

An Abridged Old Testament for Popular Use.

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THAT there is a wide-spread and growing neglect of Bible-reading, both in private and in the family circle, is matter of general acknowledgment and regret. Probably it is due not so much to a real decline of interest in the things of God as to the increasing competition of other books and of newspapers and magazines, and the greater facilities for spending leisure time in various profitable and pleasurable ways. Probably also many educated people have abandoned or curtailed the reading of the Bible under the vague impression that modern scholarship has undermined its divine authority and thrown clouds of dubiety and perplexity around large portions of it. In this respect the O.T. has suffered more than the N.T., and even in quarters where one might expect better things it would seem unfortunately to be falling more and more into disuse. 'I have been astonished,' writes Professor D. S. Cairns in a recent letter, 'at the English *Christian* attitude to the O.T. It is the nemesis of some men's evangelical orthodoxy as to the O.T. that in practice they are compelled largely to ignore it.'

But what an intolerable loss it is that here threatens the Christian life and the Christian Church! Apart from the O.T., the Scriptures of the N.T. do not afford all the sustenance and all the guidance that the souls of men require. Apart from a knowledge of the O.T., the Scriptures of the N.T. are in many passages obscure and unimpressive, and the personality and teaching of Jesus Christ Himself hard to understand. 'The O.T. was the Bible of Jesus Christ—the Bible of His education and the Bible of His ministry . . . He repealed, indeed, some of its strongest tempers and institutions; He added to it beyond all its own dreams. But on the other hand, how much in it He took for granted; how much He enforced; how much He came expressly to fulfil! . . . He drew from it most of the categories of His gospel. . . . Above all, He fed His own soul upon it. . . . What was indispensable to the Redeemer must always be indispensable to the redeemed.'¹ 'The O.T. was not, as it were, the scaffolding necessary for

the erection of the Christian Church, needing to be taken down in order that the full symmetry and beauty of the building may be seen, and only to be had recourse to from time to time when repairs are needed. It is an integral part of the structure.'² 'It is one purpose of God which is being fulfilled throughout both O.T. and N.T.; one people of God the story of which is being told from Abel to the Apostolic age. . . . The Christian Church is conscious of being the true people of God, and as such the heir of all God's promises.'³

Looking at the subject for a moment from the preacher's point of view, the range and variety of our pulpit work would be deplorably diminished if, either by our own choice or in consideration of the ignorance, the indifference, the dislike of many of our people, we came to shut ourselves off from O.T. themes. Inexhaustible and profound though the N.T. is, we cannot afford to be banished from that older and more varied territory in which the Kingdom of God is viewed from so many different standpoints. Our ministry would inevitably tend to be monotonous if we had not at our disposal the O.T.'s long and lively history, its wonderful gallery of vivid portraits, its incomparable collection of praises and of prayers.

There are vital elements of divine truth, important aspects of the divine will and the divine government, which are more clearly brought out and emphasized in the O.T. than in the N.T., and which indeed the N.T. tacitly accepts as its foundation stones. In times of war and world-crisis, such as we are now passing through, the reading and preaching of the O.T. are peculiarly needful. Its glowing patriotism, its noble sketches of soldier-heroes, its fearless denunciations of oppression and wickedness, its great ideals of social righteousness, its bright visions of a world in which swords will be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks, have in these days special interest and value. After many years of an over-pronounced individualism we are now being compelled to think *Nationally*; and we ought to be grateful for a sacred literature in which for the

¹ Dr. G. A. Smith, *Glasgow Inaugural Lecture*, p. 11; *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the O.T.*, p. 11.

² Dr. A. F. Kirkpatrick, *Cambridge Sermons*, p. 195.

³ Dr. James Denney, *Reconciliation*, p. 123.

most part the religious unit is not the individual but the community. We there see God dealing with a nation as a whole; a nation elected, redeemed, judged, chastened, purified, and made fit for His service.

There is another reason why in these days every possible facility should be afforded for our people acquainting themselves with the teaching of the O.T. There was perhaps never a time when the old, old problem of the divine permission of evil, the apparent prosperity of the wicked, the cruel sufferings of the innocent and of the righteous, pressed more heavily upon men's minds. Thousands of our soldiers at the front are wrestling with the difficulty, and so are tens of thousands of our people at home. Now, of course, it is to the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ that these perplexed hearts must look for the most helpful light. Nevertheless it is in the O.T. rather than in the N.T. that the problem receives its classic and most powerful presentment. It is in certain Psalms and chapters of Prophecy, and above all in the Book of Job, that we see thoughtful and noble men agonizing over the difficulty, and slowly, painfully, falteringly making their way towards the light. To a soul tormented with similar perplexity the spectacle of their struggles and of their partial entry into peace and into light is apt to be more comforting and stimulating than the victorious assurance of a more complete and more enlightened faith. We see, moreover, in the strange, chequered history of Israel, how the sufferings and humiliations of a nation, and especially the worthiest section of the nation, at the hands of arrogant enemies, may prove to be God's wise, slow, gracious, wonderful method of bringing the nation to a deeper knowledge of Himself and a fuller conformity to His will.

The value of the O.T. being so unspeakable and its wide-spread neglect so undeniable, there would seem to be good reason for adopting any feasible and legitimate expedient which would tend to gain for it a more effective circulation and a more interested perusal. The plea of this paper is that one such expedient would be the preparing and publishing of *An Abridged Old Testament for Popular Use*.

No one can assert that all parts of the O.T. are of equal value and authority. There are whole chapters and portions of chapters filled with names, with abrogated Jewish ceremonial, with unimport-

ant biographical detail, with very difficult and obscure prophecy, which it is far from necessary for the average Christian to read. There are two or three whole books which, as we know, obtained a place in the Canon only at a rather late date and by a rather narrow balance of favourable opinion. There are several instances of almost verbatim duplicates of the same narrative, the same laws, the same proverbs, the same songs of praise.

Without sacrificing anything vital, it would seem possible by well-considered eliminations to reduce the total size of the O.T. by about one-half. And if the great Churches and the great Bible Societies saw their way, even informally, to give such an Abridgment their approval, it might come to have a very wide circulation.

In days when the cost of paper and printing is so abnormally high, the economy thus effected would be a consideration of no small weight. But more important than this, we should have a volume more attractive to many a reader in type and *format* and also in substance. Are there not people who have started out to read the Bible and been disconcerted and checked by finding themselves confronted, as early as the fifth chapter of Genesis and again in the tenth, with lengthy and dry lists of ancient Hebrew names? Clearly an Abridgment would stand a better chance of being read right through from beginning to end.

For sailors and soldiers on active service,¹ for travellers, for native Christians on the mission-fields where small-type editions are unobtainable, and for many other classes, the provision of a less bulky and yet sufficient edition of the O.T. would surely be a distinct boon.

In some quarters it may be contended that the proposed Abridgment would be an unwarranted tampering with the Bible. But such an objection really proceeds from a superstitious and untenable view of the Bible's nature and authority. Even the *Westminster Confession*, which, as Dr. Denney points out, makes a false start by treating of Holy Scripture in its very first chapter and making it fundamental to everything else, declares that the great authority in religion is not the mere letter of

¹ Like others who have recently worked among the troops abroad, the writer found himself supplied with hundreds of N.T.s for distribution; but not a single copy of the O.T. And yet not a few soldiers would certainly have been glad to get an O.T. of manageable size.

Scripture itself but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture. It is the message, not the *ipsissima verba*, that we have mainly to concern ourselves about.

The O.T., as we have it, was itself originally a selection out of a larger amount of sacred literature. Like the N.T., its growth as a Canon was very gradual. Of its three divisions, the Pentateuch was accepted and adopted apparently in the year 445 B.C.; 'the Prophets' followed within the next 200 or 230 years; the third division, even in the time of Christ, was not quite defined, and what decided the inclusion or exclusion of certain books was not any miraculous decree from heaven, but simply the fact that some books as contrasted with others had vindicated a place for themselves either by the fulfilment of their predictions or by 'the power they evinced of living and giving life.'

Now, any decision arrived at in a bygone age by the servants of God met prayerfully in council and guided by the experience of believers can manifestly be revised and modified by the servants of God similarly met and similarly guided in a later age.

But, of course, it is no interference with the established Canon of Holy Scripture that is contemplated in this proposal for an abridged popular edition. The Abridgment would frankly announce itself as an Abridgment. There would be no effort or desire to displace the unabridged Authorized Version, which in countless quarters would inevitably and for excellent reasons continue to be preferred. All that is aimed at is the furtherance of Bible-reading among the masses and the making it more attractive and effective.

May not the proposal almost be said to be in line with other liberties which have from time to time been taken with Scripture and which have been vindicated by experience? The introduction of vowel-points into the Hebrew text was in its day a daring innovation; yet it immensely facilitated the reading of the Scriptures and greatly helped the preservation of their meaning. The translation into the Greek of the LXX was a significant innovation, especially as the rendering by no means always aimed at verbal faithfulness; yet by and by the LXX came to be more widely read than the original, and was abundantly useful and profitable; as the English translations and innumerable others have also been. In 1643, doubtless at the suggestion, direct or indirect, of the Great Protector,

there was published 'The Souldiers Pocket Bible: Containing the most (if not all) those places contained in holy Scripture which doe shew the qualifications of his inner man, that is a fit Souldier to fight the Lords Battels, both before the fight, in the fight, and after the fight: Which Scriptures are reduced to severall heads, and fitly applied to the Souldiers severall occasions, and so may supply the want of the whole Bible: which a Souldier cannot conveniently carry about him: And may bee also usefull for any Christian to meditate upon, now in this miserable time of Warre.' This Soldier's Bible of Cromwell is a small octavo of sixteen pages; with only two exceptions it culls its extracts exclusively from the O.T. Bible Societies and other publishers have long been accustomed to issue separate books, and groups of books, of the Bible, selecting those which seemed most important and most edifying. The present proposal for an abridged edition of the whole O.T. is really only an extension and modification of that idea.

It might be well that the Abridgment should not be made in the interests of any particular views or results of the Higher Criticism. Neither should it be coloured by any prejudice against miracles, or by any desire to harmonize apparent discrepancies.

Passages which suggest so-called moral difficulties, or which are unsuitable for children or for reading aloud in the family circle, would not on that account be omitted: it is not an *expurgated* edition that is aimed at.

Historical interest, biographical vividness, ethical impressiveness, devotional value, theological importance, literary beauty are among the considerations which would carry weight for the retention of this and that portion respectively. But not from any one of these various points of view, exclusively or even preferentially, would the Abridgment be made. It would reverently aim at including the great bulk of what is decidedly characteristic, essential, vital, helpful.

Care would have to be taken to retain the early chapters of Genesis, with their sublime declaration of fundamental ethical and religious truths; and to conserve enough of the historical books to make clear the main course of Israel's and Judah's national affairs and keep intact all the great personal portraits. The fundamental moralities as inculcated by the Mosaic Law and

eloquently emphasized by the Prophets would, of course, be included; but on the other hand little or nothing of the details of sacerdotal and ceremonial arrangements. The Messianic visions of the Prophets could not be dispensed with, nor the pithy wisdom of Proverbs. Room would have to be found for the greater part of Job, and for at least two-thirds of the Book of Psalms.

With some hesitation there is now submitted a tentative and somewhat rough list of portions to be omitted in the proposed Abridgment.

The whole of Leviticus, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Esther, Song of Solomon, Obadiah, Nahum.

Genesis—4¹⁶⁻²⁶; 5; 10; 11¹⁰⁻³²; 15⁷⁻²¹; 17²²⁻²⁷; 19²⁹⁻³⁸; 20; 21²²⁻³⁴; 22²⁰⁻²⁴; 23; 24⁵⁻⁹; 25^{1-7, 12-20}; 26; 29²⁹⁻³¹; 31¹; 31⁴⁻³⁶; 33¹⁸⁻²⁹; 34; 36; 37³⁶; 38; 46⁸⁻²⁷; 47¹²⁻³¹; 48; 50⁹⁻¹¹.

Exodus—1¹⁻⁶; 4^{18, 19, 21-26}; 6¹⁰⁻⁷; 18; 25-31; 35-40.

Numbers—1¹⁻¹⁰²⁸; 13^{4-21, 32}; 14²⁶⁻³⁴; 15-19; 20¹⁴⁻²¹; 21¹⁹⁻²²; 25-36.

Deuteronomy—2^{10-12, 20-28, 34-37}; 3⁴⁻²²; 4⁴¹⁻⁴⁹; 7¹⁻¹²⁹; 12²⁰⁻¹⁴²⁹; 15¹²⁻¹⁸⁸; 21-29; 31⁹⁻²⁹.

Joshua—1¹⁰⁻¹⁸; 2^{10, 11}; 3^{6-9, 13}; 4^{4-7, 9-19}; 5¹⁻⁹; 7¹; 8³⁹⁻²⁵; 9^{1, 2}; 10¹⁵⁻⁴⁵; 11¹⁻²²; 12-24.

Judges—1; 2^{1-5, 11-19, 23}; 7²⁸⁻¹⁰¹⁸; 12⁸⁻¹⁵; 17-21.

Ruth—3¹⁻⁴¹²; 4¹⁸⁻²².

1 Samuel—2⁸⁻²⁶³⁶; 5; 11; 12; 13^{1-4, 6-23}; 14¹⁷⁻⁶²; 19; 20; 23^{1-13, 19-29}; 25; 30.

2 Samuel—1¹⁻¹⁶; 2^{2, 3, 12-32}; 3²⁻¹⁶; 5¹³⁻²¹; 8⁷⁻¹⁸; 9; 10; 12²⁶⁻³¹; 13; 14; 15³²⁻³⁷; 16; 17; 19-22; 23²⁴⁻³⁹.

1 Kings—1; 2^{5-9, 18-46}; 3¹⁻³; 4¹⁻²⁰; 6^{1-6, 8-16}; 7; 9; 10¹⁴⁻²⁹; 11⁹⁻²⁵; 13¹⁻¹⁶²⁸; 20; 22⁴¹⁻⁵³.

2 Kings—1; 3; 4^{1-7, 38-44}; 6-8; 10-17; 21³⁻²⁶; 22³⁻²⁸; 23^{1-20, 31-38, 36-37}; 25^{8-11, 23-30}.

Ezra—1⁶⁻³⁷; 4⁶⁻¹⁰⁴⁴.

Nehemiah—1⁵⁻¹¹; 3¹⁻⁶¹⁴; 6¹⁷⁻⁷⁷³; 8^{4, 6, 7, 12-16}; 9-13.

Job—3^{7, 8}; 4^{20, 21}; 5^{2-8, 18}; 6^{2-7, 16, 13, 16-23, 27}; 8¹⁶⁻²²; 9^{15, 17-21}; 15¹⁷⁻³⁹; 16⁹⁻¹⁶; 17^{3-8, 12-16}; 18⁸⁻¹³; 19⁹⁻¹³; 20^{6-21, 23, 26}; 22^{6-11, 14-20}; 24^{8-13, 17-23}; 27⁷⁻²³; 28; 30^{2-9, 11-19, 24-31}; 31-37.

Psalms—5; 6; 7; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 26; 28; 29; 35; 38; 41; 44; 52; 53; 54; 58; 59; 60; 64; 69; 70; 71; 78; 79; 80; 81; 82; 83; 86; 87; 88; 89; 97; 98; 99; 105; 108; 109; 111; 117; 119^{41-66, 73-96, 118-176}; 120; 123; 128; 129; 134; 135; 136; 140; 141; 142; 143; 144; 148; 149; 150.

Proverbs—1²⁰⁻³³; 2; 3²¹⁻³⁵; 6²⁰⁻³⁶; 9; 10²³⁻³²; 11³⁻²⁹; 12; 13; 15²⁰⁻³³; 16²¹⁻³⁹; 17; 18²⁻²⁰; 19; 20⁵⁻¹⁶; 21; 22¹⁷⁻²⁷; 23¹⁻¹⁴; 24^{1-9, 26-28}; 26; 28^{2-7, 15-29}; 29²⁻¹⁴.

Ecclesiastes—5³⁻²⁰; 6; 7; 8; 9¹⁻⁶; 10.

Isaiah—1²¹⁻³¹; 3^{1-9, 16-26}; 4; 8¹⁻⁸; 9⁸⁻²¹; 10^{1-4, 28-34}; 11¹¹⁻¹⁶; 13; 14^{1, 2, 24-32}; 15-24; 25¹⁰⁻¹²; 26¹¹⁻²¹; 27; 29; 30^{3-14, 22-28}; 34; 36-39; 41¹⁸⁻²⁹; 46; 47; 48³⁻⁸; 49¹⁷⁻²¹; 50^{1-2, 11}; 51; 52³⁻⁶; 56; 57¹⁻¹⁴; 59⁴⁻¹⁴; 65^{1-7, 18-18}; 66³⁻²⁴.

Jeremiah—2⁴⁻³⁰; 3; 4¹⁵⁻³¹; 5¹⁻¹⁹; 6^{1-10, 17-30}; 7²⁸⁻³⁴; 8^{1-5, 10-17}; 9^{4-22, 25, 26}; 10; 11^{1-8, 10-17}; 12⁷⁻¹⁷; 13^{12-14, 24-27}; 14¹²⁻¹⁸; 15²⁻²¹; 16; 17¹⁶⁻²⁷; 18¹³⁻²³; 19; 21¹¹⁻¹⁴; 22; 23⁹⁻²⁵³⁸; 27; 28; 29¹⁵⁻²³; 30^{4-9, 12-24}; 32¹⁻³⁷¹⁰; 39-46; 48^{2-5, 12-47}; 49^{1-6, 17-29}; 50²⁻²¹; 51^{1-82, 57-59}; 52.

Lamentations—2; 3^{1-21, 48-66}; 4; 5.

Ezekiel—4⁴⁻¹⁷; 5⁹⁻⁷²⁷; 10-17; 19; 20¹³⁻³²; 21^{1-7, 18-33}; 22¹⁷⁻²⁴¹⁴; 26⁶⁻²¹; 28-30; 32; 33^{1-9, 12-29}; 35; 36¹⁻¹⁵; 37¹⁵⁻⁴⁸³⁶.

Daniel—2; 4; 7-12.

Hosea—1²⁻²¹; 3; 5¹⁻¹⁴; 7; 8⁹⁻¹⁰¹⁶; 12; 13.

Joel—3.

Amos—1³⁻²³; 5¹³⁻¹⁷; 6²⁻⁷⁹; 8¹⁴⁻⁹⁶.

Jonah—No omissions.

Micah—1⁷⁻¹⁶; 2⁵⁻¹³; 3¹⁻⁴; 4⁹⁻⁵¹.

Habakkuk—No omissions.

Zephaniah—2¹⁻³¹⁰.

Haggai—2¹⁰⁻¹⁹.

Zechariah—1⁷⁻²¹; 3; 5; 6; 7; 9¹⁻⁸; 10; 11; 12⁴⁻⁷; 14¹⁻¹⁹. Malachi 2¹¹⁻¹⁶.

Literature.

REUNION IN ETERNITY.

THE Introduction to Sir William Robertson Nicoll's new book on *Reunion in Eternity* (Hodder & Stoughton; 6s. net) has already been referred to. But it must have its place here also, for the sake of its great purpose and the consummate literary skill with which that purpose is pursued.

'Reunion in Eternity'—we had become much concerned about reunion in time, then came the War, and set the perspective right. For you never can be properly worldly unless you are first quite otherworldly. You must set your interests within

the range of the eternal to save them from secularism, which is the curse. You must crave for reunion with those who have gone within the veil if you are to care truly for reunion with those who are still without. Reunion must be with Christ both here and there, otherwise it is the reunion of selfish desire and already a disappointment.

Sir W. Robertson Nicoll brings his subject into focus and then proceeds. He believes in reunion and in the blessed persistence of it. But he is modest enough to think that his belief is insufficient for our conviction. So he calls on other witnesses—many witnesses and wonderfully diverse