

## Spade and Bible.

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### II.

WHEN we come to estimate the bearing of archæology on the historical character of the earlier Old Testament records, it will be necessary to go over ground which will be in some measure familiar to most readers of this article, for much of the material has been known for a considerable time; but it can scarcely be omitted in the attempt to form a general view of the case.

The patriarchal period will naturally occupy most of our attention; its historical character has been most widely assailed, and round it the controversy has raged hottest. With regard to this the spade has supplied a background, both of political history and of social conditions, from the monuments of Babylonia and Egypt, which is of the highest value; for Syria was always the debatable land between these two great centres of civilization, and each has left its impress on the thought and culture of that bridge of fertile country between them. Now it may be said at once that the broad outline of the Hebrew story fits in with the background which has been thus provided. The line of migration ascribed to Abraham seems to have been that taken by the second great Semitic movement, commonly known as the Canaanite, which probably gave to Southern Palestine its Semitic inhabitants, during the third millennium B.C.; and the references to journeys into Egypt receive abundant illustration from the wall-paintings of the tombs of the Nile Valley; the best known, perhaps, of these is the representation in the tomb of Khnum-hotep (*circa* 1900 B.C.) at Beni-Hassan of a family of Semitic immigrants under the chief Absha (= Abishai); while the political condition of the country, divided up into a number of independent principalities of small extent, exactly corresponds with the picture given in the Tell-

el-Amarna tablets of its condition after the relaxation of the Egyptian domination of the eighteenth dynasty, a condition which may reasonably be supposed to have preceded the establishment of that supremacy.

These general conditions, however, were more or less permanent in Canaan, and are therefore of comparatively little weight in establishing the historicity of the patriarchal narratives; for it would be possible for the writer to be describing similar conditions of a later date. But there are at least two points in which the story of Abraham touches the history of the time in a way to afford us a test. The first of these is the reference to the Hittites at Hebron, in Gen. xxiii. The historical character of this has often been doubted, on the ground that we had no evidence of any movement of the Hittite peoples so far south before the time of the nineteenth Egyptian dynasty (fourteenth century B.C.); there is now accumulating proof of their activity at a much earlier period. On the Babylonian side we learn that about 1800 B.C. they overthrew the first dynasty of Babylon, and the name of one of the kings of Gen. xiv. has been recognized as Hittite, Tid'al (=Tudkhula in cuneiform, the equivalent of the purely Hittite name borne by a later king, Dadkhaliya). In Egypt the name of the kheta has been read with much probability on a monument of the twelfth dynasty (2000 to 1788 B.C.), while it is highly probable that the name of the king of Jerusalem in the Tell-el-Amarna tablets, Abdi-khiba, is compounded with the name of a Hittite deity which occurs in other names of that people (a singular illustration of the reference to the origin of Jerusalem in Ezek. xvi. 3, 45). In view of these facts, gathered over so wide an area, is it too much to say that on this point Hebrew tradition, so far from antedating facts of a later period, has preserved the record of a historical situation which has only recently been revealed by other sources of information? In the light of this conclusion we may turn to the second point of contact, the story of the expedition of Chedorlaomer, in Gen. xiv.; round this considerable controversy has raged. It is possible, though the con-

clusion we have just reached with regard to the first point raised renders the view highly improbable, that we owe this story to a piece of antiquarian research on the part of the exiles in the sixth century B.C., of whose literary activity there can be but little question ; and, as against any wild estimate of the complete re-establishment of the historicity of the patriarchal narratives by this incident, it must be remembered that there are certain improbabilities in the narrative itself which no evidence has done anything to remove—*e.g.*, the route taken by the invading force, and the names and number of Abraham's helpers ; further, there is no mention of *this* expedition in any record as yet discovered ; and, thirdly, the tablet on which the names of two of the kings, Chedorlaomer and Tid'al, are read is one which cannot be dated before the Persian period, and may be as late as the third century B.C. The "Idylls of the King" could scarcely be brought forward 2,000 years hence as valid historical evidence for the existence of Arthur ; yet the period which separates Tennyson from his hero is about the same as that which separates the Babylonian poem from the events with which it deals, and even on this tablet the name of Chedorlaomer (Kudur-laghamal) is read with much uncertainty. On the other hand, there is no inherent probability, but rather the reverse, in a Babylonian, or Elamite, invasion of Palestine at this date. The Hebrew story has preserved the memory of an Elamite supremacy over Babylon at the period, which we know to have existed, and has given to its leader a name which is undoubtedly Elamite in form. It has preserved the names of two kings, 'Amraphel of Shin'ar (= Hammurabi of Sumer—*i.e.*, Babylon), and Arioch of Ellasar (= Eriaku of Larsa), the latter of whom was, with his brother, the last representative of the Elamite suzerainty, while the former was the man who in the thirty-sixth year of his reign broke down that suzerainty. Is it too much to argue from these two points of contact with external history that the tradition which has preserved such remarkable memories of the relations of its ancestors with alien peoples cannot be assumed to be wholly at fault in the memories

which it has preserved about those ancestors themselves, that the patriarchal narratives do contain a solid substratum of historical fact? But when this has been said, the weightiest conclusion that the evidence can bear has been stated: for the results of archæology up to the present, with one exception, contain no reference to, and tell us nothing directly about, the patriarchs; the one exception is the name, "Field of Abram," read by Professor Breasted among the place-names of Shishak's monument at Karnak (*circa* 926 B.C.).

The mention of Egypt recalls to us the next period at which the stories of Israelitish beginnings offer themselves to the test of archæological research, that of the Bondage and Deliverance. It is of little value to urge the Egyptian colouring of the stories of Joseph and the Exodus, for Egypt was sufficiently unchanging to make it possible to get convincing local atmosphere at a date long after that in which the events are ascribed; there are, moreover, several indications that the stories in their present form are by no means contemporary with the events which they describe. The anonymity, for instance, of the Egyptian monarchs, who are all designated by the generic title of Pharaoh (= Per-o, "great house"), is in marked contrast to the specific descriptions in the later books, where Shishak, Tirhakah, and the rest are named. It has often been pointed out that the Egyptian personal names of the story are not those which are familiar to us from the monuments of the earlier period contemporary with the events, but those common at a later date, the period of the twenty-second dynasty, the period at which Israel was brought once more into definite relations with the Valley of the Nile; and if Professor Flinders Petrie's ingenious and attractive theory with regard to the census lists of Num. i. and xxvi. be accepted, we get the result that, while the numbers themselves are authentic, the writing in which they were incorporated was composed at a period when the true meaning of the census lists was lost, a result which can scarcely prove fatal to modern theories as to the composition of the Pentateuch.

There is reason also to believe that the Hebrew tradition is

an imperfect one, not giving an exhaustive account of the fortunes of the race. The most natural interpretation of the earliest reference to Israel by name, on the stele of Merenptah, seems to be that part of the tribes who ultimately bore that name never went down into Egypt at all, but remained as nomads in Southern Palestine. This conclusion is confirmed by the occurrence of the name Asher in Western Galilee in the name-lists of Seti I., who reigned at a date which is well within the period usually assigned to the Bondage, and by the more doubtful reading of other place-names of Palestine as Jacob-el and Joseph-el. Nor is this view altogether without Biblical support. There is a reference embedded in the lists of 1 Chron. vii. 20-24 to a contest between the immediate descendants of Ephraim and the men of Gath, which is not easy to reconcile the statement of the Book of Genesis that Ephraim was the son of Joseph, born in Egypt, whose descendants only became resident in the promised land after the Exodus. And, on the other hand, if the Hebrews are to be identified with the Apriw, or foreign workmen, who appear first on the monuments of the eighteenth dynasty, they cannot all have left Egypt under Moses, for this name continues to occur down to the period of Rameses IV. (1167-1161 B.C.), a date later than any assigned to the Exodus, save by the theory of Professor Eerdmann. Such indications as these must be taken into account in any estimate which is formed of the historical value of the Hebrew traditions on the subject of their adventures in Egypt.

But when all allowance has been made for these indications of late composition and incomplete record, there are a considerable number of points of contact between the Hebrew tradition and the results of archæology which give good ground for the claim that the tradition does embody valuable material which may be relied on as historical. These coincidences are not equally striking or cogent, but, taken together, they form a body of evidence which cannot be ignored.

There is, in the first place, the fact that the migration of Israel into Egypt falls just at that period when immi-

grants from Syria would be most welcome, and a foreigner would have the best chance of rising to the position of Grand Vizier—the Hyksos period, when Egypt was under the domination of a foreign Power. It has often been pointed out that this synchronism is corroborated by the statement of George the Syncellus, a Byzantine chronologer of the eighth century, that “it is generally agreed that Joseph ruled Egypt under Aphophis.” Aphophis will represent Apepa II., the last great King of this alien dynasty, towards the close of the seventeenth century; nor is it without significance that the name of another Hyksos king has been read, from his own scarabs, as Jacob-her.

In the next place, there is the phrase: “There arose a new king over Egypt, that knew not Joseph” (Exod. i. 8), which is singularly appropriate to the dynastic changes, which displaced the foreign rulers, and set the native Egyptian monarchs of the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties upon the throne. Another phrase, “It came to pass in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died” (Exod. ii. 23), is scarcely less appropriate to the sixty-seven years’ reign of Rameses II., the predecessor of Merenptah, the probable Pharaoh of the Exodus. That the period of the oppression should be compressed or foreshortened, as it must be if these allusions are rightly interpreted, would not be in the least surprising if the narratives were handed down by tradition for many a year before they crystallized in written form.

A further point, which has not always had due weight allowed to it, is the change of land tenure, ascribed to Joseph’s famine relief measures, in Gen. xlvii. 13-27. Here it is asserted that, as the result of these measures, all the land, except that of the priests, became crown property, and was held at a rental of one-fifth of the produce. Perhaps the most marked contrast between the Middle Empire which preceded the Hyksos period and the Later Empire which followed it was the supremacy of the crown at the latter date, as contrasted with the power of the great feudal lords of the earlier. The

steps taken by the Hebrew Vizier, according to the Biblical narrative, would be an adequate cause for this result.

The place-names of the narrative supply another point of contact. Goshen, through the LXX form Gesem., has been recognized in the name of the nome at the western end of the modern Wady Tumilat ; Succoth is generally taken as a Hebraized form of Thuku, the name of the district at the eastern end of the same ; Pithom has been found in Pa-Tum (house of the god Tum), the capital of Thuku, a brick-built store city of Rameses II., under the mound known as Tell-el-Maskhuta ; while a second store city, closely connected with the same king, has been discovered under the neighbouring Tell-er-Reztabeh ; and, though no equivalent of the name Raamses has been discovered there, its identification with that other store city of the Exodus is highly probable. In it has been found the tomb of an official, one of whose titles may be translated "keeper of the foreigners of Syria" ; and round it, at the level of the remains of the nineteenth dynasty, are beds of ashes from the camp-fires of a large body of tent-dwellers, who must have remained there a considerable period.

Two other matters may be referred to, in which archaeological evidence may be said to bear out the broad outlines of the Israelitish story. It has sometimes been urged that the escape by Sinai must be unhistorical, since that district was occupied by the Egyptians to protect the working of the turquoise and copper mines round Sarbut-el-Khadim ; but if the Exodus took place, as there is increasing agreement that it did, under Merenptah, it has been pointed out that only once in many years at that period was the district occupied in force ; and, further, with this date for their escape, the Israelites are brought into Palestine after the last campaign of Rameses III. (1187 B.C.), from which time Egypt ceased to interfere in the affairs of Syria down to the tenth century B.C.

The cumulative effect of these coincidences and synchronisms, subtle and even insignificant as they may appear individually, is not slight. They have been produced by the torture neither

of the Bible nor of the monuments, and they are based only upon such results as are very generally accepted. The evidence will not support any strong conclusions as to the accuracy in detail of the Hebrew tradition ; it offers no clear light upon the great names with which the early history of Israel is wrapped up ; it gives little reason to believe in anything in the shape of contemporary *written* chronicles ; and it will not satisfy the stalwart conservative, who must look elsewhere for support of any view of literal historical accuracy of the early narratives. But it at least throws the burden of proof upon those who would assert that Israel preserved no memory of her earliest beginnings, and that no reliance can be placed on Hebrew tradition as to events prior to the conquest of Canaan. It raises a strong presumption in favour of the view that the broad outlines of the patriarchal movements are historically correct, and that Israel preserved definite recollections of that long travail by which it was brought to birth as a nation ; and the discovery of the background against which the Israelitish history unrolls itself has only thrown into greater prominence the workings of that unseen power, which the choice spirits of that nation always declared to be its Guide and Protector.

In such a brief sketch as this whole fields of inquiry have of necessity been ignored. There is the question of the relations between the Creation and the Flood stories in Babylonian and Hebrew tradition, and of those between the codes of the Pentateuch and the code of Khammurabi ; there are the problems raised with regard to Israel's religion, in its earlier stages, by the excavations at Gezer, Taanach, and Megiddo, in its later stages by the temples at Aswan and Tell-el-Yahudiyeh ; there is the correction of the vague and confused dating of the historical books by the precise chronology of the Assyrian eponym canon, and the relegation of the Book of Daniel, *on archæological evidence*, to the category of pious Haggadah. But enough has perhaps been said to illustrate the service which archæology has rendered ; it has done nothing to show that Hebrew history differs *qua* history from that of other races ; it

shows the same features at different stages of its development, the same standard of comparative accuracy, when we can reasonably infer it to be based on contemporary written documents; the same tenacious memory of the broad outlines of its early movements before the days when written history can reasonably be postulated; the same overlaying of those outlines with a mass of material which the conscientious historian can only use with cautious discrimination. It reads us again the lesson which many find so hard to grasp—the lesson that our faith must not find perilous poise upon the pin-points of literal accuracy in historical detail, to preserve its balance upon which a dangerous amount of mental gymnastic and moral contortion is required; but that it must be based firmly and strongly upon the broad foundation of that great purpose which unfolds itself in the history, seen dimly at first in those early traditions in which it is hard to draw the line between historical fact and legendary fancy, between the personal ancestor and the personified tribe; seen more clearly in the birth of the nation through the travail of the bondage and the wanderings; coming into the clear light of day with the history and consciousness of king and prophet and priest; working itself out on the stage of the world's history, in which every conflict of the great empires of the Euphrates and the Nile was made to serve its ends; and finding its perfect consummation and crown in the person of Him who came in the fulness of the time to make known to the world that the God Who in the age-long process had revealed Himself as Power and Wisdom and Righteousness was also Love.

