

THE DATE OF THE EXODUS.

IN his series of articles dealing with the people of Israel before the conquest of Canaan by Joshua, which always interests even when it fails to convince, Professor Eerdmans has attempted ¹ to revise the date of the Exodus in such a manner as to bring it a century nearer to our own time; and this he does not by any alteration of the Egyptian chronology, but by transferring the Exodus itself from its accepted date in the reign of Merenptah to the time of the later Ramesside kings of the Twentieth Dynasty. It remains to be seen, however, how far the new date will appeal to Biblical chronologers, and whether it may not be possible to establish an effective defence for the commonly received chronology.

It is certain that the usual date can boast of long acceptance. It is no mere critical conjecture of modern scholars, nor any discredited tradition of doubtful authority. It goes back for more than two thousand years to the direct testimony of Manetho, and it claims the adhesion and support of nearly all eminent Egyptologists from Manetho himself to Flinders Petrie. It is remarkable too that as the years go by, the authority of Manetho is held in ever increasing estimation, and in this particular instance it seems to have every confirmation from recent research; and as the store cities of Egypt gradually yield their secrets to the spade, it seems to be increasingly borne in upon us that Ramesses II. was indeed the Pharaoh of the Oppression, and his son Merenptah that of the Exodus. Let us see exactly how the matter stands; and first of all let us look at it in the light of the received chronology.

Merenptah was the thirteenth son of Ramesses II. He

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had become heir to the crown on the death of his brother Khaemuas in the fifty-fifth year of his father's reign, his father being then seventy-two and Merenptah forty-six. I have stated elsewhere¹ my reasons for dating the reign of Ramesses II. from B.C. 1318 to B.C. 1252. In the latter of these years Merenptah succeeded to the throne, being by now about fifty-eight years old. The length of his reign has been variously stated, different versions of Manetho attributing to him a reign of eight, nineteen and a half, twenty, or even forty years. *In medio tutissimus*. Chronologers have generally preferred the two middle numbers. The evidence of the monuments, however, is in favour of the shortest estimate. Full and clear runs the inscriptional record from his first year to the eighth. Then it ceases. We may assume, then, that the number eight, given in the Armenian version of Eusebius, represents the true length of the reign; and if there be any value at all in the readings nineteen and a half or twenty (there is certainly none in that of forty) they must apparently be reckoned from the death of Khaemuas rather than from that of Ramesses. But stronger evidence even than the significant silence of the monuments is at hand. It is recorded² that a certain Bakenkhonsu was an official of Ramesses II. at the age of eighty-six, and that he survived till the reign of Ramesses III. Now if we assign Merenptah so long a reign as nineteen years, Bakenkhonsu's life must needs be stretched out to 114 years. This seems to verge on the impossible, and should no doubt be rejected. If, on the other hand, we yield to the silence of the monuments and the testimony of Eusebius, and limit Merenptah's reign to eight years, we see at once how this Bakenkhonsu might just survive, as a very old man just past the century, till the accession of Ramesses

¹ *Chronology of the Old Testament* (Deighton, Bell), 1906.

² Petrie, *History of Egypt*, vol. iii., pp. 2, 165.

III. and the Twentieth Dynasty. We may take it then for the present that Merenptah reigned for eight years from B.C. 1252 to B.C. 1244, and that he died at the age of sixty-six.

The reign of Ramesses II., the Pharaoh of the Oppression, had been long and prosperous. But its close was clouded by war and by the pressure of alien tribes on the north of Egypt and on the cultivated land of the Delta. These aliens included both Libyans from the West and Canaanites (using the term in its widest sense) from the East. If the Israelites were at that time dwelling in the land of Goshen, it is easy to see how readily they might associate themselves with the aliens rather than with the Egyptians, how readily indeed they might look to the invader for relief from their Egyptian bondage. As a matter of fact this is precisely what occurred.

The ancient empire of Memphis, the Egypt of the Pyramids, had long since disappeared, and the capital of the newer Egypt of the Nineteenth Dynasty lay far to the South. Lower Egypt, in fact, counting from the arrival of the Hyksos, had been continually liable to the irruption or actual occupation of foreigners for a period of about 800 years. Their presence there must have been as much a commonplace of politics as that of the Moors in Spain during the Middle Ages or of the Turks in the Balkan Peninsula to-day. Still the feeling remained that the land was Egypt's, and that the alien must sooner or later be expelled. The alien monarchy of Shepherd Kings had been overthrown, but the pressure was becoming acute once more and called for decisive measures. Merenptah hesitated for some years to strike; but when the blow came, it was with terrific force and called for no repeating.

The account of the campaign may be read either in Manetho or on the monuments. If we turn to Manetho as

reported by Josephus,¹ we find ourselves reading the story of certain "leprous folk." The word Leper, no doubt, contains the suggestion of a taint of something un-Egyptian in blood or in character, and is used as a term of reproach ; and Josephus, though visibly stung by the unworthy insult, has no difficulty in seeing that by "Lepers" Manetho meant "Jews." Remembering this we have no difficulty in understanding the story. It is the story of the oppression and the Exodus as seen from an Egyptian point of view. Probably it is no less historical than the more familiar story of the same events told by the Jewish writers from their different standing. We learn from Manetho, though indeed we might find it just as easily in the Pentateuch, that religious bitterness was added to international jealousy, and that Amenophis (the Greek equivalent of Merenptah), in order to win the favour of the gods, was urged to clear the whole country of the "lepers" and other impure people. The king was pleased with this injunction and got them together to the number of eighty thousand, and so set them to work in the quarries that lay on the east side of the Nile. We are told too how certain of the learned priests were polluted with this leprosy (were "pro-Hebrews" in fact); how the city of Avaris was set apart for their habitation, "but when these men were gotten into it, and found the place fit for a revolt, they appointed unto themselves a ruler out of the priests of Heliopolis, whose name was Osarsiph, and they took their oaths that they would be obedient unto him." Osarsiph was a religious lawgiver as well as a political leader ; but lest there should be any doubt whatever as to his identification Manetho goes on to say : "It was also reported that the priest, who ordained their polity and laws, was by birth of Heliopolis, and his name Osarsiph, from Osiris, the god of Heliopolis ; but that when he was

¹ *Apion*, i. 26.

gone over to this people, his name was changed, and he was called Moses.”¹ What is there lacking? Here we have Moses learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians,² of priestly training, but of doubtful birth, and the leader of what the Egyptians no doubt called treason, and the Jews considered religious and national emancipation. Manetho adds the important information that a tribe of aliens came and occupied the land for thirteen years, and so rendered valuable assistance to the “polluted wretches.” This is precisely confirmed by the monuments, which show how, during the latter years of Ramesses II. and the opening years of Merenptah, the irruption of desert tribes from Libya and Canaan devastated the Delta and destroyed the security of life and property in Lower Egypt. But the plagues of the Egyptians were a blessing to the Jews. If the Nile ran red with blood, it was Egyptian blood and not Semitic; if the hordes of the desert descended like locusts on the crops and wasted the land with fire and tempest, the crops in the land of Goshen were protected. But I will not press this fanciful interpretation of the plagues. It is enough to know that the plain history, allowing for the standpoints of the two nations, is in perfect harmony in each of the two accounts.

In the fifth year of his reign Merenptah struck his blow for the deliverance of Egypt. He had no need to strike twice. The Egyptian army was mobilized at Prosopis on the 14th of Payni (April 10), and after a rapid march came into contact with the enemy on the 1st of Epiphi (April 27). It was at the time of the New Moon—three nights of darkness and three days of war. The general engagement took place on the 3rd of Epiphi (April 29) and ended in the utter rout of the invaders. The victory, as at Cressy and at Agincourt, went to the archers; but Petrie is no doubt right in

¹ Whiston.

² Acts vii. 22.

comparing it rather to the effect of the rifle fire and shrapnel of a civilized army when opposing the wild rushes of an undisciplined enemy. At all events the victory was signal and complete. The Libyans and their allies were driven across the frontier. Eastward and westward the vengeful pursuit of the Egyptians followed them, Canaan and Libya alike felt the force of the blow.

So far all seems to be clear. Now we come to that part of the inscription that troubles Professor Eerdmans. He quotes some of the closing words in the September number of the *EXPOSITOR*. It is rather a pity that he did not quote a little more; but of that I am not justly entitled to complain, since in my own chronology I quoted rather less. Here is the conclusion of the matter: ¹ "Devastated in Tehenu (Libya): Kheta (the land of the Hittites) is quieted, Canaan is seized with every evil: Led away is Askelon: Taken is Gezer: Yenuam is brought to nought: The people of Israel is laid waste, their crops are not: Kharu (Palestine) has become as a widow by Egypt."

It is the one mention of Israel on all the Egyptian monuments. How comes Israel to be mentioned at all? Obviously, one would think, because the Israelites, being in virtual or actual revolt against Pharaoh, under the leadership of Moses, found themselves in natural and inevitable alliance with the Libyan and Semitic invaders of Egypt. No doubt there were Israelites in the Libyan army, just as there was a "mixed multitude" in the Israelite retreat. Why, then, need Professor Eerdmans say, "Here Israel is evidently part of the population of the Karu"? Why of the Karu, which lay to the east, rather than of the Tehenu on the west? Is it not rather clear that we are dealing with a conglomerate host drawn from all the countries on the seaboard of this south-eastern corner of the Mediterranean,

¹ See Petrie's *History of Egypt*, vol. iii., p. 114.

only to be shattered by an Egyptian army descending like a thunderbolt from the inland regions of the Upper Nile ?

It is important to notice the time of year. Doubtless the movement was designed, and it was certainly carried out with remarkable skill, in order that the blow might fall in time to secure the harvest for the Egyptians. The immediate success of the Egyptian arms shows at once how the crops of Goshen and the Delta were lost to the Hebrews. A parallel to the Egyptian monument is found in the Elohist story of the Exodus.¹ "They were thrust out of Egypt and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual." That the pursuit was carried into Palestine is certain ; but if any Israelites dwelt there, they were not under the leadership of Moses, and they had no part in the Exodus. Moses evaded the pursuit by turning unexpectedly southward towards Sinai instead of northward to Canaan, and apparently witnessed the discomfiture of a section of the victorious army that pressed too hotly or too rashly on his rear.

Now the Passover was the Feast of the Firstfruits. At the present time the harvest in the Delta begins very early in May.² If we express our dates in terms of the Julian Calendar, it would be later in the thirteenth century B.C. But in any case the coincidence of the Feast of Passion with the Exodus, or Expulsion, of the Jews shows how successful Merenptah was in seizing the harvest for himself. A full moon had occurred on March 15.³ The crops were then growing, and the Egyptian army had not as yet been mobilized. The Hebrews and their allies were unaware of the impending blow. Another Full Moon occurred on April 14.

¹ Exodus xii. 39.

² Petrie, *Ibid.*

³ Julian Calendar, equivalent to March 5 in the more accurate Gregorian Calendar. For the dates cf. Guinness' *Creation Centred in Christ, Astronomical Appendix.*

Still the crops were unripe, but the Egyptian army was on the march. The battle took place at the New Moon that ushered in the month of Abib and the Hebrew new year. From the defeat there was no recovery; and by the light of the Full Moon following (May 13 B.C. 1247) Moses and Israel fled from the land of Egypt with their families and their flocks and everything that could be removed. Their ripened but unharvested crops were left unwillingly behind. Yet a great commander's skill may be shown as much in the hour of defeat as in that of victory. The Exodus was not lacking in elements of dignity and even of grandeur, and the salvation of Israel was duly accomplished.

Surely we have here such a convergence of testimony from all sources—Exodus, Manetho, the monuments, the institution of Passover, the tropical seasons of the year, the thricetold tale from widely different ages and opposing points of view—that doubt can be no longer possible either as to the true sequence of events or the true interpretation of our records.

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