

## PREFACE

THE TITLE is based on the view that religion arises within the commonplace terms of life; the religious problem itself being found, therefore, in the contents of the moral experience as an evolving process. But on the other hand, ecclesiastical orthodoxy avoids experience by positing a Power totally external to man, which irrupts into the stream of history, leaving a deposit of doctrine, and then retreating into its proper sphere—a transcendent realm beyond the orbit of human life. The simplest form of orthodoxy is best observed among tribes whose religious rituals, evolving within terms of secular experience, are afterward said to have been established in the dim past by the tribal god who lives perhaps on some distant mountain.

Orthodoxy is always *post eventum*; and while the belated nature of dogma gives no inconvenience at first, it is one cause of religious difficulty in a scientific age. Thus, Judaism and Christianity grew out of certain experiences among the ancient Hebrew people, which were described in writings under such titles as “The Book of the Wars of Yahweh,” “The Book of Yashar,” “The Book of the Acts of Solomon,” and so forth. By taking selected passages out of these ancient writings, inscribing them on rolls of papyrus, and interpolating *post eventum* comments between the excerpts, the Bible was gradually brought into existence through the work of compilers and editors who were not contemporary with the events described and whose interpolations represent stages in the development of Jewish and Christian orthodoxy.

Having originated thus, and having been adopted as Holy Scripture by official authorities, the Bible has practically monopolized the interpretation of Hebrew history up to our own day. But the interpolations vary from the excerpts taken out of “source books,”

showing that the compilers and editors of the Bible have desecularized the history of Israel by transforming it into a religious drama. In other words, Hebrew history has been converted into what is called "Bible history," which has always impressed the popular imagination as a tale of supernatural marvels and miraculous events contrary to the rules of cause and effect recognized by scientific method.

The foregoing considerations explain more fully the title given to the present volume, which aims, in brief, to reverse the method of Biblical compilation and bring into view the secular history which produced the monotheism common to the Jewish and Christian religions. Such an undertaking would, of course, be impossible without the previous work of Biblical criticism, by which the fundamental sources have been carefully distinguished from the comments and interpolations of the compilers.

But the mere separation of the literary elements composing the Bible does not in itself restore the history. For the task of Biblical criticism has been, first of all, to challenge the literary structure of the writings which compose the Bible and consequently at the same time to formulate a new theory of the sources. Such was the work of the critical school which came to a climax in *Geschichte Israels* ("History of Israel"), by the German professor Wellhausen. But the volume was misnamed "History"; and its title was retracted by the author in later editions. Other scholars, however—German, British, French, and American—were not deterred from producing books under such titles as "History of the Hebrew People," "History of Israel," "Old Testament History," and so forth. These works have been serviceable in promoting the claims of criticism as a method of approach to the Bible; but they deal mainly with source-theory and with disjointed materials of history, instead of presenting intelligible explanations of the process which brought the religion of Israel into existence and which, after all, is the only reason for taking any special interest in Hebrew history.

This book is the concluding number of a trilogy begun many years ago—the first being *Sociological Study of the Bible* (1912),

the aim of which was to propose a method of handling the Biblical material so as to give effect to the underlying sociological and economic forces in Hebrew history. That the German critics had not given a scientific interpretation of the history and that a minority of trained historical scholars in that country were already aware of the fact is indicated by the reaction of Professor E. Troeltsch, of Berlin University, who, in the course of a lengthy and careful review of the above-mentioned volume said, "This is the path which theological research must follow if the history of religious ethics is to be understood. This is one of the most suggestive and instructive books that have come into my hands in many a day."<sup>1</sup>

The application of the proposed method resulted in modifying the source-theory of the reigning critical school so that it is possible to distinguish more clearly between the "J" (Yahwistic, Judaic) document and the "E" (Elohistic, Ephraimite) source. The former had been currently regarded as earlier than the latter, whereas the fact now clearly emerged that the Ephraimite documents preceded the J element; the two sources being contrasted not only in the order of time, but by hitherto unobserved linguistic distinctions. The second volume in the series, *God and the Social Process* (1935), accordingly, dealt with Hebrew religious evolution on the basis of the new source-theory. The manuscript of the book was examined by Dr. Stanley A. Cook, Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge, England, who wrote as follows:

You point out, in a way I at least had not clearly realised, the significance of the Joseph-core of tradition [that is, the Ephraimite element]. This question you handle in a quite original manner . . . and I think your argument requires very careful attention. We are approaching a stage where our conceptions of the Bible, and of the history in and behind it, will have to be completely remodeled. We need a secular history of Israel; and it is obvious that our theology needs adjustment to the facts. I have enjoyed perusing your original and highly stimulating study.

The facts and problems of the subject are not, of course, handled exhaustively by the present volume, *The Bible Is Human*. Its pur-

<sup>1</sup> *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, July 19, 1913.

pose is to interest the scholarly public and the lay public in acquiring a more accurate sense of the evolutionary process back of the Bible and of the religion which, manifested in Judaism and Christianity, is moving on today as a vital stream of progressive thought.

That a new period is dawning in the apprehension of Hebrew history is indicated by the attitude of certain members of the Anglican Church Commission on Doctrine. These members find themselves unable to hold that miraculous events actually occurred; and they feel that in the present state of historical knowledge and scientific method it is no longer possible to make evidential use of Biblical narratives in relation to alleged miracles. In similar wise, referring to the dogma of the Virgin Birth, Dr. C. C. Morrison, editor of *The Christian Century*, says, "It is easier for me to believe that the exquisitely beautiful story of the Annunciation grew up in the devout imagination of the Church than to believe that it is a literal account of an objective physiological fact."<sup>2</sup> Speaking of the Bible as a literary production, Dr. Morrison says, "It does not occur to me that its words were dictated, or authorised, or guaranteed in any way essentially different from the manner in which any other ancient writing on a highly important subject was set down"; and he adds, "What I have said does not divorce God from the Bible,—indeed it brings him more intimately into it."<sup>3</sup>

Professor Herbert L. Willett, of the University of Chicago, writes:

Most nations have wonder stories to lend dignity and divine sanction to their origins. The Hebrew traditions regarding their contacts with other nations were on the moral level of the age from which they came, and reflect the nationalism and race prejudice of a primitive culture.<sup>4</sup>

Neither Judaism nor Christianity was established upon a foundation of logical argument. Both became realities in human life on the basis of experience and function; whereupon Jewish and Christian theology took form as attempts to rationalize what had already taken place. But in both cases the resulting dogmatic formulas

<sup>2</sup> *Christian Century*, Mar. 30, 1938, p. 393.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *The Christian Century*, Sept. 29, 1937.

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usurped the religious field with such devastating power that religion itself was compromised. This is the situation with which the present book seeks to deal.

L. W.

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