

I. Introduction.

A. New Vistas for Old Testament Studies.

During the first third of the nineteenth century, as during the two thousand years that preceded, the Old Testament stood practically alone in most of its historical statements. All that was known about ancient history at that time went back to about 500 B.C. Before that there were a few statements in some of the Greek writers but these were so mixed with myths and legends and with miraculous interventions of the pagan gods that they were not considered at all reliable as sources of historical knowledge. The Old Testament was unique in that it told of events during a period of well over a thousand years preceding 500 B.C. It referred to great cities whose location was no longer known. It mentioned great world conquerors whose very names had disappeared. Even whole nations that bulked large in its pages had been completely forgotten. The historical statements of the Old Testament stood entirely alone. Under these circumstances it was easy for individuals who did not wish to accept the moral and religious teachings of the Bible to question whether its historical statements were at all dependable. This produced a situation in which students of the higher criticism of the Old Testament felt free to rearrange its sections in such a way as to show a merely natural development of moral and ethical ideas, since many of them were of the opinion that its factual statements were largely mythical and not at all dependable from a historical viewpoint.

It is no longer possible to take such an approach to the Old Testament. During the past century and a quarter, at point after point, archeology has demonstrated the existence of the cities, conquerors, and nations mentioned in the Old Testament. At point after point the background of the Old Testament