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ARCHAEOLOGICAL VERIFICATION OF BIBLE RECORDS.

CERTAIN findings of the higher criticism are assailed in a volume from the pen of the Oxford professor, A. H. Sayce, on "Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies." In this volume the author marshals the facts of recent archaeological discovery, and points out their bearings upon the conclusions of Old Testament critics. So high a value does he place upon the character of his evidence as to lead him to affirm that "the more archaeological and the less philological our evidence is, the greater will be its claim to scientific authority." The reason for this claim is given as follows:

"For purposes of history, philology can be only accidentally of service, so far as it throws light on the meaning of a literary record, or assists in the decipherment of an ancient inscription. It is the linguistic sense of the record, and not the history it embodies or the historical facts to be drawn from it, with which alone philology is properly concerned. We must not go in for dates or for the history of the development of civilization and culture.

"Still less can we look for help to what has been called 'literary tact.' 'Literary tact' is but another name for a purely subjective impression, and the subjective impressions of a modern European in regard to ancient Oriental history are not likely to be of value. It is quite certain that an ancient Oriental author would not have written as we should write, or as we should have expected him to write; and, consequently, the very fact that an ancient Oriental document does not conform to our modern canons of criticism is an argument in favor of its genuineness....So far as the historical side of the question is concerned, the philologist, pure and simple, is ruled out of court. [R3443 : page 311] It is the archaeological evidence of

Egyptology and Assyriology, and not the philological evidence, which can alone be applied to the settlement of historical disputes."

One of the first strongholds of the philological critic assailed by archaeologists was the assumption, current for more than half a century after the publication of Wolf's "Prolegomena," concerning the late use of writing for literary purposes. But the clay tablets found at Tel-el-Amarna, says Dr. Sayce, establish that:

"The Mosaic age, instead of being an illiterate one, was an age of high literary activity and education throughout the civilized East. Not only was there a widespread literary culture in both Egypt and Babylonia which had its roots in a remote past, but this culture was shared by Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, and more specially by Syria and Palestine."

Furthermore:

"Moses not only could have written the Pentateuch, but it would have been little short of a miracle had he not been a scribe....Egypt, where the Israelites dwelt so long and from which they fled, was a land of writing and literature, and the Canaan which they invaded was even more so, for here three literary cultures met, as it were, together – the culture and script of Egypt, the culture and script of Babylonia, and the culture and script of the Philistines from Crete."

Another discovery, that of the Babylonian code of Khammurabi, has overruled the denial of the critical school that a legal code was possible before the period of the Jewish kings. The position which the archaeological critic is enabled to take is that "the Mosaic code must belong to the age to which tradition assigns it, and presupposes the historical conditions which the Biblical narrative describes. Not only has the code of Khammurabi proved that the legislation [R3444 : page 311] of Moses was possible, it has also shown that the social and political circumstances under which it claims to have arisen are the only ones under which it could have been compiled."

From the papyri and temples of the Nile valley come other corroborative evidence; this evidence, Professor Sayce claims, establishes the fact that "the story of the Exodus, as it is set before us in the Old Testament, must have been derived from contemporaneous written documents, and must describe events which actually took place." It is no fiction nor myth, no legend whose only basis is folklore and unsubstantial tradition, but history in the real sense of the word.

Driven from the first assumption of the late use of writing for literary purposes, the "higher critics" began to apply the theory of evolution to the religious and moral ideas, the political conceptions and theological dogmas of the ancients, and then declared that they knew "precisely how religious ideas must have developed in the past," and could "consequently determine the relative age of the various forms in which they are presented to us." They decided that "certain conceptions of the priesthood or the sanctuary are older than others," and, consequently, where "there are books or passages which do not conform to the critic's ruling," the critic "forced them to do so by an alteration of the traditional dates." The fallacy of such procedure lies in the inability of the European critic to think in common with the Oriental mind.

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