

## The Hebrew Prophets.

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THE Revisers of the Old Testament in the English Version were confronted by different problems from those which had to be faced by the Revisers of the New. The latter had to deal with a number of grave questions arising out of the many variations which are found in ancient copies of the Greek Text. In adopting readings, which often differ essentially from those that underlie the words of the Authorized Version, they necessarily made many notable changes in the familiar English: these were increased by strenuous efforts to attain accuracy and secure uniformity of rendering. It was inevitable that their work should produce a storm of criticism. Many writers, amongst whom the author of *The Revision Revised* was pre-eminent, brought the controversy in its facts and issues to the understanding of all who love the English Bible, whether scholars or not. The revision of the Old Testament provoked no such opposition as that which the revision of the New had to encounter. It was published later, by which time the English mind had become a little more accustomed to interference with its 'Saxon Bible.' The changes are not so numerous, although many are noticeable; and the result is a translation which is far more reminiscent of the familiar language of the old book. There has therefore not been the demand for explanations of the work of the Old Testament Revisers which arose in the circumstances of the publication of the Revised New Testament. Yet, in some respects, the need is greater; for, in comparison with those who read Greek, the number is small of those who can judge at first hand of the work of the Old Testament Revision Committee. The book which we are about to review is the attempt by two scholars to supply a real want. It addresses the reader who is sufficiently educated to be able to take an intelligent interest in the literary and historical questions connected with the authorship and purpose of the books of the Old Testament, but it does not assume acquaintance with any of the learned languages, or the possession of special technical knowledge. The annotations are, for the most part, brief; but are very pertinent and illustrative comments. Other renderings are some-

times suggested, in addition to those in the Revisers' margins; and sometimes we are informed that the Hebrew is very obscure; and this, not seldom, because of the state of the present Hebrew text.

The Revisers of the Old Testament followed a different plan in dealing with the original text from that which was adopted by the Revisers of the New. This is the principal cause of the marked difference to be found between the two Versions which they respectively issued. During the three centuries which have elapsed since the publication of the Authorized Version there has been a great accession of materials for the criticism of the Greek Textus Receptus. No evidence of like character and amount is available for correction or alteration of the Massoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible, and there are no signs that it ever will be. The Hebrew original depends on much the same diplomatic support as in the days of James I. Dr. Cheyne has courageously attempted to supply the lack of external evidence by probing the Hebrew, and its Septuagintal representative, with the result that he has rewritten the Bible in many places. We are eagerly waiting to see whether his successor, Professor Cooke, will continue and complete a work so radical in character and startling in results. Nothing of this nature was attempted by the Revisers of the Old Testament; and, as they did not depart from the Received Text, their translation is free from those omissions of verses and changes of rendering which so deeply impressed the readers of the Revised New Testament a quarter of a century ago. Many to whom the revision of the New Testament has never been acceptable, have learned to value the revision of the Old; and such will find very great help from the work which has been auspiciously commenced by Mr. Woods and Mr. Powell in the initial volume lying before us.

This volume<sup>1</sup> contains Amos, Hosea, Is 1-39, and Micah. Deutero-Isaiah will be included in a later volume. As the editors consider that

<sup>1</sup> *The Hebrew Prophets for English Readers.* Edited by F. H. Woods, B.D., and Francis E. Powell, M.A. Clarendon Press. Vol. i. 2s. 6d. net.

other parts of the canonical Isaiah are the compositions of later writers, it might have been more logical to have relegated these also to their places towards the end of the Canon; but these portions are not so completely separated from the rest, as are chapters 40-66, and dislocation would have had practical inconvenience. The comfort and advantage of the reader are consistently aimed at throughout the work.

The editors deal with the writings of the Prophets on what are known as critical principles. The common antithesis between 'tradition' and 'criticism' sometimes veils contempt, and always suggests an absence of judgment in the generations in which the traditions arose. As we now know that the literature of the Hebrews contained works of which some are no longer extant, and others were never included in the Canon, it is impossible to deny that a certain discretion, more or less reasonable, must have been exercised by the Jews as to what should be rejected, what religiously preserved. But modern criticism feels that its tools are strong and delicate enough to effect a successful dissection of the Canon; that it can reject parts, and relabel the remainder, though it cannot recover what the scribes of Maccabean days did not think worthy of special protection. Scholars, to whom criticism of the Bible is a familiar literary exercise which they can pursue without casting a shadow on their own belief in the divine origin of the Scriptures, do not always realize the effect produced on the minds of those whom our editors describe in their Preface as 'intelligent, but not necessarily highly-educated people.' Such are apt to wonder whether the character of their Bible has not been changed, when large portions are declared not to be the writings of the Prophets, to whom the men of ancient days assigned them; and when prophecies are post-dated, and brought near to the courts, which formerly they were supposed to predict. We think that the volume before us, and expect that those which are to follow, will remove some unfounded anticipations. Here the 'intelligent' reader will discover that, after all, it does not signify as much as, perhaps, he supposed, whether there were many Isaiahs, or only one. The pieces collected under one name conspire in conveying a united and consistent message. But we also think that the same 'intelligent' reader will ask for a little further explanation. We fully recognize that necessities

of space have curtailed argument; but note *A*, p. 59, affords a hope. We venture to ask that some reasons may be given in later volumes, not only with respect to the famous twenty-seven chapters, but also about other portions of prophetic writings. Why are some redated and renamed? Is it because of the historical background? or of the ethical teaching? or for linguistic reasons? or because the use of a proper name demands, in common sense, the reduction of the interval between prediction and fulfilment? The editors may not have space for discussion, but the 'intelligent' reader will like to have a sight of the critical tools at work.

The question asked on p. xxvi, Were the New Testament writers right in claiming events as fulfilments of prophecies? shows how marked is the effect produced by the use of those critical tools. A generation ago Catholics and Protestants alike regarded the New Testament writers as our guides to the exegesis of the Old. Something, we grant, 'depends upon what we understand by "fulfilments" and "definite prophecies"'; but the final answer comes out of our 'presuppositions,' to borrow a thought from Dr. Illingworth. If we presuppose in the Bible only a difference from other sacred books in degree, but not in kind, then it would be vain to expect in an Isaiah or a Nahum a gift of prescience essentially greater than that which was possessed by a certain statesman, who recognized (what we are beginning now to realize), that the United States may hereafter become the dominant world power. But though we may begin by interpreting the Bible as any other book, we cannot, in reason, refuse to recognize its unique character, evidenced in its history; the cohesion of its parts; the power of its teaching; and what Professor Butcher (quoted p. xvi, n.) calls its 'capacity of eternal self-adjustment.' We return to our study of the Bible with the presupposition that we shall find more here than in any other book. We expect superhuman elements, as the fitting environment of words and deeds, which transcend the immediate occasion. It would be interesting to know, though it is impossible to determine, to what extent the future was patent to the spiritual vision of those prophetic men of Old Testament days; men of saintly mind, and living very near to God. We recognize with the writers (p. xxvii) that the Prophets were not passive musical instruments. Their sound expressed their personal sentiments, with all the

necessary human limitations. But in music no tone is single; the note echoes off in by-tones, which in some conditions are distinctly audible to the practised ear. Within the melody of the Prophet's utterance for the men of his own time, there lurk the tones of a deeper, more Divine significance. Perhaps to Hosea and his audience (6<sup>2</sup>) the 'two days' and 'the third' meant no more than 'very soon,' as the editors explain them. But the Christian catches a note of the 'third day' of complete victory. It may be that Micah in the famous passage (5<sup>2-6</sup>) intended no greater event than the birth of a saviour of society in David's town; but what he delivered, became an anticipatory word picture of the world's Saviour; who was born in the very town Micah named, who has extended the spiritual realm of Israel over the earth, and is conquering Assyria, type of the world in opposition to God. In this connexion we remark that we feel no hesitation in here adopting the typical interpretation, which, in reference to Edom, is suggested as an alternative in notes on Is 34<sup>5</sup> (cf. 63<sup>1</sup>). Of various national adversaries, the Prophets take now one, now another, as types of the world in conflict with the theocracy.

If we understand aright the first paragraph of section vi. (p. xxvi), the writers regard allegory as a method of interpretation, by which the Christian may read gospel meanings into Old Testament sentences. We prefer to regard allegory as a style by the use of which a deeper meaning is enclosed in the more obvious. It is a feature of Holy Writ, and part of its unique character, that there is a remarkable coherence between the teachings of the many authors of the 'Divine Library.' One writer interprets another; the later elucidate the earlier, and show that inspired utterances constantly contained more than the speakers, as far as we know, intended to express. This seems to be recognized by the editors in the second paragraph of section vi. (p. xxvii). Certainly, to deny such fulness of meaning is to

ignore a feature of the problem, which it is the task of Biblical exegesis to solve.

The work of the editors in their arrangement of the text, and the headings of the subjects, is excellent, and will assist the reader in taking an intelligent interest in the words of the Prophets. We particularly commend the section (pp. xviii-xxiv) on the Poetical Features of the Prophetical Books; for the style of Hebrew poetry is little known outside the limited circle of Hebraists. We can readily believe that 'considerable self-restraint' had to be exercised in selecting the annotations. We do not deny that in some cases our choice of what to say, what to pass over, would have been different; but perhaps the editors have made a better choice than we should, of what would best serve the interests of those for whom they have written. We are not sure, however, that all those would know the classical meaning of *nudus*; yet no explanation is given of Mic 1<sup>8</sup>, and the note about the prophet's official dress on Is 20<sup>2</sup> does not quite answer the reader's inquiry. Do not 'the years of an hireling' (Is 16<sup>14</sup>) mean simply 'three full years'; it being necessary to define, because of the reckoning by which a portion of a period was taken for the whole? Compare the curious addition in 2 S 21<sup>1</sup>, lest the reader should think only one year, with a week or so on either side, was meant. Without disputing the broad statement in the note on Is 7<sup>14</sup>, we ask, What can '*almah*' mean in Song 6<sup>8</sup>, if not *virgin*? Only so is the classification maintained. In any case, superhuman prescience is required to announce the sex of an unborn child. It may be replied that the announcement is not a prophecy, but only a hopeful anticipation. We forbear to add other criticisms, such as inevitably occur in reviewing annotations on various passages, full of difficulty, and the subjects of controversy; rather we desire to express our hearty approval of the volume before us, and to thank the editors for this helpful addition to the books now available for an intelligent study of the Hebrew Prophets.