PART I

HISTORY

I

THE NATURE OF BIBLE HISTORY

BIBLE HISTORY IS THE RECORD OF A CHAIN OF CIRCUMSTANCES binding God's original purpose in man with the advent of Christ. This gives inward significance to the historical books of the Old Testament. These histories are something more than a cross-section of human experience, such as one may find in any other history book: they are the record of a unique Divine process, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the full expression. Outwardly, indeed, they move within the orbit of general history, but inwardly they concentrate upon a particular history, a Divinely-conditioned series of "things determined beforehand to be done." The materials of the common history of Scripture are actual events, which in themselves are perfectly normal and common to human experience, but are afterwards seen to have had a Divinely-guided issue, a predisposition to a definite end. This predisposition is found in God's original purpose in man: this definite end is found in the advent of Christ.

The form of these histories shows strict fidelity to historical truth. The objectivity of the writers, the unforced references to known geographical sites and to actual chronological periods, and, in addition, the natural way in which the facts are set down, go far to create a presupposition in favour of the traditional Christian belief that these books record events which have actually taken place. Furthermore, the events of the common history of Scripture, as distinct from what is supernatural, accord so perfectly with human experience and with civil history as to give the immediate impression of being a straightforward narration of facts, based upon the personal knowledge of the writers or upon reliable sources of information. They are, upon the surface at any rate, true to life, and, as far as one can judge, true also to fact.

The naturalistic approach to the writings of the Old Testament, however, has led to other conclusions. It has been assumed that the methods employed by the ancients in compiling their chronicles were such that historical accuracy is not now to be expected in their works. A substratum of historical fact certainly underlies the general narrative, but large sections of the material, it is

said, are conditioned, wholly or in part, by the individual outlook of the authors, or by the vital necessities of the periods in which they wrote. Nor is this all. Accretions are held to have gathered, in the course of time, around the original narratives, and the religious consciousness of later transcribers, living in quite different circumstances, to have contributed materially to the final form of the documents. In order that these subjective elements may be distinguished from those of objective fact and a reconstruction of the actual history made possible, the methods of modern historical criticism are called into use. Thereby, we are told, an irreducible core of reliable tradition has been laid bare; and we are assured that, whatever may have been destroyed in the process, no injury has resulted to the spiritual authority of the writings. Indeed, on the contrary, it is affirmed that the critical process has elucidated their true spiritual values, and relieved these of the need of any strict dependence upon historical accuracy.

The normal Christian reaction to this has been one of deep-grounded suspicion, and that for two reasons. The first is that, by a sound spiritual instinct, the Christian man senses in it an underlying negation of the Divine authority of the Scriptures, and consequently a danger to the heart of his spiritual life; the second, that, through discoveries in other fields of human knowledge, the findings of the critics upon the historicity or otherwise of certain Scriptures have repeatedly been proved untrustworthy: consequently, an attitude of reserve has been induced toward speculative critical reasonings.

The first may, not unjustly, be put down to prejudice, but the real question to be asked is, "Is it good prejudice, or bad?" That is, "Is it founded upon reliable concepts?" Prejudice is not necessarily unreasonable. In everyday life we prejudge many questions in the light of ascertained fact. This, of course, is prejudice, but it is good prejudice, because founded upon knowledge. If the average Christian were asked to put into words the reason of his objection to any theory which belittles the historicity of Scripture, he would in all probability give as answer his faith in their Divine origin. Now it can scarcely be denied that the more destructive critical methods presuppose an almost wholly naturalistic origin for the documents. The Christian man feels this, although, for lack of intellectual training, he may not always be able to refute the critical arguments. In brief, he has an inward assurance of the validity of his own position, and being persuaded of this, he rejects all speculative reasonings which, in his judgment, contradict it. This is not to say that the critical position cannot be assailed and refuted, on

logical grounds, within its own field; but that a refutation of this kind, while valuable from a speculative standpoint, seems quite unnecessary from a practical. So that while, on the one hand, no true man would wish to stifle free enquiry after truth, on the other, it is our duty to safeguard ourselves against vexatious and wasteful speculations that may be disposed of out of hand by reference to established facts. Many of the problems, therefore, raised by modern historical criticism are simplified for the believer by a return to first principles.

Two leading questions may be proposed. First, is the dogma of the Divine inspiration of Scripture grounded in reality? And, secondly, is the naturalistic approach to the Old Testament histories at variance with that of faith in their Divine origin?

The proof that the Scriptures have the Holy Spirit of God as their effective Author comes from within Scripture itself rather than from external sources. The Christian has heard or read the Book for himself, and, from that contact, has come to acknowledge, as a personal conviction, its Divine origin. As fire kindles wood, so is he kindled by the flame of truth. He is born again by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. This miracle, of which there is abundant evidence in Christian experience, is mere illusion if life in the Word is not a reality. Is it surprising that those in whose lives it has taken place should regard with scrupulous confidence the instrument through which it has been effected? But, more objectively, on detached intellectual grounds, the Scriptures exhibit a coherence and self-consistency of such amazing breadth that a mere human origin for them, even on a broad cultural basis, is quite incredible. As this is to be the main line of discussion in subsequent chapters, it need not be elaborated here.

The second question proposed is, for the present argument, crucial. Is the naturalistic approach to the Old Testament histories at variance with that of faith in their Divine origin? Does the acceptance of the one view inevitably exclude the other? Is it possible to form a synthesis? Many professed Christians here find themselves upon the horns of a dilemma. They feel—upon grounds, it is said, of intellectual honesty—that they cannot refuse assent to the critical findings, yet they are equally sure, they earnestly aver, that God's voice is audible in this Book: so they conclude that some sort of compromise must be possible. The results are neither happy nor convincing. The dilemma is not avoided by minimizing the verbal accuracy of Scripture in order to avoid conflict with critical preconceptions. Fresh difficulties arise. For one thing, we must then face the fact that the writers of the New Testament viewed as inspired the writings

of the Old. More embarrassing still, we must explain our Lord's acceptance of their integrity. Clearly, we must get behind the problem before an answer can be given.

All are agreed that the Old Testament is a vehicle of spiritual truth for mankind. These truths are mediated through stories of one kind or another. "What matters it," says the critic, "whether the truth is mythological in form or whether it is historical? Either is only the external mode of presentation. The truth itself is neither invalidated nor certificated by the literary dress in which it has come down to us. That literary fashion is determined by the age in which it was written, and is only relative and temporal: the truth which it clothes is eternal." Superficially, this appears irrefutable. Do not the very Scriptures themselves affirm that the Old Testament narratives were written with ethical and religious purposes in view? For after enumerating some of the incidents in Israel's journey through the wilderness, Paul, in his epistle, goes on to say, "Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition" (I Cor. 10: 11). This seems to favour the view that even historical incidents were primarily written in order to convey spiritual teaching, and the critics draw the conclusion that this value can exist equally well in mythological as in historical narratives. While this does not absolutely rule out historicity, it leaves an open door for religious mythology. This concept of the nature of Bible history puts the Bible into the same category with the sacred books of other world-religions, even if upon a higher level within that category. If mythological truth or spiritual teaching is the final value of the Bible, the Christian may well on this issue capitulate to the critics; but if, on the other hand, we accept the truth that the Bible not only shows us a way of life, but that its supreme object is to reveal a Divine purpose in history, then the question of its historicity becomes acutely vital.

Myths may mediate moral truths: they do not document circumstances of fact. And the Event of Christ in history is linked up with certain antecedent circumstances of fact. We cannot dismiss these without dismissing Christ. If these are without historical truth, Christ, as the sum and substance of them, has no real meaning. The chain is broken. For it is not merely a question of abstract religious truths handed down through successive generations, but of a personal action of God within history: an action initiated from the beginning of the world, carried on in unbroken sequence throughout Old Testament times, and consummated at the end of the ages by the appearance of Jesus Christ. It is not even a question of Old

Testament incidents *prefiguring* events in the life of Christ, true also as that may be, but that the very incidents themselves are historical links in a chain of circumstances binding, as already said, the original purpose of God in man with the advent of Christ. This fact is postulated by the genealogies both of the Old and New Testaments, which are careful to link the promised Deliverer with the first man, Adam. Faith in Christ, then, is more than the acceptance of His teachings: it is the acceptance of Himself as He is presented to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments—the Son of God come down from heaven, the Messiah promised through a particular human ancestry, Who, in the circumstances of His death and resurrection, has fulfilled the prophetic Scriptures. Faith is rooted in fact.

Now the Fact of Christ includes the reality, not only of His own death and resurrection, but also of the whole preparatory series of events and situations comprehended in Old Testament history. The whole great development stands or falls together. That events are recorded which appear to have no connexion with the Messianic history does not affect the argument. The Divine process referred to is embedded in the common history of Scripture, and if the latter is discredited, the former is scarcely likely to be trustworthy, and the whole process falls to pieces. If faith in Christ is not securely grounded on matters of fact, then, as Paul points out in his argument upon the resurrection, our faith is futile. These things being so, we see how impossible it is to effect a compromise between the findings of destructive criticism and faith in the Divine origin of the Scriptures. The two are mutually incompatible. To the one, the Old Testament histories mediate religious truths, and nothing more: to the other, they document the circumstances of a Divine intervention in human history. We conclude, therefore, that the prejudice of the Christian is not without reason, and that his spiritual intuitions, when the facts out of which they arise are examined, are shown to be justified.

The second reason for doubting the reliability of critical pronouncements upon Bible history is not exclusively Christian, but a matter of common experience. For if, in the light of duly ascertained facts in other fields of human knowledge, such pronouncements have repeatedly turned out to be misleading, a cautious attitude toward fresh critical theories is not so much an index of faith as of practical good sense. Are we, then, faced with such a situation? In reply it may be said that competent and informed writers of worldwide scholarly repute have challenged the soundness of many conclusions which throw doubt upon the authenticity of certain Old Testament narratives: and have shown

by irrefragable proofs that those incidents have a firm foundation in fact, and that, in many instances, the verbal account of them in the Old Testament shows a scrupulous and sometimes surprisingly vivid accuracy.

Archaeology in Biblical lands has made important contributions to our knowledge of ancient history, and in consequence of new facts laid bare by the spade of the excavator, readjustments have had to be made in many departments of human thought. On no branch of study, however, has scientific archaeology had such devastating effects as upon destructive criticism of the Bible. Indeed, so numerous have been the striking confirmations of Old Testament history, and of Scripture passages disputed on so-called critical grounds, that a whole literature has sprung up round the subject. Volumes have been written jubilantly pointing out, in direct contradiction of the critical points of view, indubitable confirmations of Bible history brought to light through archaeological research. Again, conversely, volumes have been written by erudite theologians contending that, while the archaeological facts themselves are indisputable, their logical bearing has been misunderstood by over-earnest apologists; and that the facts point in quite a different direction. Nevertheless, after all enthusiastic overstatements have been sifted out, and due weight given to all modifying criticisms, there remains a substantial mass of evidence, sufficient to convince any unbiased reader, that the modern critic's key positions have, in many instances, been rendered untenable; and that, after all, the traditional Christian view of the Old Testament holds the field.

It is common knowledge that implements recovered from ancient sites, and associated with definite historical periods, have accorded in a most remarkable manner with chance notices of such articles in the Bible, within precisely the same periods. Take for example the discovery, on the site of Lachish, and in a context of temple use, of a three-pronged fork. This supplies an "illustration" of I Samuel 2: 13, where it is said that "the priest's servant came with a flesh-hook of three teeth in his hand." While this does not supply actual "proof" or "confirmation" that the wickedness of Eli's sons is a historical incident, it does afford proof that the record in I Samuel is in keeping with the period, and that there is nothing to show why it might not have taken place. Similarly, the discovery on the site of Gerar of Philistinian cornpits and of primitive flint sickles "illustrates" the narrative of Genesis 26: 12. It does not prove that a man of the name of Isaac, at that particular place, sowed corn and reaped a bountiful harvest, thus incurring the envy of established rivals; but it does show that there is no apparent

reason for believing that the incident so recorded may be something other than an objective statement of fact. Thus, while these and similar "illustrations" are not to be taken as technical "proofs" for the historicity of particular incidents, they should nevertheless caution men against the fallacy of assuming that these ancient narratives are not good history. In the nature of things it is not to be expected that archaeology can supply strict logical confirmation for every separate incident. But it can, and does, dispose of objections raised against the possible genuineness of narratives bearing such authentic marks of the period in which they are set. Moreover, since the archaeological discoveries cannot have been made in collusion with the writers of the histories, it is only fair to assume that the correspondences referred to rise out of circumstances of historical fact: that is to say, certain things happened in a certain way; in this way, therefore, they are reported of by the historians; in this way, also, they are found by present-day archaeologists to have occurred.

Due weight has here been given to the technical distinction between an "illustration" and a "proof" or "confirmation." This is all the more necessary since it has been advanced that in the appeal to archaeology Christian apologists have failed to observe this distinction. The question may therefore be asked, whether, in addition to the numerous side-notes supplied by recent discovery, there are also genuine "proofs" for the existence of disputed historical personages, and for the authenticity of disputed historical incidents. The once prevalent denial of Belshazzar as a true historical figure, and the subsequent discovery of inscriptions which put his historicity beyond doubt, is but one instance among many which could be put forward in reply to our question.

From times still more primitive may be produced confirmations that serve to refute critical doubts on Genesis, and which would certainly strengthen Christian faith were that not already established upon more secure grounds. It was once believed that the presence in the book of Genesis of certain clearly perceptible Babylonian traditions must have been derived from Jewish contacts with Babylonian thought during the period of the captivity. It is now established on archaeological grounds, what hitherto ought to have been perceived on Scriptural ones, that the Hebrew race, through Abraham, had an earlier contact with Babylonian culture, and that the knowledge of this must have been transmitted to Moses. The work of Sir Leonard Woolley at Ur of the Chaldees (Abraham's old city) has revealed the existence of a highly developed civilization, which flourished long before the days of Abraham; a civilization, moreover, in

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