

which literature was a commonplace, and in which the arts and crafts were advanced to a surprisingly high degree. Certain literary peculiarities in Genesis are quite well accounted for within the context of this early Babylonian culture. Moreover, it has been pointed out that the language of the later chapters in Genesis has an Egyptian colouring superimposed upon it, suggesting that the author of Genesis, besides inheriting this early Babylonian tradition, also had an intimate acquaintance with Egyptian modes of speech. Moses, in social and spiritual descent from Abraham, and trained in the court of Pharaoh, exactly fills the picture.

These points of discussion might be continued indefinitely without arriving at a conclusive result. For all along the dispute has been something more than a difference of opinion on minor interpretations, but has risen out of radical and strongly-opposed differences of judgment on the fundamental nature of Bible history. It is not that critical investigations have been characterized by constant changes of opinion, or by lapses of judgment—in all human studies mistakes are inevitable, and scientific method allows for correction, through experiment, of a working hypothesis. Nor is it that traditional orthodoxy has always been able or willing to abandon mistaken interpretations of Scripture, or that it has never advanced unsound arguments in support of its convictions—good causes sometimes have indifferent advocates. Nor, again, is the quarrel with Higher Criticism as such: for, in the same way as much valuable information has been made available for students by the work of textual criticism, so also may much valuable information be gained from knowledge of the conditions under which a particular book came to be written. To join issue on such points is merely to beg the main question, which has to do with the Divine inerrancy, or otherwise, of the Scriptures, and their consequent historical reliability or unreliability. For the Christian this will be determined by the Fact of Christ.

Accepting, therefore, without reserve, the historical accuracy of our materials, we may now turn to the variously documented narrative and see if it is held together by a single comprehensive plan, and so forms in truth one book. As Old Testament history would be presented less laboriously, and certainly more significantly, under an expansion of distinguishing “notes,” than as a bare recital of events, a chapter might well be devoted to each of three such signatures of unity, namely, the note of Continuity, that of Progression, and that of Crisis, all of which presuppose a central superintending purpose. By applying these as tests, we shall find that the Old Testament contains internal

proofs of its unitary character, and that its several histories are but integral parts of a single *Heilsgeschichte*. This in turn will be seen to form an impressive piece of evidence for the moral unity of all history, and the consequent significance of our individual lives. The Christian revelation gives meaning to human existence, and the long history of the race, in outward seeming sorely broken, becomes integrated within a divine purpose of cosmic dimensions.

If this interpretation of the Old Testament histories is indeed central, we should be able to discover in our studies the bearing of varied incidents and to perceive vital relations between events far removed in time and place. This would go far to support what has here been put forward as the true interior significance of these histories. The whole subject is of the highest practical importance toward a working philosophy of life. If founded on truth, the knowledge of this Divine activity within history confers on those who possess it an understanding of the true relation in which man stands to the world around him, and to God the Creator of all. It is therefore our duty to examine these writings, and to test whether they contain those features of ordered purpose and of spiritual process already referred to.

II

THE NOTE OF CONTINUITY IN OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

ABRAHAM IS A FIXED POINT IN OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY. From him proceeds in unbroken continuity the whole history of the chosen race until the coming of Christ: toward him flows the main stream of earlier history from the beginning of the world. He stands in the centre of the economy. His experiences of God become the spiritual heritage of the nation. The Abrahamic covenant, in particular, provides the norm of Israel's future development. Out of that dynamic circumstance is released the historical activity which finds its ultimate goal in the advent of the promised Seed, which is Christ. The fact of the covenant, as a determining influence upon subsequent history and upon Israel's religious faith, calls for more than a passing glance. Meantime, it may be said that behind the historical proceedings recorded in the pages of the Old Testament may be traced one continuous policy, which has its dynamic centre in the Abrahamic covenant.

Abraham provides also a definite point of intersection with

other movements recorded in the Old Testament which also go back to earlier beginnings, and which look forward to the time of the end. The evil spiritual culture identified in Scripture with Babylon, which first showed itself in apostasy from the knowledge of the One God, Creator and Sustainer of all things, by the building of the city and tower of Babel (the end of which is shown apocalyptically in the book of *Revelation*), had its local manifestation in Abraham's days in Ur of the Chaldees. The political and cultural aspects of that phase of Babylonian life are now disclosed to us by the spade of the excavator, but the Bible is concerned rather with the spiritual significance of that great movement in the human race, a movement which had its origin in pre-Abrahamic days, and which extends beyond these into a remote future; but with which Abraham had significant personal connexions.

The prologue to the Abrahamic covenant was made when the Lord first called Abram (as he then was named) out from Ur of the Chaldees. This severance from the idolatrous polity of Babylonia was the necessary condition to the establishment of the covenant. Apart from this condition, the promises given by God were unconditional. They included a national future in another land, a sphere of influence which should extend over the whole earth, and the assurance that God Himself would maintain the cause of Abraham's race. The precise terms are:

"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee;

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing:

"And I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12: 1-3).

Upon Abraham's obedience God confirmed the gift of the land, saying, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12: 7). And again, "All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Gen. 13: 15). And again, "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it" (Gen. 15: 7). By a covenant sacrifice this deed of gift was formally ratified, and the extent of it expressly defined: "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15: 18).

When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, the Lord again appeared to him, and confirmed the covenant as being irrevocable, adding, however, certain provisions to define the lawful succession. At this point careful emphasis is laid upon the true line of inheritance. A reservation is made, the peculiar blessings attached to the covenant being secured to Isaac and to his heirs

for all time coming. The sustained obedience of Abraham under trial led to a still further ratification of the covenant on God's part and a promise made of worldwide and beneficent rule. "Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22: 17-18). In due time Isaac is born, the heir to the promises. To him, on Abraham's death, the covenant is renewed.

"I will establish the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father;

"And I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these lands; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 26: 3-4).

After him, the question of special succession is still a matter for God's decision: Jacob is elected in preference to his older brother, Esau. To Jacob also a personal renewal of the covenant is given by God:

"I am the LORD, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

"And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, . . . and in thee and in thy seed shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 28: 13-14).

After this the question is dropped—at least as far as inclusion among the covenant people is concerned. The twelve patriarchs all share in the Covenant, and any distinctions made thereafter are economical, and have to do with special offices within the nation.

The foregoing observations indicate how particular a matter God held this principle of continuity to be. By assuming the formal style and title, "I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob," He lays emphasis not only upon the initiation of the covenant under Abraham, but upon its continuance under Isaac and Jacob. Abraham is named, as distinguished from all others throughout the whole earth; but Isaac in a specific manner, in order to mark him, as God's choice, from his half-brother, Ishmael; and Jacob, likewise, to distinguish him from his twin-brother, Esau. Only those who are in direct succession to the heads of the twelve tribes, or who by law have been incorporated into the nation, may share in the privileges of the covenant. This safeguarding of the covenant-privileges for Abraham's true posterity is a meaningless act unless some special importance is attached to the historical continuity of Israel as a nation; unless, indeed, some purpose of God is to be wrought out in this particular field of history.

The active influence of the covenant upon the direction of

Israel's future history was recognized in all the great periods of Jewish nationalism. The Exodus from Egypt is, according to the testimony of Moses, the sequel to the Abrahamic covenant. According to the "testimony" of Moses—for Moses bears witness to this on grounds of objective experience; it is not simply a judgment-value arising out of religious preconceptions. God had actually appeared to him, and that under His covenant Name of "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob" (Ex. 3: 6). This title is used and repeated with punctilious regularity in the proceedings which led up to the Exodus. The initial movement toward the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt is recorded thus:

"And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Ex. 2: 24-25).

So when Moses received his commission at the burning bush, the Lord transacted with him as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and used language which was a direct paraphrase of the terms of the covenant: and Moses was instructed to adhere to the same language in his report to the elders of Israel. Later still, when the issue with Pharaoh was finally joined, God strengthened Moses with the assurance,

"I am Jehovah:

"And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah I was not known to them.

"And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings, wherein they sojourned. . . .

"And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning which I lifted up my hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob: and I will give it you for an heritage: I am JEHOVAH" (Ex. 6: 2-8).

The whole set of circumstances, therefore, surrounding the Exodus from Egypt is intimately connected with, and rises out of, the earlier circumstances surrounding the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

The remembrance of this forms the principal theme of Psalm 105, in which we read,

"O ye seed of Abraham his servant . . . He is the Lord our God . . .

"He hath remembered his covenant for ever . . .

"The covenant which he made with Abraham, and his oath unto Isaac; and confirmed the same unto Jacob . . .

"Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan."

The subsequent history of the chosen nation is then celebrated as the direct outcome of this covenant, and after recounting the deliverance from Egypt and the experiences of Israel in the wilderness, the psalmist concludes with this observation,

"For he remembered his holy word, and Abraham his servant."

The sanctity of the covenant is as remarkable in its preventative as in its operative effects. When Israel sinned in the matter of the golden calf, God withdrew His presence from them; but stood by the pledge which He had made to the patriarchs (Ex. 33: 1-3). When Hazael king of Syria was used to chastise Israel, the Lord would not actually destroy them "because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (II Kings 13: 23). The Captivity also, and the return from Babylon, were controlled by the remembrance of "My covenant with Jacob; and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham," as was foreseen even in Moses' day and referred to in the book of the law (Lev. 26: vv. 42, 44, 45).

The covenant not only determined actual history but also the inner religious faith of the people. The public speeches of Moses, recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, testify to this, as also do his prayers and intercessions. The spiritual experience of the patriarchs themselves was profoundly affected by the covenant promises, which became to them their very life and existence, and without which their faith would have been mere hallucination. This preoccupation with the covenant did not wane in the national consciousness with the passage of time and change of circumstances, but remained a living force, as witness the invocations of Elijah, of Jehoshaphat, of Nehemiah, and the public utterances of such men as king David and the prophet Isaiah. Passing over, however, the numerous occasions when the covenant name of God was invoked as the sanction for what was taking place, we come to the supreme event in Israel's history—the advent of the Messiah.

As with the Exodus, so here in the Incarnation we have a set of circumstances intimately connected with the earlier circumstances surrounding the Abrahamic covenant. But now, in a unique sense, events have gathered themselves up into a single circumstance, which holds together and comprehends all that has gone before. That circumstance is a living Person, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the promises made to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, come into effect, and in a way that no previous fulfilment had covered.

The words of the *Benedictus* and the *Magnificat* draw strength from the consciousness that God had brought to pass what had

been pledged aforetime to Abraham. Mary, in her lofty song of praise, rises above her own wonderful experience, and declares, "He hath holpen Israel his servant, that he might remember mercy.

"(As he spake unto our fathers) Toward Abraham and his seed for ever" (Luke 1: 54-55).

Zacharias also, the father of John the Baptist, prophesies under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and says,

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people,

"And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; . . .

"To show mercy towards our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

"The oath which he sware unto our father Abraham" (Luke 1: 68-74).

A Divine action in history was about to take place, the far beginnings of which were to be traced back to a particular transaction, itself a Divine action in history, in the days of Abraham. The birth of Jesus Christ, the first-born son of Mary, would be in very fact God's remembrance of His holy covenant. For it was within the category of human personality that the covenant was to operate. "In thy seed shall all nations be blessed." From Abraham onwards the heirs of the promise had anticipated a personal incarnation of all that the covenant stood for. The language of John 9: 56, however interpreted, can mean nothing less than that Abraham's faith was concentrated upon Christ, and that in Him Abraham saw the objective of all his hopes. The same expectation on the part of Mary and Zacharias shows how fixed in the minds of true Israelites had remained this principle of historical continuity, especially in relation to the Messianic hope. Because in the *Benedictus* not only is the Abrahamic covenant referred to as the root in history of the Incarnation, but the house of David as the appointed stem through which it derived. "And (He) hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" (Luke 1: 69).

Until now, the performance of the mercy promised by oath to Abraham had been an indefinite far-off event; but now it was near at hand. The special value of Mary's witness, and that of Zacharias, is that the identity of the Messiah was now known. For it had been revealed to them that the first-born son of Mary, miraculously conceived of the Holy Spirit, was indeed the long-awaited Seed of Abraham. The highway of God's purpose from Abraham had reached its destination.

The public speeches of Peter, reported by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, disclose how this conviction dominated apostolic thinking, and gave character to apostolic preaching. The resurrection of Christ—the vital fact commanding the situation—is attributed by Peter to the God of the Abrahamic covenant, for he declares,

"The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Servant Jesus" (Acts 3: 13).

And in making his appeal before the Jews, he bases it upon the covenant relationship of Israel to God, and upon the priority of right which that relationship confers, saying,

"Ye are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

"Unto you first God, having raised up his Servant, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities" (Acts 3: 25-26).

This teaching was opposed by the religious leaders in Jerusalem, who saw in it a reproach upon themselves. Nevertheless, Peter and his associates adhered to this position, and when confronted with the charge of disobedience to constituted authority, replied,

"We must obey God rather than men.

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging him on a tree" (Acts 5: 29-30).

The conflict was concentrated around this central point. For on the part of the Christians the invariable mode of defence, and of attack, was an appeal to Jewish national history—and to the action of God within that history—as the sanction for faith in Christ. Stephen's apology is indicative of general Christian feeling on the matter. Commencing with the call of Abraham to covenant relationship with God, he traces the historical development of the Divine purpose within that covenant up to Christ, and exposes with inescapable logic the significance of the crucifixion as the climax of the movement. His martyr-testimony, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God," confirms the fact of God's mastery of the situation in its final issues, and illustrates with dramatic directness the crucial importance of the resurrection.

Paul's method, too, at least before Jewish audiences, is to root the fact of Christ in the soil of Jewish history, and to lay stress upon the continuous activity of God in that field. In his synagogue sermon at Antioch in Pisidia he makes God the active subject of his statements, the history of Israel the predicate, and the Messianic hope the object of that predicate.

"Ye that fear God, hearken . . .

"The God of this people Israel chose our fathers . . .

"He raised up David . . .

"God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus . . .

"God raised him (Jesus) from the dead . . .

"The promise made unto the fathers . . . God hath fulfilled the same unto our children" (Acts 13: 16-41). Such was the substance and method of apostolic preaching.

Upon this foundation also rests the structure of New Testament doctrine. Again and again, expressly or by implication, this truth is made the basis of some particular teaching, or the sanction for some practical measure. A few typical passages may be quoted by way of proof.

"Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers" (Rom. 15: 8).

"For how many soever be the promises of God, in him is the yea: wherefore also through him is the Amen" (II Cor. 1: 20. Cf. Psalms 72: 17 with Genesis 22: 18).

"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed" (Gal. 3: 8).

"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law . . . that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 13-14).

"If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3: 29).

Sufficient evidence from Scripture has been brought forward to establish the reality of a Divine process in history from Abraham to Christ. We have yet to trace a like continuity of purpose and action from Adam to Abraham, and thus to cover the entire period of Old Testament history from Adam to Christ.

The early chapters of the book of Genesis deal with two divergent streams of human descent from Adam: one, the dynasty of Cain; the other, the dynasty of Seth. The former exhibits material progress in the crafts and arts, but is characterized by moral deterioration and spiritual apostasy. The latter, however, preserves contacts with God's original purpose in creation, and becomes the repository of continued revelations. The inner quality of both generations soon manifests itself. Seth is represented by such men as the righteous-minded Enoch, submissive and trustful Lamech, and by obedient Noah, the

builder of the ark; to all of whom God found it possible to entrust fresh communications of His will. Cain, too, had fit successors in individuals like the violent and revengeful Lamech, the son of Methusael; indeed, so prevalent did his race become that the earth is said to have been filled with violence through them. The character of both races is submitted to the test of a universal deluge, a sifting at once by God of evildoers, and the vindication of the righteous: only the line of Seth survived. Noah and his household came out into a new earth. It is as if the racial stream, after parting into two, had reached a narrow defile in the mountains, through which only one had been able to find exit, the other having plunged underground and out of sight. Thus in Noah is preserved a strict and distinct continuity from the old world into the new, and a true descent, moral and genealogical, from Adam to the immediate ancestry of the patriarch Abraham.

Noah had three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth. By these the earth was populated after the Flood. The genealogies of Genesis chapter 10 give us the racial origins and the early geographical distribution of the nations of the ancient world. Three great racial groups are distinguished therein—the Semitic, the Hamitic, and the Aryan. Noah's prophetic curse and blessing (Genesis 19: 25-27) predicts the future of each; and Shem is singled out for a unique destiny, having spiritual primacy over the other two, and being the vehicle for the fulfilment of God's action in history. The direct line springing from Shem is given in fuller detail than that from Ham or from Japheth, and forms the connecting link between Noah and Abraham.

Has future history vindicated this designation of the line of Shem as the sphere of action for God's world-plan? A host of instances leap to mind, giving a strong affirmative. Through the Semitic race has been transmitted the knowledge of the one true God, Creator and Redeemer. Through the offspring of Shem has been given the Divine Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. From Shem has sprung that favoured people, the Jewish nation, whose supernatural history proclaims their Divine call. From Shem, too, is derived the human ancestry of Him who was born at Bethlehem, the Saviour of the world. In relation to the dominant branch of the Semitic race, moreover, is determined the boundaries and destinies of the nations of the earth (Deuteronomy 32: 8), and even in our day the indestructible Jew is a notable factor in world politics.

The genealogies of Genesis, chapter 10, also contain notices of two events of outstanding importance for the future of mankind: the rise of the kingdom of Babylon; and the scattering of the

peoples (vv. 8-11, 25). Chapter 11 is an important appendix to these notices, interpreting them as a spiritual crisis between God and the race.

The rise of Babylon marks the beginning of a new and powerful influence in human history. The organizing power of Satan creates the beginning of a world system through which he, as its unseen ruler, gains ascendancy over the affairs of man, and diverts to himself the worship and allegiance rightfully due to God. Until now evil had shown itself largely as independent action in individuals; from henceforth it was to be organized as a mass movement. The personality of Nimrod provided the necessary leadership. Of him we read that "he began to be a mighty one in the earth"; that "he was a mighty hunter before the Lord"; that "the beginning of his kingdom was Babel"; and that "out of that land he went forth into Assyria" (Gen. 10: 8-11; *cf.* Micah 5: 6). Paraphrased in modern language, "he strengthened himself to acquire world dominion; to this end he pursued the chase as a preparation for war; he then organized his resources under a central government; and thus ultimately, through violent conquest, extended the territories under his rule." A familiar pattern of things even in our day! Babylon may therefore be designated a spiritual empire of evil, manifesting itself in great world-systems, religious, political and commercial. The historical manifestations may each have its rise and fall (*e.g.* the Dynasty of Nimrod, and that of Nebuchadnezzar), but the dominating force behind them is one. No political kingdom of Babylon may now exist, but the prophetic writings assure us that in the last days the power of Babylon will again develop, and mankind be organized into a final revolt against the authority of heaven.

With the rise of Babylon may be associated the other notable event referred to in Genesis 10, namely, the division of the earth among the nations. This is said to have taken place in the days of Peleg (Gen. 10: 25), four generations removed from Shem, and apparently only one after Nimrod's rise to power. How rapid, it seems, the deterioration! And how short the time since the stern admonition of the Flood! For this division is almost certainly the Divine action described in the subsequent chapter (Gen. 11: 8), and so the immediate fruit of the building of the Tower of Babel. If this be so, it expresses the consequences of a spiritual crisis in the history of man. This crisis revealed the religious foundation upon which the political structure of Babylon was built. The four corner-stones of that foundation were (1) INDEPENDENCE, expressed in human self-sufficiency and freedom from Divine law, a characteristic not absent from our own times.

"Let us make us a name." (2) CONFEDERATION, symbolized by the City and the Tower. Control is thus established, and leads the way to (3) DICTATORSHIP, expressed in the absolute supremacy of one man, as, for instance, Nimrod, Nebuchadnezzar, or the Roman Caesars, and illustrated also in the Papal pretensions of the Roman Church. This, in turn, leads to (4) INTOLERANCE, expressed in military conquest and religious persecution, and in the claim of absolute obedience to the state in things spiritual as in things natural (Dan. 3: 6; Rev. 13: 15-18), so that the blood of all that have been martyred for the truth shall be found in Babylon (Rev. 18: 24).

God, Who discerns ultimate aims (Gen. 11: 7), frustrated man's purpose and disorganized the movement. The dispersion after Babel made further concerted action impossible at that time: in this way internal confusion has broken up all world confederacies. God thus restrains the pride of man until such time as the kingdom of darkness shall have fully manifested itself, and become ripe for judgment (*cf.* Gen. 15: 16; Rev. 14: 15).

This division of the earth was also intimately bound up with the predetermined position of Israel among the nations (Deut. 32: 8). So that this early history of the rise of Babylon has special meaning for Israel. The call of Abraham, the father of the nation, from an important Babylonian civil community emphasizes the inter-action between Babylon as representing the kingdom of darkness and Israel as representing that of God. The rescue of Lot also, Abraham's nephew, from the Babylonian confederacy (Gen. 14: 1), may indicate the spiritual conflict between the people of God and "the rulers of the darkness of this age." The later contacts of Israel with Babylon, particularly that of the seventy years' captivity, still further illustrate how closely set over against each other are the two movements. Israel, as God's nation, had been during her golden age separate from the surrounding nations, though a witness to them. Now, because of her unfaithfulness to God, she became, and still remains despite partial restoration, a captive in the Gentile world-systems. As already indicated, the final phase of Babylon, in the last days, will have peculiar relations to the testimony of Israel among the nations of the earth (Rev. 18: 4).

Here, then, in the book of Genesis we have God's finger laid upon events which were to have an ever-increasing and continuous significance for the future history of mankind, events which had their immediate focus in the person of Abraham and in that covenant made with him by God. Thus Old Testament history, when reviewed in all its parts, has running throughout it a distinct line of continuity; a line of continuity, moreover,

which from beginning to end is dominated by one undeviating Divine purpose, of which the Abrahamic covenant is the operative expression, and the advent of Christ the ultimate objective.

III

THE NOTE OF PROGRESSION IN OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY IS PROGRESSIVE TO CHRIST. EACH successive stage brings forth some divine activity, unparalleled in previous experience, and so requiring new vehicles of praise. When, therefore, we hear the recurrent burst of song from Israel's minstrels, "O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvellous things," we know that it heralds some unique and amazing and hitherto unheard-of happening. The former things are forgotten; a new thing springs forth: who but must declare it? The events celebrated are new, not simply in the sense of having newly occurred—which might mean nothing more than bare repetition—but new in the sense of each being without precedent, new in itself, original. Not of the circumstances of Sinai alone, but of all other milestones in the national history could the words be spoken:

"Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from the one end of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?" (Deut. 4: 32).

For throughout the entire history creative activity breaks in upon the course of events, and situations arise which to human experience are bewilderingly new and different.

Though original and unique, these "mighty acts of the Lord" are not unrelated to each other, the later being fresh developments of the earlier. As it is written, "Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them. Sing unto the Lord a new song" (Isa. 42: 9-10). These "wonderful works of the Lord" are, each and all, part of one preconceived plan, the details of which are hidden from man, but known to God. Acts 15: 18 speaks of "the Lord who maketh these things known from the beginning of the world." There is thus no contradiction between the originality of each new event and the continuity of the whole series, and scope is provided for orderly development and

planned progression. New situations are linked with previous history, but form an advance upon it. In each fresh crisis are disclosed both fulfilment and creative energy.

Over against the Biblical interpretation of history may be set the basic conception of pagan nature-mythologies, namely, the idea of endlessly-recurring cycles of events without any point of departure or arrival, and therefore in their movement without dynamic progression. With such heathen philosophies the revelation of God's action in history has nothing in common. The prophets faced with unflinching opposition all naturalistic world-views, such as those expressed by the cult of Tammuz denounced by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 8: 15-16), represented in later times by such pagan figures as the Scandinavian Baldur. These mythical heroes and goddesses symbolized processes of nature, and in particular the natural cycles of the seasons. Transferred as a thought-form to collective human experience they also express mythologically the rise and decline of successive generations as the ultimate norm of human history. So expressed, history moves onward by a sort of natural necessity in an endless chain of perpetually-repeated events, having no fixed point of beginning, and leading up to no conclusive ending. Human life upon earth becomes a vicious circle from which there is no escape, and man, created in the image of God for the enjoyment of eternity, settles down to a futile natural existence, seeking the fulfilment of life in the ordered changes of the little turn of the wheel in which he finds his earthly existence moving. All deeper hopes of a more satisfying environment for his true being become doomed to perpetual frustration.

In the book of Ecclesiastes we have a reasoned exposition of this naturalistic philosophy, worked out to its logical conclusion. Not that Ecclesiastes is a divinely-authenticated world-view of things! Rather is it a formal presentation of a fallacious creed of life considered on its own principles. The viewpoint under discussion is not endorsed but described. But because justice is done to it, and its supporting facts presented soberly and accurately, we may be assured that the uncompromising attitude of Christian faith to all rival philosophies does not spring from ignorance or prejudice.

The Preacher, assuming the position of natural scepticism, asks in open challenge, "Is there anything whereof it may be said, See, this is new?" "No," he continues, "there is no new thing under the sun. Consider the movement of human history. One generation passes away, another takes its place; nevertheless, the face of things on the earth remains very much the same. The sum total of life now is not very different from what it was in