

Hommel's 'Ancient Hebrew Tradition.'¹

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ALTHOUGH the Editor has already given a lucid summary of the contents of this book (see THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for July, pp. 433-36), I have been asked to discuss it afresh; and before doing so I ought to premise that Professor Hommel's services in the fields of Assyriology and S. Arabian epigraphy entitle his opinions on all matters which involve those subjects to respect; that, even though this book may be considered to have failed in its ostensible purpose, it is full of valuable matter attractively stated; and that, although THE EXPOSITORY TIMES admits even abstuse disquisitions, I will endeavour to keep within the depth of most of the readers and my own.

1. This work represents itself as a blow struck in favour of a conservative view of the character of the Old Testament as opposed to the 'Higher Criticism.' Its author hopes to restore to many the paradise of their faith, of which the scientific demonstrations of Wellhausen have deprived them. Nevertheless, the specimens of his method quoted by the Editor in the July number, seem far more akin to Radical than to Conservative theories. He does not hesitate to dissect, to rearrange, to eject, to supply what he fancies missing; and these are the processes from which, carried out on a large scale, the Higher Criticism derives its name. The 'paradise of faith,' which will be restored by the application of these methods, will surely be somewhat different from that which has been lost. It should seem, however, that the division of parties in Old Testament criticism should be marked at least as much by the nature of the methods employed as by the conclusions to which their application leads. The decidedly harsh language which this author employs about the 'critics' must therefore strike the reader as remarkable.

2. The sources whence Dr. Hommel draws his arguments are mostly unfamiliar ones; few readers can test his S. Arabian epigraphy, and fewer still his Assyriology. It is well known that in both

those studies much depends on acute reasoning and inference; and reasoning, to be of value, must be not only acute, but sound. Many readers therefore will have to be guided in their estimate of Dr. Hommel's reasoning in subjects with which they are unacquainted by the specimens of it which he gives on better known topics. These specimens will probably make them think it acute rather than sound.

He observes that the Moabite dialect, like the Minæan, uses the letter H to denote in certain cases the lengthening of a vowel, a usage which occurs less frequently in Hebrew, and never in Phœnician. 'The only possible inference which can be drawn from this is that both the Moabites and Hebrews, during the period prior to the adoption of the Canaanite language, that is, while they still spoke a pure Arabic dialect, must have originally employed the Minæan script in place of the so-called Phœnician or Canaanitish; for in no other way can this remarkable fact be satisfactorily explained.' One swallow does not make a summer; and a *single* parallel between the orthography of the Minæans and the Hebrews is not sufficient to support so vast a deduction. However, there is more to follow. This orthographic employment of the letter H, he finds, will account for the variety between the forms Abrahm and Abram,—I may notice that on p. 277 he states that this spelling, when applied to the internal elements of words, has no parallel outside the Minæan inscriptions, whereas on p. 276 he finds it in a Moabite inscription,—and now observe the inference. 'This fact is of the utmost importance to the study of the origin of the earlier Hebrew literature, since it permits us to assume confidently that a certain, and not inconsiderable, portion of the tradition on which Genesis is based had already been reduced to writing in the time of Moses.' Doubtless we may assume confidently anything that we like; but the confidence here would seem very insufficiently grounded. Let it be granted that the forms Abrahm and Abram could only be distinguished in writing, not in speech (an admission which ought not, of course, to be made); it follows that some one, at some time before

¹ *The Ancient Hebrew Tradition as illustrated by the Monuments.* By Dr. Fritz Hommel; translated by M. Laure and Crosslé. London: S.P.C.K.

Genesis reached its present form, had documents before him in which the forms alternated; but how does this bring us any nearer Moses? But, besides, it has to be proved that Abram and Abraham are the same person. There are names in Arabic compounded with the element *Ruhm* (an *Abu Ruhm* occurs in the *Aghani* xii. 66, with which *Abrhm* might be compared), and since Professor Hommel regards the biblical account of the relation between the names as fictitious, there can be no critical objection on his principles to going a step further, and denying all connexion between the names. Moreover, in most languages proper names are less regular and more subject to arbitrary alterations than other words.

One other example may be given of the signification which our author attaches to the word 'proof.' 'From a single instance,' he says, 'viz. the passage in Deut. xxviii. 68, I am able to prove that Deuteronomy must have been known to the prophets at least as early as the time of Jotham and Menahem, about 740 B.C. . . . In this verse there is a threat that "the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships." This passage is twice quoted by Hosea, viz. "Ephraim shall return to Egypt" (viii. 13), immediately followed by (ix. 3), "and they shall eat unclean food in Assyria," a threat more in harmony with the apprehensions of the time. The only possible deduction from this is that Deuteronomy must have been in existence at least long before Hosea.' This is very confident language; but no one who is not convinced already will attach any weight to the argument. The phrase 'quotation,' to begin with, is an exaggeration, since the form of the sentence is different, and the most characteristic part of the passage in Deuteronomy omitted; 'allusion' is the more appropriate word. But it has been rightly said that because a man has water, it does not follow that he has robbed some one else's cistern; and this threat of a return to Egyptian bondage may well have occurred to a number of prophets and preachers independently.

Even in minor matters Dr. Hommel does not appear to possess the strength of mind to resist an attractive combination, even when he knows that it will not 'do.' He argues that the Israelites spoke Arabic in the wilderness, because when they saw the manna they said *man hu*, and *man* in Arabic means—not 'what,' but 'who,' as Dr. Hommel has to acknowledge; as therefore they

cannot have asked of the manna 'who is this,' it is safer to infer that they did not speak Arabic. It might not be difficult to find an Aramaic dialect in which *man* does signify 'what.' Before, however, we rush to the conclusion that the Israelites in the desert spoke that dialect, two reflections should be made: (1) that this etymology belongs to a class of frequent occurrence in the Bible in which attention is called to an assonance rather than to the true source of the word; (2) that the statements of etymologists about the form and meaning of words must be received with caution, for they have an interest in misrepresenting them. The book under review will supply an instance. 'There are many ritual *termini technici* such as *tamid* ("perpetual burnt-offering," or rather "everlasting sacrifice"), which can only be explained through the Arabic (Arab. *ta'mid*, "fixed appointment"; *amad*, "end," "eternity").' Without passing an opinion on this etymology, we may nevertheless observe that the meaning of the Arabic words is misrepresented. *Amad* occurs both in the Koran and the Tradition, and its meaning should be given as 'term' or 'period,' i.e. a space of time within limits. *Ta'mid*, the existence of which is scarcely recognised in the classical dictionaries, should mean 'setting a limit,' the very *opposite* of 'perpetual' or 'everlasting.' As the meaning of words shifts, it does not follow that the etymology is wrong; but it is clear that Dr. Hommel has concealed from his readers the difficulties that attend his conjecture.

One more specimen of the reasoning may be taken from the highly ingenious chapter in which the import of the name Eber is discussed. Glaser (*Die Abessinier*, etc., p. 74, *seq.*) had compared two inscriptions in the Minæan dialect, in which there are many unintelligible words, but in one of which 'Egypt, Gaza, and A'shur,' while in the other 'Egypt, A'shur, and Ibr Naharan,' are mentioned side by side. 'From this we may conclude,' says Hommel, 'that to the Minæans Gaza and Ibr Naharan were interchangeable terms, or, at any rate—assuming that Ibr Naharan included a much larger territory than that of Gaza—that they undoubtedly regarded Gaza as forming part of it.' A man who knows nothing of Sabæan or Minæan may yet perceive that if he were to reason in this way in ordinary life, he would go wildly wrong. He sees one placard mentioning England, Ireland, and Scotland; another mentioning England, Scot-

land, and Wales; should he infer that Ireland and Wales are interchangeable terms? The inference does not become the more sound because the antiquities of the Minæans are wrapped in a veil of obscurity out of which the most fragmentary outlines emerge.

While, then, Dr. Hommel's arguments are invariably learned and subtle, no one who cannot test his statements will be justified in regarding his inferences as secure. By calling that certain which is possible, and that proved which is plausible, rapid progress may apparently be made; but it is illusory.

3. A further consideration is how far Dr. Hommel has carried out his undertaking to refute Wellhausen. Wellhausen's famous work consists of a reconstruction of the religious history of Israel; and although it would be surprising if the monuments of S. Arabia or Assyria had anything to say on this subject, still they might conceivably tell us facts about Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, and others, which would seriously endanger Wellhausen's position. These personages, however, would appear to be quite unknown to Hommel's inscriptions. Wellhausen did not deny the Egyptian episode; indeed, in dealing with it he for once dropped the weapons of criticism to assume those of Euhemerus. Later writers, however, have denied it *on the evidence of cuneiform inscriptions*. Even these daring sceptics are not answered: the

Tell el-Amarna tablets, according to Hommel, contain no allusion to Israel or to any Israelitish tribe. Perhaps Wellhausen's hypothesis would not be seriously affected, even if it could be shown that the fourteenth chapter of *Gènesis* is historically accurate; Hommel, it is clear, has at best demonstrated that it contains seriously disfigured elements of truth; and though it might be charming to find Abraham restored to the theatre of history, this it at present lies beyond Hommel's power to accomplish. And while his theory about the tribe of Asher is brilliantly ingenious, it would, if made out, be hard to reconcile with the biblical narrative.

To those of us who have been convinced by the reasoning of Kuenen and Wellhausen, since Professor Hommel does not deal so much with facts as with inferences, it will probably seem best to endeavour to reconcile some of his results with the system they have adopted rather than to regard that system as overthrown. But even where those results seem most attractive, they will ordinarily find a gulf between his premises and his conclusion which it is dangerous to leap, and at present impossible to span. And though a man of such unusual attainments may with justice retreat upon 'Babylonian and Phœnician and Arabic, including the Sabæan and Minæan dialects,' many readers will be less alarmed by the names of those studies than doubtful whether they do not incapacitate the mind for sober historical inquiry.

The Two Fig Trees.

AN ADDRESS TO CHILDREN.

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I AM going to tell you about two fig trees; one which Jesus cursed, and the other which He blessed. You all know about the fig tree which He cursed. Our Lord's miracles were works of goodness and mercy. They were done to save and bless people. But there was one of them, at least, that was a work of destruction. One day Jesus went out of Jerusalem at sunset to spend the quiet evening hours at Bethany, a little village hid in a dimple of the Mount of Olives. Next morning as He was going back to the sacred city to resume His work of teaching the people,—for He had but a short

time now to do that work, and must therefore do it with all His might,—He felt very hungry. Either He had started too early from the hospitable home of Martha and Mary to break His fast, or He was so occupied with the thought of the work that He was going to do, that He forgot all about His bodily wants, as, you remember, He forgot His thirst when He was speaking to the woman of Samaria at the Well of Jacob. In any case, He was very faint and hungry, and He looked about for something to eat, which it is not difficult to find in that fruitful and open-handed country. He