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SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BIBLE¹

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This paper is not an exhibit of the sociological material in the Bible, nor does it claim the Bible as exclusive territory for social science. It argues that the sacred book is a fact for sociology before it is a fact for theological discipline. In other words, it claims that the Bible is primarily material for scientific treatment. Its deeper meaning is a matter for discussion from other standpoints. In biblical inquiry, as in other departments of learning, the distinction of standpoints needs to be rigorously maintained. The sociological investigator is merely a scientist; and science cannot have the final word on the deeper problems of life. This paper claims the Bible for the process of social evolution. The Bible originated in oriental society, and has become the sacred book of our own civilization. These facts raise a presumption that there is an essential community of nature between all the social situations in which the Bible has figured. Whatever may have been the special circumstances of its origin within the history of ancient Israel, that history discloses the elements common to the general process of social evolution. We venture to say that the Bible affords better concrete ground of appeal for a special course introductory to sociology than any other material at our command. We anticipate the establishment of courses in biblical introduction to sociology, with points of attachment in our conventional ideas about sacred things.

It is well sometimes to emphasize the commonplace. All the world's mysteries are lodged in the heart of the familiar. We have spoken of the Bible as the sacred book of our society. It is more or less familiar to us from childhood. We say "more or less" because, with most of us, the Bible is yet very largely a

¹An address delivered before the Philosophical Society of the Ohio State University, December 11, 1906.

strange and unspeakable thing. Our ancestors in a far-off age inherited this book from another branch of the human race; and for many centuries there was no scientific study of its contents.

But with the revival of learning at the beginning of the modern period the sacred book very slowly came into its rights. The first great stage in modern critical study of the Bible was mainly of a *literary* character. In 1520 Carlstadt ventured, contrary to the received view, that Moses may *not* have been the author of the Pentateuch, since the general style of the narrative remains unchanged after the account of the death of Moses. Martin Luther was familiar with this view and seems to have had a bias toward it. In 1570 Du Maes published a biblical commentary which regarded the Pentateuch and Joshua as late compilations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In the following century Hobbes and Spinoza took strong positions against Mosaic authorship. In 1678 the French priest Simon published a *Critical History of the Old Testament*, in which he showed that not only the so called "Mosaic" books, but other works of the canon, were compiled by writers who stood at some distance from the events described. Criticism had taken the initial step in the direction of a working hypothesis of the Bible.

But the seventeenth century did not advance beyond the position represented by Simon. Not until the eighteenth century was the key to the literature discovered. In 1753 Astruc, a Catholic physician, put forth a little treatise which is one of the most important contributions ever made to biblical study. Although he accepts the old, ecclesiastical tradition of Mosaic authorship, he presents a thesis which is far in advance of his time. The title of his book is *Conjectures on the Original Memoirs Which Moses Used in Composing the Book of Genesis*. This work brought clearly into view the fact that the biblical narrative is composed of two main strands, each having its own, characteristic name for the Deity. The book of Genesis, for instance, is constructed by taking out passages from earlier books, and piecing these excerpts together like newspaper clippings. According to one of these documents, God revealed his name "Yahweh" to Moses at the time of the exodus from Egypt, stat-

ing that he had not been known to the earlier patriarchs by that name; but according to the Book of Genesis the patriarchs long before Moses were well acquainted with the name "Yahweh" and used it frequently. On the unitary theory of authorship, discrepancies like these, which occur frequently, present a difficult, if not an insoluble, problem; but on the view that the Pentateuch and other parts of the Old Testament were constructed, like the gospels and other ancient works, out of excerpts from earlier books, the literary problem is solved.

The next important work was a treatise written by Eichhorn, entitled *An Introduction to the Old Testament*. This was published in 1780. Eichhorn applied the term "higher criticism" for the first time to the scientific study of the Bible. He describes his task as that of investigating the inner constitution of the different books. Planting himself on Astruc's documentary theory, he carried the inquiry further into detail without making any radical advance. This work signified that scholarship was awakening to the fact that the Bible is not a single treatise, but a *literature*. It was necessary that this fact be firmly established before the higher criticism could develop into another stage.

Thus we see that up to the close of the eighteenth century biblical criticism was mainly of a literary nature. But with the nineteenth century a new phase of investigation comes into view. Criticism of the Bible passes into the *historical* stage. The turning point is marked by De Wette's work, entitled *Contributions to the Introduction to the Old Testament*, published in 1806. Although this writer treats the literary phase of the subject, he shows that there is a deeper problem—the relation of biblical literature to the institutional history of Israel. In De Wette the outlines of the modern position begin to come into view. His work was incomplete, although of great value; and it offered points of departure for later criticism.

The next notable work approaching the Bible from the historical standpoint was published by Ewald in the middle years of the nineteenth century. Its title is *History of the People of Israel*. This book is the first attempt to bring historical study of Israel into line with corresponding investigation of other ancient

peoples. It comes within the category of modern works based upon critical sifting of the "sources." Its main defect is in its position that the priestly elements of the Bible are earlier than the prophetic elements. The mistakes of Ewald were corrected by a number of scholars—chief among whom are Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen—through whose labor the reigning school of biblical higher criticism was established. The official religion of Israel down to the time of the Babylonian exile was exhibited on a level with the religions of antiquity. A cardinal fact in the history was pointed out in the great prophetic movement. The predictive aspect of prophecy was minimized; while its contemporaneousness was emphasized and put into the foreground. The older view had regarded the prophets as concerned mainly with the future. The new school explained them as creative preachers to their own times, and showed that the history was marked by a succession of reforms growing out of the prophetic movement. The claims of Yahweh, as represented by the prophets, were asserted with growing force and exclusiveness until the last vestiges of the earlier heathenism were cast out. The higher prophetic ideas about God and his moral nature were, so to speak, inclosed within the protecting hedge of priestly institutions which grew up around them. Thus the Prophets came before the Law. But Judaism after the exile conceived the Law as having been supernaturally imposed upon Israel at the beginning of the national history; and this idea was inherited by Christianity. It remained for historical criticism to show that instead of "The Law and the Prophets" we should say "The Prophets and the Law."

The readjustment of perspective growing out of the critical movement has been revolutionary. It is to be compared with the Copernican astronomy, which deposed the earth from its imaginary position at the center of the solar system. In spite of dissenting voices, the higher criticism, both literary and historical, has come to stay. At some points the reconstruction has probably been carried to extremes that will provoke reaction. Too many of Israel's ideas and institutions have been supposed to originate after the exile; and concessions will have to be made

to the demands of a more sober criticism. But in the final issue the main results of the modern school will stand. This paper takes the biblical higher criticism for granted. But we dispute the current assumption that it ends with the historical stage as thus far developed. If our standpoint is correctly taken, the critical movement will pass into a *sociological* stage before its work is completed.

While the historical higher criticism is true as far as it goes, it fails to explain the Old Testament situation. Although the older view of the Bible has been discredited in the world of science, we have to reckon with the fact that higher critics are not united in explanation of the Bible and its theology.² The new scholarship exhibits different views about the origin of biblical religion as contrasted with religion in *general*. The old theory of Mosaic revelation having been abandoned, some critics become "orthodox" at one point in the history and some at another; by some there is a vague appeal to the "religious genius" of Israel in the same way that the older physiology invoked the aid of a peculiar "vital force" to explain the phenomena of living bodies; while the extreme naturalistic wing of criticism assumes that the Bible is a result of the secular process, but fails to give a credible account of the process. From the standpoint of scientific explanation—by which we mean the reduction of phenomena to their simplest possible terms—the historical school is hardly more satisfactory than the old orthodoxy. We do not mean to imply that scientific explanation can penetrate all mystery. We gladly grant the substratum of mystery under the whole social process from the earliest ages down to the present. But we object to setting up an antithesis between Israel and the rest of humanity, and imposing upon this oriental people an additional burden of mystery over and above the common, universal mystery of human life.

This brings us to the point where it is in order to differentiate between history and sociology: The historical interest is pri-

²"Men of every shade of opinion with regard to the supernatural and to evangelical religion may be found among the advocates of the theory."—Briggs, *Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch* (New York, 1897), p. 94.

marily in the *narrative*; while the sociological interest is primarily in the *motive*. In a general way, the historian subordinates motive to narrative. The sociologist, on the other hand, subordinates narrative to motive. When we try to tell *what* happens, we are working in the conventional historical interest. But when we try to tell *how* things happen—when we attempt the reduction of historical phenomena to their lowest possible terms, as such—we are working in the sociological interest. It is a mistake to suppose that sociology is trying to set the historian aside. Instead of this, it merely tries to modify the historian's outlook.

History has well been called "sociology in the yolk." But sociology is not merely a renaming of historical discipline. Already there have been differentiated from history a number of special sciences which deal with common historical data from different standpoints. Not one of these particular sciences, however, can be cultivated without making appeal to the rest. The term "sociology" is the name for correlation of the material of the different social sciences in a single perspective. Sociology is ultimately a struggle to see human life as a unitary fact. The particular social sciences bear the same relation to general sociology that the sciences of anatomy, physiology, histology, etc., bear to general biology. The physiologist is primarily concerned with the functions of living bodies; but he cannot investigate function without appealing to the facts of structure. In the same way, none of the social sciences can be cultivated independently. Each must in the long run appeal to all the rest. In this way there slowly emerges a body of doctrine which is not identified with any of these disciplines, which is logically introductory to them, and which we are learning to call "sociology." "The name has come to stand for something which is asserting itself whether we like it or not," says Small; "and history, whether the historians like it or not, will remain a collection of litter, more or less artistically arranged, until it is generalized as sociology."³

"The latest word of sociology," says the writer just quoted, "is that human experience yields the most and the deepest meaning when read from first to last in terms of the evolution, expres-

³ *General Sociology* (Chicago, 1905), p. 46.

sion, and accommodation of interests.”⁴ Although interests fall into a number of categories, all classes of interest can be brought under the general head of *self-interest*. Society can be studied as a plexus of reactions between the interests of the individuals that compose the social body. The terms employed in these reactions are “good” and “bad,” or their equivalents. This, no doubt, is very elementary and commonplace; but, as already observed, it is well sometimes to emphasize the commonplace. Anything that helps what we conceive to be our interest is called “good.” Whatever works against our interest, we term “bad.” In the endeavor to satisfy our interests we take up certain relations toward each other. These relations are the structures, or institutions, of society. Social structure in general is the issue of compromise between the interests concerned. It never satisfies everybody; and there is always a tendency toward modification of the structure. We may define history as the working of social structure punctuated by readjustment of the structure. Thus the process of social evolution moves on from one adjustment to another without end.

Now, if the sociological proposition is valid, it must cover all history, including the history of Israel. If it applies universally, the Bible is in some way a phenomenon of interests. We are confronted by two facts: the Bible is the sacred book of society—the peculiar, holy book of civilization; and it applies the terms “good” and “bad” to human conduct with more frequency and emphasis than any other book in the world. These great, fundamental facts are a challenge to *sociology*. Why is the Bible the sacred book of society? Why is it so preoccupied with “good and evil”? How do these terms come to be so closely related to the idea of God?

Even a cursory examination of the Old Testament shows that Israelitish history involved a struggle of interests of *some kind*. The struggle is described in terms that vary according to the standpoint of the observer. On the old view of the Bible, the antagonism of interests lay merely between a fully developed, heaven-revealed system of religion on the one side, and “heathen-

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 282.

ism" on the other. But if the modern school of criticism is right, the fully developed system of religion did *not* stand at the beginning of Israel's life; and in this case there is ground for claiming that the distinctive religious ideas of the Bible are not a *cause* but an *effect* of the struggle of interests that agitated the history.

There are several avenues of approach to the Bible as a phenomenon of interests. A good introduction is offered by the legends of the Book of Genesis. In this ancient work man is created in the midst of a scene of rustic happiness; and the first city has an evil origin, being built by Cain the murderer. Later, the people of the earth undertake to build a city with a great tower; but "Yahweh scattered them abroad upon the face of the earth, and they left off building the city." The family of Abraham leaves Ur, the city of the Chaldees; and Abraham, "the father of the faithful and the friend of God," becomes a dweller in tents. In another legend God brings destruction upon Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the Plain for their great wickedness. Abraham intercedes and secures a divine guarantee of exemption for Sodom if there should be found fifty "good" men within its walls. He then persuades the Almighty to reduce this figure to forty-five, then forty, then thirty, then twenty, and finally ten. But Sodom shares the fate of the other cities. We recall the words of the prophet Jeremiah, who cried: "Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that doeth justly, that seeketh faithfulness; and I will pardon her."⁵ Jeremiah came from a country village a few miles north of Jerusalem. The proposition at this point is that the legends of Genesis, having been compiled at a late period, reflect the situation of that late period back upon the patriarchal narrative.

These hints might be worthless did not the Bible furnish abundant evidence that throughout a large part of the history there was a hostile reaction of interests between the central and the outlying parts of Israelite society. This reaction does not by any means exhaust the situation; but it occupies an important

⁵ Jer. 5: 1.

place in the perspective, and furnishes *one* clue to the vital correlation of biblical material.

The process of social evolution, when unchecked, always resolves the social mass into a *center* surrounded by outlying, or peripheral, parts. The center is the city, which functions as an exchange point for the entire body. From the purely analytical standpoint, as an aid to clarity of thought, all the cities of any society may be figured as *one* city; and the rustic element may be pictured as disposed around that city in a circle. This ideal figure is usefully applied in the general study of civilization; but we are now concerned with it only in reference to the Bible.

Prior to the invasion of Canaan by the tribes of Israel, the land had had a long history going back into a dim past. It was the crossroads of ancient oriental civilization. Many fortified cities had grown up here in the midst of the usual rustic environment. According to the rule in ancient history, the symbols of Canaanite society were found in connection with its religious observances. Each district had its own god, the Baal, or divine proprietor. According to ancient practice, worship of these gods would naturally come to a center in the cities, where the markets were held. "The proper site of an ancient shrine," says Dr. G. A. Smith, "was nearly always a market."⁶ It was Jeremiah who complained at a later time: "According to the number of your cities are your gods."⁷ The centralization of early religion at the points of exchange needs to be emphasized. Other eastern societies illustrate this fact.

Concerning early Arabia Professor W. R. Smith writes as follows:

In the centuries before Mohammed the gods of the . . . villagers and towns-folk had superseded the gods of the . . . dwellers in tents. Much the most important part of the religious practices of the nomads consisted in pilgrimages to the great shrines of the town Arabs.⁸

To this we might add that the shrine of the city of Mecca had become so sacred under the old paganism that Mohammed found

⁶ *Book of the Twelve Prophets* (New York), Vol. I, p. 36; cf. H. P. Smith, *Old Testament History* (New York, 1903), pp. 172, 173.

⁷ Jer. 2: 28.

⁸ *Religion of the Semites* (New York, 1894), p. 112.

it necessary to accommodate his new system to the situation by adopting the city as the focal point of Islam. Turning to ancient Egypt, we learn that

the superior splendor of the deities in the large cities, with their great temples, led to the worship of the tutelary gods of the villages and small towns being more and more abandoned.⁹

The same was true of Mesopotamia :

In its first recognizable form the state was a city gathered about a temple, the center of worship. . . . Each of the city-states of Babylonia had its god with whom its interests were identified.¹⁰

In such an agricultural country, villages grow up in protected centers where fortification is possible. . . . This was . . . no doubt the origin of the Babylonian cities. These cities were in the first instance the residence of fellow-tribesmen and were built around the temple of their divinity of fertility. . . . Before the dawn of our present historical knowledge, about 4500 B. C., the struggle between these cities for supremacy had not only been begun, but had been waged with such varying fortunes that now one city had been in supreme power over the others for a century or two, and now another. This struggle . . . continued until terminated by the final supremacy of Babylon about 2300 B. C.¹¹

Bearing in mind this fact of cult concentration, we take special notice that when the Israelites invaded the land of Canaan they were generally unable to reduce the fortified cities. It is true that the book of Joshua represents the children of Israel as taking victorious possession of the entire land; but this account is unhistorical. The real nature of the invasion is indicated by the first chapter of Judges, where we are told of about a score of prominent Canaanite cities which, with their suburbs, the Israelites were unable to take. These unsubdued places were the principal cities of the land. In a general way, then, the invaders occupied the country districts, while the Canaanites retained the cities, becoming a factor of enormous importance in Old Testament history.

⁹ Professor W. Max Müller in *Encyclopedia Biblica* (New York, 1901), col. 1215; cf. Breasted, *History of Egypt* (New York, 1905), p. 31, and Jastrow, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria* (Boston, 1898), p. 649.

¹⁰ Goodspeed, *History of the Babylonians and Assyrians* (New York, 1902), p. 80.

¹¹ Barton, *Semitic Origins* (New York, 1902), p. 162.

About two centuries after the invasion a monarchy was founded which embraced both country and city in a single state. Upon the accession of the fourth king the nation divided into two rival kingdoms, north and south.

A hundred years after the division we reach an extraordinary period marked by phenomena of the utmost interest. We are now in the *ninth* century before Christ. If we make a list of the names of Israelite political heads, beginning with the judges, passing up through the monarchy and the double line of kings who ruled after the division, a remarkable fact comes into view. In the ninth century the name of the national god, "Yahweh," begins to be incorporated as a rule in the names of Israelite political heads. Another noteworthy fact is that in this period begins the line of those great prophets who, from now until the Babylonian exile, fiercely preached that Israel ought to be faithful to Yahweh and cast away the Baals and all other gods. Another notable fact in the ninth century is the abrupt rise and fall of what may be called the "miracle line." The Old Testament contains many stories of supernatural occurrences; but these accounts of the supernatural follow a *natural* law of distribution within the sources. No qualitative estimate can be attempted. We speak merely in terms of quantity. There are two large masses of miracles in the Old Testament. One of these is connected with the period of the exodus from Egypt and the invasion of Canaan. The other is connected with the period now before us. These masses form, as it were, two mountains; while the miracles between make a line of little hills. There was no movement in the history between the invasion and the ninth century powerful enough to force the miracle line upward. There is nothing to correspond to the establishment of the united monarchy, and nothing that answers to the great disruption—dramatic as these events were. But in the *ninth* century the miracle line rises abruptly to a considerable height, and then falls. Another notable thing in this age is the founding of the Rechabites, a peculiar sect of country people, whereof more presently. Still another special fact is the literary activity which the modern historical school assigns to this age. The ninth cen-

tury seems to have been the time in which the earliest code of laws was brought together and the first great historical document compiled. The last item in our catalogue is more spectacular than all the rest. The monarchs of both Israelite kingdoms were assassinated in a bloody political revolution which attempted to root out Baalism in the interest of Yahweh worship.

The clue to explanation of these remarkable phenomena leads to understanding not only of the ninth century, but of much that came before and after. At the time of the invasion, the heads of Israelite families acquired country estates in freehold by right of conquest. These lands were held by farmers like Gideon, and Elkanah, and Kish, and Saul, and Jesse, and David, and all the rustic folk who appear in the Books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings. But as the territory was limited, these parcels of land were taken up before no very long time. At a later period—perhaps about the time of Solomon—there evidently set in a gradual concentration of landed property in fewer and fewer hands, like that which has taken place in all the great historic states—Greece, Rome, modern Europe, and America. There were many causes for this in the natural course of things; but we need not go into detail. A suggestive passage bearing on the subject may be reproduced from Professor Hogg, of Oxford:

In the days of Israel's greatness, when agriculture was the chief occupation of the people, the population . . . was certainly enough to bring the country into a state of cultivation, even in places that are now quite barren. The land would be full of husbandmen tilling their fields by day, and returning to their villages at night. . . . At the other extreme also—in such a society as is described, for instance, by Amos and Isaiah—there was an aristocracy that had little immediate connection with the land it owned. Slave labor would doubtless, as elsewhere, be a weak point in the agricultural system, tending to lower its status. . . . After making due allowance for homiletic coloring, we are bound to suppose that agricultural enterprise must have suffered grievously from a sense of insecurity in regard to the claims of property, and from the accumulation of debts. . . . Civil disturbances (such as those abounding in the later years of Hosea) and foreign wars would, in later times, take the place of exposure to the inroads of nomadic tribes. The burden of taxation and forced labor would, as now in many eastern lands, foster the feelings that find expression in the narrative of the great schism and in some accounts of the rise of the kingdom.¹²

¹² *Encyclopedia Biblica* (New York, 1899), col. 85.

The fact of land concentration is undisputed. The point for emphasis here is the form which this concentration took within the social mass. All the evidence leads to the conclusion that country property fell more and more into the grasp of the wealthy classes who centered in the cities. There seems to have been a general mortgaging of country lands. Experience proves that the temptation to borrow is very seductive. The owner of real estate has no difficulty in getting loans up to a certain proportion of the value of his holding. When the Israelite peasants felt the pressure of hard times, they found it easy to obtain loans from the wealthy classes. Wealth centered in the cities of Canaan long before the Israelite invasion. It was precisely these places and their suburbs that were not reduced by the newcomers; and their continued wealth is proved by the abundant references of the literary prophets, like Amos and Isaiah. Of course, all the wealthy persons in the nation were not found in the walled cities. We assert merely that the bulk of the rich were there; and that all well-to-do families tended to move into the cities or their suburbs in order to obtain the many advantages of the great centers of population. The same conditions that forced the mortgaging of country lands made it difficult to redeem the mortgages. Loans are easier to get than they are to repay. All this led either to foreclosure, or to a permanent charge on farm property, or to the absolute slavery of the farmer and his children. The case of the ninth-century widow who appealed in her trouble to the prophet Elisha was not exceptional: "Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear Yahweh; and the creditor is come to take unto him my two children to be bondmen."¹³ This woman was widow of one of the "sons of the prophets" who, in his lifetime, had been heavily in debt. The Hebrew phrase translated "son of a prophet" could be more liberally rendered "candidate for the prophetic office." Several interesting inferences might be drawn from the fact that a would-be prophet of Israel was in debt. The situation in the

¹³ II Kings, 4: 1.

time of Nehemiah, although much later than the period here in view, is worth citing in this connection:

Then there arose a great cry of the people. . . . We are mortgaging our fields, vineyards, and houses: let us get grain because of the dearth. . . . We have borrowed money to pay taxes upon our fields and vineyards . . . and lo, we bring into slavery our sons and daughters. . . . Neither is it in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and vineyards.¹⁴

Against this condition the once free peasants reacted. The result was a tension between the central and outlying parts of the social mass. According to this interpretation, the reaction between country and city is a factor of large importance in the problem of the Old Testament. The remarkable facts listed in our catalogue of the ninth century will now appear in their proper connections.

The enslavement of the outlying districts—the adding of house to house and field to field, about which the Yahweh prophets bitterly complain—this condition became acute in the ninth century before Christ. If the present view is correct, the famous conflict between Yahwism and Baalism was, in the short run, a struggle between the country districts and the cities. We say “in the short run” because in the *long* run it was far more than a struggle of the rustic and the city man. On this rendering, the Yahweh prophets were, at first, the spokesmen of the peasantry. At the outset, the champions of Yahweh were preoccupied with a special problem.

The first of the great prophets came from the rural districts. Elijah was a countryman from the hills of Gilead beyond the Jordan. Elisha, the next prophetic leader, was a farmer whose property was located near the village of Abelmeholah. The next was Amos, a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees, whose home was in the village of Tekoa, a few miles below Jerusalem. Contemporary with Amos, and perhaps a little later, was Hosea, whose interests were in the northern kingdom, but whose home is not known. His book shows that he sided with the peasantry. Micah, the next prophet, lived in the village of Moresheth, in the Judean south country. It is true that in a *later* period the prophets located in the city; but of this more presently.

¹⁴ Neh. 5: 1-5.

The prophetic protests were directed largely against the kings and the governing classes. In general, there was a breach between prophecy and government. Now, the government of Israel had commenced in the country. None of the political heads in the period of the judges were properly city men. After the judges the first king, Saul, was a farmer. David, the succeeding monarch, began life as a shepherd boy in the service of his father Jesse. Before taking the crown, he married the widow of a wealthy sheepmaster. After he became king of all Israel, he captured the city of Jerusalem and made it his capital. It is worth while to emphasize that Jerusalem was one of the Canaanite cities which were not captured at the time of the invasion. Like other fortified cities, it had remained wholly or partly Canaanite until a late period; and King David seems to have reached an accommodation with its inhabitants. The place became known as "the city of David;" and thenceforward the government, both of the united kingdom and of the two monarchies, was administered from the fortified cities. After the age of David, the peasantry doubtless felt that power was more and more slipping from their grasp. When the prophet Elijah came forward to rebuke King Ahab for treacherously seizing the land of Naboth, a great thrill of sympathy went through the homes of the countryside. As the Old Testament law codes prove, the moral ideas of the peasantry made no distinction between treacherously seizing land, after the manner of King Ahab, and foreclosing a mortgage. Foreclosure was thought to be on the same ethical plane as robbery and murder. It was held to be wrong even to charge interest on loans. We see here the primitive, tribal standpoint of the peasants in opposition to the more modern, commercial standpoint of the walled cities.

So profound was the impression made by Elijah and Elisha, as the first great prophetic leaders of the peasantry, that their memory was honored by the luxuriant growth of miracle stories already noted in connection with the ninth century.

After the death of Elijah, the agrarian movement found expression in the field of practical politics. The prophets of Yahweh, under the leadership of Elisha, encouraged the army

officer Jehu to exterminate the royal house and seize the crown. In carrying out his bloody programme, Jehu had the formal, public support of Jehonadab the son of Rechab, who founded the remarkable sect of the Rechabites mentioned above. The Rechabites were country people, who lived in tents, and who probably followed the occupation of shepherds. They supported the side of the prophets in the revolution of Jehu.

Probably it was amid the turmoil of this remarkable age that the primitive law code was compiled which is listed in our catalogue of the ninth century. Although its compilation was probably an incident of the literary activity of that century, there is no reason to suppose that it contains ideas which were new to the age. It was attributed to Yahweh, the god whose worship had been imported into Canaan by the ancestors of the country folk. "The background," in the words of Dr. Harper, "is agricultural throughout."¹⁵ The code could not have been an element of the "official" religion of Israel at the time of its compilation because, on the whole (and especially in its economic aspects), it represents the attitude of the only one party in the state—the agrarian party. But its ideas may confidently be set far back in time—perhaps before the monarchy. It is to be found principally in the middle chapters of the book of Exodus. One of its principal concerns is with the lending of money *by* free Israelites *to* free Israelites, and the holding of erstwhile free Israelites in slavery by their brethren the children of Israel. The agrarian party, which wanted to enforce these laws, was helpless in the face of a great social movement. When you lend money to any of your brethren who are in need, you must not be as a creditor to them; nor may you charge interest for the use of your money. When your brethren become your slaves, you must not hold them in slavery more than six years. In the seventh year they shall go out free. Laws like these were dead letters from the start. Instead of being acknowledged by city and country alike, they merely stood for the *desires* of the rustic party. When they became a part of the officially recognized code after the exile, they were

¹⁵ *Amos and Hosea* ("International Critical Commentary," New York, 1905), p. lix.

evaded; and even had it been possible to enforce them, the remission of interest, and the limitation of slavery, would not have stopped the adding of house to house and field to field. These demands were as unpractical as the law of redemption in Leviticus, which draws a distinction between city and country. According to this law, the man who sells farm property may redeem it, if he care to, at the "jubilee;" but the man who disposes of property in a *walled city* has the right of redemption for only one year, after which the property is confirmed in the hand of its new owner.¹⁶

The remaining item in our catalogue of the ninth century is the fact that in this period the name of Yahweh begins to be incorporated as a rule in the names of the kings. The change in king names may be set alongside the fact that the seat of government, once it was located in the city, remained there to the very last. It indicates that the campaign of the farmers was beginning to have objective results. The prophet Elijah had called upon the nation to serve Yahweh more faithfully, and renounce the Baalim. Yahweh had given Israel the land of Canaan, and raised the people up to great prosperity and glory under David and Solomon. They "were many as the sand by the sea, eating, and drinking, and making merry, every man under his vine and under his fig tree." But now great trouble had come. No longer did every man sit in happy freedom under his vine and fig tree, for the land was coming into control of the wealthy class in the cities. The kingdom was divided; and the royal arms had met defeat on the battlefield. If the people had been as faithful to the covenant with Yahweh as he had been; if they had not mixed his worship with that of the Baalim whose great shrines were in the walled cities; if there had been more brotherly kindness, then Israel might have remained in the Golden Age. On the one hand, the Yahweh party advanced the superstitious claim represented by the Book of Deuteronomy, that the

¹⁶ Lev. 25: 29 f. It was the *walled cities*, not taken at the time of the Israelite invasion, that served as the great shelters of old Canaanite Baalism. It is to these that we refer in speaking of the "city classes." Many so-called "cities" in the Old Testament were nothing more than country villages. Cf. I Sam. 6: 18.

worship of Yahweh resulted in material *good*, and Baal worship in material *evil*; while, on the other hand, this movement had an unmistakably *moral* character, inasmuch as it fiercely condemned certain kinds of conduct. The platform of the Yahweh party was not carefully reasoned out. It was a blending of primitive superstition and the crude ethic of the clan. It was incredible to the city aristocracy. Its emphasis upon Yahweh and its denunciation of Baal were not thought to be well taken. But the Israelite agrarian party is not the only party that has operated successfully on a poor platform; and the strength of a movement which had such leaders as Elijah and Elisha, and which could engineer the bloody revolution of Jehu, forced the respect of its opponents. When Jehu was in the midst of his revolution, he called upon Jehonadab to see his "zeal" for Yahweh. This was a purely formal, ritualistic devotion. Led by the kings, the cities were now adopting a policy of greater *zeal* toward the national god; and one sign of this reform is found in the Yahweh king names which become the rule in the ninth century before Christ. The situation is exactly struck off by Jeremiah when he addresses the god of Israel in these words: "Thou art near in their mouth, but far from their reins."¹⁷

While the new zeal for Yahweh was worthless in itself, it was vastly important for the evolution of religion. The agrarian party had apparently won a great victory; but the pressure of

¹⁷ Jer. 12:2. The limits of this paper forbid enlarging upon the *covenant* aspect of the Yahweh cult, upon which Jeremiah and his fellows laid emphasis. Most ancient gods were thought to be the actual fathers of their worshipers, and hence to be indissolubly connected with society. Sometimes, however, a people acquired part of its cult by association. There is more and more agreement that such was the case with reference to Yahwism. After the misfortunes in Egypt, one or more of the Israelite clans under the leadership of Moses entered into covenant with the Midianite Kenites of the Mount Sinai region; and the Yahweh cult came in at this time and place. From the standpoint of ancient theology, this transaction was conceived by the prophets as the *choice* of Israel by Yahweh; and from this they deduced that he could separate himself from his chosen people if they did not *choose* to do "good" and thus maintain intact "the inheritance of Yahweh." For an excellent statement of the Kenite position, see Professor Paton's articles in the *Biblical World* for July and August, 1906, entitled "The Origin of Yahweh-Worship in Israel." See also Budde, *Religion of Israel to the Exile*.

the social problem continued as before. The reformers were thus goaded into further effort. Inasmuch as the worship of Yahweh was now more zealous than ever, it became clear that the fundamental issue was not merely between the god Yahweh and other gods, but between right and wrong ways of serving Yahweh himself. Nowhere in the Old Testament is the reaction of the outlying districts against the cities formulated explicitly in such terms. To express it in this form would have been a great strategic blunder, and, indeed, would have been impossible. The prophets necessarily assumed that the worship of Yahweh was as ancient in the fortified cities as it was in the country. They could not proclaim Yahweh a god of the rural districts, for after the union of Israelites and Canaanites in the monarchy he had become the god of the entire land. The early prophets merely exploited the national god as champion of the special brand of "righteousness" which was demanded by the agrarian party; while, in contrast with Yahweh, the Baalim were more and more identified with the wrong which was consolidating in the cities. In other words, even at the time of Elijah, in the ninth century, Yahwism had a very definite, but narrow, ethical content. Yahweh versus Baal meant the struggle of Right and Wrong as the peasant saw it. But if Yahweh laid ethical demands upon a city capitalist who was foreclosing a country mortgage, or taking interest from a peasant, or enslaving some poor farmer to work out a debt—if the god of Israel prohibited wrongs like these, why was he not against wrong *everywhere*? He was God of all Israel. There was, indeed, but a single step from the narrow ethics of early Yahwism to the broad moral demands of prophecy in the eighth and following centuries. For the social problem was not merely a question between the peasant and the city plutocrat. It pressed for solution *inside* the cities as well as in the outlying districts. Although in the short run the issue of the great Yahweh-Baal conflict lay between country and city, yet in the long run this great struggle simply furnished the ethical symbols for a wider movement. The last great prophetic leaders, Isaiah and Jeremiah, seem to have lived and worked in the fortified city Jerusalem. If the Yahweh movement had not

advanced beyond the stage represented by Elijah, it would not have been a fact of world-wide significance. But the literary prophets, who worked after the revolution of Jehu, took up the symbols of the rural-urban reaction, and read into them a profounder moral meaning than Elijah could have conceived. The writing prophets took the terms of the crude struggle between Yahweh and Baal, and recast them into coin fit for circulation wherever human society is found.

This paper is necessarily a mere sketch of certain aspects of the Old Testament problem. But perhaps we have assembled enough historical facts to illustrate our main propositions relative to the sociological meaning of the Bible and the need for a new stage in biblical higher criticism. Recurring to the introductory statements, we claim the Bible, not as imposed upon the social process according to the old theology, but as a *part* of the process. We have to bear in mind that long before the religion of the Bible became a fact in the world there was going on within society the same struggle of "good and evil" that is taking place around us today. The forms of the struggle vary; but everywhere men strive to make other men do what they conceive to be "good," and avoid what they regard as "evil." Two remarkable items of evidence in ancient Semitic society are the Egyptian "Book of the Dead" on the one side of Israel, and the "Code of Hammurabi" on the other. Coming long before the Bible and its theology, these early works bear impressive witness to the common ethical striving of the race. This mighty movement was universal in humanity before the religion of the Bible arose. It is the biblical dynamic—the motive that strikes along through the whole complicated process by which this lofty religion was realized for us. Bible religion is an involution of the common ethical struggle, conditioned by the special circumstances of Bible history. Its conceptions and institutions are the result of a development which passes through a number of crises, each disclosing a composition of *interests*—priestly and prophetic, conservative and radical, rural and urban. It is the merit of the literary stage of biblical criticism to show us the nature of the documents. It is the merit of the historical stage to emphasize

the fact of development. It will be the merit of the sociological stage to indicate how this development took place.*

*There are so many works from which a good introduction to biblical higher criticism can be obtained that it is difficult to make a minimum list without omitting some of the best. The sociological student would do well to begin with historical treatises from the modern standpoint: Kent, *History of the Hebrew People*; H. P. Smith, *Old Testament History*. Other good works in English are Wade, *Old Testament History*, and Cornill, *History of the People of Israel*. In German, corresponding to the above, are the histories by Löhr, Guthe, and Thomas. In French, Pipenbring. For the Old Testament prophets (i. e., *preachers*) see Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*; Harper, *The Prophetic Element in the Old Testament*; W. R. Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*. For a general outlook on Semitic religion, see Barton, *Semitic Origins*, and W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*.