THE KORAN AND THE "BOOKS OF MOSES."

THE EXPOSITOR for February, 1886, contains an article from the pen of Professor Curtiss entitled "Professor Julius Wellhausen and his Theory of the Pentateuch," which was doubtless the means of introducing many English-speaking students to the now generally accepted view of the origin of those books of the Old Testament which formerly went by the name of "the books of Moses."

The whole problem remains practically where Wellhausen left it in 1878, after which his statement of it was accepted by German professors on all sides, although Professor Curtiss declares that he "does not know of more than one who publicly acknowledged that his critical views were changed through Wellhausen's History of Israel. This was done by Kautzsch." No doubt later writers have sought to emulate Wellhausen by working along one or other of the lines he laid down, but it has only been the endeavour of the disciple to outbid the master, and the results have in no instance been generally accepted. What is known as the Higher Criticism does not cease to be linked to the name of Wellhausen, as the credit of introducing the penny postage will always belong to Rowland Hill.

Summing up Wellhausen's account of the true course of Israelitish history, based upon his analysis of the Pentateuch, Professor Curtiss says: "Now if we regard the Jehovistic, Deuteronomic, Ezekelian, and Priest's Code as forming a pyramid with the Jehovistic work as the base and the Priest's Code as the apex, we shall find that there are steps on each of the four sides ascending to the top, and that the apex is four-faced: 1. On the side of the sacred seasons, ascending to the year of jubilee; 2. On that of sacred places, reaching the one legitimate place of worship in the temple at Jerusalem; 3. Sacred ceremonies, which

find their culmination in the sacrifices of the great day of atonement; 4. Sacred persons, attaining their highest dignity in the high priest, who is at the same time an ecclesiastical and civil ruler.

The sacred seasons are the Sabbath, the sabbatical year, and the year of jubilee: also the three annual feasts which, from being purely agricultural, passed into solemn religious functions. As to the place of sacrifice there is at first no restriction: later one spot is singled out, which finally becomes the one recognized sanctuary. Sacrifice, again, is at first merely the slaughtering of a beast, the flesh of which the owner eats in common with his friends and his God. Lastly, the grades of sacred persons are "young men, Levites, sons of Zadok, sons of Aaron, and a complete hierarchy with the high priest at its head."

It will be seen that this pyramidal arrangement of the religious development of Israel is, taken as a whole, simply the old traditional account standing on its head; and the question is merely whether the pyramid *should* stand upon its base, or upon its apex; or, rather, whether the history is better represented by a pyramid diminishing from its base, or by a tree springing from small beginnings and spreading its branches wider as it grows.

In attempting to arrive at some satisfactory decision upon this point it is not necessary to rely upon pure theory, as is usually done. All theorizing about the history of Israel which is based solely upon the history of Israel is obviously futile. It is admitted that the critical argument is mere reasoning in a circle. To base a theory upon certain documents and then to alter and manipulate the documents in order to demonstrate the theory based upon them is clearly absurd. The consequence is that no argument is possible in the matter, because there are no premises from which to start. Instead of that, two independent accounts of the early history of Israel are presented to the observer, the

traditional account and the account given by the critics, and he is asked to decide, by a sort of instinct, which account is correct: and the general opinion pronounces the narrative of the critics to be the more rational and to agree better with human experience.

The educated man in the street, however, is not altogether in the best position to pronounce upon the question in hand. As a rule he has had a purely classical training and is familiar with the literatures of Greece and Rome and of the modern West, and to him the Old Testament is something unique, something unparalleled in his experience, and he is compelled either to regard it as lying quite outside the laws of nature which regulate all other mundane affairs, or else to break it up and "reconstruct" it in conformity with them.

Fortunately, we are not compelled to have recourse to either of these alternatives. It is only necessary to extend one's horizon so as to embrace the nearer East, in order to find that the traditional history of Israel is neither unique nor unparalleled. Wellhausen himself has indicated where the light which will illuminate the Hebrew annals is to be sought for, in betaking himself to the study of the Arabs and of the rise of Islam. "I have gone over," he says, "from the study of the Old Testament to that of the Arabs, with the purpose of getting to know that wild stock upon which priests and prophets grafted the shoot of the Torah of Yahveh. For I am convinced that a proper conception of the equipment with which the Hebrews made their appearance in history is best obtained by means of a comparison with the early history of the Arabs."[1] If, indeed, we would obtain a proper idea of the forces which produced the Israelite nation and religion, we shall not do so by any analysis of documents in the light of the history of the

[1] *Muhammad in Medina*, cited in the EXPOSITOR, in the article referred to.

classical and modern West, but by a comparison with the course of history in Arabia and other Semitic lands. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that a nursery edition of the *Arabian Nights* throws more light upon the Old Testament life and literature than the most learned and painstaking German commentary.

There are three momentous events in the history of South-western Asia, each of which so closely resembles the others, that the three may be regarded as a repetition of the same phenomenon. This phenomenon was the appearance of a new religion in the world, and the occurrences of it with which we are most familiar, and which have left permanent results, are the rise of the Israelite, Christian and Muhammadan systems. It is, indeed, only with the last of these that we are well-nigh as familiar as we could wish to be, but of the second also we know enough to be sure that all three, externally at least, followed very much the same lines. When we find the same phenomenon recurring three times, and on two of these occasions from the same cause, we are bound to infer that the result in the third instance also was due to the same cause as in the other two. In the present case the Muhammadan system offers the best subject for examination, as the text of the Korán and the facts of Muhammad's life are too well substantiated to allow of the principles and methods of higher criticism being applied to them, although, but for that, the Korán rather lends itself to critical analysis, even better than the Old Testament books.

If anyone were to have a view of the Israelite, Christian and Muhammadan systems presented to him for the first time, what would strike him most about them would probably not be anything in the systems themselves so much as the personality of their founders. He would not look for the kernel of the religion at the close of its development, but at the beginning. This is just where modern criticism

seems to go off the rails. Men who have been trained to think scientifically and whose minds are imbued with the idea of development and evolution, naturally think of religion and the other arts as coming under the same laws as the physical sciences, and as growing like them from lower to higher. An Oriental, on the other hand, would no more think of applying the scientific method to the history of religions than an art critic would dream of finding the highest art in present-day Europe or America, instead of in the Italy of the Renaissance or the Greece of Pericles.

The most striking feature in the three systems mentioned above is the suddenness with which they burst upon the world. No doubt the rapidity and extent of the spread of the faith were much greater in the case of Muhammadanism than in that of Christianity, as they were much greater in the case of Christianity than in that of the religion of Israel; but that was mostly due to external circumstances of place and time. The point to be noted is that these were not organisms which grew up by slow and painful degrees from a feeble germ, absorbing nourishment from and at the expense of their environment. The only process in nature to which they can adequately be compared is the sudden eruption of a volcano.

Where there is smoke there is fire. Arguing by analogy, from what we know of Christianity and Muhammadanism, we may be sure that the sudden appearance of Israel upon the world's stage was the work of one man not less great than Moses is represented to have been. The tendency of modern writers is to belittle the part played by Moses. Indeed, in the "reconstructed" history he is by no means an essential figure, and would have been dropped altogether, if that had been possible. According to the Biblical account, on the other hand, Moses is the mainspring of the whole movement, which but for him would never have occurred, and it is no more possible to imagine

Israel without Moses than to think of Islám apart from the Arabian prophet.

In order, however, to bring about amongst Semites the birth of a new faith there is required something more than a mighty personality. A second element, which is always present, is a Written Revelation. Muhammad himself perceived this. It is, indeed, the revelation which makes the prophet. It is not possible for an educated European, to whom books are like the dust on the streets, to know what writing means to an unlettered people. Embodied in charms it possesses powers of life and death, and in any form is regarded as a species of magic. Eloquence too casts the same spell upon the Oriental mind. Muhammad declared it to be a form of enchantment. The Arab sheikh is not only the bravest man of his tribe, but the best poet as well. Alike in the séances of the Hebrew seers and in the assemblies of the early Christians, the manner of the utterance was everything. When the eloquent speech was clothed in written form, it acted with permanent force.

This is best seen in the sway which the Korán has held over Muhammadans down to the present day. Even before it was written down Muhammad's worst enemy could not deny its charm. Ibn Ishák gives an amusing account of a meeting of Muhammad's fellow-tribesmen, the Koraish, under the presidency of Waleed, the son of Al Mugheerah, which was held for the purpose of defining Muhammad's position, in case strangers coming to the fair should ask about him. Waleed opened the meeting by calling upon the Koraish to agree upon some one opinion which they should all hold concerning Muhammad.

"Do thou, O Waleed," they replied, "make the opinion for us, and we will speak by it."

"Nay," answered Waleed, "say ye, and I will listen!"

Some one suggested, "Let us say that Muhammad is a soothsayer!"

"Nay, by Allah," replied Waleed, "he is no soothsayer. I have seen soothsayers, and he hath not the soothsayer's mumbling and rhyming."

"Then let us call him a poet," said the tribesmen.

"He is not a poet," answered Waleed; "I know poetry of all sorts, with its iambics and antispastics and long syllables reckoned as short and all that; and this is not poetry."

"Let us say he is a charmer," was the next suggestion.

"He is not a charmer," returned Waleed. "I have seen charmers and their charming, and this is no blowing and tying of knots."

"What *shall* we say then, O Waleed?" the tribesmen asked in despair.

Waleed replied: "Verily, by Allah, his words are sweet. Their stem is a palm-tree, and their branches are a garden; and there is naught ye can say of all this, but it will be known to be false, and perhaps the truest thing ye can say about him is that ye say he is a charmer, and his words are a charm; and they divide between a man and his father, and between a man and his brother, and between a man and his wife, and between a man and his tribe."

Therewith the meeting broke up.

Muhammad was well aware that his words acted upon the Arabs like sorcery. He appealed to the diction of the Korán as a standing miracle, and defied his opponents to produce anything like it. Professor Nöldeke interprets this challenge to mean that the Korán, being a denunciation of polytheism, Muhammad's opponents, who were polytheists, could naturally not compose anything in the same strain. This, of course, is the matter-of-fact Teutonic love of accounting for all phenomena upon every-day European lines. What Muhammad evidently meant his challenge to refer to was the poetry of the Korán, for

which he alone possessed the inspiration. That his claim was just is clear not merely from the ease and swiftness with which his followers, fired by his words, overran half the known world in the first century of Islám, but by the fatal courage with which half-naked Muslims still encounter wounds and death "in the way of God."

The charm which the voice and presence of Jesus exercised over His contemporaries, and which the mere diction of the Gospel still exerts over the minds of men, must have been very like that with which Muhammad bewitched the Arabs of his day, and the results which it produced were the same.

In the case of Israel the facts also are the same, but on a smaller scale. A few weak and scattered nomad tribes suddenly combined and seized the territory of the rich and powerful Canaanites, and from that day they have not ceased to exist as one of the nations of the world, even after being deprived of their land, their one bond of union being the Law alone. Behind this movement there must have stood, if the analogy of history be worth anything, a Man and a Book. Every other similar occurrence known to us has been a return to what Muhammad well called "the religion of Abraham," that is, to pure monotheism. We may be certain too that Moses' message was delivered in highly poetic form, and equally certain that it was not so completely lost as is generally supposed. It is just as easy to imagine Islám without the Korán, or Christianity without the Gospels, as to suppose that the impetus given by Moses to his nation continued to be felt without either living voice or written word. There are many passages in the first five books of the Old Testament, especially in the Book of Deuteronomy, which may well have inspired the Israelites with faith and courage enough to seize that earthly inheritance which was to be their reward for fighting the battles of the Lord.

There are many minor respects in which the native account of the origin of the Israelite nation and faith finds an exact parallel in the early history of Islám. It may be sufficient to refer to three.

More than a decade after the death of Muhammad all the tribes of Arabia, which he and his successor had welded together, remained still a united whole. Under the wise policy of Aboo Bekr, assisted by the sword of Khalid, the son of Waleed, the Arab state was consolidated, and by the end of the caliphate of Omar the subjugation of Persia, Syria and Egypt had been completed. It was not until after the assassination of Omar that leaders arose in different localities whose success naturally led to the hegemony of their own tribes. In regard to the history of Israel the modern theory tends to reject the narrative of the conquest of Canaan by the people as a whole, given in the Book of Joshua, in favour of a conquest by individual tribes, apparently suggested by the Book of Judges ; but a comparison with Arab history shows that the two factors are complementary.

As the Arabs carried their arms beyond the confines of Arabia it became increasingly evident that they could not hold the conquered territories in person. The land was therefore left in the hands of its original owners, the proceeds being paid over to the State, which in turn paid fixed pensions to the individual conquerors. This involved the registration of the whole people. A similar registration of the Israelite tribes upon their occupation of Canaan can hardly have been avoided, and some of the lists in the Old Testament may have originated upon this occasion. Here, of course, Christianity does not present a parallel on account of the early communism, any more than in the previous case, on account of its rejection of the use of force.

The only nobility which Islám recognizes is descent

from Alee and Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet. In Persia the form of Alee looms larger than that of Muhammad. These two figures, Muhammad and Alee, stand side by side in Islám very much as Moses and Aaron do in the history of Israel. Moses and Muhammad are the lawgivers and spiritual heads, but the nobility which comes by birth is derived from Aaron and Alee. The descendants of Alee are at the present day counted by tens of thousands, and in the last resort the authority of the Sultan is second to that of the Shareef.

The purport of the preceding pages has been to show that whatever objections may be brought against the traditional history of the early beginnings of Israel, that history follows from point to point the course afterwards cut out for itself by Islám.

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