

IT IS ANCIENT, YET MODERN

How ancient it is difficult for us to realize. Here, for instance, is a poem over three thousand three hundred years old-Psalm 90. How was life viewed at that distance from our day?

Abram, the Bedouin sheikh, lived his life and made his contribution to world history four thousand years ago! The king of Egypt whose embalmed body may be seen in the museum in Cairo was contemporary with Moses, about three thousand four hundred years ago.

Cities, such as Nineveh and Babylon, once thought to be impregnable, and empires such as the Assyrian and Roman, once regarded as indestructible, have long since crumbled to dust, and are now chiefly of archeological interest.

When Ezra was a youth in Babylon, the battles of Marathon, Thermopylae, and Salamis were fought; Pindar was writing his Odes, and Aeschylus his Tragedies; and Confucius was inaugurating an age in China. And it will be well to remember that Nehemiah was contemporary with Herodotus, "the father of history," and with the great Socrates. These are names that take us into a remote past, and to that past the Old Testament belongs. Paul was contemporary with Seneca and Pliny, and John reached to the time of Tacitus and Suetonius. All that seems and is far away. The Bible is a very ancient Book. Its 'last chapters were written nearly nineteen hundred years ago.

But it is difficult to believe it because the Bible is so modern. The ink might scarcely be dry on the page. There are millions of books of recent date which are already out of date, but this old Book is the most modern of all. Why do not men leave the Bible alone? If they believe it to be a pious fraud, or a collection of myths, why, having said so, are they not done with it?

The answer is, because they cannot. Samuel Taylor Coleridge said that for him the most convincing proof of the divinity of the Bible was that it found him at deeper depths of his being than any other book. That is what the Bible does with all of us, whether we acknowledge it or not; and that is why we cannot leave it alone. I suppose the most recent thing in print is the newspaper. But is it more recent than the Bible?

Dr. Joseph Parker eloquently wrote on this point. He says: "What a Book is the Bible in the mere matter of variety of contents! Everything seems to be in it-poem, narrative, intelligence, judgment, battle, prayer, song, anathema, and benediction. The bush is common enough. But what of the fire which makes the shepherd turn aside? The bread is such as has been used at supper, yet presently it will become the body of Christ! Paul is almost in heaven, yet in the very height of his anticipation he asks for his parchments and his cloak, and he knows exactly where both are left.

"Whole pages are taken up with obscure names, and more is told of a genealogy than of the day of judgment. Stories are half told, and the night falls before we can tell where victory lay. Where is there anything to correspond with this? Not in any book, certainly; but in actual life there is the self-same thing over again without the loss of one line. If the seer could print for us what he sees on any one day in the year he would print a second edition of the Bible. We should have it all over again, including, perhaps, something even of creation itself, with its light, its ascending and descending waters, its trees bringing forth each after its kind, its sunny day, its starry night; but the humanity would be the same, still more vividly—family life, love, fear, envy, covetousness, magnanimity; chosen people and alien lands; temples warm with the fire of the Lord and houses of vain and corrupt idolatry; the noise of war and the song of peace; shepherds keeping their flocks and soldiers listening for the foe; David in the wilderness and Jonah on the sea; weird dreams, spectral hands on the wall, baffled magicians and truth-telling prophets; psalms for which no music is good enough, and proverbs that glisten with wit. All these, and more, we should have on every or any day in the year if the sun could but print as well as shine!

"This is just the Bible. It is a page torn out of the volume of human life, only torn by the hand of God, annotated by his Spirit.

"What is the daily newspaper but a revised translation of the Bible, often, indeed, with God left out in the spelling, though he cannot be left out in reality. Take tomorrow's newspaper in one hand, and the Bible in the other, and see if the paper is not full of repetitions, and if there is not something like an echo in all its utterances."

— Author unknown