

*RECENT ENGLISH LITERATURE ON THE
OLD TESTAMENT.*

THERE is, I regret to say, but little to notice in this department.

Dr Edersheim's *Warburtonian Lectures*¹ are devoted to proving that Christianity was the true unfolding and fulfilment of the Old Testament, and not a natural upgrowth out of the ideas or the circumstances of the age. Lecture I. states the question generally, and shows how Christianity in its origin appealed to a great Messianic expectation, the source of which can be found nowhere but in the Old Testament. Lecture II. maintains that this expectation was not based on a false or fanciful interpretation of the Old Testament, and contains some important remarks on the relation of prophecy to fulfilment, which is more fully discussed in Lecture IV. A brief quotation will indicate the writer's view.

"Prophecy can only be properly understood from the standpoint of fulfilment; prophecy always starts from historical *data* in the then present; and the fulfilment in each case not only covers but is wider than the mere letter of the prophecy." Hence "prophecy is not predicted history; . . . it had always a present meaning and present lessons to those who heard it; and as this meaning unfolded in the course of history, it conveyed to each succeeding generation something new, bringing to each fresh present lessons" (p. 37). Lecture V. discusses the moral element in Old Testament prophecy, and the features which distinguish it from heathen divination; and Lecture VI. treats of its progressive character, and the spiritual element in it.

Lectures VII. and VIII. discuss recent theories of the origin of the Pentateuch and the relation of the Law to the Prophets. The difficulties which Wellhausen's hypothesis involves are examined, and in defence of the traditional view the history of Israel is reviewed, with the object of showing that the circumstances of the people account in great measure for the non-observance of many of the Mosaic ordinances, and that traces of the observance of some of them are to be found, though ignored by modern critics.

¹ *Prophecy and History in Relation to The Messiah: the Warburton Lectures for 1880-1884, with two Appendices on the Arrangement, Analysis, and Recent Criticism of the Pentateuch.* By Alfred Edersheim, M.A. Oxon., D.D., Ph D., Author of *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1885.

In the remaining lectures the Messianic ideas of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphic writings are investigated, and the last stage of Messianic prophecy—the testimony of the Baptist—is examined.

Dr. Edersheim feels strongly that if Wellhausen's theory, with all that it implies, were true, "it would seem logically impossible to maintain the claims of Christ as the Old Testament Messiah of Moses and the Prophets, and the Son of David." But that theory must, as he goes on to say, "be examined on its own merits, irrespective of preconceived opinions or possible consequences." No doubt, if it can be proved, we must wholly recast our view of the Messianic preparation; but it is surely a mistake to say that the reality of that preparation would be disproved. There certainly are students who find it possible to accept that theory without abandoning their belief that Jesus is the Messiah, and that the Old Testament records the Divine preparation for His advent.

The work has suffered from the nature of its origin. A series of lectures spread over four years is certain to be unequal in proportion and somewhat desultory, unless the plan has been very carefully laid out beforehand. The author is sensible of this, and apologises for it in the preface; but it is a pity that he did not see his way to rewriting a considerable part of the lectures for publication.

Appendix II. ("Analysis of the Pentateuch and its Criticism") should have been helpful to the general reader, but is so condensed as to be almost unintelligible, if not actually misleading. The book ought to have been more accurately revised. *Josh.* viii. (p. 212) for *Jud.* viii. will do no harm, but the misprint 1855 (for 1835) as the date of the publication of the works of Vatke and George is serious (p. 202, note 2), and "the common quotation, *Magna est veritas, et prævalebit*" (p. 313, note 1) should have been correctly given. For *Isaac Israeli in the tenth century* (p. 192, note 2) read *Isaac ben Jasus in the eleventh century*. See the second edition of Zöckler's *Handbuch*, p. 133.

The general character of the *Pulpit Commentary* is already well known, and it is only necessary to mention the appearance of a new volume, containing the remainder of Jeremiah (chaps. xxx.–lii.), and the Lamentations.¹ Dr. Cheyne's name is sufficient guarantee

¹ The *Pulpit Commentary*, edited by Rev. Canon H. D. M. Spence, M.A., and

for the excellence of the Exposition, though the nature of the work and the limits of space allowed impose somewhat serious restrictions. The note on Jer. xlvi. 13 contains a good example of the way in which fresh light is continually being thrown on the Old Testament by the decipherment of inscriptions. The prophecy is discussed on the assumption that there is no certain historical evidence of a conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar. A postscript however is added, to say that the note is left as it was originally written in February, 1881 (it is surely rather hard upon an author that the publication of his work should be so long delayed) "in ignorance of Wiedemann's then recent discovery of a contemporary hieroglyphic inscription, which, as the report of the German Oriental Society expresses it, 'ratifies the hitherto universally doubted fact of an invasion of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar.' The hieroglyphic narrative is supplemented and confirmed by two cuneiform records," of which the substance is given.

Dr. Cheyne's Introduction to the Lamentations, though brief, is very interesting. He assigns the book to three authors at least, belonging to the same "school of elegiac poets," but "no part of it was written by Jeremiah." Jeremiah however "was probably the favourite book of these poets (next to the Psalter, so far as this book was in existence); and so, if a title must be given by way of defining the authorship, we might perhaps style the entire book, on the analogy of a portion of the Psalter, 'The Book of the Lamentations of the Sons of Jeremiah.'"

The "Homiletics" and "Homilies" contain an abundance of material for sermons. It is to be hoped that they will be used with judgment, and not made a substitute for the careful study of the text.

Professor Sayce has given us in a brief compass an excellent introduction to Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther,¹ the distinguishing feature of which is, as will be expected, the use made of recent monumental discoveries, more especially of the inscriptions of Cyrus. Readers of Dr. Cheyne's *Isaiah* will be already prepared for the new view of the origin, beliefs, and policy of Cyrus, which

Rev. J. S. Exell, M.A. "Jeremiah": Exposition by Rev. T. K. Cheyne, M.A., D.D.; Homiletics, by Rev. W. F. Adeney, M.A., etc. "Lamentations": Exposition by Rev. T. K. Cheyne; Homiletics, by Rev. W. F. Adeney, etc.

¹ *An Introduction to the Books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.* By A. H. Sayce, M.A., Deputy Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford. London: The Religious Tract Society. 1885.

is forced upon us by the decipherment of his inscriptions. Cyrus, though of Persian descent, was an Elamite, and did not become king of Persia till after B.C. 549; he was not a monotheist, but "a polytheist who worshipped Bel-Merodach and Nebo, and paid public homage to the deities of Babylon"; his restoration of the Jews was not a special act of favour to them, but part of a policy of conciliation towards the conquered populations which had been deported from their homes.

Differing from many modern critics, Professor Sayce thinks that the Book of Ezra was compiled by Ezra himself, about B.C. 457; the Book of Nehemiah, as is generally admitted, was written partly (chaps. i.-vii., xi.-xii. 26 in part, xii. 27-xiii.) by Nehemiah himself, about B.C. 430, partly by a later hand.

Very interesting are the remarks on the way in which Aramaic became the language of trade, and superseded Hebrew, and upon the Babylonian and Persian words in Ezra and Nehemiah.

The problems of the Book of Esther are excellently treated. The very late date assigned to the book by some critics—Zunz and Reuss place it in the post-Maccabæan age—is rejected, and its composition is placed towards the end of the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus (B.C. 425). The author must have lived in Persia, before the overthrow of the Persian power. The historical credibility of the book is defended, and the striking contrast between the Hebrew book and the anachronisms and exaggerations of the apocryphal additions, is well brought out.

The Book of Esther was omitted from the canon by Melito of Sardis and Gregory of Nazianzus (how came Professor Sayce to make such a slip as "of *Nazianzen*"?), and Luther wished it had perished; but, as Professor Sayce well concludes:

"The Book of Esther affords a useful illustration of a fact which is often forgotten. God's inspiration is not confined to a particular kind of literary work or a particular description of narrative. Holy Scripture contains examples of almost every sort of literary composition; all alike are consecrated in it. . . . Like the Song of Songs or the Book of Ecclesiastes, it teaches us the lesson that St. Peter had to learn: 'Nothing that God hath cleansed is common or unclean.'"

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