

CHAPTER VI.

THE KEY OF THE CRITICAL POSITION.

The preceding inquiry has given us so far a general confirmation of the Biblical view, and the conclusion has been reached by taking undisputed documents in their natural sense—But since the modern view claims to rest on a critical examination of the documents, we have to consider what the critical sifting amounts to—Stade's statement of the process that has taken place in the canonisation of books—The historical books; how modified in accordance with later views—Critical appeal to contemporary prophetic writings as a check on the historical—Prophetical books, however, have also to be critically sifted: Stade's account of the case—Examples of the critical adjustment of Amos and Hosea—Striking out, allowing for unhistorical ideas—Want of fixed objective standard of appeal—The first principle of criticism, how stated and how misapplied—The whole controversy, however, turns round the question as to whether the prophets were reformers or originators—Two points eliminated as not in dispute—Still there are three points to be proved before the critical position can be adopted.

“I GREET you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere for such a start.” With these words Emerson extended to Walt Whitman a welcome into the literary world; and in a similar way we must greet the so-called first literary age of Israel. By three distinct lines of inquiry we have examined this age, and from a literary, a religious, and a historical point of view, we conclude that it must

have had "a long foreground somewhere for such a start." We have confined ourselves to such books or portions of books as are placed in this period, and we have found that by a safe inference they lead us back to an anterior time and an antecedent condition of things which, substantially, are those represented in the books which profess to give us a record of those times. The testimony of the writing prophets, Hosea and Amos, to the history, is particularly weighty. When they refer to the past history of the nation, they do so as to a matter well known; and when they give a particular representation of the history, they leave no room for doubt that the consciousness of their contemporaries was with them. Now what does this imply? It implies that the facts and ideas were so wrought into the national mind that there was no need to prove or substantiate them, no thought of gainsaying them. And applying the argument we have employed in regard to the literary and religious features of the books, we conclude that a scheme of history like this was not a sudden product, foisted upon their generation by two individuals. Before it could become, as it clearly had become, the settled belief of the whole nation in any one century, there must have been not merely a set of facts on which it was based, but a process of reflection upon them, a holding of them up by some person or persons before the nation's eyes; or a provision of some kind for keeping them alive in the nation's remembrance. Again, therefore, we are driven back to an antecedent time, during which these traditions took concrete shape, and became, not only recollections of events, but interpretations of them in a religious historical sense. From every point of view, therefore, it appears that the century we

are considering is not merely, or not mainly, the starting-point of a new development, but that, preceding it, there is implied a very considerable stage of culture and a long process of religious reflection and education. All this, of course, is not sufficient to establish the existence or composition of the disputed books at the early period to which they relate. It is enough, however, to show that writings of a historical and religious kind, such as they are, might quite well have been composed before what has been provisionally called the first literary age. Moreover, the testimony afforded by Hosea and Amos, and by writings of their century, amounting, as we contend, to the testimony of the nation itself, will be regarded, by some minds at least, as stronger testimony than that of written compositions, and a sufficient guarantee that the disputed books, which profess to relate the earlier national history, at whatever time they may have been written, rest upon and are in accordance with the same tradition, which we find to be a national possession at the period of the undisputed compositions.

So far as we have gone, then, we seem to get a general confirmation of the Biblical theory. And the conclusion at which we have arrived, whatever may be its value, has not been based upon any of the writings that are said to be late and unhistorical, nor has any attempt been made to strain words beyond their natural sense, or to assume anything that ordinary experience and common-sense do not warrant. According to the modern critical historians, however, the matter is not by any means so simple as this; for the conclusion to which they come, based, as it is claimed, on the same documents critically examined, is very different, as has already been indicated. We must now, therefore, consider somewhat more closely what this

critical sifting of the documents amounts to, and on what principles it is carried out, so as to discover, if possible, what residuum of testimony remains to us as authoritative and trustworthy.

A great part of Wellhausen's *History of Israel* is devoted to what he terms "History of Tradition," in which he goes over the historical books in detail, pointing out how later views have been superimposed on earlier accounts, or made to explain or even originate earlier alleged events. Stade, near the beginning of his history, lays down in a preliminary way, and more explicitly, the grounds for this critical sifting. Canonical writings, he says,¹ are usually affected in only too sensible a manner by the process of canonisation. With every act of canonisation there is inseparably connected a thorough revisal and working over—a final redaction, in fact, of the work canonised. The reason for this is, that a definite final development of thought is only reached after varied mental movement; and those standing at the end of a chain of development and looking back at the process by which it has been reached, assuming that the final form is alone right, will find blanks and contradictions in the writings that have been composed in the course of this development. The final redaction will seek to fill up the blanks and to smooth down the contradictions; and this gives rise to insertions, omissions, and patching up of the original. Even after canonisation has taken place, writings are exposed to defacement in the interest of some party or tendency which has gained the upper hand and possesses the guardianship of the books.

This working over of the materials of tradition, Stade

¹ *Geschichte*, p. 14 f. I give the substance of the passage instead of a literal translation.

proceeds, raises special difficulties, inasmuch as the whole material is subjected to a repeated systematic revision to adapt it to the ideas of each successive period at which revision takes place; and though among other peoples the historical traditions have also been remoulded to suit later ideas, nowhere is the process more energetically carried out than where religious interests come into play; for then it is not merely a case of touching up individual details, but a radical refashioning of the whole material of tradition in harmony with the theological system prevailing at the time.

He then goes on to specify the occasions on which the traditions of Israel were thus revised, and the interests in which they were refashioned. The historical matter, he says, underwent three different revisions. (1.) In the year 621 B.C. was discovered a law-book (the Code of Deuteronomy), which became authoritative, and was made the basis of a reform of worship. This code, which professes to come from Moses, has for its chief requirement that "the place which God should choose" on the west side of the Jordan—viz., Jerusalem—was to be the only authorised seat of sacrificial worship. When once this code had gained recognition and ascendancy, there ensued a process—beginning in the end of the reign of Josiah and lasting on till the first part of the exile—of retouching and working over the whole traditional material, in accordance with what had now become standard and accepted views. For, seeing that all the leaders of the nation up to the year 621 had systematically (and naturally) worshipped contrary to the requirements of the Deuteronomic Code, these men, from the time of David and Solomon onwards, must have seemed, in the eyes of a person brought up under the new ideas, nothing better than half heathen. But this was repugnant to his

religious experience, and so the traditional matter was revised under the ruling ideas: that Israel from the time of Moses had been a sacred community, that Moses was succeeded by Joshua, Joshua by the Judges, and that Saul's reign was a declension from the divinely appointed organisation of the people. (2.) At a later time the law-book found in 621 was joined with other writings, and the whole, through Ezra's labours, made the law-book of the community. The most recent of the works embraced in this collection was the so-called Priestly Code, which gives another and more developed view of the history of Israel; and in accordance with this, again, the earlier history was revised, so as to agree with the conditions of this Code. For as a fully developed ritual, claiming to be of Mosaic origin, was now in force, it was necessary to represent ancient Israel as living also under a similar organisation, divided into twelve tribes, with not only a sacred tribe of Levi, but a family of Aaron with special privileges. And whereas the Deuteronomic law had been content to date the unity of worship from the time of Solomon's Temple, the Priestly Code dated it back to the wilderness, and provided the people with a tabernacle. (3.) Finally, the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles were composed about the year 300 B.C., with the view of exhibiting the whole ancient history in the light of the post-exilian Judaism, and in accordance with the circumstances which arose on the basis of the Priestly Code.

These later revisions of the traditional material, it is to be observed, did not, on the theory, obliterate the older traditions, which are still capable of being discovered by patient criticism. In regard to the last revision, Wellhausen says it is a fortunate matter that "Chronicles did not succeed in superseding the historical books upon which

it was founded; the older and the newer version have been preserved together." ¹ But it is different with the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings. Here "the whole area of tradition has finally been uniformly covered with an alluvial deposit, by which the configuration of the surface has been determined." ² It is the work of criticism to remove this deposit, to get below it to the earlier form of the tradition, and to assign the various deposits to the dates at which they were deposited. In this process, we are told, "it may stand as a general principle that the nearer history is to its origin, the more profane it is." ³ "What is usually given out as the peculiar theocratic element in the history of Israel, is the element which has been introduced by the redaction. . . . This pedantic supranaturalism—'sacred history,' according to the approved recipe—is not to be found in the original accounts. In these Israel is a people just like other people; nor is even his relationship to Jehovah otherwise conceived of than is, for example, that of Moab to Chemosh." ⁴

It will now appear why at the outset, to avoid controversy, we left out of account certain portions of the books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings, since these, it is claimed, have undergone a Deuteronomistic revision, ⁵ and also those parts of the Pentateuch other than the patriarchal stories of the Jehovist, because the Pentateuch is strongly overlaid with additions in the spirit of the Priestly Code. But the question here arises, Is it possible, and if so, by what means, to separate earlier from late, and to de-

¹ *Hist.*, p. 228.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁵ The revision in the spirit of Deuteronomy is usually designated the Deuteronomist, in distinction from the Deuteronomer, or author of the writing found in the Temple.

termine the time at which the later supervened upon the earlier parts in those writings that profess to be history? To this Stade, and those of his way of thinking, answer in effect that the revisers or redactors were not so skilful as to entirely conceal what they worked upon; that sometimes political events enable us to determine at least whether a piece belongs to the northern or southern kingdom, to pre-exilian or post-exilian¹ times, and so forth. But Stade says very truly² that if we are to fix the rise of any disputed writing, we must have a firm point by which to fix it; and the prophetic movement, he adds, furnishes a number of such fixed points. It will be found, in fact, that the whole theory of the rise of the Deuteronomic and Priestly Codes at the periods to which they are respectively assigned, appeals for support in the last resource to the prophetic writings; and so indeed does the whole theory of the development of the history. For in the prophetic writings we have contemporary documents, which give us a direct knowledge of the times to which they belong. They enable us, therefore, to control the so-called historical compositions, and to say what is pre-prophetic and what prophetic, since the whole religious history was powerfully modified by prophetic influence.

Leaving out of view for the present the aids furnished by political events and considerations of general development, we seem, on the admission of the critical writers, to have obtained, in the writings of contemporary prophets, a sure standard by which to estimate the statements of the historical books, and to determine generally the course of the historical development; and so, in the preceding chapters, we have appealed with confidence to the books

¹ Wellhausen, *Hist. of Israel*, p. 13.

² *Geschichte*, i. p. 19.

of Hosea and Amos. Another complication of the matter, however, occurs here; for this fixed standard, it appears, is only to be accepted with reservation. The prophetic writings also, in becoming "canonical," have passed through vicissitudes similar to those of the historical books. This is what Stade has to say on the subject:¹—

"We must, indeed, in using the prophetic literature, always keep before us the fact that the judgments found therein regarding historical persons and circumstances are passed from a party point of view. Since, however, we are able to survey the prophetic activity as a movement running in a straight line, and fully completed, the points of view are sufficiently known to us from which the treatment of the history was regarded by the prophets, and we are thus in a position to control and correct their judgments. Moreover, it is to be noted that a writer who does not set himself, *ex professo*, to write history according to definite guiding principles, but only touches on historical matters by the way in the unfolding of his thoughts, will never allow his ideas to have such a moulding influence on the historical material as a historian who proceeds upon such principles. He will probably view persons and circumstances at an oblique visual angle, and, just for that reason, will not judge correctly. He will, however, hardly go so far as to draw generally the conclusions from his own ideas, and consequently will communicate sufficiently accurate details, by which we can correct those that are inaccurate.

"In the employment of the prophetic literature there is still a second point to be well noted, which is generally overlooked. The development of prophecy, whose literary products lie before us in the Old Testament, is only development in one straight line. But the development of human thought [as explained in connection with the historical writings] is not in the habit of moving in this one-sided way. Then we have besides, in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, sufficient indications pointing to the conclusion that the development of the Old Testament prophecy was once a much richer and more manifold thing. The false prophets who were combated by the authors of the prophetic writings that have

¹ Geschichte, i. p. 80 ff.

come down to us, are representatives of divergent prophetical tendencies. They also wrote prophetical works. It is self-evident, however, that only the works of such prophets have been handed down as lie in the direction of the prophetic ideas which gained the victory and came to be universally received. One of the things that mainly determined this result was the circumstance whether or not the prophecies of a prophet had been fulfilled. From those prophets, who, in opposition to Jeremiah, prophesied the victory of the Judæan state over Babylon, not a single work, as a matter of course, has come down to us. When, however, it was a question of receiving or not receiving a prophetic piece into the canon, it was not always so simple a matter for a work to prove that it belonged to a certain mode of thought; and accordingly, just when the collection of the writings of the prophets was made, there must have taken place a very special and thorough overworking of the material handed down, with regard to the points of view explained already [in connection with the canonisation of historical writings], and by means of the expedients already described."

We cannot enter into all the questions here raised as to what happened to books in the process of canonisation. It is quite apparent that what is assumed to have taken place is something very different from the events incident in the ordinary transmission of ancient books. These sweeping assertions, however, are of no value unless supported by positive proof; and it could be shown that the graver portion of them is entirely destitute of historical foundation.¹ The struggle between opposing tendencies, so far as it did take place, lies before us quite patent in the Biblical writings; nor is there the shadow of proof that any attempt was made in these writings to suppress one side of it; and the genuineness of the writings before us is not to be settled by such *a priori* canons. But the thoughtful reader will ask at this point, Where now is the fixed standard of appeal? If prophetical writers wrote under a bias, which must be allowed for and

¹ See König's Hauptprobleme, pp. 12 ff., and his Falsche Extreme, p. 3.

corrected; if their writings have not come down to us in their original form, and require to be critically adjusted; or if the prophets even held erroneous views in regard to the national history, which have to be rectified,—who holds the infallible standard for determining all the grave and difficult questions which then arise? The answer will perhaps appear as we now proceed to observe the application of the critical canons to the two books of Hosea and Amos on which we have hitherto relied. We have already seen¹ that, by both these prophets, a certain pre-eminence is given to the house of David and the southern kingdom of Judah. The modern theory, however, maintains that it was at a much later time that this pre-eminence was assigned to Judah, and that in the early prophetic period the balance of power lay in the northern kingdom. Accordingly, Stade proceeds to strike out of Amos as “insertions” certain expressions (among others²) that are at variance with his theory. The most important in this connection are the two verses 4 and 5 of chapter ii., containing the prophet’s denunciation of the sin of Judah, “because they have despised the law of the Lord, and not kept His commandments.” It may suit Stade and others to regard this as an “insertion,” but it is important to observe that if the verses are omitted, there would be a singular incompleteness of the whole passage, chapters i., ii., in which Amos makes a survey of the neighbouring nations on every side, ending with Israel, to which he directly addressed his words. The omission altogether of Judah from the

¹ Chap. v. p. 111.

² Stade, *Geschichte*, i. p. 571, footnote. Besides the passage, ii. 4, 5, considered in the text, the other portions rejected by Stade are, iv. 13 (partly), v. 8 f., ix. 6. Reference will be made to these in another place.

survey, therefore, would be unaccountable on the mere ground of literary form, to say nothing further in the meantime of the substance. The book of Hosea fares no better at the hands of the critics. It is part of their theory that those passages in the historical books which express disapproval of the monarchy, as inconsistent with the divinely organised theocracy, are due to the Deuteronomistic revision. Since, therefore, Hosea (more than a century before the discovery of the Deuteronomic Code) is found to speak in that sense, the passages must be removed. Stade says:¹ "Since this prophet's expectations of the future, owing to his peculiar representation of the monarchy, differed in cardinal points from the type of view of the future that came to prevail with Isaiah, an attempt has been made at a later time to get over the difficulty by the insertion of the missing details." Consequently we are told to strike out i. 7, ii. 1-3, which break the connection and disturb the order of thought; and also in iii. 5 we are to omit at least the words "and David their king," as well as iv. 15, viii. 14, which refer to Judah.² Wellhausen also perceives the difficulties that emerge here, and has a similar method of laying them.

¹ *Geschichte*, i. p. 577, footnote.

² The passages in question are these:—

Hosea i. 7: "But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, nor by horses, nor by horsemen."

ii. 1-3 (*viz.*, in A. V. i. 10 f.): "Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered: and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel. Say unto your brethren, Ammi; and to your sisters, Ruhamah."

iii. 5: "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the

He confesses that Hosea "appears to have regarded the kingdom as such as an evil; in more than one expression he makes it the antithesis of the rule of Jehovah."¹ And having given what he considers the explanation of this, he says in a footnote: "He even speaks with favour of David and the kingdom of Judah, but I consider all such referenees in Hosea (as well as in Amos) to be interpolations. In i. 7 there is a reference to the deliverance of Jerusalem under Hezekiah."

The process of "striking out," however, does not meet the whole difficulty. The teaching of Hosea and Amos on important points is so ingrained in the whole books that it cannot be evaded. Accordingly, another line of explanation has to be followed. Stade says:² "Hosea is the first who conceives the whole of the past from the point of view of a declension (*Abfall*), and his opinion in regard to the monarchy is but a part of this general view. And just as his ideas of the intercourse of Israel with foreign nations had, along with other things, a material influence on the later Jewish ideas regarding the heathen, so also his use of the argument from history, in order to prove to the people their deviation from the requirements of Jehovah and their declension, prepared the way for the unhistorical view that came to be taken of the past, and the treatment of it in the light of later religious conceptions. That view, which took Israel's history as a sacred history under a process

Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter day."

iv. 15: "Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend."

viii. 14: "For Israel hath forgotten his Maker, and buildeth temples; and Judah hath multiplied fenced cities."

¹ Hist. of Israel, p. 417.

² Geschichte, i. p. 582.

of throwing a light of its own on the actual circumstances, did not indeed take its beginning from him, but received from him its strongest impulse." ¹

The position in which we are now placed is this. The modern historians have refused to call the books of the Pentateuch as evidence; they have eliminated those "summaries" of the history which are overlaid on the historical books; they triumphantly appeal to contemporary witnesses; and we have accepted them. And then, when their own witnesses step into the box, and are expected to bless the modern theory, they curse it altogether. And this by no forced cross-examination on the part of those who were to be confuted by them, but by spontaneous straightforward statements; and forthwith those who called them proceed to tell us that the evidence is to be taken with reservation. For later additions have been made to the testimony, and these must be removed before we can get the true statement of the case. Nay, these prophets themselves, even when we get at their own words, are not to be relied on for matters of fact when they tell us that other teachers taught the same truth before them, nor for their statements of history when they declare that their nation had been taught a better religion and had declined from it. The question again recurs, Where now is the fixed point and firm standard by which we are to reach the truth? The historical books are to be corrected by the aid of the prophetic; but where is the standard for correcting the

¹ Stade is not by any means alone in discrediting the views of the prophets. Smend, in an article in 'Studien und Kritiken' for 1876 on the stage of development in the Israelite religion presupposed by the prophets of the eighth century, speaks in a similar strain. He is criticised by König, *Offenbarungsbegriff*, vol. i. p. 23 f.

prophetical books? On what authority are these "insertions" to be removed; by what guide are we to adjust the prophetic misapprehensions? The only "fixed" thing perceivable is the theory itself; the only standard is "strike out" or "I consider." For the rest, what may be called by admirers a delicate process of criticism may appear to others uncommonly like a piece of literary thimblerrigging. You come upon the critic suddenly when he professes to be engaged in one of those delicate processes of criticism, and you find him slipping his subjective scale up his sleeve. The passages which disturb a pet theory are declared to disturb the connection. We have, in fact, *no* contemporary reliable documents till the critic has adjusted them; and the theory ultimately is appealed to in confirmation of itself.

Looking to the assumptions made by Stade as to what has happened to historical and prophetical books before and during canonisation, the difficulty of getting beneath the documents to the precise facts of the history will appear to most minds stupendous; and looking to the absence of fixity in the standard of judgment, one cannot help wondering at, if not admiring, the confidence with which critics set to work on the task. One,¹ for example, tells us that "it is not needful in starting to lay down any fixed rules of procedure. The ordinary laws of evidence and good sense must be our guides. And these we must apply to the Bible just as we should do to any other ancient book. That is the only principle we have to lay down. And it is plainly a just principle." So undoubtedly it is, if only all were agreed as to what "the ordinary laws of evidence and good sense" amount

¹ Robertson Smith, *the Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, Lect. i. p. 25.

to. Another¹ of a more daring temperament, after giving his own sketch of a part of the history, which differs *toto cœlo* from that of the Biblical books, says, "The sketch which we have given can be extracted from our sources without too much trouble. In order to disengage the encumbrances (*surcharges*) which the theological point of view of the redactor has introduced into them, all that is wanted (*il suffit*) is a little practice and some decision." Some! Critics, indeed, profess to proceed upon a principle which, properly taken, is the basis of historical inquiry—viz., "that every book bears the stamp of the time and circumstances in which it was produced."² But in the exercise of this principle many of them set to work after the manner of a schoolboy, who, finding that his new knife can cut a stick, employs it in barking fruit-trees and hacking furniture. In order to determine an author's time, expressions will be seized upon which might refer to any time; or, his time being determined, his position in it and even his relation to it will be circumscribed by our meagre knowledge of what the time and circumstances were. The most lofty poetry may be degraded into the dullest prose; critics, "unable to follow prophecy in its flight, clip its wings;"³ and because, forsooth, a prophet is to be regarded as speaking to his own age, he must not be allowed to see anything beyond it. Properly speaking, the first principle of criticism is that every book bears the stamp of the man that produced it; and it is from the book that we are to know the man. It is not

¹ Maurice Vernes, *Résultats*, p. 26.

² Old Testament in Jewish Church, Lect. i. p. 23.

³ So Delitzsch speaks of men of the type of Grotius, a type not by any means extinct.—Comm. on Isaiah, last Eng. ed., vol. i. p. 41.

legitimate to determine beforehand both his time and his circumstances, and then to interpret the whole book in the light of the position we have assigned to the writer. It is no doubt true that every man belongs to his age, and is to a certain extent a product of it. But are there not men who mould their age? Are there not men in advance of their age? Are not the *circumstances* under which an author writes partly the influences of a past time, and partly also the adumbrations of a coming time? In a word, to tie a writer down to the circumstances and surroundings of his day is utterly unscientific and opposed to experience. To treat Hebrew prophets, of all men, in this way, is simply to lay down an insurmountable barrier to our understanding them.

Of the critical pretension to be able to determine dates of passages by occult references, we have just seen an example in Wellhausen's confident assertion that Hosea i. 7 must be as late as the time of Hezekiah. It is an example as good as many of those with which his pages are thickly strewn. Different readers will estimate differently the ability which they display. I confess that many of them do not, to my mind, exhibit even "such a display of ingenuity as makes people clap their hands and cry *well done!* but does not seriously persuade them."¹ If they were merely the occasional coruscations of the critical wit, serving to enliven the dull pages, they might be borne with. But they are, in fact, advanced with a gravity which at times makes the reader doubt his own sanity, and given forth as the results of critical science, out of which a new history is to be constructed.

We come back, however, to the essential point. The

¹ Matthew Arnold, *God and the Bible*, chap. v. § 1. The whole section is well worth reading in our connection.

key of the position is the view that is taken of the teaching of the prophets; and at this point the two theories are quite opposed. The Biblical theory represents the prophets as continuators, reformers, recalling their people to a standard of religion from which they had fallen. The modern critical historians place a wide gulf between the pre-prophetic and the prophetic religion, the general position being that the pre-prophetic religion of Israel differed little, if in anything, from the religion of the nations who lived round about Israel. "The religion of David and Solomon," says Renan,¹ "did not differ appreciably from that of the neighbouring peoples of Palestine." Jahaveh, as others put it, was to the Israelites very much what Chemosh and Moloch were to the Moabites and Ammonites.² So far from appearing among the Canaanites with distinctive religious beliefs and customs, they resembled them in all essential points, settled quietly among them in many or in most cases, and finding their ideas conform to their own, adopted their sacred places, attaching to them stories of their own tribal heroes, but observing the religious customs and worship of their neighbours.

This is what Stade says:³—

"That the religion of Israel, from being a nature religion, became a religion of the spirit; that such a religion arose in the ancient world is, in the first place, the merit of the prophetic movement, and in the second place, the result of the political fortunes of the people. The prophetic movement had to wage violent conflicts with the popular religion."

And Wellhausen,⁴ after remarking that the prophets,

¹ Pref. to second vol. of *Histoire d'Israel*, p. ii.

² Stade, *Geschichte*, i. p. 429.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴ *Hist. of Israel*, p. 461.

who first appeared as a novel phenomenon some time before the beginning of the Philistine war, had in the interval (ending with Ahab) become so naturalised that they had a recognised and essential place in connection with the religion of Jehovah, goes on to say:—

“First-rate importance on the whole cannot be claimed for the Nebiim, but occasionally there arose amongst them a man in whom the spirit which was cultivated within their circles may be said to have risen to the explosive pitch;” and “the prototype of this class of exceptional prophets, whom we not unjustly have been accustomed to regard as the true, is Elijah of Thisbe, the contemporary of Ahab. To him first,” Wellhausen proceeds,¹ “was it revealed that we have not, in the various departments of nature, a variety of forces worthy of our worship, but that there exists over all but one Holy One and one Mighty One, who reveals Himself not in nature, but in law and righteousness in the world of man.”

Passing on to Amos, we are told²—

“Amos was the founder and the purest type of a new phase of prophecy. The impending conflict of Asshur with Jehovah and Israel, the ultimate downfall of Israel, is its theme.”

Again:³—

“The canonical prophets, the series of whom begins with Amos, were separated by an essential distinction from the class which had preceded them, and which still continued to be the type of the common prophet. They did not seek to kindle either the enthusiasm or the fanaticism of the multitude; they swam not with but against the stream. They were not patriotic, at least in the ordinary sense of that word; they prophesied not good but evil for their people (Jer. xxviii. 8). Until their time the nation had sprung up out of the conception of Jehovah; now the conception of Jehovah was casting the nation into the shade. The natural bond between the two was severed, and the relation was henceforward viewed as conditional. As God of the righteousness which is the law of the whole universe, Jehovah could be Israel’s God only in so far as in

¹ Hist. of Israel, p. 462.

² Ibid., p. 472.

³ Ibid., p. 473.

Israel the right was recognised and followed. The ethical element destroyed the national character of the old religion. It still addressed itself, to be sure, more to the nation and to society at large than to the individual; it insisted less upon a pure heart than upon righteous institutions; but nevertheless the first step towards universalism had been accomplished, towards at once the general diffusion and the individualisation of religion. Thus, although the prophets were far from originating a new conception of God, they none the less were the founders of what has been called 'ethical monotheism.' But with them this ethical monotheism was no product of the 'self-evolution of dogma,' but a progressive step which had been called forth simply by the course of events."

We shall have occasion to consider at length in the sequel the various positions here assumed. In the meantime particular attention must be called to this iteration of "Amos was the first to" say this or that, "Hosea first perceived" this and the other thing, or "to Elijah was first revealed" something else. So Wellhausen says in another connection: ¹ "It was Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah who introduced the movement against the old popular worship of the high places; in doing so they are not in the least actuated by a deep-rooted preference for the temple of Jerusalem, but by ethical motives, which manifest themselves in them for the first time in history, and which we can see springing up in them before our very eyes." If these statements are allowed to go unchallenged, they amount to practically the begging of the whole question—for the very thing we want to prove is whether or not there was antecedent teaching such as that of these men. But the statements are utterly unwarranted by any facts at our disposal.

It would be a hazardous thing to say of any writer in whose works we first come upon the enunciation of a truth, that he was the very first to grasp it. And in

¹ Hist. of Israel, p. 47.

regard to Amos and Hosea all that we can admit in the meantime is, that these are the two who furnish us the earliest undisputed contemporary writings. But even if they are the *first* to hold the views ascribed to them, is it necessary to conclude that they were mistaken when they refer to the historical development of the religion? This is the view we have seen Stade takes of Hosea—viz., that he was wrong in declaring that Israel had declined from the true religion; and that he thus prepared the way for the unhistorical theocratic view which came to prevail. And yet is not this just one of the points on which we ought to take the true prophet to be a safe guide and a skilful interpreter? The polemic of the prophets, says Wellhausen,¹ “is a purely prophetic one—*i.e.*, individual, ‘theopneust,’ in the sense that it is independent of all traditional and pre-conceived human opinions;” and Robertson Smith² says, “The possession of a single thought about Jehovah, not derived from current religious teaching, but springing up in a soul as a word from Jehovah Himself, is enough to constitute a prophet, and lay on him the duty of speaking to Israel what he has learned of Israel’s God.” Now it is undoubted that to the prophets Israel’s God was closely connected with Israel’s national life; it was “God in history,” not God in His essence, that was the subject of their study, the theme of their teaching. And if, on their own proper theme, in their own prophetic sphere, they are wrong, in what respect, we may ask, are they true prophets at all?

Supposing still, however, that these prophets “were the first” to teach as they did, let us consider the situation that arises. What we would have to believe is that,

¹ *Hist. of Israel*, p. 48.

² *Prophets*, p. 182.

whereas, as Wellhausen¹ expresses the matter, the nation had up to the time of Hosea been the ideal of the religion in actual realisation, and the people at large had no feeling that they were doing anything inconsistent with the principles of the national religion, this prophet now confronted them with a new ideal, and taught them that their present religious position was a declension from an earlier one. Now it is conceivable that a view taken up by Hosea or Amos might afterwards become the basis of an unhistorical conception; it is conceivable that Hosea or Amos may have given hints of past events or personages that were afterwards expanded into so-called history. But I doubt very much whether the ideas of a whole generation as to its own past history are thus produced by the *new* teaching of one or two men. For if the view originated with Hosea, and gained acceptance straightway on his word, we have to suppose that this one man not only introduced a new conception of the whole of the past history, but obliterated from the consciousness another conception of it which had previously existed. If language has any meaning at all, the hearers of Hosea were at one with him as regards the facts of the history and their significance, however degenerate they were in practice. In the line of prophets that follow Hosea, we see no indication of the gradual acceptance of his view, which must have taken place if it was new. His view is that of all the prophets. The position, in fact, is entirely forced and unnatural, and shows simply the shifts to which one is reduced in pushing his theory through at all hazards. Moreover, we are not so anxious in the meantime to know the influence of Hosea's views on succeeding times, as to know the origin of Hosea's own

¹ Hist. of Israel, p. 491.

views; and as to this, the vital point, we get no information. Modern writers demand development; but we have now found and shall always find that when it comes to a vital point like this, their development breaks down: whereas the Biblical writers set before us a development which, at all events, in this case is comprehensible, and, taken in connection with the explicit declarations of the prophets before us, answers the conditions of the present problem. For it is to be observed that Hosea does not deal in generalities in stating his view. It might have been supposed that, like other moralists, he was a *laudator temporis acti*, and being of a melancholy spirit, dwelt on the "good old times" that were gone. But this is not the case. He does indeed speak of the early love of Jahaveh's bride for her Husband, and he does blame the people of his age for falling very low; but he lays his finger on certain positive sins in their past history, and indicates definite places in which their sin had been most flagrant¹—a proof that he was not talking at large or inventing past history—a proof that the conscience of the nation could not gainsay what was laid to its charge.

And now, before examining in detail the fundamental points in dispute, let us eliminate the elements of the problem in regard to which there is no controversy.

1. In the first place, it is not denied that the prophets waged war against the popular religion and worship. The prophets themselves tell us so, and the historical books no less distinctly. The question simply is, Was the popular religion with which they were in conflict the only accepted and recognised religion of the nation up to their time, or was it a declension from it and perversion of

¹ See Hosea iv. 15 ff.; ix. 10, 15; x. 5; xiii. 1.

it? The modern school leaves it to be inferred that it was the religion of Mosaism; and Duhm seems to say as much when he declares¹ that the prophetic consciousness was at variance with the Jahaveh religion as it was represented at the Temple of Solomon; and Wellhausen also, when he says:² "In old times the nation had been the ideal of religion in actual realisation: the prophets confronted the nation with an ideal to which it did not correspond." So far as the attitude of the prophets to the mere externals of religion is concerned, we shall have to speak at length by-and-by. In the meantime, we insist upon the recognition of a religion altogether distinct from the popular conceptions and the popular abuses which the prophets condemned. And the more sober-minded writers of the critical school do not deny this. Reuss, for example, says:³ "We are persuaded that the essential elements of the collective view of the prophets are older than our oldest witnesses." So Smend says:⁴ "Clearly there were fundamental views of religion which the people had in common with the prophets." It is difficult to understand how any other view of the matter could be entertained in the face of the two facts, (1) that the prophets themselves ever appeal to the conscience of the people in attestation of the truths which they deliver; and (2) that the people in Elijah's days, for example, should have recognised the force of the appeal so readily and universally, and acted upon it so energetically. From the beginning to the end there cannot be found a passage in which a prophet speaks as if he were uttering a new or strange truth, and there are many expressions plainly implying that they were simply enforcing what they and their

¹ *Theol. d. Propheten*, p. 10 ff. Cf. p. 53.

² *Hist. of Israel*, p. 491.

³ *Geschichte*, p. 316.

⁴ *Theol. Stud. u. Krit.*, 1876, pp. 599-664.

hearers accepted as undisputed and indisputable. This is a feature of the prophetic teaching to which the modern theory does not give sufficient weight. It is quite characteristic. If we compare, for example, the claims of Mohammed on the attention of his countrymen, we find that he indeed appeals to antecedent teachers who had taught the same truth, but he insists upon it that *now*, in his person, there was a special promulgation of the truth to the people of Arabia. Nay, the Gospel itself claims to rest upon Old Testament revelation; yet the Founder of Christianity spoke with authority, setting his "I say unto you" over against the commands of the men of old time; and St Paul contrasts the time of Gospel revelation with the antecedent times of ignorance. The Old Testament prophets, however, give us no hint that they have got a clearer or more precise message to their times than had been given of old time. On the contrary, they describe their own times as degenerate and apostate, and no one dares to contradict them. The consensus of the whole "goodly fellowship" of the prophets on this point should not be lightly passed over.

As to the existence of an ideal religion side by side with an actual one, the experience of the world has proved but too clearly that the practices of a people, or their ordinary conceptions in any given epoch, are not to be confounded with the principles of the faith which they profess. Religious belief and religious practice, indeed, so react upon one another, and practice, as experience shows, is so strong, that it would be vain to search for a people at any time exhibiting a *pure* faith in the proper sense of the expression. We need not expect to find in ancient Israel a faith untarnished by superstition or free from the limitations of ignorance. It is both un-

scientific and unscriptural to look in the Old Testament for either a theology or a religious life which was *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*. But it is surely easy enough to distinguish between hindrances or corruptions and purity of germ. What the prophets themselves plainly represent is, that there had been made known to their people of old time a better faith and a purer worship than those of the heathen nations, or of their own degenerate people; and in testimony of this, they think it sufficient to appeal to the consciences of their hearers.¹

At the same time, we must recognise to the full what was the actual condition of the popular religion. The Biblical writers do not conceal this from us, but prophet and historian alike dwell upon it as evidence of the national defection. In the first place, they admit that the ancestors of Israel were idol-worshippers, when they say that the fathers of the patriarchs "beyond the river" Euphrates served other gods, and claim for Abraham a special knowledge of the true God. Then history and experience alike go to show that the sojourn in Egypt had a deteriorating influence on the old patriarchal faith, and finally, the position of the people in the midst of the idolatrous nations of Canaan and surrounding lands is ever to be kept in view in estimating the complex product of religious life at the time at which we have undoubted contemporary accounts. When we remember how long it takes for pure religious conceptions to work themselves into the practical recognition of a nation, how isolated Israel was in its days of independence among surrounding nations, and above all, how much tendency there is in human nature—as witness the course of

¹ Cf. also Micah vi. 4, Jer. vii. 26, Isa. lxiii. 11, Mal. iv. 4. Cf. König, Offenbarungsbegriff des Alten Testaments, vol. i. p. 57.

ecclesiastical history—by the imperfection of language for one thing, and by the infirmity of human nature above all, to run down to practical heathenism; and how superstitious ideas and superstitious practices survive even when there is no external inciting motive,—we need not wonder at the low ideas which prevailed among the common people in the days of Amos and Hosea and much later, or at the tenacity with which superstition kept its hold long after the purest-minded of the prophets had delivered their message. The thing we do wonder at is, how a succession of prophets kept so far above the level of the ordinary conceptions, and the wonder does not cease but takes a new phase when we come back to the only true explanation—viz., that this nation, so perverse and yet so highly favoured, had been at an earlier time the recipient of a higher truth, up to whose level the best of the nation strove to keep their contemporaries.

2. Nor need it be disputed that there was an advance in the prophets' own conceptions of religion. In maintaining that there was a national religion made known to Israel and preserved by the prophets, apart from the mere popular conceptions, we are not to be held as maintaining that some complete scheme of theology was in their hands, from which there was no possibility of advance. The writings of the prophets are before us to refute such an idea, should it be entertained. The days are past when it was thought admissible, in arguing a theological point, to cite texts promiscuously from any of the books of Scripture, because all were inspired; and to handle the Bible as if it were a code or encyclopædia of theological doctrines. Nor need we expect the religion taught by the prophets to be a philosophical or theological system. The truth which the prophets

taught was in themselves a germinating influence, and whether by the events occurring on the political stage, or by their own God-guided reflections, or by the condition of the men among whom they lived and moved, they rose from a lower to a higher stage of spiritual perception. The works of the writing prophets which lie before us show a variety in each writer's conception of Jahaveh's character and of His relation to Israel and the world at large. Amos dwells particularly on the attribute of righteousness; Hosea's favourite mode of viewing God is from the side of love; while Isaiah represents Him as the exalted one, the sovereign ruler. But we are never safe in making any individual writer the exponent of any single conception—as many are inclined to do. The various views of the prophets are not so much stages in an orderly progression, as different aspects of one truth which, from personal temperament or from the nature of his surroundings, each prophet was led to emphasise, although each one gives indications more or less explicit that other aspects of it are not ignored by him. We may not indeed observe a strict advance from attribute to attribute in the case of each succeeding writer, yet there is on the whole an advance in the one grand conception as the periods succeed one another, till at a certain late stage we can note a marked difference as compared with the earlier. The ideas of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for example, are a clear advance upon the more general truths taught by Amos; but there is no inconsistency between them—there is simply the advance in spiritual perception. Later prophets have a wider idea of the world, but they have the same idea of the relation of God to it. To the mind of all the prophets and Old Testament writers, the

“nation is the unit of organisation and life. Even the new covenant of Jeremiah is made with the people; though it operates first upon individuals, it is in order to gather them into a people.”¹ What is maintained is, that the point from which the very earliest prophets start is not the low platform of nature religion, or even the narrow ground of simple national religion, but one infinitely higher, and one reached by an antecedent development which the modern school will insist on placing farther down in history—in other words, that from the first the idea is moral or ethical and not naturalistic. That the prophets should have attained purer and more spiritual conceptions of Jahaveh as time went on and events taught them, it is but reasonable to suppose; though here, as elsewhere, we must beware of putting that first in order of time which appears most elementary in conception: for all prophets had not the same insight; and it might be given to one at a comparatively early period to catch glimpses of a truth which men of a succeeding age hardly perceived. The post-exilian prophets, for example, do not seem on the whole to have ever reached the height attained by Isaiah and Jeremiah, although they enjoyed the advantage of having their prophecies to instruct them. Even the prophecies of Balaam are in one respect more advanced than those of the second half of the book of Isaiah; for in the latter there is a constant polemic against the gods of the heathen, whereas in the former the unique character of Jahaveh is boldly asserted. It was by political events and the fate of the nation generally that the best spirits were educated into more spiritual truths, and the progress of the evolution or revelation of divine truth was controlled, as always, by provi-

¹ A. B. Davidson, in *Expositor*, third series, vol. v. p. 177.

dential circumstances; but the truth to be developed was already there.

These two points being admitted, however, there still remains for the new theory the difficulty of explaining the prophetic ideas apart from an antecedent revelation of them to the nation. The modern historians, in their negation of a pure *pre-prophetic* religion, are ever faced with the task of explaining the rise of pure *prophetic* religion. They do not allow themselves a sufficient starting-point for the development; for the prophetic religion, when we meet it, is not of a germinal or elementary character. They are forced to make sudden transitions and assume such extraordinary changes, as invest the theory with difficulties much greater than those attending the Biblical view.

I confess that it is extremely difficult for me, not only to believe the position that is taken up, but even to apprehend it as a possibility. That Israel, with nothing distinctively peculiar to start with beyond the bare belief that Jahaveh was their only national God, should have adopted and absorbed elements the most diverse, and still have remained Israel; that the elements absorbed should have been the most distinctively heathenish and low, and yet that the result of it all was not an eclecticism, but a product *sui generis*; and that all the time this transmutation was going on, a body of men, whose official basis rested on heathenism, should have lashed their countrymen with invective and threatening for forsaking the religion of their fathers,—all this is to me as great a psychological and moral miracle as any of the miracles recorded in Scripture. Before we can accept it as a true account of Israel's religious development, we must be satisfied on three points.

First, It must be shown by clear proofs that before the time of the writing prophets the religious beliefs and observances of Israel were on the same level as those of their neighbours, and that this state of things was accepted by the enlightened men of the time as the normal and authorised religion.

Second, Some differentiating element must be pointed out sufficient to explain the fact that Israel remained Israel all this time. In other words, a national religion sufficient to mark off the people as a nation must be exhibited.

Third, The process of development must be pointed out in the historical stadia, through which, from the rudimentary stage, Israel arrived at the "ethic monotheism" of the prophets.

The chapters that follow will be devoted to a consideration of these points. In chapters vii. to x. the main points relied upon to prove the low tone of pre-prophetic religion will be discussed. Chapter xi. will treat of the Jahaveh religion; and in chapter xii. we shall consider in what way it is alleged the pre-prophetic passed into the prophetic, and Israel arrived at the ethic monotheism of the prophets.