

Testament came from the unexhausted forces below, and not from the feeble, resigned culture of a worn-out upper class—for this reason alone was it able to become the Book of Humanity.

Thus from the simple writings on stone, papyrus, and clay that unfold to us the nature of the lan-

guage of the New Testament and at the same time reveal the peculiar characteristic of the Book, there streams a flood of light on the fate of the Sacred Volume in the history of the world: the New Testament became the Book of the Peoples because it was first the Book of the People.

## A New Commentary on the Psalms.<sup>1</sup>

BY THE REV. J. A. SELBIE, D.D., ABERDEEN.

FOR obvious reasons there is no part of the O.T. that commands a wider interest than the Book of Psalms, which is the great manual of devotion alike to Jew and Christian. English-speaking students are not, indeed, without valuable aids to the understanding of this book, but hitherto they have lacked what Professor Briggs has now supplied, a commentary giving the latest results of modern research, and at the same time treating the materials in a way that ministers to practical needs. Probably no O.T. scholar could have been selected better fitted for the task. The work before us, as we are told, represents the fruit of forty years of labour, and the evidence of this is manifest on every page. The ease with which our author handles his vast theme could come only from familiarity with all its details; he knows *how to suppress*, and he exhibits at every turn a well-balanced judgment and a rare capacity for weighing conclusions. By his share in the great *Hebrew Lexicon* recently published (Oxford, 1906), Professor Briggs has shown himself to be one of the foremost Hebraists and O.T. scholars of the day. But this is not the only ground on which he can claim our confidence. All through the volume before us we meet not only the scholar and the critic, but the man who is in thorough spiritual sympathy with his subject, and whose admiration for the Psalms enables him to appreciate their spirit and message. It will interest many to read this testimony by Dr. Briggs:

'The Psalms are among the most wonderful products of human genius. No other writings but the Gospels can compare with them in grandeur and importance. The Gospels are greater because they set forth the life and character of our Lord and Saviour. The Psalter expresses the religious experience of a devout people through centuries of communion with God. I cannot explain either Gospels or Psalms except as books of God, as products of human religious experience, inspired and guided by the Divine Spirit' (p. viii f.).

We may now proceed to give a short account of the contents of the volume. The Introduction starts with a very informing discussion of the names applied in the Hebrew canon and elsewhere to the Book of Psalms as a whole (with which should be compared the full treatment [p. lix ff.] of the terms applied to particular psalms in their titles). This is followed by an account of the text of the Psalter. Here we may call attention to our author's remarks on the testimony of the Versions, and in particular to his contention that certain MSS of the liturgical psalms, although of late date, have preserved the most correct text of the LXX. He even goes the length of saying that where B and  $\aleph$  differ from the other MSS they are almost invariably at fault (p. xxviii). The true aim of the textual criticism of the Psalter is set forth by Dr. Briggs as directed towards the recovery not merely of the Canonical Psalter in its final edition, but of *the original text of the psalms themselves as they came from their authors*. This we have to determine by the use of additional internal evidence in the Psalter itself, and of external evidence from other books of the O.T. [p. xxxiii f.]. Among the instruments of research in this department Dr. Briggs makes considerable use of the strophical and metrical structure of a psalm. Now, Hebrew metre is a thorny subject,

<sup>1</sup> 'The International Critical Commentary': *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, by Charles Augustus Briggs, D.D., D.Litt., Professor of Theological Encyclopædia and Symbolics, Union Theological Seminary, New York; and Emilie Grace Briggs, B.D.; in 2 vols. Vol. I. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906. Price 12s.

and some of the best Hebrew scholars have as yet felt themselves unable to accept any of the schemes that have been put forward. Dr. Briggs, however, while he rejects such detailed systems as that of Sievers, is quite convinced that a metrical scheme has been established. For particulars we must refer the reader to p. xxviii ff. of the Introduction. We do not at present propose to discuss the validity of his reconstruction of the text, or his setting down of phrases or clauses as glosses in obedience to the exigencies of his scheme, but we may venture to question whether, even in his judicious hands, metre does not sometimes play too large a part in deciding the question of the composite authorship of a psalm. Take Ps 19. The argument that it is not likely that the same author should have combined in one piece the praise of God's glory in the heavens (vv.<sup>1-6</sup>) and of God's law (vv.<sup>7-10</sup>) has never struck us as a powerful one, and it is not strengthened in the least by the circumstance that the first half of the psalm is in trimeter, and the second in pentameter measure. What more natural than that the transition from the one subject to the other should be marked by a corresponding change of measure? Does not Professor Briggs himself point out that Ps 23 consists of three strophes, treating of parallel themes, and that the measure changes from a trimeter in the first strophe to a tetrameter in the second, and a pentameter in the third?

Nothing in the volume strikes us as more admirable than the account (p. xlix f.) of the way in which many early psalms have been adapted for later use by glosses of various kinds, the editors of the various Psalters thus doing exactly what the editors of prayer-books, liturgies, and hymn-books have always done. This process, while it has damaged the literary and historical value of the Psalms, has enriched them as expressions of religious experience, and rendered them more suitable to minister to the needs of congregations. On the interesting question of the dates of the component parts of the Psalter, Dr. Briggs holds, in the first place, that no psalm can be regarded as earlier than David, and that few belong to his time. In passing, we may notice how in a few sensible words he brushes aside the extraordinary attempt that is occasionally made still to claim Davidic authorship for a psalm upon the supposed testimony of our Lord or His apostles:

'Jesus and Peter were arguing with the Pharisees in the *Halacha* method, on the basis of received opinion. There

were no good reasons why Jesus and His apostles should depart from these opinions, even if they did not share them. There was no reason why Jesus, as a teacher, should have come to any other opinion on this subject than His contemporaries held. This was not a matter in which His Divine knowledge would have influenced His human training. He was doubtless not informed as to matters of criticism which did not confront Him in His day. We cannot therefore regard this single statement of Jesus [Mk 12<sup>30</sup>] as decisive of the authorship of Ps 110' (p. lv f.).

The final editorship of the Psalter cannot have been earlier than the Maccabæan period, and most of the Psalms are post-exilic. At the same time, it will, we believe, surprise not a few of our readers to find how many psalms Dr. Briggs accepts as either pre-exilic, exilic, or early post-exilic. Even Ps 110 is attributed to the early monarchy.

The problem of the Imprecatory Psalms is faced by Dr. Briggs without any flinching. He believes, indeed, that many of the imprecations were originally scribal glosses, which have found their way from the margin into the text; but he justifies their use, even by the original authors, on the ground of a sense of the solidarity of the interests of the individual servant of God with those of the nation of Israel, and with the religion of God itself. Moreover, he adds, and it is refreshing to read his vigorous sentences:

'No one knows what love is who cannot truly hate. It is a weak and sickly individualism which shuts its eyes against the wrath of God and of the Lamb, and of the Church the Bride of the Lamb, against evil and incorrigible sin. There is a place, therefore, for imprecation in the highest forms of Christianity, only it is more discriminating than in the O.T. religion, and much more refined. In substance, the imprecations of the Psalms are normal and valid; in their external form and modes of expression they belong to an age of religion which has been displaced by Christianity' (p. c).

Amongst other points of interest may be noted our author's explanation of the mysterious and much discussed term 'Selah!' which he takes to indicate the abbreviation of a psalm in liturgical use, and to mark the place where the closing benediction might be sung. The word itself means, we are told, 'Lift up (the voice in praise).'

The section on the 'Interpretation of the Psalms' is valuable and interesting as tracing the development of interpretation through allegorical, typical, and other methods to the historical method of to-day.

Our author desiderates a good *metrical* version of the Psalms, which, he thinks, might quite well

be produced in English poetry in essentially the same measures as the original. There is no reason why, as he points out in another connexion, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jew should not combine in carrying out this task.

Of the Commentary itself, which extends to Ps 50, we need say no more than that we have

examined a great many passages in it, and have found its treatment of them satisfying in every way. We shall await with eagerness the second volume, which will complete one of the noblest products of American scholarship, and what, it is safe to predict, will prove one of the most popular of the series of Commentaries to which it belongs.

## Recent Foreign Theology.

### Jesus of Nazareth.

*Von Reimarus zu Wrede, Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung.* Von Albert Schweitzer, Lic. Theol. Dr. Phil. Privatdozent an der evan. theol. Facultat zu Strassburg. Pp. viii, 418. Price M.8.

*Die Hauptprobleme der Leben-Jesu-Forschung.* Von Otto Schmiedel, Professor am Gymnasium zu Eisenach. Zweite verbesserte und vermehrte Auflage. Pp. viii, 124. Price M.1.25.

*Die Geschichte Jesu.* Erzählt von P. W. Schmidt, ord. Professor der Theologie an der Universität Basel, mit einer Geschichtstabelle. Volksausgabe. Pp. viii, 179. Price M.1.

*Jesu von Nazareth, im Wortlaute eines kritisch bearbeiteten Einheitsevangeliums.* Dargestellt von Wilhelm Hess. Pp. xv, 77. Price M.1.

*Jesus von Nazareth in seiner Geschichtlichen Lebensentwicklung.* Dargestellt von Wilhelm Hess. Pp. vi, 126. Price M.2. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1906.

It is significant that these five works are published within the present year, and that they are all on the same subject, and that the central subject of the Christian religion. Nor are these all the books on this topic published recently. From all quarters, and from varying points of view, men are approaching the centre fact of Christianity, and are endeavouring to grapple with it and to understand it.

The approach to the central position has been very gradual. For a time the subject of inquiry was the Christian literature as a whole, and the question was as to whether the documents of the New Testament belonged to the first or the second century. That issue was fought out, and the conclusion, on the whole, was that these are

first-century documents. No sooner was this so far settled, than a fresh controversy began. What is the character of these documents, supposing them to belong to the first century? Are they historical documents, that is, are they documents which can be trusted, as containing trustworthy statements of fact, when they *prima facie* appear to state facts? Or are they only apparently historical, and really accounts of what those who set them forth believed not to have happened, but what, from their point of view, ought to have happened? Or, to come closer to the life of Christ, is the figure of the Gospels an historical figure as He is set forth in the Gospels, or is He partly historical and largely the figure which faith fashioned for itself in the interests of the edification of the believer? So the more recent inquiry is as to the steps taken by the Early Church in the interests of faith, to make great and striking the figure of Jesus Christ, in order that that figure might be equal to the demands of faith. Thus the problem is for these modern theologians to separate the historical Jesus from the Christ of faith, and to eliminate from the historical figure all that may plausibly be assigned to the action of the faith and reverence of the Church. These five books are all concerned with this problem, and all answer it in ways which have a measure of agreement, and yet have their peculiar points of view. But there ought to be a preliminary discussion on two points—a discussion not contained in any of the modern books on the *Leben-Jesu-Forschung*. The first is as to the capacity of the Early Church to undertake a process like that attributed to them. As far as we know, they were not a reflective or originating Church. They were receptive, and they were immature. Inven-