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A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL.

BY A. LUKYN WILLIAMS, D.D., Hon. Canon of Ely Cathedral.

1. *The Religion of the Semites*, by W. Robertson Smith. Third Edition, with Introduction and Notes by Stanley A. Cook. A. & C. Black, London, 1927.
2. *The Religion of Ancient Palestine in the Light of Archæology*, by Stanley A. Cook. The Schweich Lectures for 1925. Oxford University Press, 1930.
3. *The Psalmists*. Essays on their religious experience and teaching, their social background, and their place in the development of Hebrew Psalmody. Edited by D. C. Simpson. Oxford University Press, 1926.
4. *A History of Israel*. In two volumes, by Theodore H. Robinson and W. O. E. Oesterley. Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1932.

UNTIL a little more than a hundred years ago the question, What are the sources of information about the History of Israel? could receive a very simple and short answer. For, although certain mysterious remarks in Josephus, and even in more secular writers, were well known, yet they were single sayings, whose relevance was hardly appreciated, much less understood. The one and only source was the Bible. But about that time strange discoveries began to be made. The Egyptian hieroglyphs were beginning to deliver up their secrets. Even the worm-like markings on the Rock of Behistun, and on the monuments and tablets which were found in abundance beneath the earth of the Euphrates and Tigris valleys, were being guessed at, and at long last becoming read with certainty. And other discoveries were being made in quite other directions, bearing vitally upon the subject. So that to-day there is a mass of information about the History of Israel of which our elder forefathers of, say, a hundred and fifty years since never even dreamed.

And if they ever did dream of such trove of the past hidden away in the hands of Time, they would never have imagined its importance. For they would certainly have said that the statements of Holy Scripture were sufficient, because it was inspired by God, meaning by this that it did not contain anything that was imperfect, much less anything that was erroneous. How strange this seems to us! Had they forgotten Copernicus and Galileo, and the quotations from the Bible that were hurled at their heads? Alas, that Christians should have been so slow in learning God's methods! How painful too it is to read the controversy in the fifties between Bishops and Geologists, when the latter had dug into the earth and interpreted the meaning of the fossil plants and fish and birds and animals, hardly men so soon, that lay in the various strata, waiting to be brought to light, and so to sing in their turn of the Glory of the Lord. We confess with sorrow the errors of our very conservative ancestors, and grieve that believers could ever have shut their eyes so tightly against the Divine Light, because it did not shine solely through the

spectacles they wore, however heavily tinted these might be. We cannot help wondering that earnest Christians have dared, and the more readily the more earnest they have been, to assert that God can only have communicated His will in one way, and not have understood from the first that it was their duty humbly and patiently to investigate His methods before forming their own theory and judging all else by it. After all, the only religious way of dealing with the things of God is to learn the facts, and then form the theory that fits them. And if fresh facts are revealed, naturally the theory has to be modified. Herein lies the glory of true religion. It is never fixed, but grows and grows with each further knowledge of the facts of Life. Induction spells humility; deduction only presumption. For example: we say, and say rightly, that God made the world, and it might be deduced from that fact that every tree in it is perfect. Yet no one has yet seen a perfect tree; nay, no one has ever found one perfect leaf. It has not been God's method of work, that is to say, to make anything perfect. If the Bible is perfect, it is something absolutely abnormal in God's world. They who hold the perfection of the Bible—if there are any such—come perilously near to denying the uniqueness of the One and Only manifestation of God on earth—"God only begotten. . . . He revealed Him."

What, then, are the sources from which we can learn the facts about the History of Israel, and in what ways do they assist us?

Besides the Bible, which, after all, must, on strictly scientific reasons, be pronounced to be by far the best and fullest source we possess, we can obtain from elsewhere information on language, dates and data of history, customs and laws, doctrines, and even to a slight extent spiritual perceptions, related to the History of Israel. It is worth while to consider these briefly.

First, as to Language. Time was when a teacher would in all good faith point out to his pupil the curious relation between the two Hebrew words for Truth and for Falsehood. The former is *'Emeth*, and is made up of the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the last (its Alpha and Omega), the centre being one of the middle letters, every letter being of a solid and steady character, resting on two feet. For, in fact, Truth is the very Seal of God. But what of the Hebrew word for Falsehood? The three letters of this are *Sheqer*, and they are not even in the right order of the alphabet, and each of them has either only one leg to stand on, or a semicircle! And then after telling the pupil this, the Teacher would turn round and say, Can any other language do that? Is it not plain proof that Hebrew is Divine, the very language used by God in His speech to the inhabitants of heaven?

To-day we smile at all this, and are fully aware that Hebrew is only a late form of a primitive tongue, from which it and the other members of the great Semitic family of languages have been derived, each preserving something of the old stock better than the others, and each contributing its own share towards our knowledge of the forms and meanings of the others. Aramaic, Arabic, and Accadian (the title now given to the matter common to Assyrian and Baby-

lonian) all help, to say nothing of the occasional assistance to be found even in Ethiopic.

Then there are the dates and the historical facts. There is at least one fixed date in the History of Israel. For the Annals of the ninth year of King Ashur-dan III tell us that a total eclipse of the sun took place in that year, and, astronomers now assure us, on June 15, 763 B.C. By that fixed date we are able to trace dates in Assyrian chronology as far back as the end of the twelfth century with almost complete accuracy, for we find each year designated by the name of an official called *limmu*, and the lists are practically complete from the fall of Assyria until then. Thus we now know with certainty the dates of the following events: 853, the battle of Karkar, when Ahab King of Israel was present; 841, Jehu pays tribute to Shalmaneser; 738, Menahem pays tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III; 721, the capture of Samaria by Sargon.¹

Again, there are the statements, often indeed hard to place, from which we learn the history of the Egyptian dynasties, and their peculiarities. From these we may see, for example, that the only period to which Joseph's history can belong is that of the Hyksos, the Semitic intruders who ruled over Egypt from about 1700 to 1580 B.C. And again, closely in connection with this, it is increasingly probable that the Exodus took place, not in 1215 B.C., as our older text-books tell us, but in 1447 or thereabouts, with the Fall of Jericho in 1400, as Garstang has almost proved. This recalls the letters found at Tell-el-Amarna in 1887, written by kinglets of Jerusalem and of other Palestinian towns to their suzerain the Pharaoh. They lament the onset of the Ḥabiri, and call upon him for protection from them. And who were the Ḥabiri? Has the word any connection with the word Hebrew? Further, whether it has or not, do they represent the Hebrew tribes who now here, now there, attacked the cities of Palestine about that time? These questions have to be answered, and after much discussion the probability is that scholars will soon agree that the Ḥabiri are the Israelites, even though the Letters about them must somewhat modify our idea of the History of Israel drawn from the Old Testament alone.

Nor can one leave Egypt without thinking of the much later documents, the Aramaic Papyri found at Elephantiné in 1904. These describe the experience of a little colony of Israelites at the beginning and near the end of the fifth century B.C., far away from Palestine in Upper Egypt, yet continuing to maintain the worship of Jāhōh, though in somewhat corrupt form, and in touch with persons of importance who are mentioned in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. These documents cannot but affect our own interpretation of the canonical books which deal with that time.

There is yet another source of information, not so concise, nor so easy to consult, but of wide extent and singularly convincing. This is the customs, and what we may conveniently call the folklore, of the nations in and around the Holy Land, or even of those

¹ See further *O. and R.*, i, 455 sq.

which are far distant geographically yet are still in conditions of life not unlike some portrayed in the Old Testament.

Such, for example, are the endless details about sacred stones and trees and springs of water ; the manner of offering sacrifices, the customs of the Avenger of Blood, etc., etc.

And, further, there is the vast territory of the various laws promulgated partly in the Assyrian, partly even in the Hittite, inscriptions, all raising questions about their relation to the Laws found in the Pentateuch. How was it that the great Lawgiver was guided by the hand of God to select and improve the legal and ritual customs of his day ?

Yet there is one question to which very little attention has been given, apparently from despair at finding an answer. In what relation do the Sacred Songs of Israel stand to those of other nations ? Is there, or is there not, any connection between them ? If there is not, *cadit questio*. But if there is, when was it made ? That Israel's Psalms are superior to those of other religions of the time in everything that really matters, no one will deny. But how came they into Israel's life at all, if, as some writers seem to say, the religion of Israel itself stood for so long at a dismally low level of spiritual attainment ? Did the Israelites learn their sacred hymnody from their heathen contemporaries during the Exile in Babylon, and from Egypt in even later years ? Or was there, perhaps, nothing of the sort in ancient Israel, nothing, that is to say, of the more spiritual kind, until, as some scholars seem to think, the blessed time of the Maccabæan Revolt ? Is this probable ? Is it even possible ? Will a nation which confessedly produced such high spiritual conceptions as Israel possessed in the days of Amos and Hosea, have had nothing corresponding to these in their public worship ? It was a noisy religion, no doubt. Worshippers shouted out *Jâhôh*, prolonging the last syllable of the sacred Name, but is that all there was to it ? Can the worship have been only as senseless as the cry of the Baal worshippers at whom Elijah jeered ? Or as the delirious " Ram, Ram " of the Indian devotees to-day ?

Will there have been no poet in early times, or at least as early as the eighth century, who was moved by the Divine Spirit as we know the great prophets were from the days of Amos downwards ? And indeed, what were the songs which the old seers uttered as they discoursed on their instruments in such a way that their hearers were moved to the very depths ? Or, at most, are we justified in asserting that it was only the terrible experience of the stay in Babylonia that humbled Israel's pride so low that at last people were able to learn their own unworthiness before God, and so come to place their confidence in Him in a deeper, and therefore more spiritual, way than in the former days of independence ? And, briefly, is it true that we have any substantial reason for believing that the time of the Maccabees was especially conducive to the formation of the Psalter ? The Maccabees were, it is true, the very embodiment of Patriotism, but there is very little evidence that they were spiritually-minded people, at all able to compose the majority

of the contents of the Psalter. Besides, were no individuals—and Psalms were made by individuals, not by companies or committees—fitted to learn humility before God in years previous to the Exile? Had they had no sorrows to move their hearts, none to cause introspection, none to lead them to search out the character of Jāhōh, and to learn more of His ideal Holiness and the perfection of His Love?

The third volume of the list at the head of this article is a courageous attempt to probe the subject. It is a collection of Essays with writers holding very different opinions. Yet each writes with great learning. Professor Gressmann tries to trace the beginning of Biblical Psalmody from the earliest days of the Judges—suggestively indeed but not too convincingly. Others describe the doctrines and the characters and the surroundings of the Psalmists themselves. Mr. G. R. Driver, above all, fascinates us with his description of the hymns of Babylon. And his essay shows, on the one hand conclusively that the Israelites could not have learned their Psalmody in the Captivity, and, on the other hand at least with great probability, that the Babylonian culture in Palestine from 2000 B.C. onwards contained plenty of hymns, which may well have served as a basis for the Hebrew Psalms. If this theory stands further examination it will throw not a little light on the origin and the development of spiritual song in Israel.

But putting the problem of the five books of Psalms on one side, how are we to deal with all the other material before us? For deal with it we must. We dare not shut our eyes, and read our Bibles as though the outside testimony to the History of Israel did not exist. God, as St. John insists in his Prologue, has been the God of the whole world, not of Israel alone, and He has not left Himself without witness. And now in the last days of the nineteenth, and the first days of this twentieth century, He has brought us this fresh evidence of His activity, and of His ceaseless preparation in other than Israelitish hearts for the full revelation of Himself in Christ. We dare not turn our eyes away; much less dare we say, It is not God's doing at all; it is but the imitative craft of the Evil One trying to appear like an angel of light.

In any case, serious attempts have been made, and, unless sanctified human nature changes its interests, attempts will continue to be made, to understand the information supplied by sources outside the Bible, and to see the relation in which the two classes of the sources of our information stand.

The books selected above represent such attempts. Only the last indeed tries to cover the whole ground of the History proper. But the first two deal very fully with the portions selected.

The first is in one sense an old book. For it was published originally by Robertson Smith as long ago as 1889. And a very charming book it was; more attractive to the general reader than its present form, though naturally not so complete. It covers the wide range of all religious institutions (not of doctrines, so far as these can be separated) current in Semitic lands. Naturally it is concerned

primarily with the Bible, and the other sources are used to throw light on that. Robertson Smith, it must never be forgotten, though his opponents seem hardly to have remembered it in his lifetime, was a man of very deep personal religion, and exceedingly orthodox in all the essential truths of our holy Faith. But when he found that outside the Bible there were established practices and institutions similar to those within it, he asked himself, How is it that this or that practice or institution is commanded or forbidden in the Bible? and, How came such orders into existence? For it is evident that most of them were not given to Moses for the first time at Mount Sinai, seeing that in one form or another they existed long before the Exodus. No student of the Bible can afford to neglect Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites* if he wishes to understand the spiritual meaning of many parts of the Pentateuch.

Evidence of the same kind brought up to date has been collected by Professor S. A. Cook, and handed on to us partly in the third edition of Robertson Smith, and more systematically and in greater detail in the Schweich Lectures. In this second volume on our list the reader will find also many pictorial illustrations of objects described in the text. One of these can hardly be omitted even in so cursory a survey as the present article. It is an enlarged copy of a South Palestinian coin (? of Gaza) belonging, it would seem, to about 400 B.C., on which is a representation of the God of Israel Himself. He is pictured somewhat like Zeus, but above His head is His Name JĀHŌH, doubtless the true pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, and almost sufficient in itself to demonstrate the falsity of the nineteenth-century blunder in supposing it was Yahweh.

The third volume in the list has been mentioned already in what has been said about the Psalter.

But the last book is of most interest and importance to-day. For it is the first serious attempt made in England to provide a large and scholarly résumé of the present state of the critical use of all the sources now at our disposal for knowledge of the History of Israel. Although the authors tell us that they have continually consulted each other in details, yet Professor Theodore Robinson is really responsible for the first and Dr. Oesterley for the second volume. But the two writers run very well together, and even though where their subjects overlap they do not always see eye to eye, this is all to the reader's advantage, both for information and for suggestion. No doubt Professor Theodore Robinson has had the easier task. That is not his fault; a division had to be made somewhere. For his period, nominally from the Exodus (but in fact from much earlier times) until the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., has been investigated again and again. He has therefore had chiefly to make up his mind on evidence which has been thoroughly sifted as to the verdict he must give. But he is to be sincerely congratulated on the result. He writes clearly, with full consciousness of the difficulties in explanation, and he shows us quite definitely what his decision is. He has accomplished his task well and attractively.

Naturally he adopts the Higher Critical position. Rightly or

wrongly—and, on the whole, we believe rightly—this has become the tradition of theological professors and lecturers. Wellhausen's school is still supreme, though there is sparse agreement among scholars about many details of his exposition. And in consequence there is now the tendency in all examinations, from those for Holy Orders downwards, to require more knowledge of those inspiring designations, J, E, D, H, P, than of the actual text and statements of the Authorized and Revised Versions. One can hardly be surprised. For to-day it is not exactness of Bible knowledge that is demanded of our clergy—at least by those in high office—but a general attitude towards fundamental questions. Probably this is the basic reason why the Bishops have now given up requiring Candidates for Deacon's Orders to be examined in Greek. In any case, it is the sad fact that whereas Hebrew has never been necessary for our clergy (unlike the clergy of Hungary and of Scotland), and Latin has been discarded for some twenty years, now many candidates are allowed—and even encouraged—to be ordained without any knowledge whatever of Greek, the tongue of the great document of our faith, the New Testament itself. What with the unwillingness of some scientific men to become properly educated, on the one hand, and, on the other, the desire of not a few influential ecclesiastics to stifle study of the Bible itself, conscientious students are having a thin time. Soon, it may be feared, our Church of England will indeed become *stupor mundi*, not in the sense in which the phrase was first used!

This is by the way, but it is plain that those who do not know a language must be content to accept the statements of those who do. And so very few of our clergy and laity know Hebrew that they will be compelled to trust experts. Dr. Theodore Robinson and Dr. Oesterley are fully qualified to guide them.

For the second volume of this great work is by Dr. Oesterley, and deals professedly with the History of Israel from the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (but really from some forty years earlier) to its final Fall in A.D. 70, and even to the hopeless Revolt under Bar Kokhba in A.D. 135. Dr. Oesterley has had a very difficult task. For he had to correlate the non-Biblical, or perhaps we should say the non-canonical, literature with that of our English Bible. And to do this, as has been said, is extremely difficult. For the evidence of the Apocrypha and the Elephantine documents, besides the information drawn from the Babylonian and Persian inscriptions, raises many new questions which have at present been very inadequately discussed. But here Professor Oesterley has shown extraordinary diligence and insight, and, for the first time in English histories of Israel of a full and connected kind, he has drawn up what may well be the true answers to the questions involved. Thus, for example, he believes that the Temple was not wholly destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar; that the country of Judæa was not actually depopulated; that the Samaritans were not unfriendly at first, or indeed until about 445 B.C.; that Ezra lived some fifty years after Nehemiah; that it was not the Pentateuch as such but only portions of it

(especially those added during the Exile) which Ezra read out. He also makes the interesting suggestion that the Jews who wrote the Elephantiné documents were really Northern Israelites who had been transported from Babylonia to Egypt. This would make the imperfection of their doctrinal statements easier to understand.

Dr. Oesterley had also a somewhat wearisome task before him in tracing the history of the interrelation of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kings, and, after the Maccabæan revolt, the disputes of the Hasmonæans. His chapter on the Jewish Parties in Palestine—Pharisees, Apocalyptists, Sadducees, Essenes, and also the Therapeutæ—is especially interesting. We could wish, however, that he had written in more détail the history of the nation during the first century and a half of our era.

The net result of this our short study of the History of Israel may be set out quite briefly. In spite of the mass of information pouring in from all sides, with new contributions supplied almost every week, serious attempts are being made to cope with it all, and estimate the brightness of the light that it casts upon the Scriptures. For these still reign supreme. But, little by little, we are learning to put them in their true setting, and to understand them not merely according to our preconceived and usually Western notions, but as the result of the Spirit of God working by and through Oriental minds. Whom else could He employ so well? To whom else could He reveal His will so plainly? They were, no doubt, only imperfect instruments, men sometimes prejudiced, sometimes steeped in traditionalism, sometimes men of free and almost radical outlook, but all sincerely desirous of learning His will, according to their several capacities. So He could use them.

And the consequence is that we see in our Bible, as nowhere else, the gradual disclosure of the Truth of God, veil after veil of human prejudice and ignorance being torn away, until at last all is seen in our Lord Jesus Christ, the final revelation of the Father. "All is seen?" Thank God, all is not seen. For this will never be. Throughout eternity there will be to believers the ever fresh unfolding of His glory and majesty and forethought and love, the very Temple of the Knowledge of God, of which the foundations were laid slowly but surely in the History of Israel.

Two Irish Bishops have brought out a most interesting book on *The Cathedrals of the Church of Ireland* (S.P.C.K., 6s. net). Dr. Godfrey Day, Bishop of Ossory, and Dr. Henry Patton, Bishop of Killaloe, inspired by a real love of the ancient ecclesiastical edifices of the country, have told their story and illustrated it with a series of excellent photographs. The Churches have suffered much in the distressful changes through which in the course of the centuries the country has passed, but they yet possess features of great interest, and many who have never visited Ireland will find this book a fascinating study.