

SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF OLD TESTAMENT
ARCHÆOLOGY.

ARCHÆOLOGY is a term very variously understood. Of Dr. Murray's two definitions, "Ancient history generally, the systematic description or study of antiquities," and "The scientific study of the remains and monuments of the pre-historic period," the former is too broad, the latter too narrow, for our purpose, neither would be in accordance with current usage as to Old Testament archæology. I venture to suggest, as a convenient definition of the latter, the study of all sources of information which contain contemporary evidence as to the circumstances of the authors, books and history of the Old Testament. The direct and exclusive study of the Old Testament would not be Old Testament archæology.

This definition enables us to emphasise the claims of natural science, physiography, philology, philosophy, comparative sociology, and theology to rank with Egyptology as branches of our subject. They also enable us to supplement biblical statements by informing us as to the circumstances of Old Testament history. A quotation of Dr. Murray's from Tylor's *Primitive Culture* will serve to justify our classification. "Archæology," he says, "displays old structures and buried relics of the remote past." The human mind, human nature, language, Eastern life, with its manners and customs, the physical features of Palestine, are all very old structures, and contain many buried relics of a remote past. They include the contemporary monuments of bygone ages, just as the earth of to-day includes the geological record of the formation of the world in pre-historic times. Hence the study of psychology, philology, Eastern life, and the geography of Palestine, stand on the same footing as branches of archæology.

The comparative study of sociology and religion affords contemporary information as to the Old Testament in as real, though in less obvious a way, than Semitic philology or Palestine exploration. As soon as we can discern general principles of the social and religious development of nations, we are warranted in considering that a nation now in the same stage of its growth as ancient Israel is virtually contemporary with ancient Israel, and can afford us evidence as to the probable conditions of life and thought in Old Testament times. It is this principle that underlies much of Prof. Robertson Smith's recent work.

But the most familiar branch of our subject is that comprising the literature and other remains of the nations bordering on Palestine. We are specially familiar with the names and histories of the closely connected group comprising Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and the Hittites. There is even a most unfortunate tendency to limit Old Testament archæology to the antiquities of this group, and ignore other branches of the subject. There were many points of likeness in language and religion between Tyre and Israel, together with constant intercourse and close alliance. The keen interest of the prophets in Phœnicia is well illustrated by the three important chapters which Ezekiel devotes to Tyre. A careful study of Phœnicia and her great colonies will be amply repaid in a fuller understanding of the religious and social life of Israel. Prof. Cheyne has pointed out the importance of Persian history and literature for the student of the Psalter and later books of the Old Testament; and the period of the Greek dynasties in Egypt and Syria has its bearing not only on the transmission and translation of the Old Testament, but also on the Book of Daniel, and the controversies as to the formation of the Psalter and the Maccabean Psalms. We have left—Palestine itself, with the immediately surrounding tribes, and Arabia. Palestinian antiquities seem to divide themselves for the

present between Palestine exploration and Egyptology and Assyriology. Arabia is mainly utilised by means of comparative sociology and religion, and as a source of information as to Semitic language and life.

From this very brief and imperfect review of the scope of our subject, we pass to a very general estimate of its significance. We may summarise the latter thus: Old Testament archæology enables us to confirm, and illustrate, and explain the Old Testament in detail; it gives us a broader and fuller knowledge of the historical setting of its events and writings; it enables us to realise the place of Israel in the history of Divine revelation.

The function of Old Testament archæology as to details has been largely illustrated in many standard works, and most readers will be familiar with Prof. Whitehouse's translation of Schrader's *Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament*, or, at any rate, with Prof. Sayce's little book, *Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments*, in both of which the illustrative matter from the monuments is arranged under the verses or books of the Old Testament. Indeed, this use of archæology with reference to details may be seen in any good modern commentary. Now, for instance, we see that in Ezekiel the face of the cherub is that of an ox, and in Assyria the winged bulls of the portals of the temples are called cherubs, or, again, some numeral or other word whose origin is inexplicable from the Hebrew is explained by a reference to Assyrian, or the mention of Ahab or Uzziah in an inscription enables us to fix the date of those kings; or, again, it is interesting to note that some obscure Jewish town, like Adoraim, mentioned once in the Old Testament, also occurs in a list of cities captured by Shishak, king of Egypt. Instances might be multiplied, and yet each exemplify some new class of illustration afforded by the results of archæology of the details of the Old Testament. To the intelligent reader of the Bible the

smallest detail is interesting, and true scholarship is always careful of small matters, and anxious to be accurate even in minute details. Such details may prove to be of supreme importance; it was by the addition of only a single letter, for instance, that Jewish scribes attempted to suppress the fact that the grandson of Moses became the priest of the idolatrous sanctuary at Dan. Moreover, the vividness and truth of our idea of the Old Testament depend very much on the suggestive outlines and colouring, the dramatic force, which can only be gained by the accurate setting forth of details; and unless our ideas are life-like and true, they will not be of much spiritual value.

But even in the interest of a correct understanding of detail, it is necessary to protest against a piecemeal treatment of archæology, an undue tendency to dwell on detail as detail. There is a danger that we should confine our knowledge of the subject to the scraps of information which can be connected with words or verses, paragraphs or books of the Old Testament; that in our minds the facts about Assyria and Egypt should be arranged according to the order of books, chapters, and verses in the Old Testament. Schrader and the *Fresh Light* are very useful for their special purpose, but they cannot be intelligently used till the student has some general knowledge of the subject, such as may be derived from any of the standard works on Egypt, Assyria, etc. Without such reading, his information becomes a loosely jointed chain of incoherent fragments torn away from their natural surroundings.

The danger of fragmentary study is much increased by the expedients of a timid and despairing apologetic. It seems to be held that the only use of archæology is to furnish confirmation of the historical details of the Old Testament, and the deeper and fuller meaning of the subject is lost in the ecstatic delight with which we are asked to hail the discovery that a city mentioned in the Book of

Chronicles was actually known to the Egyptians in the time of Rehoboam, and that manners and customs found in Genesis may be seen in Palestine to-day. Apart from the injury inflicted on the study of archæology, the Christian revelation is grievously prejudiced in the eyes of unbelievers when the faithful are seen catching at such straws to save themselves from sinking in the waves of doubt.

The various details of our subject are stones for the temple of Divine Truth, and should not be recklessly used as missiles to be thrown at the enemy, especially as they seldom hit anybody, and we have better weapons for our warfare. Unfortunately, this obsolete and ineffective artillery is not merely directed against the common enemy; it is often thought necessary to direct the battery against the most earnest and competent Bible scholars of the day. There is a Jewish legend that Hiram, the Phœnician artist whose productions adorned Solomon's temple, was killed in a quarrel with his fellow workmen. Others of God's temple-builders have since suffered and sinned in the same way. At intervals the workmen engaged upon the Temple of Truth, the masons and carpenters, as it were, of the spiritual edifice, suspend operations, that they may engage in a free fight, using as weapons their building tools and materials. The Assyriologist denounces the critic, and the critic sneers at the Egyptologist, while the students of other branches hasten to take sides.

It is evident that the different branches of our subjects must necessarily be left in the hands of experts, and the man who could be an expert in all its branches would be a transcendent genius, and such a division of his energies would involve infinite waste. We have to take our information from the experts, and experts must use each others' results; there is great need of intimate and sympathetic co-operation. We must be able to trust our experts. It is most unfortunate when the spirit and temper of a great

scholar seem to suggest that his impartiality will be impaired by his enthusiasm for apologetic or for any other special criticism ; and that he may use his great authority as an expert to vouch for statements which have not sufficient foundation. The real interests of the Christian Church cannot be served by partisan feeling, however ready a party may be to welcome and foster such feeling. It is our duty as Biblical students and as Christians to encourage and maintain the supreme reverence for truth which is the peculiar characteristic of genuine scholarship. It is pleasant in this connection to be able to quote the following wise and timely words of Captain Conder (EXPOSITOR, 1886, I. 326) : " I am not aware that the permanent publications of the Palestine Exploration Fund can justly be said to have an ' apologetic tendency.' Survey and the description of ruins have no tendency at all : they represent the collection of facts over which the reader may put any construction he pleases. The strength of the Society lies in the fact that officially it recognises no *views*, only dealing with ascertained facts." That is the strength of all true scholarship.

When we turn to broader aspects, we are at once conscious that in these we see most clearly the new fulness of the Old Truth. We may have to readjust our ideas to the origin of the Old Testament, and to reconstruct our history of Israel ; but the vital truths that are the moving force of our religious life gain new reality and deeper meaning. We being human, are always eager to accept and to emphasize the limitations and misunderstandings that human error has attached to the truth of God ; these limitations and misunderstandings are exposed and discredited by the expansion of knowledge and the growth of spiritual discrimination. But it is the glory and sufficient evidence of Eternal Truth that they can embrace and interpret all new knowledge and thus manifest their permanence, width and

fertility. For they not only interpret, but are themselves interpreted and expanded, and we discover that our ancient principles have a fulness and depth of meaning and a variety of application of which we never dreamed. Archæology has done much towards the removing of limitations. In the old histories our impression of Israel itself is confused, but our impression of the surrounding nations is dim almost to utter darkness. Israel lives in a circle of light, and the Gentile nations from the surrounding darkness make occasional incursions into the bright area. Now the area of light is almost indefinitely extended and the whole drama of Eastern politics is revealed to view. In our former pictures Israel was like a single mountain peak, mostly standing out from surrounding mists, but sometimes obscured by them; now and again the mist would clear away for a moment and some neighbouring peak would be seen, but the general effect of the series of pictures was to set forth the solitary grandeur of this one peak. Now all the mists have cleared away and we see Israel as one peak of a magnificent mountain range.

This enlarged view of Israel involves a multiplication of our points of view. In trying to take in the beauties of landscape we do not feel that we have become familiar with it or entered into the full enjoyment of it till we have looked at it from different points of view; and the most interesting and instructive point of view of a mountain is seldom the mountain itself. Now in the case of Israel we were in the habit of, as it were, surveying the mountain from one of its own peaks. We saw Israel exclusively, or almost exclusively, from the point of view of Judah, for most of the Old Testament is by Judæan authors. Not only so, but we also looked at the Gentile kingdoms through Jewish spectacles. Now we have many points of view; we can also study Egypt and Assyria each from its own point of view, and Egypt from that of Assyria, and Assyria

from that of Egypt, and Israel from those of Egypt, Assyria and Israel.

One immediate result is to give new reality to the familiar idea of the political insignificance of Israel. Naturally enough the idea is not conspicuous in the Israelite scriptures, and is further obscured to many minds by the fact that the map of Palestine in an atlas may quite justifiably occupy as big a page as the empire of Russia. But an elementary study of geography compels us to recognise that Palestine is small in extent. When however we begin to form some general idea of the great Eastern empires, with their wide territory, their arts, literature, and science, their unlimited military resources ; or when we see the Phœnician cities traversing all Western seas with their fleets, and Asia and Africa with their caravans, and we recall again the slight importance of the clans of herdsmen and shepherds and husbandmen that occupied the highlands and valleys of Palestine :

When we read of Israel in a long list of conquered tribes side by side with obscure and forgotten peoples, Irkanatians and Arbayans, or Kirzamai and Musri, we feel that Israel and Judah were but pawns in the great international game of chess between Egypt and Assyria. On the other hand, as our sense of the power and the culture of these splendid empires grows with every increase of knowledge, so are we more deeply impressed with the unique spiritual value of Israel.

Here and there we may be able to parallel some Bible passage from the Chaldæan Penitential Psalms or the Egyptian Book of the Dead, but the treasure of Divine Truth in Psalms and Prophets and Wisdom is as far beyond the religious teaching of the great empires as these were superior to Israel in power and magnificence. When we contrast the permanent value to the world of Israel and of Assyria, we are helped anew to understand the true Divine

standard of men and things, and to recognise how military power and material resources are powerless against spiritual tendencies, and ultimately become subservient to them. The passion of the prophet for justice and righteousness has counted for infinitely more in human history than the generalship, statecraft and culture of these great empires.

Thus archæology emphasizes the unique religious importance of Israel, and moreover corrects a common error as to what is unique in religion. Christ is unique, and a popular theology, conspicuous for want of spiritual discernment, supposes that His uniqueness consisted in external and material matters, which manifested His Deity to the most unspiritual observer. While He Himself sought to suppress the fame of His miracles and refused a sign to the Pharisees, the unspiritual imagination delights to think of Him chiefly as taken up with the working of physical signs and portents. The Christ it pictures, neither man among men, nor God revealed to men, could neither have touched us by His human sympathy, nor saved us by His Divine sufficiency. The uniqueness of Christ was compatible with a humanity that in no way hindered His intimate and familiar friendship with peasants and fishermen. It was a uniqueness that was only spiritually discerned.

So with Israel. We have been too apt to find our main interest in the history of Israel in signs and portents. We have thought of Israel as visibly, conspicuously different from other nations; as set on high with a kind of national halo; in its sin and its holiness alien and estranged from all peoples in their common, everyday suffering and sin and faltering attempts at righteousness. Hence we have greatly failed to learn the lessons of its history. But it is clear from the inscriptions that the surrounding nations knew of no such conspicuous uniqueness. There was no visible halo to be seen about Israel; the nation seemed to Egyptian and Assyrian to be common clay; indeed very common

clay, chiefly fit for nobler nations to trample under foot. Israel and its kings and its cities occur in the most ordinary and unemphasized way in the list of Egyptian and Babylonian conquests, and no notes of admiration are appended to their names.

It is now beginning to be understood that the isolation of Israel has been greatly exaggerated, and archæology shows more and more fully how little unique Israel was in external matters, either in its worship, its idolatry, its wars, or its captivities. We see it in vital connection with the history of the world along very many lines of contact. Even in the Bible itself the Temple is decorated with Phœnician workmanship, and the pattern of its altar is borrowed from Damascus ; it has commerce with Phœnicia and the Hittites and Egypt. In the inscriptions the Israelite kings are constantly among the groups of petty and futile conspirators against Assyrian and Babylonian supremacy. The Israel of the Old Testament is merged in the general picture of Eastern politics, and that picture presents itself to us as a whole composed of many closely connected and intimately related parts. Israel vibrates through its whole being to the harmonies and discords of the system of which it is a part. It is connected with other nations by real and living ties, and to set it apart in weird, demoniac isolation is almost as fatal and ghastly as to tear a vital organ from a living body. The later Pharisees attempted the operation with only too great success, and the result has been a byword ever since. The true spiritual uniqueness of Israel may indeed be symbolised by the drying up of the Red Sea and the Jordan, by the Pillar of Fire and Cloud ; but it is not manifested by them. It wrought itself out in the lives and words of prophets and psalmists and apostles ; The very names of many of these servants of God are forgotten and unknown. Many of them died a martyr's death, and no miracle intervened to save them ; but their

words are to-day the spiritual food of millions, whose use of their Bibles is a constant testimony to the unique inspiration of Israel.

Moreover, as we study the Old Testament in its vital relations to the world of its time, and are thus set free from an undue absorption in mere details of external resemblances, the outlines of religious history and teaching develop a new harmony of form and fulness of colouring. We can best explain this by an illustration. As children, our first idea of a flower is of something altogether different from its surroundings. The delicate green of its leaves, the vivid blue or yellow of its petals, are simply a contrast to the brown shapeless soil from which it grows. Until we have pulled it up we do not realise that it has roots, and we scarcely know the meaning of the word atmosphere. But we soon learn that the materials of leaves and petals are identical with those of the soil and air around, and are drawn from them. The flower, because it has a life of its own, is able to select from the solid earth and the thin air the material suitable for its nourishment, and to mould them into forms of beauty. So Israel had a life of its own, forces of Divine revelation working in its prophets and teachers. This life and these forces were able by subtle but irresistible processes to deal with elements of foreign life and thought, to select and reject, to mould, assimilate, and transmute. By such dealings its relations with the great Gentile empires were made subservient to the growth of its understanding of Divine truth. As the character and genius of these great empires becomes more real and intelligible to us, we are able to appreciate more and more fully the delicate and consummate workmanship of "that great Artist, the Divine wisdom," as a recent writer has said. The growth of truth from Isaiah to Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and the great prophet of the Exile, and from these to the later Psalmists, has a new interest and meaning. It

is largely to this kind of insight that such works as Prof. G. A. Smith's *Isaiah* owe their charm and force.

When we speak of Israel as a plant drawing from its surroundings the materials of its growth by the power of an indwelling Divine life and the influences of a Divine sunshine, we are reminded that Christ has been called the flower of the old Israel and the root of the new.

The same idea may be stated more prosaically. History converges to Christ and radiates out again from Him. Any deeper understanding of the development of Old Testament truth is also a deeper understanding of the Divine preparation for the coming of Christ; the more clearly we see how freely the Divine treasures of power and wisdom and love were spent in this preparation, the more profound is the wonder, and reverence and awe with which we recognise the transcendent position of Christ in history. We know how Rome, Greece and Israel were combined to furnish the agents and opportunities for the preaching of the Gospel. Rome gave her political organisation and lofty ideal of public law and order, Greece her language and culture, Israel her deep religious feeling and devotion. It has been often shown how the whole history of Rome and Greece shaped itself to this great end. Old Testament archæology shows us that the preparation for Christ in and through Israel was not a simple, isolated stream of tendency, but a subtle and delicate combination and control of the interlacing influences, the action and reaction of the politics, culture and religion of a great international system of conflicting empires. We learn that the means used to prepare for Christ were more divinely infinite and far-reaching and more deeply penetrating than we had supposed, and our sense of the Divine dignity and supreme importance of the Person and work to which this preparation was directed are infinitely enhanced. And for the future as we remember how thus once God controlled and combined all history

to the advent of one "far-off Divine event," we are encouraged to believe that to some such another event the Divine purpose is at work amid the apparent confusion and conflict of modern history.

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HEBREWS XII. 2 (1st Clause).

"LOOKING unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of *our* faith"—the word "*our*" being a supplement.

So reads the Authorised Version, the Revised Version making no change, except that for "*Finisher*" it has "*Perfecter*." But does this mean that Christ is the Author of the faith which we have in Him? If so, it is a very unusual expression, and, what is more, it has nothing to do with the subject of the verse. The Apostle¹ is urging us to look to the "great cloud of witnesses," enumerated in the preceding chapter, witnessing to the power of *faith* to triumph over all opposition, and, like them, to run with patience the race set before us. But from all these witnesses to the power of faith he bids us "look" to a witness nobler still, *the faith of Jesus*, "who, for the joy set before Him"—the joy of saving a perishing world by His death—"endured the cross," with all the agonies of crucifixion, and not only rose above, but "*despised the shame*" of being held up to the contempt and scorn of the assembled multitude between two criminals as the greatest criminal of the three, and now, as the prize He ran for, "set down on the throne of God."

The subject, then, of this verse is not "*our* faith," but that of Jesus Himself. The words, "looking unto Jesus" are (literally) "*looking away* unto Jesus" (the compound verb ἀφορῶντες), meaning that His faith transcends that of

¹ I say the Apostle, for, with Origen, I believe that the *Epistle* is that of the Apostle Paul, but that the *language* is moulded by Luke, who, during his two years' imprisonment at Cæsarea, would be almost constantly with him.