eminently *the* literature of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. Every educated person knew it and the commentaries based upon it, and few knew any other literature. After the Renaissance its influence declined on the Continent in general, but in England it increased, sharing on at least equal terms with the literature of Greece and Rome the formative colouring of our own literature, both in prose and verse, and far more widely known among our people in general. During these later centuries our knowledge of its character has increased, and we are in a better position to compare it with other more or less contemporary literatures, to see what its peculiar characteristics are, and to estimate, apart from religious prepossessions, its place among the literatures of the world.

It will be convenient to deal with each Testament separately; for, although both are known to most of us through the medium of English translations, the Hebrew and Greek languages are fundamentally different in literary character.



## (a) OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament, regarded as literature, is a collection of works of different ages, of varying character, and representing at least five distinct categories of literary form. It comprises (i) narrative works, which have been considered from the point of view of history in the preceding chapter, and now fall to be considered as literature; (ii) poetry; (iii) prophetic prose works; (iv) sapiential works, i.e. the wisdom and proverbial literature; (v) apocalyptic. These will be considered separately, in the light of the most recent knowledge and with reference to recent critical views, some of which may be of only relative and provisional value.

(i) *The Narrative Books.* These include the Octateuch (i.e. Genesis to Ruth), the books of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Maccabees, with the romances of Tobit, Judith and Esther. Their dates, method of composition, and historical character have been discussed in the preceding chapter, and need not be re-examined here. Accepting the conclusions there indicated, they represent a body of narrative literature, the origins of which go back to the earliest ages, but the nucleus of which took form about the eighth century before Christ, and which for the most part had assumed its present form by the fifth century. For the purpose of comparison, which may enable us to appreciate better its special characteristics, we have, as in the last chapter, the literatures of Egypt and Mesopotamia on the one hand, and the literature of Greece on the other. The contrasts with these very different types of literature are illuminating.

From the literary point of view, Hebrew history is, for the most part, intermediate in style as in date between the annalistic methods of Egypt and Mesopotamia and the artistic handling of prose by the Greek writers. Some idea of their differences may be gathered from the following passages relating to the same subject, the invasion of Palestine by Sennacherib :

*Cylinder of Sennacherib.*

I drew nigh to Ekron and I slew the governors and princes who had transgressed, and I hung upon poles round about the city their dead bodies; the people of the city who had done wickedly and had committed offences I counted as spoil, but those who had not done these things and who were not taken in iniquity I pardoned. I brought their king Padi forth from Jerusalem and I established him upon the throne of dominion over them, and I laid tribute upon him. I then besieged Hezekiah of Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, and I captured forty-six of his strong cities and fortresses and innumerable small cities which were round about them, with the battering of rams and the assault of engines and the attack of foot soldiers and by mines and breaches. I brought out therefrom 200,150 people, both small and great, male and female, and horses and mules and asses and camels and oxen, and innumerable sheep I counted as spoil. Himself like a caged bird I shut up within Jerusalem his royal city. I threw up mounds against him, and I took vengeance upon any man who came forth from his city. . . . The

2 Kings xviii. 11-16.

And the king of Assyria carried Israel away unto Assyria, and put them in Hulah and in Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes; because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord their God, but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and would not hear it nor do it.

Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah and took them. And Hezekiah, king of Judah, sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; return from me; that which thou puttest upon me I will bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah king of Judah 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria. . . .

xix. 20. Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Whereas thou

*Herodotus II, 141.*

The next king, I was told, was a priest of Hephaestus, called Sethos. This monarch despised and neglected the warrior class of the Egyptians, as though he did not need their services. . . . Afterwards, therefore, when Sennacherib, king of the Arabians and Assyrians, marched his vast army into Egypt, the warriors one and all refused to come to his aid. On this the monarch greatly distressed, entered into the inner sanctuary, and before the image of the god bewailed the fate which impended over him. As he wept, he fell asleep, and dreamed that the god came and stood at his side, bidding him be of good cheer and go boldly forth to meet the Arabian host, which would do him no hurt, as he himself would send those who should help him. Sethos then, relying on the dream, collected such of the Egyptians as were willing to follow him, who were none of them warriors, but traders, artisans, and market people, and with these marched to Pelusium, which commands the entrance into Egypt, and there pitched his camp. As the two armies lay here opposite one another, there came in the night a multitude of field-mice, which devoured

fear of the majesty of my sovereignty overwhelmed Hezekiah, and the Urbi and his trusty warriors, whom he had brought into his royal city of Jerusalem to protect it, deserted. And he despatched after me his messenger to my royal city Nineveh to pay tribute and to make submission with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones . . . and divers objects, a heavy treasure, together with his daughters and the women of his palace, and male and female musicians.

[tr. Budge]

hast prayed to me against Sennacherib, king of Assyria, I have heard thee. . . . He shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast a mount against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come unto this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for my servant David's sake. And it came to pass that night that the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand : and when men arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went and returned and dwelt at Nineveh.

all the quivers and bow-strings of the enemy, and ate the thongs by which they managed their shields. Next morning they commenced their flight, and great multitudes fell, as they had no arms with which to defend themselves. There stands to this day in the temple of Hephæstus a stone statue of Sethos, with a mouse in his hand, and an inscription to this effect : "Look on me, and learn to reverence the gods."

[tr. G. Rawlinson]

The Babylonian chronicler shows little literary skill. He simply strings together a number of statements of fact, with no particular attention to effectiveness of phrase or rhetorical colouring. The Greek historian, on the other hand, has an easy narrative style, showing complete mastery of his language and ease in the formation of his sentences. Between these two the Hebrew writer shows less modulation of sentence-structure, with principal and subordinate clauses, than the Greek, but much more diversity than the Assyrian, and a much higher emotional colouring than either. He shows, for the first time in literary history, a real command of narrative, and in the message of Isaiah he reaches true eloquence, arising naturally from the deep stirring of his

emotions, to which the Greek writer, whose emotions are not equally stirred, shows no parallel.

In literary structure and character the Hebrew history resembles the mediaeval chronicles of England rather than the work of the great Greek or of modern historians. In both the framework is annalistic, and the writer incorporates whole sections of previous chronicles instead of digesting their substance into a new narrative of his own. Thus, just as Roger of Hoveden incorporates a whole Durham chronicle, which itself was compounded from the works of Simeon of Durham, Henry of Huntingdon, Florence of Worcester and a Northumbrian chronicle, so the editor whom we know as P (see p. 24) incorporated large sections of J and E, who themselves had probably utilised previous writers, though we can no longer trace their borrowings in detail. Those who are familiar with our own chroniclers will find little difficulty in accepting, at any rate in general principle, the conclusions of modern critics with regard to the composition of the historical books of the Old Testament.

There are, however, some sections of the Hebrew histories which reach a far higher literary level than these annalistic chronicles, and which must have been derived from a different source. Such are the narratives of the life of David, the history of the reign of Ahab, the life of Elijah, and the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib. Here we find narrative skill of the very first order, notably in the conflict between Elijah and the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, the appearance of Micaiah before Ahab and the death of the latter before Ramoth-Gilead, and the speech of Rabshakeh under the walls of Jerusalem. The source of these, as has already been suggested, may have been records kept by the "schools of the prophets," of the nature and activities of which we know little; for it is significant that all these more detailed narratives, with the exception of the history of David, are associated with the activities of prophets—Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Isaiah. There is no reason to question the contemporary nature of these passages. The prophecies of Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah, which belong to the same period, amply prove the existence of

literary genius of the first order ; and when it is remembered that these writings are three or four centuries earlier than the date of Herodotus, the primacy in time of literary history, as well as a very high place in absolute achievement, must surely be awarded to the historians of Israel.

A separate class of narrative literature is provided by the romances of Esther, Tobit, and Judith. These are assigned, on internal evidence, to the second century B.C., and are comparable with the stories which form the most attractive section of Egyptian literature. The book of Tobit, indeed, was probably written in Egypt, and is indebted to the widely popular Oriental romance, the story of Ahikar, known to us in Syriac and Arabic versions. The Egyptian stories are considerably earlier in date, so that the Hebrew stories claim no originality in this form of literature, and they have no outstanding merit of style.

Latest of all are the books of the Maccabees, which may be assigned to the first century before Christ. Of these, 1 and 2 Maccabees, which are included in our Apocrypha, are serious histories, the former originally written in Hebrew, the latter in Greek. The Hebrew original of 1 Maccabees is lost, and we know it only in a Greek translation, which suggests that the Hebrew may have been of good literary quality. 2 Maccabees is written in the ordinary Hellenistic Greek of the period, and is of no particular merit. 3 and 4 Maccabees, which are found in some of the earliest manuscripts of the Greek Septuagint, are not histories at all ; 3 Maccabees is a historical romance of poor quality, and 4 Maccabees, which is of much higher literary quality, is a homily. All of these books come well after the full development of the Greek school of history, and are strongly influenced by it. The reputation of Hebrew history, as a distinct literary category, must rest on the earlier books, of which the latest are Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah.

(ii) *The Poetical Books.* It is likely that, as with other peoples, poetry was the earliest form of literary expression in Hebrew. Several fragments, and some complete poems, are embedded in the narrative books, and although the dates

of some of them are questioned, there is no doubt that most of them are earlier than the date of the compilation of the narratives which we know as J and E (see p. 23), i.e. than the eighth century.<sup>1</sup> The more notable are the Blessings of Jacob (Gen. xlix. 2-27), the Song of Moses (Exod. xv. 1-18), the prophecies of Balaam (Num. xxiii. and xxiv.), the Song of Deborah (Judges v. 2-31), and David's elegy over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. i. 19-27). A few of them are expressly stated to be quoted from other works: Joshua's command to the sun and moon (Joshua x. 12, 13) and David's elegy are taken from the Book of Jasher, the verses referring to the wanderings in the wilderness (Num. xxi. 14, 15, and perhaps the song of the marching Israelites, *ib.*, 17, 18) from the Book of the Wars of Jehovah, the songs of triumph over Moab and the Amorites (Num. xxi. 27-30) from "those that speak in proverbs" (or perhaps better "those that sing in ballads"); and others may have come from the same or similar sources.<sup>2</sup>

In later books we find the Song of David in 1 Chronicles xvi. 8-36 [= Ps. cv. 1-15, and xcvi.] and the hymn of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii. 10-20).

Apart from these we have the definitely poetical books, Job (except the introduction and finale), the Book of Psalms, the Song of Songs, and the Lamentations of Jeremiah. The

<sup>1</sup> The following list includes most of them, but sometimes the poetical character of a passage is uncertain: the song of Lamech (Gen. iv. 23, 24); the blessings of Isaac (Gen. xxvii. 27-9, 39-40); the blessings of Jacob (Gen. xlix. 2-27); the songs of Moses (Exod. xv. 1-18) and Miriam (*ib.*, 21); the citations from the Wars of Jehovah (Num. xxi. 14-15, 17-18) and "those that speak in proverbs" (*ib.* 27-30); the prophecies of Balaam (Num. xxiii., xxiv.); the Song of Moses (Deut. xxxii. 1-43); the blessings of Moses (Deut. xxxiii. 2-29); the command of Joshua (Joshua x. 12, 13); the Song of Deborah (Judges v. 2-31); Samson's proverbs (Judges xiv. 14, 16; xv. 16); Hannah's prayer (1 Sam. ii. 1-10); the people's acclamation of David (1 Sam. xviii. 7); David's elegies over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. i. 19-27) and Abner (2 Sam. iii. 33, 34); the Song of David (2 Sam. xxii. 2-51; Ps. xviii.); the last words of David (2 Sam. xxiii. 1-7). All these are printed as verse in the Revised Version. A few more fragments may be found in Sir. G. Adam Smith's *Early Poetry of Israel* (1912), p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> The Septuagint adds a short passage at 1 Kings viii. 53, including four lines said to have been composed by Solomon on the completion of the Temple, quoted from "The Book of the Song."

proverbial and prophetic books, which have elements akin to poetry, are dealt with separately.

To appreciate Hebrew poetry, the reader must understand something of its structure. It is not written in regular metres, such as we are accustomed to in most of our own poetry, nor yet in free rhythm, such as been fashionable recently. It is composed of balanced couplets (occasionally triplets or quatrains) of moderate length, in which the second line normally echoes the first line with a slight modification or completion; e.g. Psalm xxvi. 2, 3 :

Examine me, O Lord, and prove me ;  
 Try my reins and my heart,  
 For thy loving-kindness is before mine eyes ;  
 And I have walked in thy truth.

Or Psalm lxxiii. 21-26 :

For my heart was grieved,  
 And I was pricked in my reins :  
 So brutish was I and ignorant ;  
 I was as a beast before thee.  
 Nevertheless I am continually with thee :  
 Thou hast holden my right hand.  
 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,  
 And afterward receive me to glory.  
 Whom have I in heaven but thee ?  
 And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.  
 My flesh and my heart faileth :  
 But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

Readers familiar with the history of English literature will feel something of the same effect here as in the alliterative verse of *Piers Plowman* and other Middle English poetry, though the element of alliteration is absent. The balanced character of the verse is obvious ; and though there is no strict limitation of number of syllables or accents, the norm is a short line of some eight or nine syllables. The fact that it is not tied to a fixed metre or rhyme gives it a great advantage in translation. The English reader can feel that he gets its full value in the Authorised or Revised Version, and can

realise his advantage if he compares this with the rhymed metrical versions of Tate and Brady or Sternhold and Hopkins.

Of the merit of Hebrew poetry it is not necessary to say much. Through the Book of Psalms it has entered into our very bones and coloured our daily speech and literature. This book is indeed the high-water mark of religious poetry. There must be few who have not, at some time or another, felt its appeal in their private life ; and those who have lived through two wars must have found in it, again and again, the perfect expression of their prayers, their hopes, their aspirations and their thanksgivings. It matters not what the date of the several psalms may be. It is clear that the book as a whole is made up of a number of different collections. Some (72 in all) are assigned to David, and the colophon at the end of Psalm lxxii., "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended," shows that there was one collection that bore his name. Eleven are assigned to "the sons of Korah," twelve to Asaph ; and there are the groups of "Songs of Ascents" (Ps. cx. - cxxxiv.), and the "Hallelujah" Psalms in the latter part of the book. With regard to the exact dates of the several psalms there is much difference of opinion among scholars. Many are certainly exilic or post-exilic, e.g. Psalm cxxxvii. ("By the waters of Babylon") and psalms referring to the destruction of Jerusalem or of the Temple, such as the Asaphite Psalm lxxix. ; but there is no good reason to doubt that many of them are much earlier. This applies especially to the first two of the five sections into which the book is divided (Ps. i. - xli., xlii. - lxxii., lxxiii. - lxxxix., xc. - cvi., cvii. - cl.), a division which appears in the Hebrew Bible, and is marked by doxologies at the end of each section ; these are found in the Greek Septuagint, and are therefore at least as early as the second century B.C. How many can actually be attributed to David, it is impossible to say. The tradition that he was a poet is too strong to be ignored, and his poems are not likely to have been lost, though there might have been a tendency to attribute to him poems which were not actually his work, just as there was a tendency to attribute proverbs to Solomon. But it is not necessary for



the ordinary reader to concern himself with these questions. He can take the Book of Psalms as a great anthology of Hebrew religious poetry, of the highest literary merit, and as expressions of thoughts and aspirations that are common to all humanity and that have lost no whit of their value in the course of the two thousand years and more since they were first composed.

The Book of Job is, a continuous poem, with a preface (ch. i., ii.) and a postscript (xlii. 7-17) in prose. Of all the books of the Bible it is the most difficult to place, either in time or in locality. By the time of Ezekiel the name of Job was proverbially known as that of a traditional good man (Ezek. xiv. 14, etc.), but it does not follow that the poem then existed in its present form. The only indications of date are obtainable from its language and from the stage of development in monotheistic theology which it exhibits. All that can be said here is that the general tendency of scholars is to assign it to the late sixth or early fifth century before Christ. But in truth this does not matter. What we have here is a poem of permanent value, on a subject of permanent interest. Its subject is the problem of suffering, exemplified in the person of an Arab sheikh of exemplary character who is afflicted by overwhelming losses and tormenting disease. It is a problem as alive now as it was two thousand years ago. Is pain the punishment for sin? If so, how are its inequalities to be explained? If not, what is its justification, and how is its existence to be reconciled with the goodness and the omnipotence of God? The poem sets out the problem in its various aspects, in the speeches of Job's friends and in Job's answers; but it offers no final solution, for the magnificent passage with which it concludes (ch. xxxviii.-xlii.) is no more than an assertion of God's omnipotence and of man's inability to understand His ways. The only answer is submission and faith.

Scholars have doubted whether the Elihu episode (ch. xxxii.-xxxvii.) is an original part of the poem. It has a separate prose prologue (xxxii. 1-5); Job makes no answer to the arguments of Elihu, as he does to those of his three

friends : and there is no reference to Elihu in either prologue or epilogue. It looks like an inserted attempt to provide the answer which the poem has failed to find. It can be cut out without affecting the structure of the poem.

An attempt has been made to assign to the poem a Babylonian origin. There is a Babylonian poem of about the seventh century which describes the sufferings of a virtuous man, who is eventually vindicated and restored to health. But the tone is different. It is not an assertion that suffering bears no necessary relation to sin, but rather an attempt to find out in what way the sufferer has offended his god. The problem of pain existed in Babylon as it exists to-day, and the Hebrew poet may have derived thence the suggestion of his subject ; but his treatment of it is different, and on a far higher level of religious thought and of literary performance. It is one of the great poems in the literature of the world.

The book that we know as "The Lamentations of Jeremiah" is not in the Hebrew Bible associated with the prophet. It stands apart, among the miscellaneous writings which form the third section of the Hebrew Canon. It is an elegy on the fall of Jerusalem, and its attribution to Jeremiah in the Greek Septuagint and the Hebrew Targum and Talmud is probably due to the passage in 2 Chronicles xxxv. 25, which says : "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah : and all the singing men and singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations, unto this day ; and they made them an ordinance in Israel ; and behold they are written in the lamentations." But the book is not a lamentation for Josiah, but for the destruction of Jerusalem, and it does not suggest the tone or language of the prophet. It is the work of an anonymous writer, written not in the first outburst of grief at the destruction of his country's capital, but somewhat later, when sorrow could be reduced to artificial literary form ; for it consists of four odes (ch. i.-iv.) in acrostic form, with lines divided into two parts, normally with three accents in the first and two in the second, followed by a fifth (ch. v.) which, though consisting of twenty-two lines, is not alphabetical and has lines of two equal portions, with three accents in each.

But though artificial in form, like a sonnet sequence, it is genuine in feeling, and expresses the real emotion of a lover of his city and nation.

The Song of Songs is unique among the books of the Old Testament, in that it has no religious character. It is a group of love poems, of much beauty but of secular character, and owes its inclusion in the Canon to the allegorical character imposed upon it, both by Hebrew and by Christian commentators. The Jewish interpreters regarded it as an allegory of the love of Wisdom or of God, while the Christians explained it as signifying the love of Christ for the Church. There is no authority for the attribution of the authorship to Solomon, and linguistic and other internal evidence points to the third century before Christ as its probable date.

(iii) *The Prophetical Books.* The institution of "prophecy" and the existence of a class of men (or occasionally women, Exodus xv. 20 ; Judges iv. 4 ; 2 Kings xxii. 14) known as "prophets" is one of the characteristic features of Hebrew history. The word "prophet" does not mean "one who foretells the future," but "one who speaks for" another, in this case for God. The prophets are those who claim to declare God's will, and so are the moral teachers and leaders of the people. Their origin is uncertain, and was probably gradual. Even if the description of Miriam and Deborah as "prophetesses" reflects the terminology of a later age, we find "companies of prophets" spoken of at the time of the anointing of Saul as king (1 Sam. x. 5, 10), the prophets Nathan and Gad in the time of David, Ahijah and the anonymous prophet of Bethel in the time of Jeroboam, Elijah and Elisha and Micaiah, and "the sons of the prophets" in the time of Ahab ; all which are evidence of the existence of this class of professional teachers before the days of the prophets whose works have come down to us in special books. These date from the early part of the eighth century and extend at least to the fifth century. The earliest group, that of the eighth century, includes Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Hosea. Then comes the period of the fall of the kingdom of Judah, from Josiah to the Captivity, including Nahum, Jeremiah.

Zephaniah and Habakkuk ; then the prophets of the Captivity and the Return, Second Isaiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. Obadiah, Joel and Jonah are doubtful, Obadiah being probably of the sixth century, while the other two are now generally assigned to the early part of the fourth century. Daniel does not properly belong to the prophetic books at all, being partly narrative and partly apocalyptic. It is not included among the prophets in the Hebrew canon, but comes among the miscellaneous writings added at a later date ; and it is generally assigned to the second century.

Such is, in outline, the chronological framework of the prophetic books ; but the details admit of endless discussion. This arises naturally out of the nature of their composition and publication. They must not be thought of as orderly literary compositions, issued as complete works under the eyes of their respective authors. Rather they are collections of scattered utterances, put together at a later time, often in haphazard arrangement, and including pieces of uncertain authorship. The clearest instance of the inclusion of the works of more than one author under a single name is in the book of Isaiah. Here chapters i.-xxxv. are the work of the historical Isaiah, the great prophet contemporary with Hezekiah, composed of a number of prophecies uttered on different occasions, put together without regard to chronological sequence. Chapters xxxvi.-xxxix. contain a narrative extracted with slight modifications from the book of Kings, with the addition of the poetical Song of Hezekiah. Chapters xl.-lxvi. are the work of a different period and in a different literary style. They belong to the period after the destruction of Jerusalem, and are mainly devoted to encouraging the hopes of the restoration of Israel. Some scholars would further separate chapters lvi.-lxvi from xl.-lv., assigning the latter to the years 549-538 (the period of the rise of Cyrus), the former to the period after the return from the Captivity. How the work of this later writer or writers came to be attached to the collection of Isaiah's writings is unknown ; perhaps their high literary quality caused them to be assigned to the greatest of the known prophetic authors.

A similar combination of the work of at least two authors under a single name occurs in the book of Zechariah, where chapters ix.-xiv. are plainly not the work of the same writer as chapters i.-viii.

Another sign of the uncertainty attaching to the authorship of detached prophetic utterances is the occurrence of the same utterance in more than one collection. Thus Isaiah ii. 2-4 recurs in Micah iv. 1-3, and Isaiah xv. 2-7 and xvi. 6-11 appear again, with some variations of order, in Jeremiah xlviii. 34-43 and 29-33. There must have been much scattered literature of this kind—brief utterances of the prophet on some particular occasion, written down by himself or taken down by a hearer, and circulated in casual copies, often without a name attached to them, since everyone at the time knew who was the speaker, but eventually collected at a time when the author's name was forgotten. Some, on the other hand, would be longer and more deliberate compositions, such as the greater-part of Amos, or the roll which Baruch wrote for Jeremiah and which probably formed the nucleus of the book which now bears that prophet's name. The marked difference in order between the Massoretic Hebrew text of Jeremiah and the Greek Septuagint probably reflects different arrangements of scattered prophecies once separately issued. But these details do not much concern the ordinary reader. It does not matter to him whether, for example, some parts of the book of Zechariah were actually the utterances of another prophet, whose name is now unknown; his interest is in the intrinsic merit of these passages, as literature or as religious teaching. Some parts of all these books, which had meaning for the people to whom they were addressed, have little meaning for us to-day. Others, on the contrary, reach the highest splendour of literary expression, and embody religious truths of timeless value.

In style there is naturally much difference among these products of different authors and of different periods. Some books, or portions of books are in ordinary prose, e.g. Haggai, Jonah (except the hymn in ch. ii.), much of Jeremiah, the last section of Ezekiel (xl.-xlviii.), and parts of Isaiah, Hosea,

Amos and Zechariah. Others are definitely poems, with the same kind of metrical structure as we find in the Psalms and the other poetical books. Others again are written in a poetical prose style, in which the manner and vocabulary are poetical, but the rhythm is less definitely metrical.<sup>1</sup> There are also, naturally, great differences in emotional tension and in literary mastery of language, which can be felt as well in the English translation as in Hebrew.

It is as poetical prose of the highest order that the prophetic books make their literary appeal to the modern English reader. They reach their highest pitch in Isaiah and the Second Isaiah; no reader can fail to be impressed by the magnificence and spiritual fervour of such passages as ch. v., vi., xi., xxv., xxvi., xxxv., or xl., li.-liii., lv., and indeed the whole of this prophecy; or by the passionate earnestness of Jeremiah; or by the pathos of Hosea xi.-xiv.; or by the fiery emotion of Joel; or by the spiritual exaltation of Amos. Quite apart from their religious significance, which is of the highest order, these are among the finest products of human literature, and the English reader, whether of the Authorised or of the Revised Version, can appreciate their quality to the full, and reckon them among the most precious treasures of his literary inheritance from the ancient world.

(iv) *The Proverbial Literature.* This, which is sometimes also called the sapiential literature, since it is largely devoted to the praise of Wisdom, is a characteristic branch of Hebrew literature, though one which it shares with other Oriental peoples. It is represented by the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the canonical Old Testament, and by Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus in the Apocrypha. The last of these has a known author, Jesus the son of Sirach. The others have the name of Solomon connected with them, and in view of the tradition recorded in 1 Kings iv. 30-2 there is no reason to doubt that this manner of writing, though not invented,

<sup>1</sup> In the R.V. only the hymns in Jonah and Habakkuk are printed as versé; but the reader can feel for himself the poetical structure of much of the other prophets. Oesterley and Robinson (*Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament*, 1934, p. 224) class Joel, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Malachi as wholly poetic.

was firmly planted in Hebrew literature by him. The testimony is explicit and significant: "Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five." This is clear evidence of the existence of a recognised wisdom-literature, both to the east of Palestine, that is in Mesopotamia, and in Egypt. Whether the unknown "wise men" named in this connection were earlier or later than Solomon, it is impossible to say, though the natural presumption would be that they were earlier. That there was a recognised class or category of "wise men" appears from Proverbs xxii. 17 and xxiv. 23; but Solomon was regarded as pre-eminent in it, and it is quite unjustifiable scepticism to ignore this solid and definite tradition. On the other hand, it is quite certain, from the internal evidence of the books themselves, as will be set out in the analysis of them given below, that the greater part of them has no claim to Solomonic authorship, and it is quite impossible to say what particular passages can be assigned to him.

Wisdom literature is of great antiquity in the East. It may be defined as the literature of moral admonition, ranging from precepts of the commonest worldly wisdom to a high level of religious exhortation. It appears in Egypt as the earliest class of literature that has come down to us. The oldest extant Egyptian book is the *Prisse Papyrus*, which contains the *Teaching of Kagemna* and the *Teaching of Ptah-hetep*. These works were composed in the time of the IIIrd and Vth Dynasties respectively, i.e. about 3100-2850 B.C., and the papyrus itself belongs to about the end of the third millennium; but the moral precepts contained in them were still being copied under the XVIIIth and XIXth Dynasties, only some two or three centuries before the time of Solomon. Here are a few samples from the *Teaching of Ptah-hetep*:<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From *The Teaching of Amen-em-apt*, by E. A. W. Budge (1924).

Magnify not thy heart because of thy knowledge, and fill not thy heart with the thought about it because thou hast knowledge.

Follow thy heart's desire as long as thou livest, and do not more than is ordered.

Weary not thyself concerning the affairs of the day, nor be anxious overmuch about thy house and estate.

Be not avaricious when a division of property is made, and be not greedy, and what is thy due shall come to thee.

Satisfy thy servants whom thou trustest with thy possessions, so that they may feel as if they had been rewarded by God.

Repeat not the words spoken by a man who is furiously angry; hearken not to him; they are the outpouring of a heated mind.

If thou art strong, make respect for thyself to spread with understanding and with gentleness of speech.

Command not except when thou canst guide; abuse brings a man to calamity.

It is a bad thing to set oneself in opposition to the man who is appointed chief. A man lives as long as he displays gentleness and patience.

Let thy face shine with cheerfulness as long as thou livest. . . . Do not let any man approach thee and find thee with a gloomy face.

The admonitions of Ptah-hetep are addressed to his son; they are the maxims of worldly prudence, the observance of which is calculated to secure his advancement in life. Many of them refer to the behaviour to be adopted towards superiors. More general in character, and with more moral intention, is the Teaching of Amen-em-apt, or Amen-em-ope, a later work, which shows resemblances, and even coincidences, with the book of Proverbs such as to suggest a direct connection between them. Here are some examples: <sup>1</sup>

*Amen-em-ope*

*Proverbs (R.V.)*

Give thine ear and hear what I say,  
And apply thine heart to apprehend.

Incline thine ear and hear the words  
of the wise,  
And apply thine heart unto my  
knowledge.

<sup>1</sup> Taken from the article by W. O. E. Oesterley in *The Legacy of Egypt* (1942), pp. 246-8. Oesterley dates the Egyptian work to about the middle of the eighth century; Budge puts it much earlier, in the first half of the XVIIIth Dynasty, i.e. about the end of the sixteenth century.



It is good for thee to place them in  
thine heart.

Let them rest in the casket of thy  
belly,  
That they may act as a peg upon  
thy tongue.

Beware of robbing the poor,  
And of oppressing the afflicted.

Associate not with a passionate man,  
Nor approach him for conversa-  
tion ;

Leap not to cleave to such an one,  
That the terror carry thee not  
away.

A scribe who is skilful in his business  
Findeth himself worthy to be a  
courtier.

Toil not after riches ;  
If stolen goods are brought to thee,  
They remain not over the night  
with thee.

They have made for themselves  
wings like geese,  
And have flown into the heavens.

For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep  
them within thee,  
If they be established together  
upon thy lips.

(xxii. 17, 18.)

Rob not the poor because he is poor,  
Neither oppress the afflicted in the  
gate.

(xxii. 22.)

Make no friendship with a man that  
is given to anger.

And with a wrathful man thou  
shalt not go,  
Lest thou learn his ways,  
And get a snare to thy soul.

(xxii. 24, 25.)

Seest thou a man diligent in his  
business ?

He shall stand before kings.

(xxii. 29.)

Weary not thyself to be rich ;

Cease from thine own wisdom [or  
Cease from thy dishonest gain].  
For riches certainly make themselves  
wings,

Like an eagle that flieth toward  
heaven.

(xxiii. 4, 5.)

Wisdom-literature was also common in Mesopotamia. Like most of the culture of this region, it seems to have originated among the Sumerians, and to have been taken over by the Semites ; and copies of it, as of other early literature, were included in the Royal Libraries of Nineveh. As already indicated, the intellectual class in Babylonia was exercised by the problem of pain and evil, and in the poem of the Righteous Sufferer and in the Epic of Paradise we have their apologetics for the righteousness of God, which find their parallel in Hebrew literature in the book of Job. Their Wisdom-literature is embodied in more than one collection of proverbs of which fragments have been preserved on tablets discovered in modern excavations. In character they are very like the corresponding Hebrew books. They include admonitions by a father to his son, warnings against intemperance, advice as to behaviour towards kings and

those in authority, and even rules of diet. Here are a few samples : <sup>1</sup>

As a wise and modest man thou shalt glorify thy counsel,  
And verily thy speech shall be relied on, verily thy words shall  
be treasured ;

Thy lips shall be held precious as the delight of men.  
Vulgarity and hatred, verily let them be thy abomination ;  
Slander shalt thou not speak, nor counsel which is not sure.  
He that maketh gossip, despised is his head.

Thou shalt not hasten to stand in an assembly,  
Thou shalt not rush to the place of quarrelling ;  
In a quarrel they will employ thee as the umpire,  
And thou wilt be taken for their witness.

Unto him that doeth thee evil shalt thou return good ;  
Unto thine enemy justice shalt thou mete out.

Make not wide thy mouth, but guard thy lips ;  
The thoughts of thy mind thou shalt not speak at once.  
Daily thy god adore  
With sacrifice and address becoming to incense offerings.  
Fear of God begetteth favour ;  
Sacrifice increaseth life,  
And prayer dissolveth sin.

The Wisdom-literature of both Egypt and Mesopotamia goes back to much earlier periods than the corresponding Hebrew books. The Hebrew writers were engaging in a kind of literature common to the Eastern countries, and were no doubt influenced by the productions current in the countries to east and west of them ; but their writings are not direct copies. They are original compositions in the same vein, and in their best portions, such as the praise of Wisdom as the mouthpiece of God, they reach a higher plane of thought and of emotional expression than their neighbours and predecessors.

The several books, both canonical and apocryphal, will now be considered.

The book of Proverbs, as it appears in the Old Testament, is obviously a collection put together from various sources. This appears not only from the character of the contents,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from S. H. Langdon, *Babylonian Wisdom (Babyloniaca, tome vii., 1922)*.

but from the titles prefixed to the several parts. These parts are as follows: (1) Chapters i.-ix., entitled "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel." The title is taken from the following section, which contains the collection of proverbs proper, these sections having rather the nature of an introduction addressed by a father to his son, warning him of temptations and exhorting him to the pursuit of Wisdom. It has a freer literary style than the rest of the book, and is poetical in structure. (2) Chapters x.-xxii. 16, entitled "The proverbs of Solomon." This consists of formal proverbs, each verse containing a complete proverb with two members, each of which in Hebrew consists of only three or four words. It contains 375 proverbs, and it has been pointed out that the letters of the name Solomon in Hebrew, if given their numerical value, amount to 375. This is the oldest section of the book, and here, if anywhere, the proverbs due to Solomon himself are to be looked for. Many of them, however, such as those which speak of the king from the point of view of the people (e.g. xvi. 14, 15, "The wrath of the king is as messengers of death, but a wise man will pacify it; In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favour is as a cloud of the latter rain"), or those which praise monogamy and depreciate wealth, are inconsistent with Solomon's position and character, and could not be assigned to him without an imputation of hypocrisy; and the collection is rather to be regarded as an anthology from various sources formed round a nucleus of Solomonic origin, which can no longer be distinguished from later accretions. (3) Chapters xxii. 17-xxiv. 34, entitled "The words of the wise." This is a body of practical admonitions, less strict in form than the previous section, and not claiming Solomonic authorship. Chapter xxiv. 23-34 is an appendix, headed "These also are sayings of the wise."<sup>1</sup> (4) Chapters xxv.-xxix., entitled "These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." Since these

<sup>1</sup> It may be observed that the passages quoted above, as finding parallels in the Teaching of Amen-em-ope, come from this section. It looks as if the compiler of this section was acquainted with the Egyptian work.

are not immediately annexed to the "proverbs of Solomon" in chapters x.-xxii. 16, it is reasonable to assume that section (3) had already been attached to section (2) before this Hezekian collection was made. The proverbs are more regular in form than those in section (3), but less so than those in section (2); and many of them are identical with those in section (2). Evidently the collection was made separately from materials floating about at the time, which may well be that of Hezekiah, as claimed in the title. It has been observed that the kingship appears in a less prosperous and favourable light than in section (2); e.g. chapter xxv. 5, "Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness," cf. xxviii. 15, 16; xxix. 2, 4. There has evidently been a wider and more varied experience of kings than had taken place by the time of Solomon. (5) Chapter xxx., entitled "The words of Agur, the son of Jakeh, the oracle." Neither Agur nor Jakeh is known; and the word translated "the oracle" may be read "of Massa," i.e. of the Ishmaelite tribe of Massa in northern Arabia. (6) Chapter xxxi., entitled "The words of king Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him" (or "The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which," etc.); a few warnings addressed to the king by his mother, followed (*vv.* 10-31) by the praise of a virtuous woman. These two last sections are probably of post-exilic date.

The book of Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher, is put into the mouth of Solomon, but is quite evidently of much later date. The sentiments are not those of a magnificent and prosperous ruler, nor yet of one conscious of the moral decline of Solomon's later years. There is no expression of penitence in them, only of the vanity of things and the failure of all effort. The period is one of exhaustion and corruption, and the writer finds disappointment and frustration everywhere. Yet he does not abandon his faith in God, and his final conclusion is: "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." The Hebrew also is of a much later date than Solomon. The book was plainly known to the author of Ecclesiasticus, writing in the first half of the second

century B.C. ; and a date about the middle or first half of the third century is more probable. It is thus the latest book to be admitted into the Hebrew canon ; and it was only after sharp controversy that the Synod of Jamnia accepted it. Of the two rival schools among the Rabbis, the school of Shammai wished to reject it, while the school of Hillel argued for and secured its admission.

In the main the book is in prose, but parts of it (notably ch. vi.-vii. 14, x.-xii. 7) fall into the antithetical rhythms of Hebrew poetry. In matter it is very unlike any of the other canonical books ; but as the expression of a weary and disillusioned, but not unbelieving or wholly unhopeful, spirit it has a permanent literary value, and attains at times to a sombre eloquence which will always appeal to certain frames of mind.

The Apocrypha in our Bible include two very notable examples of Hebrew Wisdom-literature, in the books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. Their lateness no doubt accounts for their non-inclusion in the Hebrew canon ; but they contain not a little that may profitably be read " for example of life and instruction of manners," as prescribed in Article VI of the Articles of Religion.

The earliest of the two is Ecclesiasticus. This is known to us as a whole only in a Greek translation, made (as its preface informs us) by the grandson of the author, shortly after his coming to Egypt in the 38th year of Ptolemy Euergetes [II = 132 B.C.]. This would give a date of about 190-180 B.C. for the original work, the author of which is named as Jesus Ben-Sira, or son of Sirach. The original Hebrew was long lost, but in 1896-1900 leaves of no less than four manuscripts of it were discovered in Cairo, amounting in all to more than half the book. The disappearance of the Hebrew is no doubt due to its non-inclusion in the Hebrew canon, as fixed by the Synod of Jamnia about A.D. 100, although it continued to be quoted by the Rabbis, and was copied as late as the eleventh century ; while its survival in Greek is due to its inclusion in the canon of the Greek Septuagint Bible, which circulated among the hellenized Jews of the Dispersion.

In substance Ben-Sira continues the tradition of Proverbs. His work is a series of admonitions, given as from a father to his children, practical, moral, and religious, and with the usual praise of Wisdom. The form is much the same as in Proverbs, though not so strictly in antithetic couplets as in the earliest section of that book. It falls into separate sections, or strophes, as is indicated in the Revised Version. The author is enthusiastic for the Law and the Temple ritual; his moral teaching is not strikingly original, but reflects the standards of an ordinary virtuous life and worldly prudence. He appears to hold no view of the immortality of the soul, and in general represents the conservative rather than the progressive side of Hebrew thought in his period. At the end, after the familiar passage, "Let us now praise famous men," is an eulogy of the great figures in Hebrew history, from Enoch to the high-priest Simon, son of Onias (probably Simon II, son of Onias II, 218-198 B.C.; the earlier Simon son of Onias lived about 310-290).

Latest in date, but perhaps first in interest among the works of Wisdom-literature, is the book which bears the title of *The Wisdom of Solomon*. That this title is pseudonymous has been generally recognised, by Origen and Jerome no less than by modern scholars. It is the work of an author well acquainted with Greek philosophy, especially (it would appear) with Heraclitus and Plato, and anxious to harmonise the teachings of that philosophy with his own religion. He was also acquainted with the defeatist and despondent frame of mind which appears in Ecclesiastes, and denounces it with great vigour (see ch. ii. 1-9, which reflects so exactly the position of Ecclesiastes as to make it almost certain that the writer was directly referring to it). This would make a date about 100 B.C. the most probable period for Wisdom, while the most probable place of origin is Alexandria, where Greek philosophy was in close contact with Hebrew religion.

The book falls into two parts, but certain peculiarities of language make it probable that both are by the same author. The first part (ch. 1-9) is mainly a praise of Wisdom, the second a survey of Hebrew history. The first section has

peculiar interest in the history of the development of Hebrew religious thought, for the representation of Wisdom as the almost personified expression of the will of God is a stage on the way to the Logos of Philo, which again is associated with the Christian doctrine of the Word of God, as enunciated by St. John. In this part also, in the beautiful passage beginning "But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God" (ch. iii. 1-9), is the earliest clear affirmation in Hebrew literature of the immortality of the soul, and also of the intermediate state. All this first part is well worth reading for its literary beauty, as well as for its religious thought; and in the second part we find, more clearly than in anything before the New Testament, the recognition of God as the God of love: "For thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing that thou hast made; for never wouldst thou have made anything, if thou hadst hated it. . . . But thou sparest all; for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of souls" (xi. 24, 26). Probably it was only the late date of the book that caused its exclusion from the Hebrew canon of Scripture.

(v) *The Apocalyptic Literature.* The remaining category of Old Testament literature is that of the apocalyptic writings, represented by the latter part of Daniel among the canonical books and 2 Esdras among the Apocrypha. Since, however, there is a close connection between the Jewish and the Christian apocalyptic writings, it will be more convenient to deal with the apocalypses of the Old and New Testaments together, along with some other writings of the same class which do not appear in our Bibles. It will be easier so to show the general character of this class of Jewish-Christian literature; and this will be reserved for a separate section, after the other books of the New Testament have been dealt with.

#### (b) NEW TESTAMENT

In literary character, as in historical, the New Testament is very different from the Old. The historical, poetical, prophetic and proverbial categories, which we have been

considering so far, disappear, and in their place we have biography and epistolography. These are forms of writing which lend themselves less to literary display, and though we shall find in them passages of great elevation, beauty and eloquence, it is safe to say that literary style was very seldom the conscious pre-occupation of the writer. The literary expression arises naturally from the thoughts to be expressed, and rises, unconsciously and unintentionally, with the heightened fervour of the writer's emotion.

It will be as well first to say something of the language of the New Testament. It used to be supposed that New Testament Greek was a thing apart, due to the attempt to express Semitic thought in Greek language; and many words and phrases were labelled as "Biblical Greek," with the implication that from a literary point of view this was a somewhat bastard and inferior language. The discoveries of vast quantities of Greek writings on papyrus in Egypt during the past generation have greatly modified this point of view. Many of the words and phrases, unfamiliar in classical Greek, which had been ticketed as "Biblical," are now found to be part of the ordinary usage of Hellenised Egypt and presumably of the Hellenistic world in general. The style and diction of the New Testament are no doubt affected by the Semitic (Aramaic) form in which many of the sayings in the Gospels were originally expressed, and to which all the writers were more or less accustomed; but on the whole it is the κοινή, or common Hellenistic Greek of the post-Alexandrian world, when classical Greek had to accommodate itself to the needs of non-Hellenic peoples spread all over the eastern world. It has not all the graces or delicacies of the best Attic Greek, but it was a good working language, capable of literary colour and emphasis, bearing much the same relation to classical Greek as mediaeval Latin does to the Latin of the Augustan period. On this basis the special characteristics of the several books can be considered.

(i) *The Narrative Books.* These consist of the four Gospels and the Acts, and from the literary point of view they fall into three groups: (1) the Synoptic Gospels, (2) Acts,



(3) the Fourth Gospel.\* The three Synoptic Gospels are linked together by the fact that to a large extent they use common material, as has been briefly set out in the previous chapter (p. 30). Their method of construction does not give much scope for literary style. The Gospel of St. Mark, which underlies the other two, was itself presumably composed from oral tradition and possibly some short written sources. These are put together in a straightforward manner, in the common Greek of the period. This character they retain when incorporated in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke; and the additional sources used by these two evangelists were substantially of the same literary quality. There is, however, this difference, that St. Luke shows rather more sense of literary style than the other two. Slight changes of expression seem to be due to this literary sense, and raise the Third Gospel a little above the level of a simple chronicle. When St. Luke proceeded to write the Acts, he had of course a freer hand. He was not using written sources, except so far as he may have kept a diary of his journeys with St. Paul. For the early portion of his history he was presumably dependent on verbal information from the apostles and others. This material he was able to shape in his own way, and the result is a straightforward narrative in an easy style, which shows literary ability without marked idiosyncrasies, and without rising to any particular heights of eloquence. The language is good ordinary Greek of the period, used by an educated man.

The Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, has strong individual characteristics. Both in language and in thought it (with the three Epistles of St. John) stands by itself among the books of the New Testament, and this led to a tendency among modern critics to refer it to a materially later date than the other Gospels. Since, however, the discovery of two manuscripts assignable to the first half of the second century, one of which is a small fragment of a copy of the Gospel itself, while the other contains a narrative evidently based on the Gospel and using its phrases, there is clearly no good ground for questioning the traditional assignation of the work to the last decade of the first century; and the

restoration of the traditional date goes far to strengthen the probability of the traditional authorship. Not a few writers who strongly maintain the high value of the Gospel, yet hesitate to accept the authorship of St. John.

The best answer is to read again the Gospel itself. The express declaration in the final chapter that the disciple who wrote these things was the disciple whom Jesus loved, who leaned on His breast at the Last Supper, and who ran with Peter to the sepulchre on Easter morning, cannot have been made *at that date* without authority. It has nothing in common with the attribution of psalms to David or of proverbs to Solomon, or of a Gospel and Apocalypse to Peter. Moreover it is strongly reinforced by the intimate details in the narratives, which more even than in St. Mark suggest the personal witness. Such are the details of the calling of the apostles, the reference of particular words to individual speakers—Philip (vi. 7), Andrew (vi. 8), Peter (vi. 68), Thomas (xi. 16), Judas (xii. 4), Philip and Andrew (xii. 22), Thomas (xiv. 5), Philip (xiv. 8), Jude (xiv. 22), Thomas (xx. 25)—the particulars of the feeding of the five thousand, the raising of Lazarus, the dialogues with questioners, the Last Supper, the trial and crucifixion, and the post-Resurrection scenes of chapters xx. and xxi. The difficulty of supposing all these to be the work of a pseudonymous fiction-writer, publishing his work under the name of an apostle then living or recently dead, is surely much greater than that of accepting the tradition of the Church that the book is the work of the Apostle, St. John, writing at the end of a long life. The difference of style between the utterances of our Lord in this Gospel and the others is not really difficult to account for. The synoptists were putting together a number of traditional sayings, which may have passed through many mouths before being committed to paper, and which deal mainly with simple instruction in language which all could follow. St. John (if it was he) was writing down his own direct recollections, including records of deeper and more difficult thought, such as those of chapters vi., viii., x., xiv.-xvii., which did not enter into the simpler evangelistic preaching and teaching

embodied in the Synoptics. The language may no doubt have been coloured by passing through the mind of St. John over a long period of years ; but also it may have lost less by traversing this single channel than the records which the synoptists received from many mouths. That there is high literary quality in the Fourth Gospel, few will deny ; but it is the quality which comes, not from conscious literary style, but from the expression of great thoughts in unaffected language. Literature and religious philosophy are here merged with the most profound mysteries of religious faith. It is impossible to disentangle these elements, but the book that contains them is one of the most precious treasures of the human race.

(ii) *The Epistles.* The Epistles of St. Paul, which form by far the largest section of this class of writings, range from short personal letters, such as that to Philemon, to substantial theological treatises, such as that to the Romans. Even the latter, however, preserve the outward forms of ordinary correspondence, such as are found in the numerous private letters discovered among papyri from Egypt. Such are the formulas of greeting and of conclusion, the personal messages to various individuals, and the practice (referred to in Gal. vi. 11<sup>1</sup>) of adding autograph subscriptions to letters written by amanuenses. In such respects the Epistles are just personal letters, and conform to recognised usages ; and although in much of their content they are more of the nature of theological discourses or exhortation, they seldom or never wholly lose the informal character of correspondence. Certainly considerations of literary form are far from the mind of the writer. His heart is full of what he wants to say, whether by way of encouragement or reproof or instruction or thanksgiving, and the words pour out often with little regard to ordered sequence and arrangement. The language which he has to use is the ordinary Greek of the Hellenistic

<sup>1</sup> Where the translation should be, as in the R.V., "See with how large letters I have written (or, better still, 'I am writing') to you with my own hand." Letters written by scribes, with autograph subscriptions by the person dictating the letter, sometimes in large characters, are frequent among the papyri.

world of the first century ; but he has to adapt it to express thoughts wholly new to that language, and often one feels that he is struggling with an instrument not yet properly adapted to its purpose. Hence arise passages which are awkward and involved in expression, and of which it is sometimes difficult to follow the exact sequence of thought. Such conditions do not conduce to the best literary results ; but from time to time the thought breaks clear of its encumbrances, and we have passages of impassioned eloquence, clear in their meaning and moving in emotional appeal. Such are the familiar encomium of Charity in 1 Corinthians xiii., where the style verges on the poetic ; or the argument for the resurrection in 1 Corinthians xv. ; or the outburst in Romans viii. 18-39, where the emotion held in restraint during the concentrated argument of the preceding chapters seems to burst out with accumulated force ; or nearly the whole of Ephesians <sup>1</sup> ; or the affectionate exhortation of Philippians ii. 1-18 ; or the enthusiastic eloquence of Colossians i. 9-29, and the earnest admonitions of iii. 1-17. In all of these the writer attains a standard of expression which, if it is not intentionally literary, fulfils the highest purposes of literature and ranks among its great achievements.

Of the other Epistles there is less to be said. That to the Hebrews, though not bearing the name of St. Paul, was from an early date included in the collection of his writings, and was accepted as his unquestionably in the East, but not in the West until the time of Jerome, who was probably influenced by his acquaintance with Eastern manuscripts.<sup>2</sup> From a literary standpoint it is difficult to believe that it is from the same hand as the unquestioned epistles of St. Paul ; but it has a fine directness of exposition, rising to eloquence in the opening chapter, and in the famous eulogy of faith in chapter xi. and the beautiful exhortation which follows in xii.

<sup>1</sup> I cannot understand the doubts which some scholars express with regard to the authenticity of this Epistle.

<sup>2</sup> Origen had doubts as to whether the language was not that of a disciple, rather than of Paul himself ; but Clement of Alexandria accepted it as authentically Pauline. In the Chester Beatty papyrus of the Pauline Epistles (about A.D. 200) Hebrews is placed immediately after Romans.

The Epistle of James and the First Epistle of Peter are straightforward exhortations to right living and right thinking, with no great claims to literary style, though few would deny that the last chapter of St. James has something of the character of Hebrew prophecy, or that the first chapter of St. Peter has a sustained dignity which is well reflected in Wesley's well-known anthem based upon it. The First Epistle of John takes its place alongside the Gospel, to which it has been suggested that it served as a covering letter, and with which it is identical in style. The second and third Epistles are brief personal letters. The Epistle of Jude and the Second Epistle of Peter are closely connected, so much so that one must have been derived from the other (compare especially Jude 6-13 and 2 Peter ii. 4-17). There have been differences of opinion as to priority, but the most generally accepted view is that Jude is the earlier document, and that 2 Peter is a pseudonymous work, probably of the first half of the second century. Doubts as to the authenticity of both works were expressed very early, especially with regard to 2 Peter, which Eusebius (quoting the opinion of "the ancient fathers") definitely classes as unauthentic, though profitable, and barely superior to the many other writings which passed under the name of Peter, such as the Gospel and Apocalypse, of which we possess considerable portions, recently discovered, or the Preaching and the Acts, which likewise passed under his name. In character both Jude and 2 Peter fall rather into the category of Apocalyptic literature, which has yet to be considered.

### (c) APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Apocalyptic—the literature of revelations of the future, whether in this life or in a life to come—plays a very important part in both Jewish and Christian history. It is not, of course, peculiar to them. Homer makes Odysseus visit a world of the dead beyond the stream of Ocean, in which the heroes of history and legend lead a shadowy existence; and his example was followed by Virgil in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*. Pindar also has a brief picture of another world

(*Ol.*, 2, 56-83); but in general this side of Greek thought was reserved for the Mysteries, the esoteric type of Greek religion which played a far greater part in life than in literature. There are glimpses of it in the chorus of the Initiated in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, or in the Vision of Er in the last book of Plato's *Republic*; but the Orphic Hymns that have come down to us are a very late representation of a class of literature which led a sort of twilight existence, in a half-concealed province of Greek thought.

Very much the same may be said of the literature of the Hebrews until after the return from the Captivity. The prime function of the Prophets—it cannot be too often or emphatically repeated—was not the foretelling of the future. It was the declaration of the will of Jehovah for the immediate guidance of His people; it says nothing of a future life. After the fall of the monarchy the promises of a future restoration play an important part in the utterances of the prophets; but the promises are general, they contain no detailed forecast of events, and they do not relate to a world beyond the grave. The book of Isaiah contains prophecies of calamities to befall Babylon, Edom, and Tyre (ch. xxi.-xxiii.), followed by a more general apocalyptic passage (ch. xxiv.-xxvii.), which scholars believe to be by another hand than that of Hezekiah's prophet. In Job also (iii. 13-19) there is a vision of a world of rest beyond the troubles of this life. But it was not until after the return from the Captivity and the national revival of the Maccabean period, when the Jewish people was involved in a constant struggle against the power of the surrounding nations, that a whole literature grew up, of which the essence is a picture of future times, in which the troubles of the writers' own days will be exchanged for a glorious triumph of national independence. This (sometimes described as the Messianic Kingdom) is the theme of a number of books ("Apocalypses" or "Revelations") written in the last two centuries before Christ; and this class of literature was carried on into Christian times. Christianity too was a religion that looked forward. It looked forward to the Second Coming of the Lord, and, as a victim of

persecution, it looked forward to a future judgement which should redress the balance of human injustice and oppression. Its vision is therefore not of the establishment of a secular kingdom in this world, but of the reward of virtue and the punishment of the wicked in a life to come. It concerns the individual and not the nation. It was this type of apocalypse that gave birth to the visions of the next world popular in mediæval times, preserved in such works as St. Patrick's Purgatory and the visions of Tuadal, Thurkill, and the Monk of Evesham, and that attained its final and magnificent climax in the *Divina Commedia* of Dante.

Jewish apocalypses were invariably pseudonymous. In order to secure attention they are put into the form of revelations made to one of the patriarchs or prophets of earlier times. Thus we hear of Apocalypses of Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Baruch, Ezra, Zephaniah, and Zechariah. Some of these are extant, more or less completely, in Greek, Latin, Syriac, or Ethiopic translations; some are known only by references or brief quotations. Similarly in Christian times we have Apocalypses of Peter and Paul, the latter of which had a considerable vogue in the West, and was the parent of the twelfth-century Visions above mentioned. This pseudonymity, though it may not have been suspected by the uncritical (thus Jude quotes the book of Enoch as the utterance of "the seventh from Adam"), was fully recognised by the early Christian Fathers, and very few of these works ever came near the boundaries of canonicity.

So much of preface seems necessary to the mention of the few apocalyptic writings which have found a place in our Bible; for they must be realised as specimens of a class of literature which had a much greater extent and wider influence than might otherwise be recognised. In the Old Testament we have the latter part of the book of Daniel (ch. vii.-xii.) and (in a somewhat different vein) the visions of Zechariah; in the Apocrypha, the Second Book of Esdras; and in the New Testament the very different Revelation of John. To these may be added the apocalyptic passages in Matthew xxiv.; xxv. 31-46; Mark xiii.; Luke xxi.

The book of Daniel was not included in the Hebrew Canon among the Prophets, but was among the later additions, like Chronicles and Ecclesiastes. Practically no scholar now believes that it was written in the time of Nebuchadrezzar and Belshazzar, i.e. in the sixth century B.C. Everything points to a considerably later date. There are many mistakes in the statements with regard to the history of the sixth century; on the other hand the writer shows accurate knowledge of the third and early second centuries. The language, partly Hebrew and partly (ch. ii. 4 b-vii.) Aramaic, suits the second, but not the sixth, century; a number of Persian words are used in describing the period of Babylonian supremacy, before the Persian conquest; and some Greek words for instruments of music occur which are not found in Greek literature before the fourth century, and could only have reached Persia after the conquests of Alexander. The date of the book can, in fact, be fixed with some precision. The historical "predictions" of the four beasts and the ram and the he-goat and the kings of the north and the south can be explained, with practical certainty, as coming down to the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.), but not so far as his death; on the other hand, reference is made in viii. 14 to the restoration of the daily sacrifice, which took place at the dedication of the new altar in 165.

How far Daniel is a historical figure is quite uncertain. By Ezekiel (xiv. 14, etc., xxviii. 3) he is mentioned as a personage of proverbial virtue and wisdom, along with Noah and Job, in language that could not have been applied to a contemporary.<sup>1</sup> The book is therefore a romance, of which it is impossible to say whether and how far there is historical truth underlying it; and the latter portion of the book falls into the category of pseudonymous apocalypses described above. It has, however, this difference, that the so-called prophecies narrate in allegorical form the actual course of

<sup>1</sup> The date of Ezekiel, beginning in the early days of the Captivity, is earlier than the assumed date of Daniel, which includes the beginning of the reign of Cyrus. The book of Daniel, therefore, even if it were of its assumed date, could not have been known to Ezekiel.



history ; they are not visions of a Messianic kingdom, still less of a Last Judgement and a future life. Their object is, while summarising the events of recent history, to lead up to the assurance of a future deliverance from the oppressor.

The Second Book of Esdras in our Apocrypha (called the Fourth in the Vulgate and in our sixth Article) is one of the most interesting of the apocalyptic writings. It is a composite work, but the main portion of it (ch. iii.-xiv.) may be assigned to about the end of the first Christian century. Chapters iii.-ix. are a dialogue between the author, whose name is given as "Salathiel (the same is Esdras)," and the angel Uriel, and its subject is the problem of the reconciliation of the goodness of God with the condemnation and destruction of by far the greater part of the human race. The angel answers, referring all to the supreme power and knowledge of God ; but Esdras returns again and again to the charge, and at the end reaffirms the judgement of despair (ix. 15) : " I have said before, and now do speak, and will speak it also hereafter, that there be more of them which perish than of them which shall be saved, like as a wave is greater than a drop." In fact, the problem, like the problem of Job, remains unsolved, or is referred for its solution to trust in God. But as a statement of the problem it has a pathetic eloquence which gives it an abiding value.

In the New Testament the one apocalyptic work (apart from our Lord's discourse recorded by the Synoptists) is the Revelation of John. In dealing with this book a knowledge of apocalyptic literature in general is of special value, just because of its unique character, which places it on a quite different level from the other works in the same category. In the first place, it is not pseudonymous, as all the others are. The author gives his own name, John. He does not identify himself with the Apostle John, the beloved disciple ; and although there was a natural tendency to identify the two, such an identification is made almost impossible by the great difference in style between the Gospel and the Apocalypse. The Gospel is written in good Greek, with a marked literary style ; the Apocalypse is written in the worst Greek in the

whole New Testament, Greek which is always awkward and sometimes ungrammatical. At one time an attempt was made to account for this on the ground that the Apocalypse was written at the time of the Neronian persecution in A.D. 64, and the Gospel about thirty years later; but it is now generally held that the persecution referred to in the Apocalypse must be that of Domitian (about A.D. 95), which brings the two books too close together in time to be the work of the same author. Since, then, the Gospel claims (and with good reason, as indicated above) to be the work of the beloved disciple, while the Apocalypse does not, it is natural to accept this evidence, and to attribute the latter book to another John, otherwise unknown. Doubts as to its authorship, and even as to its acceptability as canonical, showed themselves very early. In the second century Justin Martyr, Hippolytus and Irenaeus accepted it as the work of the Apostle, but Caius did not; and the Muratorian Fragment (a mutilated discussion of the New Testament books, written somewhere about A.D. 170) couples it with the Apocalypse of Peter, the authenticity of which he admits to be doubtful. In the third century Origen accepted it, but his pupil and successor, Dionysius of Alexandria, argues strongly against it, on much the same grounds of difference of style and language as modern scholars. Eusebius gives no decided opinion, saying that some accept it and some do not. The Eastern Church generally, up to the time of Athanasius, did not accept it, while the Western Church (except Jerome, who was always much influenced by Eastern opinion) did; and it was not included in the Peshitto version (the authorised Bible of the Syriac Church, produced by Bishop Rabbula in the early part of the fifth century).

With regard to authorship, it is therefore in accordance with much early opinion (though not by any means all) if we conclude that the writer was not the Apostle, but another John, who was exiled for his faith to Patmos in the last decade of the first century. Even those critics who have most questioned the dates of the Gospels accept the Apocalypse as a work of the first century, so that there is no need to

discuss it further. We have here the visions of a follower of Christ, living in Asia Minor towards the close of the first century; and a study of it shows how greatly superior it is to the other apocalypses which have been mentioned above. It is no conventional vision of the next world, with its representation of the happiness of the blessed and its much fuller description of the punishment of the damned. It is a series of visions of varied character, whose very obscurity and incoherence suggest that they really represent dreams or imaginations of an author who is following no pattern, but is putting down what he himself has seen or believes himself to have seen. The contrast with the Apocalypse of Peter (a second-century work of which about half was discovered in 1886) is very marked. In style and language, as has been said above, the quality is poor, and the English reader gains greatly by reading it in the stately English of the Authorised Version; but this only does justice to the elevation of the seer's vision, which, especially in the Letters to the Seven Churches and the description of the New Jerusalem, together with such passages as v. 9-14, vii. 9-17, xiv., xviii., xix., altogether transcends the imperfections of his language.<sup>1</sup>

Before leaving the literary aspect of the Bible, it is right to say something of the translations in which it is known to English readers. The translation which still holds the field, and which to all except a small minority is the Bible, is that which we know as the Authorised Version, produced in 1611 by a committee appointed by James I. This was based on the translation of Tyndale (New Testament 1525, Pentateuch 1530, historical books posthumously in 1537), completed by Coverdale (1535, revised in Great Bible, 1539-41), and revised by King James's revisers with the help of the Geneva Bible (1560) and the Roman Catholic Rheims and Douai

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bernard Shaw calls the Revelation "the visions of a drug-addict." If drugs can produce such visions as the last two chapters of Revelation and the poem *Kubla Khan*, with such wonderful powers of expression, there is much to be said for their carefully controlled administration to persons of suitable genius and receptivity. The results seem likely to outlive Mr. Shaw's own works.

Bible (N.T. 1582, O.T. 1609). Its main character, was indelibly imprinted on it by Tyndale and Coverdale, and it is a pre-eminent example of the dignified and expressive prose which is the special characteristic of Tudor translations. The Greek text of the New Testament, which was all that the translators had at their disposal, was imperfect, and their Hebrew scholarship was in some respects defective; but as a work of literature the Authorised Version is unrivalled, and it has been an inestimable benefit to the English people that they received the Bible in a dress of so much dignity and beauty of expression.

The Revised Version of the Old Testament (1885) adhered very closely to the Authorised; while removing obscurities and mis-translations due to imperfect Hebrew scholarship. It can therefore be substituted for the Authorised with little loss in respect of literary style, and with a gain in accuracy and sometimes (especially in the prophetic books) in intelligibility. The Revisers of the New Testament (1881) had a more difficult task. The great advance in the knowledge of the Greek text, due to the discovery of manuscripts far older than those at the disposal of King James's translators, made a considerable amount of alteration inevitable. In the Epistles this has often led to a great gain in intelligibility; but in the Gospels (where, since the matter is so familiar, changes are most liable to give offence) the Revisers were misled by an over-punctilious zeal for exactness and by a lack of understanding of the characteristics of New Testament Greek, which had not then been illuminated by the discoveries of contemporary documents on papyrus which have been so plentiful in the last fifty years. The result is that the Revised Version has not superseded the Authorised for ordinary reading, though for purposes of careful study it should always be referred to. The Authorised translators were the greater masters of the English language, but the Revisers had ampler material and more advanced scholarship.

The English people have indeed been fortunate in their possession for over three hundred years of the Authorised Version, and its effects alike on their literature and their

religious consciousness has been enormous and indelible. But within the last generation a demand has grown up for more modernised versions. It has been felt that readers are hypnotised by the very beauty of the Tudor translation, and the archaic language obstructs the directness, and obscures the sense, of the original message. Earnest students of the Bible, such as General Charles Gordon, have recommended the reading of it in a foreign language, in order to refresh the impressions dulled by over-familiarity; and the same object is aimed at by the various new translations which have appeared of late years. Of these the best known are those of Weymouth (N.T. 1903) and Moffatt (N.T. 1913, O.T. 1924).<sup>1</sup> Such versions may be helpful to those who feel that archaic language dulls the apprehension, and who wish to have the original rendered as near as may be in contemporary manner; though there is nothing to be said for recourse to colloquialism on the ground that the Greek of the New Testament was the ordinary Greek of its day. So it was; but it was handled with respect as a means of literary communication, and its decent dignity should not be taken from it. As works of literature the modernisations cannot compete with the version which they aim at replacing; but as aids to comprehension they may be very helpful to those who have not access to the original languages. What is needful above all is that the Bible should be read, that it should be the book of the family and of the individual, as it was in past generations. Let every Englishman take pride, as in the past, in knowing his Bible, by whatever channel most recommends itself to him.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Some also may find helpful Miss Dorothy Sayers' dramatisation of the Gospel story in her *The Man Born to be King* (1943), which preserves all the dignity of the central figure, while setting it against an imaginative reconstruction of the real surroundings amongst which their life was lived.

<sup>2</sup> I cannot see what attractiveness *The Bible in Basic English* can have to English readers. Foreigners may find it easier to learn an English language which is restricted to 1,000 words; but there is no reason why Englishmen should deny themselves the richness of their own tongue, or substitute awkward paraphrases for words which they know very well.

CHAPTER IV  
THE BIBLE AS RELIGION

IT remains to consider the Bible in its most important aspect, as a guide to the relation of Man to God, to which we give the name of Religion. It is, of course, impossible in the last pages of a small book to give even an outline of the Jewish and Christian religions; but that is not the object of the present work. Its object is rather to show how our approach to the study of religion is affected by the views of modern scholars on the history and character of the books which are the principal authorities for Judaism and Christianity. There is nothing revolutionary in such an inquiry. Ever since the earliest days, the views held by the leaders of thought in the Christian Church as to the proper approach to and interpretation of the sacred Scriptures have varied from generation to generation. Differences of knowledge, differences of intellectual ability, differences in the problems from time to time engaging the attention of thinkers, have caused these variations in approach. No method is complete, none is final; for knowledge grows and the intellectual and spiritual needs of man vary. Hence restatements are necessary from time to time, and can be undertaken without disloyalty; indeed, they must be undertaken, if the Christian religion is to continue to be the guide of life. It is hoped to show, also, that the restatements now necessary have nothing disquieting to the Christian believer.

The essence of this restatement is the proposition—by no means new—that the revelation of God in Scripture is progressive. The Bible is not a record of a stationary religion, a religion once for all revealed in the beginning of time and remaining unchanged throughout the ages; but rather the record of the progressive training of mankind in the knowledge of God, first through the specially favoured people of the Hebrews in various stages of their national life, and

finally through the revelation of God in His Son which we know as Christianity. This conception of progressiveness removes many of the difficulties which students, from the very earliest days, have felt in the application of the Scriptures to their daily life, and at the same time provides a warning against the uncritical use of them which has characterised some periods in our history. It also leaves room for the assimilation of new facts brought to light by criticism and archaeological discovery, and goes far to avert the conflict between critical science and religion which has been so disastrous to religion and so harmful to science in the past.

In the very early days of Christianity, as soon as thoughtful men began to scrutinise the books which had been handed down as specially inspired, they were met by difficulties which demanded an answer. There were stories of behaviour by the patriarchs, even of commands attributed to the Most High, which it was impossible to reconcile with later ethical standards; there were many passages offering difficulties of interpretation. The study of these problems led the first great Christian scholar, Origen (A.D. 185-250), to propound a threefold method of interpretation. He held that every text was capable of three interpretations: first, the literal or historical; second, the moral; and third, the mystical or allegorical; and Scripture has a different force for different readers, according to their circumstances and characters. This admission of allegorical interpretations (already applied by the Stoics to the legends of the classical gods and heroes) had a profound effect on following ages, and led to extravagances and even absurdities of exegesis, which to modern readers seem simply childish. In spite of the opposition of the school of Antioch, led by Theodore of Mopsuestia and Chrysostom, which upheld the literal and common-sense interpretation of Scripture, the Alexandrian doctrine of the threefold sense dominated Christian teaching throughout the Middle Ages. By this method not only could the passages whose literal sense shocks the moral consciousness be explained away, but almost any proposition could be given Biblical support at the will of the preacher or commentator. Thus

“when we are told that Rebecca comes to draw water at the well, and so meets the servant of Abraham, the meaning is, according to Origen, that we must daily come to the wells of Scripture in order to meet with Christ. . . . In Genesis xviii. 2 the Septuagint says that the three-men stood *above* Abraham, and this is interpreted to mean that Abraham submitted himself to the will of God.” . . . “What meaning can there be, he asks, in our being told that ‘the Lord opened the eyes of Hagar’? Where do we read that she had closed them? Is it not clear as daylight that the mystic sense implies the blindness of the Jewish synagogue?”<sup>1</sup>

The method of allegorical or mystical interpretation was carried into the Western church by the great authority of Augustine. “In the narrative of the Fall the fig-leaves become hypocrisy, and the coats of skin mortality, and the four rivers of Eden the four cardinal virtues. In the story of the Deluge the Ark is pitched within and without to show the safety of the Church from inward and outward heresies. The drunkenness of Noah is, shocking to relate, a figure of the death and passion of Christ.”<sup>2</sup> This method was carried on by the mediæval schoolmen, the threefold interpretation being made fourfold—literal, moral, allegorical, and anagogic (or mystical)—of which the literal was by far the least important. The others could be developed to illustrate any proposition which the writer desired to maintain. “A favourite illustration of this supposed fourfold sense was the word ‘Jerusalem,’ which might stand for a city, for a faithful soul, for the Church militant, or for the Church triumphant. Another was the word ‘water,’ which literally means an element; tropologically may stand for sorrow, or wisdom, or heresies, or prosperity; allegorically may refer to baptism, nations, or grace; anagogically to eternal happiness.”<sup>3</sup>

A marked change in Biblical interpretation came with the Renaissance and the Reformation. The Renaissance introduced new methods of literary and historical criticism, break-

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (Bampton Lectures, 1885, p. 199).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295. Dr. Farrar adds that Basil, with infinitely more good sense, says that when the Bible says *water* it usually means *water*.



ing through the crust of traditional exegesis which had established itself during the Middle Ages. The Reformation was largely based on the dissemination of knowledge of the Bible through vernacular translations, such as those of Luther in Germany and Wyclif and Tyndale in our own land ; and this led to a more intense study and realistic interpretation of the Scriptures. Luther uncompromisingly denounced allegory, and maintained the right of private judgement, with adherence to the literal sense and consideration of times and circumstances. Allegorical interpretations, which, like cobwebs, had obscured the natural meaning, were swept away finally, and misinterpretations tended to the opposite extreme, the uncritical application of texts without reference to their context or, in some cases, their true meaning. The Bible was regarded as a quarry from which passages could be drawn for controversial purposes. In our own country this was very conspicuously evident during the period of Puritan ascendancy. Since the publication of Coverdale's Great Bible in 1539, and still more when the Geneva version of 1557-60 brought the Bible into the homes as well as the churches, the Bible had been taken to the heart of the English people. Its text was well known and widely used. The combatant tone of the Old Testament was especially congenial to the militant spirit of Puritanism, and the soldiers of Cromwell and the Covenant delighted in references to the sword of the Lord against Midian, the slaughter of the Amalekites, and Samuel's execution of Agag. Expressions suitable to a primitive age and savage manners were applied to a later age which should have known better, and the New Testament doctrine of love was obscured by the ruthless ethics of early Hebrew intolerance.

This age of violence wore itself out at last, and was succeeded by the somewhat colourless tolerance of the eighteenth century ; but the Wesleyan missions of the latter half of that century and the Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic revivals of the nineteenth led to a renewed and intenser study of the Bible, with the emphasis rather on the New Testament than on the Old. Most of this was entirely to the good ; its

defect was, however, the same in principle as before, namely the application of texts without reference to their context or true meaning, as though any words found in the Authorised Version of the Bible must be regarded as authoritative in any connection to which they were verbally applicable. The main danger of this frame of mind lay in its production of a temper which regarded any criticism of the Bible as a denial of its authority ; which treated as enemies of the faith those who tried to assimilate the results of modern literary criticism or discoveries of historical facts ; and which, by defending the indefensible, imperilled the safety of that which was truly precious. Thus, when the progress of knowledge and humanity made it impossible to accept as permanently applicable the universality of the Flood or the glorification of indiscriminate massacres of enemies, there were (and are) those who said that to question the complete validity of any part of the Bible was to question the authority of the whole, and whose acceptance of the doctrine of the New Testament was shaken by any doubt thrown on the historical accuracy or the universal moral applicability of parts of the Old.

It is against this temper, which (in colloquial phrase) would throw out the baby with the bath-water, that is set the alternative method of approach, which, by laying stress on the principle of progressive revelation, would retain the full moral and religious value of the Bible while rescuing it from an impossible position of conflict with historical and scientific fact. The determination of what is fact, and what is merely insecure assertions of fact, remains open ; the assertions of subversive critics are no more immune than the assertions of fundamentalists ; but the discussion of them can be conducted without the feeling that the essential truths of faith and religion are imperilled, and without the intolerant and uncharitable tone of controversy which sometimes rises from that feeling.

In the principle of progressive revelation, as has been said already, there is nothing new. Augustine himself admitted it, though he rarely uses it. It is inherent in the progress from the Old Testament to the New. No Christian would

deny that the teaching of the New Testament is an advance on the teaching of the Old. The principle is laid down by our Lord Himself: "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time . . . , but I say unto you"; "Moses because of the hardness of your heart suffered you . . . but . . . I say unto you." Moreover, no one really maintains that all the commandments which were accepted as divine utterances by the leaders of the Hebrew people in the days of the conquest and the early kingdom are literally applicable to-day. "The Lord our God delivered him before us, and we smote him and his sons and all his people . . . we utterly destroyed the men and the women and the little ones of every city, we left none to remain"; "the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee, thou shalt smite them and shalt utterly destroy them"; "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." No one would claim that polygamy could now be sanctioned because it was permitted to the patriarchs; and many of the ordinances of the Mosaic legislation are now obsolete. In particular, the whole institution of sacrifice has been superseded by the one Sacrifice of Calvary.

We have, therefore, to look at the Old Testament as a record of the progressive training of the people of Israel, passing through various phases from the primitive beliefs and practices which they shared with the neighbouring peoples, through the teaching of the prophets and the establishment of the legalistic system after the return from the Captivity, up to the manifestation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ and the development of His teaching by the apostles, and notably by St. Paul. Approaching it in this spirit, we can apply all the established results of literary criticism and archaeological discovery, without any fear that we are tampering with the essentials of Divine revelation. On the contrary, that revelation becomes more impressive, and appeals to us with the greater emphasis when it is studied in the light of its historical setting.

## (a) OLD TESTAMENT

The history of the religious development of the Hebrews falls into three main divisions: (1) from Abraham to the establishment of the kingdom, (2) the age of the prophets, (3) the period after the return from the Captivity. For the first period we have to depend mainly on the historical books, remembering that, however old the materials on which they are based may be, they did not assume their present form until late in the period of the kingdom or after the Captivity. We trace in it the development from a family to a tribe, from a tribe to a nation, from a nation to a kingdom—small, indeed, but still a kingdom of which the neighbouring nations had to take account. Hebrew tradition looked back to Abraham as the father of the nation, and particularly as the father of its religious beliefs. Coming out of the polytheistic surroundings of Lower Mesopotamia (where Talmud legends represent him as having destroyed the idols of his father Terah) he set his descendants on the path of monotheistic worship, which was thenceforward characteristic (though with many backslidings) of the best Hebrew thought and practice. Hebrew history, from Abraham to the fall of the monarchy, is largely a history of the struggle between monotheism and the polytheistic practices prevalent in the surrounding peoples. But the monotheism was for themselves alone; it did not yet extend to all peoples. Jehovah (or Yahweh)<sup>1</sup> was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; but other peoples had other gods. Thus El was the chief god of the Amorite-Canaanites of north Syria, Chemosh of the Moabites, Milcom of the Ammonites; and Rabshakeh, in his appeal to the Jews to surrender, assumes that Jehovah is a purely tribal god, like the gods of the nations already conquered by Assyria:

<sup>1</sup> The sacred name was written (in accordance with Hebrew usage) in consonants alone, JHVH or YHWH, the vowels having to be added by tradition. But out of reverence the Jews habitually substituted the word Adonay (Lord), and by inserting the vowels of this name in the consonants JHVH produced the name Jehovah. There is, however, evidence (including the abbreviation Yah found in Ex. xv. 2, xvii. 16, R.V.; Ps. lxxviii. 4) that the true vocalisation is Yahweh.

“ Who are they among all the gods of the countries that have delivered their country out of my hand, that Jehovah should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? ” When Jehovah revealed Himself to Jacob in a dream as the God of Abraham and of Isaac, Jacob makes a bargain with Him which implies that a choice of gods was open to him : “ If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then shall Jehovah be my God. ” There is no conception as yet of a God who is the king of all the earth.

It is a remarkable proof of the exclusive self-consciousness and unshakable coherence characteristic of the Jews throughout their whole history, that the sojourn in Egypt, which left so indelible a mark in their national memory, scarcely affected their religious beliefs at all. The episode of the golden calf shows a temporary leaning to the Apis cult of Egypt, which may have been the ultimate origin of the calves set up by Jeroboam at Bethel and Dan ; but Moses at Sinai firmly established the worship of Jehovah as the God of the Hebrews, and it was as His people and in His name that they entered on the conquest of Palestine. Here, as we now know more fully from the discoveries made at Ras Shamra in northern Syria, they found a Canaanite-Amorite people established, with a polytheistic pantheon in which the more prominent deities were El and his wife Asherah and his son Baal. El (especially in the form Elohim, which is a plural denoting dignity) was familiar to the Israelites as a title applied to their own God ; but Baal and Asherah were additions, and it was the worship of them which continually led the people and their rulers astray throughout the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. As early as the reign of Asa we find the queen-mother worshipping Asherah (1 Kings xv. 13) <sup>1</sup> ; but it was especially in the reign of Ahab that the worship of Baal was introduced by his consort Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians. Thenceforth Baal was the

<sup>1</sup> The translation “ a grove ” in A.V. is incorrect, here and elsewhere ; see R.V.

rival of Jehovah, not only in Israel but in Judah, into which he may have been introduced by Ahab's daughter, Athaliah. The history of the successive kings is an oscillation between the two faiths: Ahaz "walked in the way of the kings of Israel"; Hezekiah "brake the pillars and cut down the Asherah"; Manasseh "built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he reared up altars for Baal and made an Asherah"; Josiah "brought out the Asherah from the house of the Lord and burned it at the brook Kidron"; but Josiah's successors relapsed into evil ways, until the final catastrophe of the Captivity.

So much is clear from the history recorded by the Jews themselves in the books of Kings. It is the record of a continuous tradition of the worship of Jehovah as the one God, constantly threatened and at times almost overwhelmed by the polytheism of the Canaanites among whom the Hebrews had planted themselves. One great support and mainstay of the worship of Jehovah was the Law. Of the fact of a Law given by Moses there is no reason to doubt; it was one of the most indelible traditions of the Hebrew people; of its details there is room for doubt. As indicated in a previous chapter, the Pentateuch record is an intermixture of earlier and later elements, and at one time there was a tendency among critics to reduce the earlier elements to a minimum, and to deny the possibility of elaborate legislation at a date so early as that of Moses. Archaeological discovery has removed this ground of doubt, by revealing the existence among the Babylonians and Hurrians of codes earlier in date than Moses, at least as elaborate, and showing considerable resemblances in detail (see above, pp. 18, 21). On the other hand, it is very possible that the details of temple ritual were elaborated between the times of Moses and Ezra, from the simplicity essential in the tabernacle of the Wanderings to the developed worship of Solomon's Temple. How much of this detail is earlier and how much is later, it is impossible to say; and it matters very little. The language of the earliest prophets suffices to prove the existence before their time of an elaborate ritual of sacrifice and worship, the origin of

which went back to an unknown antiquity ; and we may be content to know that the worship of Jehovah went back from the prophets to Moses, and from Moses to Abraham, guarded by the ceremonial of the Law, and stubbornly refusing contamination with the polytheism of the surrounding nations.

For the next great advance, after Moses, we must come to the period of the prophets in the eighth century. There were, of course, prophets before that—Elisha, Elijah, Micaiah, Nathan, Gad, are names known to us, which go back to the beginnings of the kingdom—but their utterances were oral and they left no records in writing. It was in the days of Uzziah (*c.* 780–750 B.C.) that Amos and Hosea began their work ; it was “in the year that king Uzziah died” that Isaiah received his call ; and Micah the Morashtite prophesied in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (*c.* 750–700) ; and it is in their writings that we find for the first time the expression of a more elevated and more universal conception of religion, and of a new relation between man and his God.

In the first place there is a call to a more spiritual form of religion than the conventional ritual of sacrifices. We meet this first in Amos : “Seek good and not evil, that ye may live ; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye say. Hate the evil and love the good, and establish judgement in the gate. . . . I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them, neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs ; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgement roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream” (v. 14–24). So also in Hosea : “I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (vi. 6). So, still more emphatically in the memorable declaration of Micah : “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God ? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of

a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed 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 with thy God?" (vi. 6-8). And the same doctrine stands in the forefront of the prophecies of Isaiah: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (i. 11-17).

Thus, along with the constant denunciation of the desertion of Jehovah and the lapse into polytheistic idol-worship, which forms the main staple of these prophets' utterances, a new note is introduced, an appeal for the spirit of religion rather than its form, for mercy and justice and kindness and humility, rather than for sacrifices and ritual celebrations. It is a permanent appeal, which has its weight to-day no less than when it was first uttered. It is the beginning of the great contribution of Hebrew thought to the moral and religious standards of humanity, preceding by some centuries that of Greece, and far transcending anything that can be found in the literature of the surrounding nations. To the great prophets of Israel men can always turn for lofty thoughts



expressed with earnestness and burning eloquence, and for a worthy conception of the relation of God to man.

But the prophets did more than defend the worship of Jehovah from the incursions of idolatry, or raise its character from ritual observances to the religion of the heart. They also extended its scope from the worship of a tribal god to the worship of the God of all the earth. The first commandment in the law of Moses did not say "There is no other god but me," but only "Thou shalt have none other gods before me." There is a glimmering of a broader view, of a God of wider power and greater purity than other gods, in Solomon's prayer of dedication of the temple (and it is a sign of the substantial authenticity of this utterance that it does not attribute to Solomon the more universal claims of a later age): "O Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath; who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart; who hast kept with thy servant David my father that which thou didst promise him; yea, thou spakest with thy mouth, and hast fulfilled it with thy hand, as it is this day" (1 Kings viii. 23, 24). There is no god *like* Him; heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him; but the conception that He is the one God of all the earth has not yet been reached. But in the prophets we find this claim asserted with full assurance. The prophet in the name of Jehovah pronounces judgement on the peoples that have misused Israel, not only on Moab and Edom, on Syria and Tyre, but also on the great empires of Egypt and Assyria. To Amos He is already the universal Creator: "Lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth; the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name" (iv. 13); "Seek him that maketh the Pleiades and Orion, and turneth the deep darkness into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the face of the earth; the Lord is his name" (v. 8); "It is he that buildeth his chambers in the heaven,

and hath founded his vault upon the earth ; he that calleth for the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth ; the Lord is his name ” (ix. 6). So also in Micah : “ In the latter days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills ; and peoples shall flow unto it. And many nations shall go and say, Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob ; and he will teach us of his ways and we will walk in his paths ; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem ” (iv. 1, 2) ; though even here we find the worship of other gods by other peoples recognised : “ For all the peoples will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God for ever and ever ” (iv. 5).

But it is in Isaiah that this conception receives its fullest and most emphatic assertion : “ Behold the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof ” (xxiv. 1, etc.) ; “ And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth . . . ; then the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem ” (*ib.*, 21-3) ; “ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain ; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea ” (xi. 9). The supreme power of Jehovah, to punish or preserve Israel, and to dispose at His will of the great nations of the earth, is asserted again and again : “ The lofty looks of man shall be brought low, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For there shall be a day of the Lord of hosts upon all that is proud and haughty, and upon all that is lifted up, and it shall be brought low. . . . Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils ; for wherein is he to be accounted of ? ” (ii. 11-22). From the time of Isaiah onwards there is no doubt that the recognition of Jehovah as the God of all the earth was fully before the

mind of the people of Israel, and no more majestic assertion of it is to be found in all literature. The revelation of the New Testament in no way supersedes this declaration of the power and majesty of God, though it adds the manifestation of Him as the God of love.

Together with the early prophets, the book of Job may be mentioned. Its date is doubtful, but its representation of the Almighty is similar. The universal and unquestionable power of God is its constant theme. It is to Him that Job appeals, acknowledging Him as the controller of all that happens, and demanding to know why all this suffering has fallen on him. God "is wise in heart and mighty in strength . . . which alone stretcheth out the heavens and treadeth upon the waves of the sea ; which maketh the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south " (ix. 4-9). " Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this ? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind " (xii. 9, 10, etc.) ? And in the magnificent finale of the book the Lord Himself proclaims His power over all creation, as the answer to the complaints and criticisms of His creatures, for whom His ways are past finding out. God is the universal source of being, omnipotent and without rival. Man can only abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes.

The prophets of the end of the kingdom and of the Captivity and the Return reach no higher standard than the prophets of the eighth century, and strike no new note. Jeremiah and Ezekiel are concerned mainly with denouncing the backsliding and idolatrous worships of the people, and in foretelling their captivity, with only the consoling hope of the eventual (but not speedy) return of a remnant. The assumption of the power of Jehovah over all peoples is common to them all. Like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel pronounced judgement in the name of the Lord on Moab and Edom and Ammon, on Tyre and Egypt and Babylon ; and Nahum and Jonah declare the doom of Nineveh. Jeremiah proclaims explicitly the supremacy of Jehovah : " The Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king ; at his wrath the

earth trembleth, and the nations are not able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding hath he stretched out the heavens" (x. 10-12)\*; "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh" (xxxii. 27).

A higher note than the assertion of power and the denunciation of vengeance is struck by the Second Isaiah: "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. . . . Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. . . . All the nations are as nothing before him; they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity" (xli. 5, 15, 17). "Thus saith God the Lord, he that created the heavens, and stretched them forth, he that spread abroad the earth and that which cometh out of it, he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein; I the Lord have called thee, in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house" (xlii. 5-7). "It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that my salvation may be unto the end of the earth" (xlix. 6). The canon of the prophets ends with the conception of a God who is the loving father as well as the omnipotent ruler and judge, and with the promise of the coming of the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings (Malachi iv. 2).

The more intimate and personal side of Hebrew religion is to be found in the Psalms; but the uncertainty of the date of many of them makes it impossible to trace in them the development of religious thought. A considerable number

of them are odes in celebration of the power and glory of God (e.g. xix., lxxv.-lxxviii., cxliv.-cl.) ; but the commonest theme of all is the appeal to that power for help, either generally or specifically against enemies. Many of them couple the appeal for help with denunciations of the wicked oppressors, and demands for their punishment. Several (e.g. cxv.-cxviii., cxxiv., cxxvi., cxxix., cxxxv., cxxxvi.) are hymns of gratitude for mercies received. There is ample recognition of God's goodness (xvi.-xviii., xl., xlii., liii., cvii.) ; but only a few (vi., xxii., xxxii., xxxix., li.) express at all strongly a personal sense of sin. The fatherhood and loving kindness of God are recognised in such Psalms as viii., lxxxii., lxxxix., ciii. There are also a few notable pictures of the character of the upright man (i., iv., v. xv., xxiv., ci., cxii.). The beauty of virtue and of good conduct towards others is amply acknowledged ; but the dominant theme is the greatness of God, the creator and ruler of the world, the defender of His chosen people, whose merit is to obey His Law, and who look to him for very present help in trouble. " O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness ; let the whole earth stand in awe of Him " is a cry that sums up much of the feeling of this collection of poems—the power and holiness of God on the one hand, the worship due to Him from man on the other, and the beauty of this relation.

#### (b) NEW TESTAMENT

There is no need to dwell long on the period that lies between the later Prophets and the books of the New Testament. It is a period of great importance in the development of Jewish religious thought, and it prepares the background against which our Lord's life was lived and Christianity was first preached. But it has left little mark on the Bible, with which we are here concerned. Its main features are (1) the Wisdom literature, and (2) the apocalyptic literature. Both of these are represented in the Apocrypha of our Bible, the former in the books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus, the latter in 2 Esdras. In neither does religious doctrine or philosophy rise to a higher level than had been already reached by the

prophets ; but the conception of Wisdom, as expressed in these books, went some distance in preparing the way for the doctrine of the Word of God, as we find it in St. John. The apocalyptic literature, on the other hand, expresses the general unsettlement of mind, the longing for a saviour and a judge who will avenge the cause of the righteous, the hopes of a coming kingdom of righteousness, which were characteristic of the period ; but it lies almost wholly outside the limits of our Bible, even of the Apocrypha.

In the New Testament we reach the climax of our religion, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. It would be quite beyond the scope of this book to attempt even a summary of that revelation. While the main theme of the Old Testament is the Power of God, that of the New Testament is His Love. This is what we find in the narratives of our Lord's life and the letters of His followers, which compose the New Testament. All that can be done here is to suggest a method of approach to them.

It is necessary to realise how informal and incomplete our records are ; and it may be of some use to recall their chronological relationship. The earliest documents are the Epistles of St. Paul—letters written by him to various Christian communities as occasion arose. None of them purports to be an ordered exposition of the Christian faith. Only once, in the earlier part of the epistle to the Romans, does he undertake a formal inquiry into a particular point, the relation between the Law and the Gospel. For the rest, they are *ἀγωνίσματα εἰς τὸ παραχρῆμα*, occasional utterances called forth by the particular circumstances of the community which he was addressing. His knowledge of our Lord's life and teachings must be picked up from scattered passages and individual references. That St. Paul had access to the general body of narrative then available, we know from his own words : " I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures," etc. (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4). This corresponds exactly with the reports in Acts of the first

preachings of St. Peter after Pentecost. All the emphasis was on the Crucifixion and the Resurrection; and to this were evidently added narratives of His life and teaching, such as we find in the Synoptic Gospels. St. Paul gives an example of these in his narrative of the institution of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. xi. 23 ff.); but he makes no systematic use of them. Rather he assumes in those to whom he writes a general knowledge of the historical facts underlying Christianity and the main substance of its teaching; and he comments only on such particular subjects as serve his immediate purpose.

The general tradition, which at first passed from mouth to mouth orally, and eventually took form in the Synoptic Gospels, no doubt represents the substance of the teaching and preaching of the apostles and their followers, addressed to the newly-converted and those whom they wished to convert. It comprises miracles and other incidents which would attract listeners, and the simple teaching based upon them, and instruction given by our Lord in language which could be understood without much difficulty. That discourses more profound and difficult were also delivered to the inner circle of disciples, there is no reason to doubt. In particular we are told that He did so during the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension. How far they all understood it at the time may be doubtful; but they had the teaching given to them to meditate on, and were promised the guidance of the Holy Spirit to help them to understand and develop it. It is this that may explain the special character of the Fourth Gospel. As was argued above, the increased (in fact, now definitive) proof of its first-century date makes it increasingly difficult to refuse the traditional ascription of it to St. John. He was one of the inner circle of the disciples from the first; and he, as the Gospel shows, must have had special gifts of spiritual discernment. He had a good memory, as the wealth of small details in his narrative shows (see above, p. 60); and he had had a long life in which to turn over in his mind what he had heard. That his expression of it would take the colour of his own style (and it will be observed that his epistles are very similar in

style to the Gospel) is natural enough ; there is a parallel in Plato's representation of his master Socrates. But the substance may well be that of the more intimate discourses of Jesus. The teaching of the Lord had to reach the world through many minds. There were the more pedestrian minds of those who passed on the stories and the sayings which they had heard ; there was the mind of St. Peter, strong, straightforward, passionately in earnest ; there was the cultivated scholar's mind in St. Paul, fired with an ardent zeal for the conversion of souls ; and there was the gentle, loving, meditative mind of the Beloved Apostle. But all these can be facets of the same mind of the one Master, interpreting to the world different aspects and details of the same teaching.

Nor need the reader be distressed by the fact that centuries of discussion were necessary before the Christian faith received its final formularisation. The assertion of a faith prompts questions and criticisms. To these criticisms answers have to be found, and these answers are again criticised until formulas are found which define beliefs hitherto held without much definition.

Formularisation is the protective bark of the tree, necessary because the truth has enemies, or mistaken friends, whose errors must be warded off. It is natural that the acute minds of the East should have had many questions to put to so strange a doctrine as that of the Christians. It is natural that divergent interpretations should have been offered, and the great leaders of Christian thought should have had to fight hard for the interpretation which they regarded as the true one. The controversies had their worldly side, sometimes not very edifying ; but the Christian is within his rights in believing that the Holy Spirit guided the course of events to the climax of the Nicene Creed.

There are those who denounce "dogma," and say that they can only believe an undogmatic religion. They are apparently unconscious that they are talking nonsense. "Dogma" means formulated belief. It is just as much "dogma" to say "I believe in a God," or indeed to say "I do not believe in a God," as it is to say "I believe in the



propositions of the Nicene Creed." To say "I believe in religion without dogma" is to say "I believe, but I don't believe anything in particular." Neither the Christian religion nor any other can exist without being formularised in dogmas. Whether any particular formula is true may be a matter for argument, as it was in the day of Athanasius; but let no one be frightened by the word "dogma." Let him read his Bible, and formulate his own "dogmas"; in doing which he can have the guidance of the wisest heads and most saintly hearts that the Church has known.

How, then, in summary, does the Bible stand for us to-day as a guide to religion, in the light of modern criticism and discoveries? In the Old Testament we see the record of a progressive revelation, a progressive growth in man's apprehension of God, set, as never before, in a historical background, and illuminated by comparison with the surrounding nations. The narrative books have for us to-day a relative and illustrative value; they must be read, and can very profitably be read, in relation to the general history of the times to which they relate, and to the gradual development of the Hebrew people which they record. The prophetic books have often a value as absolute to-day as when they were first uttered; for besides marking a great advance in the Hebrew conceptions of God and of his relations to mankind, they contain revelations of His spirit through exceptionally gifted minds which have permanent and universal application. Similarly, the poetical books, with some elements appropriate only to their own times, have much that is of permanent appeal; they are emotional, decorative, inspiring, the voice of humanity in reference to its Maker to-day as much as two thousand years ago. And in the New Testament we have the revelation of Jesus Christ, than which no greater height has been reached in the history of man, and the re-affirmation of which is the prime need in our own troubled and tormented generation.

On these lines it is maintained that the reader may approach the Bible without misgiving as to the effects of modern

criticism. He will find its literary and spiritual value wholly unaffected, and indeed even enhanced by a fuller knowledge of the circumstances of its composition. He may without misgiving read it with interest as history, with admiration as literature, and with the profoundest reverence as the record of the progressive training of mankind in its knowledge of God, up to "the dispensation of the mystery which from all ages hath been hid in God who created all things ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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