

this imagery has been the common property of mystics and philosophers and preachers throughout the ages.

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*A CONSIDERATION OF THE HISTORY OF
NORTHERN ISRAEL.¹*

THE main difference between the religions of Asia and of Europe appears to be that whereas those of the West are abandoned by their votaries for something which satisfies their adherents better, those of the East are not completely deserted, but something further is evolved out of them. Our ancestors, even though they retained many superstitions, at least professedly forsook their old beliefs when they accepted Christianity; but in India Brahminism was the parent of Buddhism, in Persia Zoroastrianism was the outcome of an older faith, the ancient religion of the Hebrews gave birth to Judaism, Judaism to Christianity, Judaism, Oriental Christianity and the faiths of early Arabia to Mohammedanism. It is not the religion of a Western nation which survives in Christianity, but rather its philosophy, as in the case of Hellas, its law in that of Rome, its political ideas as among the Teutonic races. Herein seems to be the fundamental difference between East and West. In the one religion is everything, in the other its influence has been subordinated to or shared by other interests. Our Christianity has hitherto been exempted from this rule, and has proved itself capable of infinite development, sometimes legitimate, at others deplorable; but this, to my mind, tends to prove its inherently oriental character.

But my purpose is not to dwell on this point, but to submit to the consideration of the Congress the importance of

¹ A paper read at the Fourth Congress of the History of Religions at Leiden.

investigating the character of the religion of the Hebrews which preceded that faith which is known to us as Judaism.

Thanks to the critical labours of scholars since the days of Astruc, in which Holland has taken a very prominent part, we are able now to say almost definitely when Judaism began. No one can now seriously maintain that the Law in its present form, which is the basis of Judaism, existed from the days of Moses or that before the captivity the Israelites could be called, as they actually were in popular language, "Jews." This is what the great scholars of the past have triumphantly proved beyond all reasonable doubt; but in so doing, I venture to suggest, they were scarcely able to do full justice to the religious conceptions of the early Israelites. The opposition which encountered them at every step laboured to shew that the present Pentateuch lay at the base and was the clue to all the history of ancient Israel, and in combatting this they emphasised, as I think unduly, the resemblance of the sons of Israel to the surrounding nations and the essentially "pagan" character of their cultus and morality. This tendency was perhaps inevitable. It was in accordance with the spirit of the age to subject everything to the laws of evolution and to trace growth, that of religion included, from a lower to a higher form of life. It was accepted, almost as a canon of criticism, that the religion of an ancient people should be judged by those records which were most to its discredit. And above all things it was deemed necessary to shew the erroneous nature of the old theory that the foundation of the religion of Israel was the Pentateuchal code. Thus consciously or not the enormities of ancient Israel were so exaggerated that in religion, ethics and in general conception of life they were made to appear on even a lower plane than the surrounding nations.

The object of this paper is to plead for a reconsideration

of Israelite history from the establishment of the nation in Palestine to the fall of Samaria in B.C. 721. In so doing I desire to acknowledge in the fullest degree the debt due to the great critics of the nineteenth century. I am one of those who believe that all criticism based on scholarship and a sincere desire for truth is, despite appearances, of inestimable value to religion; and I hold firmly to the hope that we are arriving at a knowledge of the true meaning of the Old and New Testament which will give them a more practical effect on our lives than they have had hitherto. And further, I have on this occasion no desire to appear as an apologist with an *arrière pensée* that I am defending a cause instead of stating my personal opinion on a difficult and intricate subject.

The movement which culminated in the production of our Old Testament as the sacred scriptures of the Jews may be, I think, said to have commenced with the promulgation of the Deuteronomic law. It is seen at its height in the career of those typical Jews, Ezra and Nehemiah, in the fifth century B.C. The ideal was throughout that of the Puritan Judaism which finally found its expression in Talmudic Rabbinism. This, be it always remembered, was only one aspect even of Judaism, and the attention now paid to the subject of eschatology is making it increasingly plain that most of the poetry, imaginative literature and philosophy of the Jews down to the Bar-cochba rebellion lay outside its pale.

Legal Judaism, with its exclusiveness, its particularism and its pedantry, regarded antiquity with no friendly eye. It looked on the past as a gigantic mistake, and attributed all its disasters to the disregard of the legal requirements of a modernised religion. It was still further prejudiced against the Northern Kingdom by the heretical tenets of the Samaritans and their claim to represent the ancient

nation of Israel. Consequently there is manifested in the books of Kings a strong bias against all the kings of Israel, who are contrasted unfavourably with their rivals in Judah.

Fortunately, however, many early records have been preserved either as traditions or in the form of a literature which has otherwise disappeared, and from them I venture to submit to you a few considerations.

The Elohist literature in the Hexateuch, the greater part of the book of Judges, the north Israelite narratives in the book of Kings, the prophecies of Amos, delivered by a Judaeon in the northern kingdom, and of Hosea, and the story of Jonah, which, whatever the date of the book, relates the adventures or visions of an Israelite prophet, are all marked by a liberality of tone towards the Gentiles which is clearly non-Judaic, though found at times in the southern prophets. This would seem to indicate that the particularism of the northern kingdom was much less than that which we are accustomed to connect with post-exilic Judah.

In vividness of description and in the power of delineating character the narrators of events in Northern Israel are simply unequalled in the Bible. It is to me inconceivable that they should have been the invention of Jewish legalisers, for they are redolent of the soil, and at times are scarcely edifying enough to have been composed to point a moral or adorn a tale. The prophecies of Amos and Hosea are arranged with surprising literary skill, and, as critics declare that the insertions relating to Judah are often clumsy and irrelevant, they may be accepted as containing much genuinely ancient work. A literary tradition must therefore have existed in the northern kingdom of considerable antiquity, of which that which the Bible has conserved is probably but a small part of its ripened fruits.

The information which we have concerning the religion of the northern tribes in the Bible undoubtedly comes

through men strongly prejudiced against it. Once Jerusalem was recognised as the lawful national sanctuary all other places of worship began to be regarded as schismatical, and those who conserved the ancient records were doubtless further prejudiced by the close proximity of the hated Samaritans, "the foolish people who dwell in Sichem." But two facts are apparent, the high-place worship was confessedly that of the ancient heroes of the nation, and the calves of Bethel and Dan were erected in honour of Jahveh.

Will you allow me to remind you of a suggestion already made by Professor Kennett, of Cambridge, as to how the problem in regard to these latter should be regarded? ¹ It is a difficult one because it is complicated by the story of the Golden Calf in the Wilderness. The part which Aaron plays in this curious tale is, to my mind at least, sufficient to render it impossible for us to regard it as an idle legend. Aaron is, I confess, to me a very dim and shadowy figure; but he surely cannot have been invented to account for the post-exilic priesthood, and at the same time be represented as acting so unheroic a part in a very discreditable story. How was it, then, that the making of the "calf" was attributed to Aaron? I cannot but fancy that it was to justify this form of worship by attributing its origin to an honoured name. You will observe that Jeroboam in 1 Kings uses the very words attributed to Aaron, "These be thy gods (i.e., is thy God), O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt," when he proclaimed a feast to Jahveh. Notice also the hint in 1 Kings that Jeroboam could not get Levites to officiate at Bethel, expanded in 2 Chronicles into a statement that the Levites deserted the northern tribes and settled in Judah. The older commentators were

¹ See the *Journal of Theological Studies*, July, 1905. In adopting Dr. Kennett's suggestions it will be seen that I differ entirely as to his conclusions regarding the historicity of Aaron.

of opinion that the calf-worship in the wilderness was derived from Egypt, but this view is generally abandoned, and it is now commonly agreed that Israel followed the Canaanites in adoring their God under the form of a bull. We must bear in mind that Jeroboam was no innovator, but that his rebellion, promoted by the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh, was in favour of the ancient sanctuaries. Consequently the calf worship must have been in existence before his time, at any rate among the northern tribes, though possibly unknown in Judah. We may, therefore, reasonably conjecture that the narrative in Exodus xxxii. is twofold, and that the story of Aaron making the calf stood alone originally and was used to justify the practice of Israel. The indignation of Moses and the vengeance taken by the Levites on the people was perhaps the explanation given by the southern prophets of the illegality of the worship and its rejection by the authorised priesthood. Be this as it may, I am convinced that in setting up the calf worship at Bethel Jeroboam was not only seeking popularity, but satisfying the religious needs of his subjects, and was persuaded that he was doing special honour to Jahveh. It is true that Hosea denounces the calf worship, but this prophet lived about two hundred and fifty years after Jeroboam.

Time will not allow me to develop this subject as I would fain do, and I must ask your indulgence if I now deal in assertions of my opinion rather than in attempting to demonstrate it.

In the first place I consider that one of the most serious drawbacks to our obtaining a right view of the history of Israel is that we have been led, partly by the exaggerated figures we find in a late book like Chronicles, but mainly by coloured maps shewing Palestine apportioned among the tribes, to imagine that the Israelites were very numerous, whereas a closer study seems to me to shew that there were only a few of them scattered throughout the country. In

the days of Solomon and for about two centuries the Israelites were the dominant race, but their numbers were never large.

Further, I consider that it is highly probable that throughout this period Israel was under the influence of a monotheistic movement traceable to the days of the monarchy and fanatically devoted to Jahveh. The sanguinary civil war under Jehu which annihilated the house of Omri shews that the attempt to introduce the Baal worship of Phœnicia proved the intensity of the devotion to the God of Israel.

In the third place the religion of North Israel was utterly unlike Judaism. Zealous as the people were for Jahveh, they were accustomed to a cheerful and natural worship, and were not distinguished by a savage hatred of other nations. Despite their many failings, many social virtues, as we may see from stories like that of Joseph, were admired and cultivated.

Lastly, in the stories which have been preserved to us the heroes of the northern kingdom were distinguished by a certain rude chivalry and generosity which wins our admiration. Cruel they undoubtedly were, perhaps inevitably, but time after time we meet with, in ever unexpected places, signs that they understood how to act fairly even towards implacable enemies.

My general contention, therefore, is this, that in the Old Testament we have accustomed ourselves to look for a single aspect of Judaism, namely, that which took colour from the Priestly code, and this has caused the study of it to fall into unmerited disrepute. But the severe criticism to which it has been subjected ought at least to remove this prejudice and to render us more alive to the value of the lessons which the ancient story of the people of Jahveh, and especially of Northern Israel, have for our own days. Inadequate as my paper is, may it be regarded as a small tribute to the work which Kuenen sent forth from the University of Leiden.

For as St. Paul ages ago perceived, the Torah and all its fruits, its stiff legalism, its pedantry, its exclusiveness is not the essence of the revelation of the chosen people nor is the average Jew the true representative of the Israelite of the north or of the great prophets and psalmists of the southern kingdom. Chamberlain in his *Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*, vigorously Anti-Semite as he is, rises to eloquence when he speaks of the genuine Sephardim as the true representatives of ancient Israel. "It is only when one sees these men and has intercourse with them that one begins to comprehend the significance of Judaism in the history of the world. Beautiful figures, noble heads, dignity in speech and bearing. The type is Semitic in the same sense as that of certain noble Syrians and Arabs. That out of the midst of such people prophets and psalmists should arise—that I understood at the first glance. . . ." And again: "Now whoever wishes to see with his own eyes what a noble race is should send for the poorest of the Sephardim from Salonici or Sarajevo (great wealth is very rare among them, for they are men of stainless honour) . . . and he will perceive the nobility which race bestows." And such we may believe were the great Israelites of whom we read in the book of Kings: that splendid minority which fought so brave a battle against national degeneracy.

Under the circumstances the rise of legalism may have been, and I believe was, necessary and inevitable, but its results were not altogether healthy. Cornhill in his *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* truly says: "It is one of those strange ironies of fate that this legislation, whose aim was to spiritualise as far as possible the religion of Israel, harked back to just the most pagan elements in it: circumcision, dietary laws, etc. . . together with a mystical and mechanical conception of sin—the legislation of P is therefore a reversion to an older stage of religious development which

