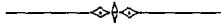


biography that may be studied with more advantage than that of Richard Baxter.

JOHN VAUGHAN.



ART. VI.—“THE EARLY HISTORY OF ISRAEL.”

The Early Religion of Israel. The Baird Lecture for 1889. By JAMES ROBERTSON, D.D. Blackwood. 1892.

NO book could be more welcome to lovers of truth than Dr. Robertson's Baird Lecture. For nearly fifteen years the now dominant critical theory has had the advantage of the support of the boldness of Wellhausen, the patient research of Kuenen and the wide learning and critical insight of Robertson Smith. If the theory has not won over the clergy and laity of England, the fault is not in its defenders, but in itself. It has been ably expounded, and it has been illustrated, if not supported, by a mass of learning of every kind. It has been fortunate, undeservedly fortunate, in its champions.

It has been far otherwise hitherto with the theories, such as they are, which have been set up in opposition to it. English writers on the conservative side have not as a rule taken the trouble and time necessary for the investigation of the subject. Indeed, few of them have had a thorough grounding in the preliminaries. Schools in which Hebrew is studied in England may be counted on the fingers of one hand, and even at Oxford and Cambridge the number of men who read Hebrew is ridiculously small, but in Germany the study is a common one in the higher schools, and some even of the smallest of her universities produce Hebrew works of real importance. The truth—the odd truth—is that Germany is interested in the Old Testament literature, while England hitherto—I judge by results, or no results—has been profoundly indifferent to it.

Dr. Robertson's book is to be welcomed in the first place because it shows that deep interest in the Old Testament which has hitherto been lacking. In the second place it is welcome because it goes to the root of the present controversy. The discussion of the mere form of the books of the Old Testament does not necessarily touch any vital question, but an attack on the historic faithfulness of their contents as a whole affects our estimate of the nature and history of God's revelation to men.

The Baird Lecturer begins by reminding us that we have two theories of the History of Religion in Israel. (By “theory” Dr. Robertson means a general conception which professes to

co-ordinate and give unity and a causal relation to a multitude of facts.) The Biblical theory, that is, the general conception given in the books of the Old Testament as a whole, is that the people of Israel, from the time of Abraham, stood in a peculiar relation to God; that they were delivered from Egypt, and that the covenant made with Abraham was renewed on Sinai; that they exhibited continual backsliding from the covenant; that their divine education was continued from Samuel onwards by a series of prophets; that when the fabric of the nation fell to pieces the views of the prophets only became more spiritual; and finally, that it was the voice of prophecy that sustained the captives in Babylon, and stimulated the pious to return to their own land, and there to set up the worship of God with punctilious regard to the precepts of the old law, which during their prosperity had been slighted.

I have considerably shortened Dr. Robertson's account of the Biblical Theory; let me now give a similar abbreviation of the author's account of the Critical Theory. The modern view may be said to be in general as follows: A number of wandering Hebrew tribes came from the desert and settled in Canaan; like the nations round them they had a national God,¹ and their religious faith and observances resembled those of the nations; from the Canaanites and others they adopted many religious customs and beliefs, appropriating their sacred places, and ascribing to their own ancestors the honours which were paid to local heroes departed; custom grew into law, legend was made into history, and at the time when we have the first authentic records of them they were under a religion which had grown up in the way indicated. The Biblical books containing the history before the eighth century B.C. are untrustworthy, being in their present form manipulated by later hands, and *exhibiting a projection of later ideas into earlier times*. The writing prophets of the eighth century B.C. were the first to teach a higher truth, and by them the ethic monotheism of the Old Testament was developed; the code of Deuteronomy was prepared a short time before the eighteenth year of Josiah as a rule for the guidance of the people *in the truth which the prophets had taught*, and was represented as coming from Moses in order to give it higher sanction; but its effect was other than its framers had intended, for it substituted for the voice of God speaking through the prophets the voice of a dead law. Law, therefore, was the outcome of prophecy, not its antecedent; its

¹ Jehovah, or Jahaveh, as Dr. Robertson prefers to spell it.

ultimate development was the Levitical code which was the starting point of modern Judaism. (Pp. 28-34.)

It will be noticed that in this brief account of the critical theory of Israel's religious history no mention of Moses occurs. That there is nothing unfair in this omission from a summary account of the views of the critics, appears from the references of Wellhausen, for example, to Israel's great leader. Wellhausen speaks of Moses ("History of Israel," p. 19) as "having been throughout the whole of his long life the people's leader, judge and centre of union"; but how slight his religious importance is in the eyes of the critic will be shown by two quotations: "We cannot treat the legislative portion of the Pentateuch as a source from which our knowledge of what Mosaism really was can be derived," and "If the legislation of the Pentateuch cease as a whole to be regarded as an authentic source for our knowledge of what Mosaism was, it becomes a somewhat precarious matter to make any exception in favour of the decalogue." No further quotations are needed to show that to Wellhausen, at least, Moses played no important part in the *religious* history of Israel. Too little is allowed to be known of his religious work.

Nothing could be more admirable than the calm temper in which Dr. Robertson begins his inquiry, or than the thorough manner with which he conducts it. Taking as his starting-point the century 850-750 B.C.—the earliest historical standing-ground allowed by the critics—he first enumerates the documents (pp. 53, 54) which are allowed to have arisen or been in existence during this period. They are (a) the stories of the patriarchs, contained in the Jehovistic portions of the book of Genesis; (b) the account of the doings and sayings of Elijah and Elisha; (c) the brief code, the so-called Book of the Covenant, contained in Ex. xx-xxiii.; (d) the books of Amos and Hosea; (e) the mass of *narrative*, contained in the books of Judges and Samuel. From this list Dr. Robertson draws the conclusion that though the productions are not many, they give proof that the power of composition on varied themes was an accomplished fact in this age. Further, the author shows that popular writings such as these imply *readers*, so that we get beyond writings to a people capable of reading and understanding them. Further still, the finished style of these compositions would lead us to the conclusion that the literary art had been long practised. "In a word, we are clearly not at the beginning of literary or educational activity in Israel."

Dr. Robertson also shows that as *religious* products the books of Amos and Hosea imply a considerable degree of religious intelligence and education. "Let anyone try for a

moment to imagine Amos addressing the people of Israel in the name of Jahaveh: *Seek good and not evil, that ye may live, and Jahaveh the God of hosts shall be with you in such a manner as ye say* (Amos v. 14): *I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Jahaveh* (viii. 11); and ask whether the people who heard these words had not already been accustomed to form some ideas of good and evil—some conceptions of the holiness of their national God far above the level of persons at the animistic or even the national stage of religion."

"Thus, then, from these two sides, the merely literary and the religious aspects of the books before us, we conclude that the eighth century rests upon an anterior stage of preparation which must have been considerable in both respects" (p. 70).

Dr. Robertson next gives reasons for supposing that this "anterior state of preparation" was due to a series of prophets, and in particular to the "schools of the prophets," which date from the time of Samuel. (The author condemns Wellhausen's depreciation of the "sons of the prophets," and also his attempt to dissociate Samuel from the schools.)

Having thus pointed to a channel through which historical and religious teaching, either oral or written, or both, might be transmitted to the age of the writing prophets, Dr. Robertson next investigates the allusions in these prophets to the earlier history, and shows that they confirm the Biblical theory. Dr. Robertson is here taking the broadest possible view. He does not attempt to show that these prophets were acquainted with the Pentateuch, nor even to prove against the critics that they accepted the special religious rites and observances laid down in the Pentateuch; what he does show is that Amos and Hosea assume those whom they address to be familiar with a scheme of the early religious history of Israel, which is in agreement with the Biblical theory rather than with that of the critics.

The four points of Dr. Robertson's proof are worthy of careful attention. The *first* is that both Amos and Hosea not only refer to the deliverance from Egypt and the guidance through the wilderness as undisputed facts, but also as events of the deepest religious import. Amos utters the word of Jahaveh "against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth'" (iii. 1, 2). The *second* point in the writings of the two prophets is the pre-eminence assigned to the southern kingdom and the special importance of the house of David. Amos anticipates coming blessing in the words "I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen . . .

and I will build it as in the days of old" (ix. 11). *Thirdly*, the prophets maintain that Israel from the earliest times had proved unfaithful to their God, and had fallen into the deepest sins. The burden of the prophecy of Amos is that "though God had raised up of their sons for prophets and of their young men for Nazirites (ii. 11), though he had from time to time made known what he was to do through his prophets (iii. 7), though he had known Israel alone of all the families of the earth (iii. 2), yet doom was impending over both kingdoms for their unfaithfulness." *Fourthly*, both prophets declare that the southern kingdom, though also doomed to punishment (Amos ii. 4), will be more mercifully dealt with (Hos. i. 7), and will form the rallying-point for a re-united nationality based on better principles (Amos ix. ii. ; Hosea i. 11).

"All this agrees most strikingly with what we have called the Biblical theory of the history. There is the insisting upon a special manifestation of favour to Israel at the first, in the deliverance from Egypt and guidance through the desert; there is the emphasis laid on the succession of teachers divinely appointed, and of laws and statutes for the people's instruction and guidance. There is the promise of the perpetuity of the house of David as the basis of the restoration of national unity. There is, on the other hand, with equal emphasis, the assertion of the fact that Israel had been unfaithful to the nation's God, and unworthy of the privileges bestowed. And, further, there is the threatening of punishment for this unfaithfulness, reiterated in various forms, and couched in the sternest tones. And, finally, there is the assurance that there will not be an end of the people, but that out of the overthrow and ruin there will arise a revived and purified nation, united under one king, obedient to their one God."

Dr. Robertson, by a quotation from Kuenen, next shows that it is just the theory which underlies these principles of Hosea and Amos which is declared to be unhistorical when it appears in the historical books, *e.g.*, in the introduction to the book of Judges (ii. 6, iii. 6), and in the retrospect of the fate of the kingdom of the ten tribes (2 Kings xvii. 7-23, 34-41). The critics have appealed to the prophets, and the prophets have declared against them (p. 116).

It must not be imagined from the foregoing that the author is ignorant of the fact that the critics have declared the most important passages quoted by him from Amos and Hosea to be deliberate interpolations made in the interests of a theory—the Biblical theory—of the early history. The critics are consistent. They hold the historical books (Judges, Samuel and Kings) to be revised and interpolated because they contra-

dict the critical theory, and they hold the prophets, including Amos and Hosea, to be treated in the same way for the same reason.

What is Dr. Robertson's answer to this? Practically he allows the theory to fall by its own weight. He points out first that the process of "striking out" does not remove the whole difficulty which lies in the way of the critics. Stade, who strikes out, is compelled in addition to adopt another line of explanation. He writes: "[Hosea's] use of the argument from history, in order to prove to the people their deviation from the requirements of Jehovah and their declension, paved the way for the unhistorical view that came to be taken of the past, and [for] the treatment of it in the light of later religious conceptions." In other words, Hosea is not to be believed when he tells us that other teachers taught the same before him, nor when he declares that his nation had been taught a better religion and had declined from it. "Where now," asks Dr. Robertson, "is the fixed point and firm standard by which we are to reach the truth? The historical books are to be corrected by the aid of the prophetic; but where is the standard for correcting the prophetic books? On what authority are these 'insertions' to be removed; by what guide are we to correct the prophetic misapprehensions? The only 'fixed' thing perceivable is the theory itself; the only standard is 'strike out' or 'I consider'" (p. 149). Dr. Robertson had before mentioned the only principle of the critics which *looks* fixed, *i.e.*, "The nearer history is to its origin, the more profane it is." This is a travesty of the principle that in the lapse of time a spiritual light is often thrown on past events; but that events have a spiritual significance is seen by spiritual men from the beginning. But I fear it is no use to suggest to the critics that Hosea was a spiritual man. They would answer that spiritual men had not yet been "evolved."

But to return. After briefly differentiating the two theories by the place assigned in each to the work of the prophets, Dr. Robertson proceeds to test the proof advanced for the Critical Theory of the early religion of Israel point by point. His words of differentiation must be quoted: "The Biblical Theory represents the prophets as continuators, reformers, recalling their people to a standard of religion from which they had fallen. The modern critical historians place a wide gulf between the pre-prophetic and the prophetic religion; 'the religion of David and Solomon,' says Renan, 'did not differ appreciably from that of the neighbouring peoples of Palestine'" (p. 153).

Dr. Robertson foreshadows the nature of the test he is about

to apply to the proofs alleged for the Critical Theory in a passage of great force. "I confess that it is extremely difficult for me, not only to believe the position that is taken up, but even to apprehend it as a possibility. That Israel, with nothing distinctively peculiar to start with beyond the bare belief that Jahaveh was their only national God, should have adopted and absorbed elements the most diverse, and still have remained Israel; that the elements absorbed should have been the most distinctively heathenish and low, and yet that the result of it all was not an eclecticism, but a product *sui generis*, and that all the time this transmutation was going on, a body of men whose official basis rested on heathenism, should have lashed their countrymen with invective and threatening for forsaking the religion of their fathers—all this is to me as great a psychological and moral miracle as any of the miracles recorded in Scripture."

The author proceeds to demand (p. 166) three things:

First, clear proof that before the time of the writing prophets the religious beliefs and observances of Israel were on the same level as those of their neighbours, and that enlightened men accepted them as authorized.

Secondly, an indication of some differentiating religious element sufficient to explain the fact that Israel remained Israel and was not absorbed in the surrounding heathenism.

Thirdly, an indication of the process of development in the historical stadia through which, from the elementary stage, Israel arrived at the "ethic monotheism" of the prophets.

In the four succeeding chapters (pp. 167-265) Dr. Robertson examines the alleged proofs of the low tone of pre-prophetic religion, *i.e.*, of religion in Israel before the time of Amos and Hosea. In four points, according to the critics, this low tone is apparent. I will mention them in order, stating briefly Dr. Robertson's criticism of each.

(1) "At first," say the critics, "the religion of Israel was Polytheism." They cite, in support of this assertion, the fact that the word "Baal," which they take as the proper name of the Canaanite god, is freely used in families distinguished for their reverence for the national God of the Hebrews, in compound proper names, *e.g.*, in Eshbaal (Ishbosheth) the son of Saul. In opposition to this the Baird Lecturer points out that in Hebrew "Baal" is a common noun meaning "Lord," and that there was to the pious Israelite no impropriety in calling Jahaveh his *baal*. Dr. Robertson further answers that we have no instances of a similar use in compound proper names of unequivocal proper names of heathen deities, such as Melkart, Eshmun, Astarte.

(2) The critics assert as a second mark of the low tone of

pre-prophetic religion that the Hebrews localized their God in their own land and in certain sanctuaries within it. Dr. Robertson rightly replies to this: (a) that the critics rely for their proof on metaphorical language which need not be literally understood, for religious conceptions cannot be expressed at all without metaphor; (b) that precisely similar metaphors are used at a quite late period: "How shall we sing Jahaveh's song in a strange land?" (c) that if it be urged that *primitively* the metaphors must have been taken literally, it is begging the question to assume that the "pre-prophetic" was the primitive stage among the Hebrews.

(3) Thirdly, it is asserted that calf-worship was part of the authorized Jahaveh religion.

The proof alleged depends, first, on the probability that Jeroboam represents a revolt as much against Solomon's foreign innovations (as Kuenen thinks) as against his oppression. If this be probable, then it is possible that Jeroboam and his advisers regarded the calf-worship as an ancient Israelitish worship, and it may be a fact that Jehovah was worshipped under the form of a calf during the period of the Judges.

The proof further depends on the *great improbability*, according to the critics, that the prohibition against making a graven image was Mosaic. It is urged that this prohibition comes in awkwardly, breaking the connection of the commandments, and, further, that the existence of symbols in the Temple, such as the cherubim, and the tradition that Moses made a brazen serpent in the wilderness, render it improbable that any prohibition of image-making was attributed to Moses for hundreds of years after his death. This sounds strong, but when, as Dr. Robertson points out (p. 223), Kuenen admits that the prohibition was decreed *in conformity with the spirit of Moses*, the proof thus far cited that calf-worship was ever part of the *authorized* Jahaveh religion does not amount to much.

"But Elijah and Elisha never condemned the calf-worship," say the critics. "These prophets had a harder duty to perform," answers Dr. Robertson. The calf-worship, "degraded as it was, *called itself* a worship of Jahaveh, and, from Jeroboam's days, may have kept the recognition of the national God of Israel in a way prominently before the people. But in the days of Ahab . . . it came to be a question whether Jahaveh or the Phœnician Baal was to receive recognition as the national God. To this great question Elijah braced himself. . . . When once that danger passed away, we see his successors directing themselves to the purification of the Jahaveh religion, which had gained the day."

(4) Lastly, it is said (e.g., by Kuenen) that "the conception of Jahaveh originally bordered on that of Molech (Moloch), or at least had many points of contact with it." If this be true, and if "originally" be explained to mean "in the pre-prophetic period," then without a doubt there *was* a low tone in the pre-prophetic religion. But let the proofs alleged for this be mentioned with Dr. Robertson's criticisms of them.

(a) It is maintained, in the first place, that the constant application to Jahaveh of language denoting fire and light is a proof that the popular conception made Him a sun or fire God, so that He was not distinguishable from Moloch (p. 245). "This conclusion," writes Dr. Robertson, "is warrantable only if these metaphorical expressions, when originally used, were not regarded as metaphors at all, but plain statements of fact." "If Kuenen and his school will insist upon it that metaphorical language must originally have been used as plain statement of fact, then the essential point in dispute is assumed, for we must necessarily admit that, on this concession, all religious thought at first expresses itself in language borrowed from material things; and therefore, without more ado, we may say that all religion begins with the worship of material things, or with purely materialistic conceptions. Stade, in speaking of fetishism, says bluntly: 'Nothing on earth begins as a symbol, but is taken as a reality.' I should think that the very first attempts at language are symbols, and consciously regarded as such."

(b) The next argument for the identification of Jahaveh and Moloch is drawn from the observances of circumcision and dedication of firstborn. It is held that these practices, though softened into harmless religious ceremonies, are proofs that Jahaveh was originally regarded as the Destroyer of life rather than its Preserver. Kuenen admits that there is very little proof that circumcision represents an old practice of human sacrifice, and the only passage he refers to is obscure (Ex. iv. 24-26). Dr. Robertson challenges the critics to tell us "when this precise rite took the place of human sacrifice, and why this precise rite, so unlike human sacrifice, should have been substituted—a rite which can be so obviously explained on the principle that the deity claimed the *sanctification* of life, not its destruction."

(c) Dr. Robertson notices next (p. 252, ff.) the sacrifices of Abraham, Jephtha, and the king of Moab, and rightly denies that they supply evidence that human sacrifice was an original custom in Israel. I will content myself with a quotation (p. 254), showing how Dr. Robertson deals with the first case. "To Abraham the testing question comes, 'Art thou prepared to obey thy God *as the people about thee obey their*

gods?" and in the putting forth of his faith in the act of obedience, he learns that the nature of his God is *different*." (The italics are my own.)

This review has touched upon only half of a book which sustains its interest and its power to convince to the close. In spite of the difficulty of the subject, the author is never dull or weak. There is an excellent passage on pp. 322-325 on the conception of Jahaveh, which Dr. Robertson shows to have been common to people and prophets at least as early as the time of Amos and Hosea. On p. 331 one of the key-notes of the book is struck where the author insists on keeping clearly distinct the three subjects of (a) the origin of laws and observances, (b) the codification of laws, or the formal ratification of observances, and (c) the composition of the books in which we find the laws finally embodied or the ordinances described. Chapter xv. ("The Three Codes") is excellent, so is Chapter xvi. ("The Law Books").

I close this review with a feeling how inadequately justice has been done in it to one of the best books in the English language which has appeared within the last twenty-five years. A man who has at hand this book, and Dr. Salmon's Introduction, may feel comfortable as regards all that the critics say about the Old and New Testaments. Dr. Robertson has given battle to the recent critics on their own chosen ground (the development of religious history) and has defeated them. The fight has not been fought over linguistic and antiquarian trifles, but on the broad question, Are the statements of the Old Testament writers on the subject for which we chiefly appeal to them worthy of credit? Wellhausen and Kuenen answered No, and Dr. Robertson has met them point by point with a well-reasoned Yes.

W. E. BARNES.

Notes on Bible Words.

No. XX.—"CONTRIBUTION."

CONTRIBUTION, Rom. xv. 26, "to make a certain contribution," is *κοινωνία*.

In the N.T. (as in class. Greek) this word *κοινωνία* means either *participation*, one's share in, or *intercourse*, fellowship.

I. ἡ κ. τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, 2 Cor. xiii. 14, "the communion of the Holy Ghost." (Vulg., *communicatio*.) Phil. ii. 1, and iii. 10.