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ARTICLE X.

SEMITIC AND ORIENTAL NOTE.

ISRAEL IN EGYPT.

EVER since the modern methods of biblical research have begun to influence and direct the thought of students of the Scriptures, the Egyptian question has been one of the most puzzling of all. It is true enough that there was abundant literature which professed to clear up the entire subject and solve all the difficulties; on every hand there were ready explanations offered, and more than one of these facile masters of the art of literary and historical reconciliation expressed wonder and contempt that there should be any doubts left in the minds of any on the matter of the historical relations of Israel and Egypt.

In addition to the inherent difficulties of the subject from the historical point of view, there was the added suspicion that we had no substantial foundation in the biblical narratives themselves; not that they were untrustworthy in the sense of giving information which could be denominated false, but that there were "strains" of tradition manifest, which created great confusion. Until the book of Judges was thus carefully analyzed, and the various "strains" according to geographical distribution determined, the whole history, speaking broadly, was a mass of helpless and seemingly inextricable confusion. Out of this wilderness we have now in a reasonable measure safely emerged.

Again, the question of Israel's unity in its historical development presented confusing features. For example, while Israel was in Egypt there appears, in some cases at least, to have been no lapse in the continuity of the tradition of persons and places in Palestine. Certainly this would seem to prove that a portion of Israel was therefore not in Egypt during the captivity, and that the Exodus and entrance to Canaan partook in some degree of a reunion. This made it sometimes hard to decide what branch of the race was uppermost in the creation of the records which have come to us, and added new perplexities to an already overcharged situation.

Moreover the just claim to confidence which the Bible had, helped to make the task more difficult than it would ordinarily have been, because the investigations were carried out on biblical lines. Now with a false biblical method, and an utterly wrong point of view historically, complicated with an over-zealous haste to vindicate the Scriptures by all means,

progress was slow and not very certain. Nor has it proceeded very fast even with a correct historical pointing and a proper spirit of inquiry. To be sure we have books like Mr. Sayce's "Egypt of the Hebrews" which give a good deal of information, more or less clearly, but are utterly worthless so far as helping us to a clear scientific view of the real situation. For example, who would suppose, after reading Mr. Sayce's three hundred or more pages, that the following citation from Mr. Flinders Petrie's article in the *Contemporary Review* represents the simple truth of the state of knowledge on this whole subject? He says:—

"A vigorous attempt was made to obtain some trace of the Israelites in Egypt by excavations in the region which they occupied. Unfortunately only the sites of temples and fortresses occupied by the dominant Egyptians can be readily submitted to examination. Possibly some obscure little villages or settlements might have shown some trace of the foreign settlers. But, as far as diligent research went in that district, geography alone was cleared; Pithom and Goshen were identified, but of any information about the Jews we were as much in the dark as before. Thus until this spring there has been no trace in Egypt to show that any descendants of Jacob ever existed. Had we no other material we should never have suspected that any such people as the Jews were known in the ancient world, so far as the evidence of Egypt carries us."

Now this is a simple but true statement of the case. And Professor Petrie is therefore justified in the exceeding great emphasis which he places upon the discovery of the magnificent slab of black syenite which bears the important inscription of Merenptah which contains the first known Egyptian reference to the people of Israel. This stone, which is thirteen inches thick and ten feet three inches long by five feet four inches wide, was highly polished, and was taken, by Merenptah, from a beautiful temple of Amenhotep III. then standing, and with its inscription-covered face turned inward, leaving a polished, unwritten surface outward, covered with the inscription which has near the end the important reference to the chosen people. The inscription has the usual preface and goes on to discuss the campaign against, and defeat of, the Libyans, and finally the triumph of Merenptah. This part we copy *verbatim* from Professor Petrie's article:—

"TRIUMPH OF MERENPTAH.

"For the sun of Egypt has wrought this change; he was born as the fated means of revenging it, the king Merenptah. Chiefs bend down, saying, 'Peace to thee'; not one of the nine bows raises his head. Vanquished are the Tahennu (N. Africans); the Khita (Hittites) are quieted; ravaged is Pa-kanana (Kanun) with all violence; taken is Askadni (Askelon ?); seized in Kazmel; Yenu (Yanoh) of the Syrians is made as though it had not existed; THE PEOPLE OF YSIRAA'L IS SPOILED, IT HATH NO SEED; Syria has become as widows of the land of Egypt; all

lands together are in peace. Every one that was a marauder hath been subdued by the king Merenptah, who gives life like the sun every day."

As Merenptah is usually, and properly so as it seems, considered to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus, the importance of the reference can readily be imagined; but it is useless to hasten to any definite conclusion as yet. It may, and most likely does, refer to the oppression, but the view is not final or conclusive. What is most important of all is the suggestion that there are hidden away further and explanatory inscriptions which will give more definite information and establish other things, and so make finally a strong clear opening into a just conception of the relations of these two nations. If by energetic exploration and careful scholarship we might have a flood of light in any sense approximating to the Assyrian material, no one can possibly predict what wonders of knowledge are opening up before us. It is *a priori* unlikely that we shall ever have as full records as we have from the Assyrian sources, but it is far from impossible. At all events this seems to settle finally the question of the date of the Exodus, and gives us another one of those fixed points which, by and by, will become numerous enough to enable us to make a complete and absolutely trustworthy reconstruction of the history of the periods in question.

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