

ART. II.—PROFESSOR CHEYNE ON JEREMIAH.

Jeremiah: His Life and Times. By the Rev. T. K. CHEYNE, M.A., D.D.,
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 Nisbet and Co., London, 1889.

PROFESSOR CHEYNE is a man of great culture, of wide and varied reading, a travelled man and a scholar, and among the most advanced of those who take to themselves the name of critic of the Old Testament, hitherto almost exclusively assumed by Germany. The little book, whose title is given above, is one of the "Men of the Bible" series published by Messrs. Nisbet; but it offers a strong contrast not only to those works that commonly issue from their house, but also to some of the other books in the same series. For ourselves, we are free to confess we have not been able to read it without pain, not unmixed also with considerable surprise and alarm. The writer professes to be a disciple of "Arthur Stanley," and to have as his object "so to delineate the outward events of the Old and New Testament as that they should come home with a new power to those who by long familiarity have almost ceased to regard them as historical at all." But in this case this result has been sought, as the writer says, "with faltering steps," not so much by endeavouring to imbibe the spirit of his author, as by translating, or attempting to translate, his thoughts and incidents into the language, customs, and sentiments of modern nineteenth century life, with all its highly-developed civilization, its love of fiction, its party spirit, and its scepticism. The book is in no sense "a Life of Jeremiah," but much more a critical essay on his writings, with occasional biographical allusions. Indeed, the writer rejects the idea of producing a biography of the prophet. The facts of his life are presented to us in a halo of mingled idealism and sentiment, which almost leaves us in doubt as to whether they were facts. One feels inclined to protest against being robbed of the actual historical Jeremiah of flesh and blood of the Hebrew, Greek, and English, under colour of having his history popularized and reduced to the conditions of our own vulgar daily life (see *e.g.* p. 125, n.). Unquestionably the Bible is a book for the million, but it can only become the book of the million by the million being brought under the influence of its spirit and conformed to its standard. It is one of the mistakes of the present day to suppose that the multitude and the masses can be won to Christ by Christ being adapted to the masses. Hence it is that we turn our churches into music-halls and theatres in the hope of winning the multitude, forgetting that once, at

all events, the Son of Man was betrayed by a kiss. Professor Cheyne's *Jeremiah* is a conspicuous attempt to make the most advanced criticism of the Old Testament popular, and to add a new interest to the study of it by eliciting interest in such criticism; but it may safely be affirmed that the attempt will not succeed. The dry details of critical conjecture will have no interest for the general public after the first effect of their novelty has passed away; and what will remain will only be an ineradicable disbelief in the essential authority of the Bible and a corresponding indifference to its teaching.

The reader must decide for himself whether these remarks are just; but let him ponder, for instance, the account given of the prophet's call in the opening chapter which bears the sensational title, "God commands to take the trumpet"—a fair sample of the endeavour to popularize above referred to. "Three distinct heavenly voices reached the youthful Jeremiah—reached him, that is, not from a God without, but from the God within him; or, in Western language, he passed through three separate, though connected, phases of consciousness, which he could not but ascribe to a direct Divine influence" (p. 2). Now, let it be granted that the mysterious call of the prophets had never so many points of specific resemblance to the summons to serve God that comes to "all His saints" and chosen ones; but what authority have we for saying that, in the case of Jeremiah, these voices did *not* come from a God without him? Surely the very fact that in his case the God within him was identical with the God without him was that which made him justly ascribe these voices to a "direct Divine influence." And what the prophet wishes to impress upon us is that they were guaranteed to him, how it is futile to inquire, in such a way that the outward and the inward were made one, and felt and shown to be so. If the call was merely subjective, as we are here carefully assured it was, then in what respect did it differ from the equally strong subjective impressions of George Fox, or John Bunyan, or Ignatius Loyola, or, as the writer himself would perhaps suggest, of John Milton, or Girolamo Savonarola?

It is exactly this which, while seeking to bring the reality of Jeremiah's call within the comprehension of all, virtually deprives it of its intrinsic worth and its specific difference. If there was not an element in the call of Jeremiah and Isaiah (define it whether we can or not) which marked them out from all others who are called, why is it that they are what they are, and capable of being held up as standards for ourselves? Were the prophets actually as great as we believe they are, or are they merely as great as we choose to make

them? Was prophecy a unique and unexampled phenomenon in Israel, or was it merely a development of that ecstatic and frenzied soothsaying which prevailed at Delphi? Was it a gift of the Divine Spirit *sui generis*, or is it rightly to be resolved into a *facsimile* of the ordinary gift of the Divine Spirit as first consciously poured out upon the individual believer? Because, if that is the case, we come perilously near to setting the light within not only on a level with, but above, the light without; and the Word of God, instead of being a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths, is in danger of being quenched in the uncertain vagaries of our own imagination. And that this is not an ideal danger may be seen from language afterwards employed in relation to the same subject. To Professor Cheyne the revelation to Jeremiah was wholly internal. "I have spoken of the experience of the young prophet as an inward experience. So it mainly was. But it was accompanied with *imaginations which were as real to him as if they had been visible to the outward eye.*" (The italics are ours.) "They partook of the nature of visions, but, unlike many recorded visions, were unaccompanied, *as we must infer*, with morbid, moral, or physical phenomena." Why must we infer it? That is precisely the question to which we seek an answer; and the only answer is, because the writer himself is pleased to infer it. But what if, as we read the prophet, the vision was not only as real as if visible to his outward eye, but it had, over and beyond its subjective reality, a positive and objective reality, which was the appointed voucher for its truth? Are we not intended to gather this from Jeremiah's own narrative, and have we any right to affirm the contrary?

We have dwelt at length on this initial point, because it is virtually the pivot of the whole matter. The view of revelation here presented is a purely subjective one, and *consequently* a view which we may modify at will¹ by the excision of the narrative, or emendation of it according to fancy and supposed critical insight. The idea of revelation is a mere creation of our own, which we honour and indulge because it is our own, not because it has any external Divine authority which we are under obligation to recognise. This is really, we venture to say, the essential defect of this treatise of Professor Cheyne's. For instance, we turn over a few pages, and we read, "It appears certain that Jeremiah often somewhat exaggerates the spiritual insensibility of his people. He himself even now and then confesses that it is composed of two very different elements" (see xv. 19, xxiv. 5-7). Let the

¹ We read, *e.g.*, p. 152, "That Jeremiah began to make the discovery, or, speaking religiously, to receive the revelation."

reader note these passages, and then ask himself what is gained by this treatment of the prophet's language, rather than by accepting it as he proposes it to us, not as the uncertain and "exaggerated" word of man, but as the veritable Word of God, which he was commissioned to speak, and which we—unless like unto "the vile" and "naughty figs"—are expected to receive. So, again (p. 39), "He had not entirely got beyond the imperfect moral conceptions of Isaiah, who says in effect, in his opening discourse (Isa. i. 15-17): 'Wash you, make you clean, and then God will hearken to your prayers,' implying that the sinner himself can nip his evil inclinations in the bud—can, by his native strength, 'cease to do evil' and 'learn to do well.' Jeremiah (in iv. 3, 4) speaks like Isaiah." Surely a very monstrous gloss, only to be equalled by some of those which the writer charges against the original guardians of the Jewish Scriptures. Does this deserve to be called criticism, and, if so, must not every true critic repudiate it? When the practice of Goethe in re-editing and rearranging his works (p. 6) is advanced as a parallel to Jeremiah's "violation of strict historical truth" in the form of his prophecies, as we have them, and when the dictum of Novalis, "all transition begins with illusion," is alleged as proof that Deuteronomy was put forth as an "illusion" (p. 76) in the days of Josiah, our eyes, not unnaturally, begin to swim, and we ask ourselves whether it can be true that we have any *Holy Bible* at all, and whether the writers of it do not stand, after all, on a somewhat lower level than Goethe and Novalis. Unless prophets like Habakkuk and Zephaniah had some mission and authority to which the greatest writers among ourselves and in Germany can lay no claim, we cannot, for ourselves, see why their writings are worth the labour which critics bestow upon them. As mere writers they cannot for a moment compare with others, and it can only be on account of the antiquarian and archæological interest attaching to them that they deserve our attention. We venture to think that there is something in them which cannot be found elsewhere, and this, whatever we mean by it, is what we rightly call the Word of God, and it is on this account, and this account alone, that they demand our attentive, and, we may add, our reverential study.

"Jeremiah: his Life and Times" is in two parts, of which the first is entitled "Judah's Tragedy down to the Death of Josiah," and the second "The Close of Judah's Tragedy." It is in the first of these that our own sense of truth and of the allegiance due to the Word of God has been the most terribly outraged, probably because it is in this part that the writer has to deal with the discovery of Deuteronomy in the

temple by Hilkiyah, the priest, in the reign of Josiah. Mr. Cheyne does not hesitate to assume and assert that in this discovery we must find the original and authoritative publication of the fifth book of the Law, and, indeed, it is this assumption, as the most assured result of the latest and soundest criticism, that is so monstrous to the scholar and so misleading to the general unlearned public. If criticism means judgment based on scholarship, we must be allowed to demur emphatically to the assumption, and to deny positively that scholarship demands any such conclusion. On this ground it is not only undemonstrated, but we may affirm that it cannot be demonstrated. But if criticism means the right, in the name of superior linguistic knowledge, to frame any conjectures we please about the structure, contents and origin of these ancient compositions, to assert that any verse or passage that conflicts with our own pet theory is to be set aside as irrelevant or of later date in order that it may not interfere with the construction of the fair aerial castle we are endeavouring to build in the upper regions of the so-called "higher" exegesis; if it means that any hypothesis for which there appears to be even the shadow of evidence in any other hypothesis may be used as a solid basis for assertions that have the greater attraction because they overturn every notion that has the disadvantage of possessing the prescriptive authority of tradition, then the assumption that Deuteronomy was of the age of Josiah may be allowed to pass, and we need not inquire, for it makes not the slightest difference whether it was by "fraud or needful illusion" that it was introduced. But, for ourselves, as laymen, we are at a loss to know how we are to continue to listen to the reading of this last solemn message of the great lawgiver, as the lessons for the Sundays before Pentecost, with the implied parallel that they suggest between Moses and the One greater than Moses in His converse with His disciples during the great forty days before His departure. And if it is part of the providence of God thus to teach by "illusion," may we not confidently expect that all the history of the life, death and resurrection of Christ will infallibly come under the law of similar illusion, and that the promised gift of the Spirit will prove to have been nothing more than the charter by which unlimited and unrestrained license is given to our own spirits to frame and fashion what theories and conjectures they please, and to imagine that these are required by the demands of scholarship, in order that we may render the pure milk and the distasteful manna of the Word of God acceptable to the palate of a critical and fastidious generation whose heart is set upon excitement, and whose appetite craves for novelty and change?

As samples of the writer's method of dealing with this matter we note the following :

The illusion respecting the authorship of Deuteronomy lasted for centuries, and produced, as we may reverently suppose, no injurious effect upon the Church. But in modern times, and especially now, when the reign of law is recognised not less by the defenders than by the opponents of theology, to ask men to believe that Deuteronomy was written by Moses, or that its substance was spoken, though not written by Moses, and supernaturally communicated to Hilkiah, would be to impose a burden on the Church which it is not able to bear, and to justify the prejudice against the Church's Biblical scholars which finds frequent utterance in the secular press. (P. 78.)

To this we can only say that two opposite suppositions are suggested and thrown together here, and that with the second we have nothing whatever to do. With regard to the former we can only ask, why not ?

Let me only add that, in spite of the critical dissection of Deuteronomy which in honesty I have been obliged to give, I can enjoy the book as a whole as much as anyone, and can admire the skill with which the different parts have been put together. It is a fine imaginative account of the latter days of Moses, and I glow with pleasure as I read the concluding words : " *There hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses* " (Deut. xxiv. 10), *sic*. Yes, truly ; for in *this* Moses I detect the germ of Jeremiah—the forerunner of Christ. (P. 84.)

What, then, one would wish to inquire, was Jeremiah's "critical" opinion of Isaiah ? Again :

Well said the author of Deuteronomy, in the introduction which (after, perhaps, a few years' experience of the benefits to the nation at large of the system introduced through him) he prefixed to his original work, *what great nation is there that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law (tōrāh) which I set before you this day* (Deut. iv. 8). He speaks, no doubt, in the assumed character of Moses ; but by the three times repeated expression, *great nation* (see vers. 6-8), he reveals the fact that the people of Israel had, either through God's long-suffering mercy (Rom. ii. 4), or through His blessing upon its obedience, attained a high degree of temporal prosperity. (P. 89.)

And yet at this time the nation was going rapidly into captivity, and sinking to its fall ! Once more :

Jeremiah "cannot any longer have been an interant expounder of Deuteronomy. Nothing which could be colourably represented as favouring mechanical religion was a fit text-book for a progressive teacher. It is, perhaps, a significant fact in this connexion that in Jeremiah's epitaph (if I may call it so) upon Josiah he praises the king, not for introducing the *tōrāh*, but for doing justice to the poor, and thus proving that he 'knew' Jehovah (Jer. xxii. 16). Later on he even becomes the prophet of a 'new covenant,' which is to supersede all previous *tōrāh* (Jer. xxxi. 31). Clearly, then, Jeremiah must before this have begun to be disappointed with Deuteronomy. He may have read it privately—this, perhaps, we may argue from his continued allusions to it ; but in public he confined himself to reproducing its more spiritual, more prophetic portions. As a whole Deuteronomy must be regarded as thrust somewhat into the background, until at length the problem which it sought to solve was resumed at the close of the exile, and a fresh combination

of elements, partly historical, partly sacerdotal, partly prophetic, was published as our present Pentateuch by the great reformer Ezra." (P. 107.)

Truly, whatever may have been the case with Jeremiah in the conjectural circumstances imagined by the writer, it is not Deuteronomy, but himself, with whom *we* are disappointed, and, withal, not a little astounded at him.

Professor Cheyne seeks to find some ground of compromise between what he calls criticism and the Church. It was plainly in the same spirit that the original writers and followers of the Tracts sought to find some compromise between the formularies of the Church of England and the teaching of the Church of Rome. They had outgrown the one; they longed for closer approximation to the other. It is the same with a particular school in the Church of our own day. They have adopted the wild and unproven theories of Kuenen, Wellhausen and others, and they feel that the formularies of the English Church as they stand, to say nothing about the scheme of received Christianity in the vast body of the universal Church, cannot but require large modification before there can be any truce with these novel theories; and rather than yield the advantages of Church communion they ignore the requirements of those formularies and ordinances upon which it depends.

It is not in any narrow spirit of exclusiveness that we write. The facts of the Apostles' Creed are those which are alone required to be believed by the baptized; but even these are assuredly inconsistent with that theory of purely and exclusively subjective revelation which, as we have seen, Professor Cheyne advocates in the case of Jeremiah. If revelation is only subjective, what about the revelation of Christ? What about the facts (?) of the life of Christ? What about the baptism of Christ, the transfiguration of Christ, and the like? Were these objective realities or subjective impressions? And if the life of Christ preserved to us in the New Testament cannot be interpreted without allowing place for the external and the objective, is this the only life in which this is the case? What about the mission of St. Paul and the history of the Acts? Have we any external revelation to rest upon or not? Is it presented to us in the New Testament or is it not? Is it peculiar to the New Testament or is it not? Is it presented to us also in the Old Testament or is it not? Is Deuteronomy the historic record of any such revelation or is it not? Most undoubtedly it comes before us as such. Most undoubtedly, if its origin was such as Professor Cheyne imagines and assumes, it is nothing but an "imaginary" and "illusory" representation of such a revelation; and, what is more, as such it was intended to

deceive—and it does deceive—those who in their ignorance and the simplicity of their defective scholarship as plain men accept it for what it plainly professes to be.

It is not to be supposed that the ordinary devout and believing English public, who from their youth up have given the Bible credit for meaning what it says, will tamely submit to be robbed of a jewel so precious as Deuteronomy if it is what it seems to be, and to accept instead a base and worthless forged imitation of the last words of the great lawgiver, to whose authority our Lord thrice appealed in His conflict with the father of lies, with the significant and conclusive assertion, "It is written." Where was it written, forsooth, if not in the volume of the sterling Word of God? Was it written in the fictitious story of some unknown priests in the time of Josiah, and was that great and pious monarch one of the first to be deluded and imposed upon thereby? And did the Son of man Himself condescend and consent to take His stand upon so insecure and untrustworthy a foundation as an ideal narrative whose only value was that which was wrongly ascribed to it by bigoted and misguided priests, when He was contending for the salvation of the world with the arch-enemy of mankind? Probably the narrative of the temptation is of no more value than that of Deuteronomy in the eyes of our critics, but assuredly Christ our Lord treated this book then as of higher value than the advocates of late origin and the apologists of "illusion" assign to it, and has thereby invested it for those who believe in Him with additional authority and recognition as the standard word of God.

If, indeed, it could be shown by clear and unmistakable evidence, by indubitable proofs of language, and the like, that this book was merely an ideal romance, there can be no question but that our position as believers in Christ would be very seriously compromised; for it is impossible that the actual Son of God in the solemn hour of His weakness should have sought to strengthen Himself with the words of a mere fiction, and that His adversary should have been quelled by their authority. But it is not without knowledge that we say that the whole body of the critics are unable to produce the evidence, as they most certainly have not yet produced it, upon which such an emergency could arise. It is the fashion and the policy of these writers to affirm and to reaffirm as the very latest revelations from the heaven of subjective criticism statements which rest only upon assumption, which have not been proved, which they know well cannot be proved, any more than they can to demonstration be disproved; for it is in this way that the circle of their admirers and followers is enlarged, and a falsehood has only to be repeated again and

again for it to be implicitly believed by a large body of men who probably have no means of testing its credibility. It is, therefore, with the same confidence that we appeal to the English reader to decide for himself whether Professor Cheyne has advanced any other than subjective reasons for accepting the "illusivè" origin of Deuteronomy; but it is not without a caution that we would forewarn the reader of the real character of his assumptions. It is, however, not merely in the field of criticism pure and simple that these assumptions are found. The writer has a way of unconsciously betraying the nature of the ground upon which these assumptions are nurtured. From time to time he very graciously takes us into his personal confidence. "It is twenty years since," "it is seventeen years ago," that such and such a work was begun, or such and such an opinion received, and the like, as if these personal memoranda were of substantive and intrinsic value to the reader in forming his judgment; and so doubtless they are if the authority of the writer is to carry the day. In like manner he has words of encouragement for the young American scholar, Dr. Bissell, "of whom so much may be hoped" (p. 86); he prognosticates that in ten years' time G. Vos will have altered his opinions (66, n.)—"he is a good scholar, but half-hearted critic" (168, n.); Rudolf Kittel, "a young and able German writer, who has modified the view with which he began" (75, n.) and so forth. He must forgive us if we think that here and elsewhere we can detect the germ of some of that supercilious contempt with which the critics of this school are wont to regard even older scholars than themselves who have not seen cause to part with the convictions and traditions of the past, even if, perhaps, at first derived from "the Scripture handbooks of our youth" (p. 164). We cannot but think that the tone of mind which commits itself unreservedly to the conjectures of so-called criticism, as this writer does, is due originally to some "subjective" revolt against the deeper and, it may be, narrower spiritual teaching and influence of youth. This is found to be intolerable, and refuge is taken elsewhere, in other schools and modes of thought, and the simple forms of early faith are despised. It is forgotten that real Christian faith is the same under all conditions and in all circumstances. If it lives, and is genuine, it may flourish anywhere; but if it is lacking, none of the attractiveness which Scripture may derive from critical conjecture and arbitrary manipulation and novel interpretation can supply the place of it. After all, it is only as little children, and not as scholars and critics, that we can enter into the kingdom of heaven; and assuredly they are mistaken who think that they can win others to that faith which re-

quires the childlike heart, and that alone, by presenting the Scriptures in novel and startling forms, as well as they who suppose themselves to have discovered a new light in Scripture which obscures and casts into dimness and darkness that light of the childlike faith in the heavenly Father and the incarnate Saviour which is, after all, the only light of life.

We have spoken somewhat strongly, because we have felt strongly. There is much in this book that is calculated to give pain to the unlearned but sincere believer; there is much that is likely to mislead, from the confident and unwarrantable assumptions with which it is associated, where there is not sufficient knowledge to detect the hollowness of the grounds on which they are based. For this reason we are constrained to withhold unqualified praise, but would couple it rather with a note of warning to those who are wise enough to heed it. The power of rich and copious illustration from the wide field of literature which is laid under ready and lavish contribution, is characteristic of this, as of all Professor Cheyne's books. His mind is very highly stored and cultivated, which is the more to be admired and wondered at when we bear in mind the weakness of eyesight from which we believe he has long suffered. From the very wide range, however, of his mental vision his style is apt to be obscure, because he oftentimes suggests rather than expresses his meaning, and leaves that to be gathered from innuendo and suppressed assumption and unsuppressed parenthesis, which he prefers to hint to the wise and the understanding rather than commit unmistakably to the unlearned or the half-informed. In his own field he simply stands alone. Even the "kings" of criticism, the scholars of Germany, may "shut their mouths at him." In boldness of conjecture they cannot distance him. But it is not a little strange that one who is capable of so much independence of thought, and so well furnished in himself, should surrender himself so tamely and so completely to the guidance of their principles and methods. It is these principles and methods which we are persuaded are unsatisfactory and unsound. They proceed from an erroneous conception of man's relation to God and of the character of Divine revelation, and they assume that the knowledge of man's relation to his Maker has been progressively evolved from within rather than Divinely imparted from above and from without.

