CHAPTER III

THE DISSECTION OF THE PENTATEUCH

THE historian is necessarily a compiler. He has to gather his materials from all sides, and in so far as they are literary his work must be to a certain extent a literary compilation. The author of the Books of Kings tells us what some of the sources were from which his narrative has been derived; they were the book of the Acts of Solomon, and the official Annals of the Kings of Judah and Israel. Other contemporaneous sources are named by the chronicler—the book of Nathan the prophet, the prophecy of Ahijah, the Visions and Commentary of Iddo the seer, the Genealogies of Shemaiah and Iddo, the History of Jehu the son of Hanani, 'who is mentioned in the book of the Kings of Israel,' and the Vision of Isaiah.

Extracts from similar sources can be detected even in the Pentateuch; the list of the kings of Edom, for example, given in the thirty-sixth

chapter of Genesis, must have been taken from the state annals of the country, and the itinerary of the Israelites in the thirty-third chapter of Numbers implies an official and contemporaneous record. As we shall see, the account of the campaign of Chedor-laomer and his allies which we find in the fourteenth chapter of Genesis must have been derived from a Babylonian document.

But because the historian is a compiler it does not follow that he is a divided personality. Herodotus has embodied in his history numerous quotations and extracts from his predecessors, but for all that he was a single individual, and not a collection of different writers living at different periods of Greek history whom tradition has comprehended under one name. Printing has made us so familiar with footnote references and marks of quotation that we fail to realize how difficult it was for an ancient author to indicate exactly where he himself was speaking and where he was borrowing from others. The fear of plagiarism was not before his eyes so constantly as it is before the eyes of those who live in an age of printing-presses and reviewers.

There are, nevertheless, modern books which

illustrate the method of the ancients. Little more than half a century ago, for instance, Bayle St. John wrote an account of his visit to Egypt, in which he incorporated long extracts from the works of other travellers without adding marks of quotation, or indeed anything that would enable the reader to distinguish between his own narrative and that of earlier writers. Had such a book been included in the Old Testament Canon, and the older books from which it has been borrowed been known, the 'critic' would have triumphantly pointed to it as an indisputable example of composite authorship. And yet it is really the work of a single author, and the greater part of it is devoted to the story of his own individual experiences.

Archaeology has furnished us with the means of actually testing the value of the 'critical' theory regarding the composition of the Pentateuch. If there is any portion of it in which the supposed fact of divided authorship seems clearest, it is the narrative of the Deluge. Here, if any where, we seem to have evidence of a double version of the story, the two sections of which can be distinguished from one another, and which appear to be characterized not only by

a different phraseology but by a different account of the catastrophe as well. And yet, as has already been said, the Babylonian story of the event goes to show that such evidence is merely illusive. The twofold description of the Flood in Genesis is like the twofold text which, it has been proved, is discoverable in some of the works of Dean Stanley when the 'critical method' is applied to them [1].

The Babylonian story in its most complete form is contained in the great Chaldean epic of Gilgames. It there occupies the larger portion of the eleventh book, and is represented as being told to the Babylonian hero by Xisuthros, the Babylonian Noah, himself. As the epic was composed in the age of Abraham, the episode of the Deluge which has thus been introduced into it must go back to at least as early a date.

Now when we compare the Babylonian story with the account in Genesis we find that it does not agree with only one or other of the two versions which criticism has discovered and distinguished in the Biblical narrative, but with both. Like the 'Elohist' it makes Xisuthros

[1] J. Carmichael, *How Two Documents may be found in One* (Montreal, 1895).

the tenth in descent from the first man, it ascribes the Flood to the sins of mankind, and the preservation of Xisuthros to his piety; it asserts that all living things were destroyed except such as had found shelter in the ark; it states that the approach of the catastrophe was revealed to Xisuthros by the god Ea, who instructed him how to build the ark, which was divided into rooms and storeys, provided with a window, and pitched within and without; it tells us that 'the seed of life of all kinds' was taken into the vessel, along with the family of Xisuthros, and that the waters covered 'all the high mountains'; and, finally, that when the Deluge had subsided and Xisuthros had offered a sacrifice on the summit of the mountain, the god Bel blessed him and promised that he would never again destroy the world by a flood, while the goddess Istar 'uplifted' the rainbow, which an old Babylonian hymn calls 'the bow of the Deluge.'

Like the 'Yahvist,' on the other hand, the Babylonian story sees in the Flood a punishment for sin, and makes it destroy all living things which were not in the ark; it describes how Xisuthros sent forth three birds, the swallow,

the dove, and the raven, to discover if the waters had subsided from the earth, and that, while the dove turned back to the ark, the raven flew away; and it states that after the descent from the vessel Xisuthros built an altar, and offered sacrifice on the peak of the mountain where it had rested, and where the gods 'smelt the sweet savour' of the offering.

The three birds of the Babylonian story explain why it is that in the Biblical version the dove is mentioned twice, though commentators long ago suspected that three birds must originally have been named. Nor is this all. The Biblical writer must have had the Babylonian version before him—if not in its literary form, at all events in some shape or other—for he has deliberately excluded and implicitly contradicted the polytheistic elements contained in it. The swallow is omitted because its name, 'the bird of destiny,' brought with it superstitious and idolatrous associations; the Deluge is not the work of one god, Bel, and the preservation of Xisuthros the work of another, Ea, as the Babylonian account averred, but the punishment of mankind and the revelation of the coming catastrophe to the righteous man

are alike due to the One God, whether He be addressed as Elohim or as Yahveh; while the statement of the Babylonian poet that the door of the ark was shut by Xisuthros himself is directly negatived by the Biblical writer, who asserts that it was that One God who closed it.

If, then, the Babylonian account of the Deluge agrees with the Biblical version *as a whole*, and not with one or other of the component parts into which it has been separated by criticism—and such, as we have seen, is the case—and if, as is also the case, this Babylonian account goes back to an age long anterior to that of Moses, only one conclusion is possible. Even the narrative in which the marks of composite authorship seem clearest is not really composite, at any rate in the sense in which the term is understood by 'criticism.' The other alternative, that the 'Elohistic' and 'Yahvistic' elements already existed in the Babylonian version, is one that no Assyriologist would accept, nor would it assist the 'critical' position, as the Babylonian version had assumed its present form before the Mosaic age.

But we can go yet a step further. When we compare the Biblical with the Babylonian account

of the Flood, we find that its geographical setting has been changed. It is true that the ark is made to rest on one of the mountains of Ararat, but in other respects it has been given a Palestinian colouring. Not only is the name of the rescued patriarch no longer Xisuthros or Utu-napistim but Noah, and the vessel itself has been changed from a ship into an ark. Unlike Babylonia or Egypt, Canaan possessed no great rivers; its population, except in the Phœnician cities of the coast, was essentially inland and unacquainted with the art of ship-building. The sprig of olive brought back by the dove to the ark is another indication of Western influence, for the olive was a tree of Palestine and not of Babylonia. Still more significant is the difference in the chronology and calendar of the two versions. The rainy season of Babylonia was the month Sebet, our January and February, and it was in Sebet, therefore, that the Flood was believed to have taken place. But in Canaan the rainy months were October and November, when the autumn or 'former' rains fall, and March, with the 'latter' rains of spring. In the Book of Genesis, accordingly, 'the fountains of the great deep'

are said to have been broken up and 'the windows of heaven opened' in 'the second month' of the Hebrew year, that is to say, at the end of October, while the subsidence of the waters began in the middle of the seventh month, when the rains of spring would be over.

The conclusion which follows is obvious. Not only does the Babylonian story of the Deluge agree with that of Genesis as a whole, and thus utterly ignore the distinctive elements which criticism has laboured to point out within it; it further shows that the story must have been known and modified in Canaan before it found a place in the Hebrew Scriptures. How this should have been the case we have again learnt from archaeological discovery.

The Tel el-Amarna tablets, which have revealed to us the literary activity and wide-spread education of the Mosaic age, have also shown that Babylonian literature was studied in the schools of Canaan. Even in distant Egypt, in the Foreign Office of the Pharaoh, as we have seen, fragments have been discovered of Babylonian legends, with the words separated from one another for the assistance of the foreign reader. The Babylonian account

of the great catastrophe which had once swept over the civilized earth must have been known in Canaan long before Moses was born. Indeed, it must have been familiar to Abraham himself before he migrated from Ur. In the 'critical' theory of the origin of the Biblical narrative archaeology thus compels us to see only a philological mirage.