

OLD TESTAMENT STUDY TO-DAY

IN THE collection of essays by members of the Society for Old Testament Study which appeared lately under the heading *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, the editor, H. H. Rowley, calls attention to the fact that during the last thirty years a considerable change has taken place in the field of Old Testament study. "Many of the conclusions that seemed most sure have been challenged, and there is now a greater variety of views on many questions than has been known for a long time"—thus he expresses himself (p. xvi). And, as he admits on p. xvii, "in general, it may be said that there has been a tendency towards more conservative views on many questions than were common at the opening of our period". Now, right at the beginning of this period the present writer, when taking up his duties as Professor of Old Testament in the Free University of Amsterdam, in his inaugural address (1920) already thought he observed a turn of the tide in Old Testament criticism. He pointed to a series of phenomena which, in his opinion, seemed to mark such a change as Rowley is speaking of. The publication of the above-mentioned book confirms his presentiment, and clearly demonstrates that in some respects even a complete ebb has been reached.

Just to mention one of these points, there is a most remarkable alteration in the attitude of Old Testament scholars regarding textual criticism. As Rowley states in his Introduction (p. xv) formerly there was a rooted suspicion of the text of the Old Testament, as represented by the Massoretic Hebrew, and commentators vied with one another in the ingenuity with which it was emended. Where any version could be invoked in favour of a change its support was welcomed, but where no version could be laid under contribution it mattered little. Any guess was to be preferred to a text which was assumed to be untrustworthy. Or, to quote another authority, the well-known American archaeologist W. F. Albright, who is one of the contributors to *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, there was a "light-hearted emendation in which Old Testament students used to indulge" (in the April issue of the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, p. 6). But how completely the picture has changed! To quote Albright again, in his essay on "The Old Testament and the Archaeology of Palestine" he states: "One thing is certain: the days when Duhm and his

imitators could recklessly emend the Hebrew text of the poetic books of the Bible are gone for ever; so also is the time when Wutz felt free to reinterpret the original Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX to suit himself. We may rest assured that the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible, though not infallible, has been preserved with an accuracy perhaps unparalleled in any other Near-Eastern literature" (p. 25). Albright writes this in connection with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, but the changed attitude with respect to the Massoretic text had made itself known quite a number of years before the discovery of the Scrolls, and was only justified by this epoch-making find. It was manifestly perceptible in the eighteenth international congress of Orientalists, held from 7 to 12 September, 1931, at Leiden. In the seventh section, devoted to the Old Testament and Judaism, a strong opposition disclosed itself, led by M. S. Daiches from London, against the current passion for conjectural emendation of the Hebrew text; which opposition caused the aged Professor Karl Budde from Marburg, one of the most outstanding representatives of the old school, to enter into the discussion with a warning against a possible return to the Buxtorf theory of the inspired vowel signs! Considerable support was given to this opposition by the Swedish scholar H. S. Nyberg, first in an article in the German periodical *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* of 1934 on "Das textkritische Problem des Alten Testaments am Hoseabuche demonstriert", and in the next year in his book *Studien zum Hoseabuche*. The changed attitude made it possible for a number of Old Testament scholars of various denominations and differing theological views in the Netherlands, at the initiative of the Netherlands Bible Society, to co-operate in the preparation of a new Dutch translation of the Old Testament. This work, which was started in 1933, could never have reached its completion, which was attained in the beginning of last year, had not all these men agreed in accepting the general trustworthiness of the Massoretic text; else the diversity of opinion with respect to textual emendation would have laid insuperable obstacles in the way, which would have frustrated every attempt to reach a common result. And in the International Conference of Bible Translators, called by the United Bible Societies, which met at Woudschoten in the Netherlands from 16 to 22 October, 1947, it was likewise recommended to follow the Massoretic Text. A remarkable symptom

of the new attitude towards this text can also be seen in the appearance in 1947 of a commentary on the book of Psalms entirely based upon the Massoretic text, by the former Leiden Professor of Old Testament, B. D. Eerdmans, who during many years held the chair which previously had been occupied by the famous Abraham Kuenen. And very recently, in the June 1950 issue of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*, the American J. Philip Hyatt wrote in a review: "the first duty of the modern translator should be to give a faithful rendering of M T, whenever that can be made to yield good sense; if not, he may then resort to emendation on the basis of the ancient versions; conjectural emendation should be a last resort, and is seldom necessary." What a quite different sound than was heard at the time of Marti and Duhm, of Henry Preserved Smith and others!

Now, as I remarked before, this entirely changed attitude towards the Massoretic text was fully justified by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in particular of the complete Isaiah Scroll, which profoundly stirred up the learned world, and aroused even a general public interest. Notwithstanding the opposition of Lacheman and Zeitlin it cannot be reasonably doubted that this scroll must be dated not later than the end of the second century B.C. Palaeography and archaeology agree in fixing this date. And now the interesting and sensational fact is that this old scroll, about a thousand years older than our oldest Hebrew manuscripts, is in such perfect harmony with the Massoretic text. As Albright remarks (*loc. cit.*), "the differences between it and our printed Bibles are seldom significant." The present writer took the trouble to put this to the test. He selected the most crucial cases, where commentators generally agree that M T must be corrupt, and found that in forty-two of these sixty cases or so the scroll had exactly the same reading as M T; in eight cases it showed very slight deviations, and only in ten cases was there a plain difference; in most of these ten cases the scroll has a reading which has already been suggested by commentators. A very remarkable instance of concurrence between the scroll and M T is Isa. xxi. 1, where a prediction against Babel is indicated as "the burden of the desert of the sea". The word "sea", which is an offence to commentators, and therefore by most of them regarded as an erroneous insertion, the more so as it does not appear in the current editions of the LXX, is supported by the scroll. On

the other hand in the same chapter we meet with an example of contrary character: in verse 8 the M T quite unexpectedly and inexplicably introduces a "lion"; here the scroll agrees with commentators who are of opinion that the text must have been mutilated, for it reads instead of the "lion" the "seer"; so we have to translate: "the seer (i.e. the watchman, mentioned in verse 6) cried out." Therefore it must be acknowledged with Albright (in the above-mentioned issue of the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*) "that the Isaiah Scroll proves the great antiquity of the text of the Massoretic Book, warning us against light-hearted emendation."

It is manifest that the completely changed attitude towards the Massoretic text must have radical consequences with respect to the interpretation of the Old Testament. In consulting commentaries of the last decades of the nineteenth century and of the first part of the twentieth, one could easily receive the impression that Old Testament scholars saw it as their primary duty not to explain what the Biblical authors actually wrote, but to construct a text which these authors in their opinion ought to have written. If, however, light-hearted emendation is eliminated, exegetical discussion exhibits an entirely different aspect. It then becomes the task of commentators to use their utmost efforts to elicit a suitably intelligible sense from the transmitted text. This, of course, will not always be a simple matter; indeed, it may be relatively much easier to strain one's ingenuity in searching for plausible emendations than to interpret rightly what the text says. And, although competent scholars like Nyberg, Eerdmans and others have furnished important contributions, there will remain various difficulties which cannot yet be solved. So, e.g., Cant. vi. 12 for the time being presents us with an insuperable difficulty. Whether you read the A.V. or the R.V., it is impossible to attach to it good sense; and in both cases the translators have not exactly rendered what the Hebrew has. As another instance may be quoted, Zech. ix. 15. Here again neither A.V. nor R.V. is clear, but the same is the case with the Hebrew. What, however, is not yet possible at present may appear to become a possibility later on. And scholars should go on devoting their labours to such tasks, not disheartened by difficulties.

It is not only with respect to textual criticism that a remarkable change is to be observed; the same can be said regarding literary

criticism. Prof. Joh. de Groot on the occasion of his inauguration in the chair of Old Testament in the University of Utrecht (1936), expressed himself thus: "The vessel of literary criticism will have to be docked for entire reconstruction, before it will be able again to render reliable auxiliary service; the repair, I fear, will last very long." This verdict especially holds good with respect to Pentateuchal criticism. The documentary theory which was predominant in the circles of Old Testament scholars at the end of the nineteenth century, from the beginning of the twentieth century fell into a state of crisis, which grew more and more serious from year to year, and all the suppositions of this theory which at a time were regarded as ascertained facts have successively been subjected to the most serious doubts, and here the words of Rowley, referred to before, are fully appropriate: "there is now a greater variety of view than has been known for a long time." In this very QUARTERLY, in No. 1 of the second volume (January, 1930) the present writer pointed to this turn of the tide in Pentateuchal criticism. He called attention to the saga-theory of Gunkel, and the metrical studies of Sievers, to the publications of Eerdmans, who outspokenly declared: "I withdraw from the critical school of Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen, and oppose the so-called documentary theory in general" (in the preface of his publication on the composition of Genesis, 1908), to the text-critical school of Redpath, Wiener, Lepsius and Dahse, which uprooted the foundation on which, since Astruc, the whole Pentateuchal analysis had been based—the criterion of the various usage of the Divine names—to the books of Möller, who from a convinced adherent of the documentary theory turned into one of its most indefatigable assailants, to the discussions around Deuteronomy (Griffiths, Kegel, Oestreicher, Staerk, Welch, Kennett, Hölscher) and to the investigations of Yahuda (1929). Since then, however, the resistance to Wellhausen increased more and more.

Löhr had already denied the separate existence of the Priestly Code (1924), Volz and Rudolph argued against the "Elohist" (1933, 1938). From Italy serious criticism made itself known by the mouth of Umberto Cassuto, who in a study on Genesis weighed all the arguments which have been advanced in favour of the documentary theory, and found them wanting (1934). F. Dornseiff, Professor of Classical Philology in Greifswald, in a series of articles in the *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (1934, 1935, 1937, 1938) disputed the validity of

the documentary theory on account of ancient Greek parallels, and developed an entirely new theory, according to which the Pentateuch is the result of the labours of two authors, differing from each other by their standpoint with regard to mixed marriage: the Tetrateuchist and the Deuteronomist. Another new theory was proposed by A. Vaccari at the twentieth international congress of Orientalists, held at Brussels in 1938: he thinks that a twofold tradition is embodied in the Pentateuch as well as in many other books of the Old Testament (e.g. in Psalms and Proverbs, in Jeremiah and Chronicles). Martin Noth is in favour of a radical separation of Deuteronomy from the remaining books of the Pentateuch (1943): it was originally intended as the introduction to an elaborate historical narrative which comprises the books of Joshua to Kings. Likewise the Swedish scholar, I. Engnell, juxtaposes the Tetrateuch and the Deuteronomic narrative, both compilations of various material, but he most decidedly rejects the idea of documentary analysis (1943). As a consequence of these new theories it may be considered that the "Hexateuch" has disappeared into the realm of legend according to Prof. Vriezen of Groningen (1948); likewise Rowley in his publication of 1950, *The Growth of the Old Testament*: "it is not to be supposed . . . that the Pentateuch and Joshua ever formed a single work" (p. 54). Edward Robertson, formerly Professor of Semitic Languages and Literatures in the University of Manchester, has published a series of papers, collected into a single volume entitled *The Old Testament Problem* (1950), defending the thesis that the entire Pentateuch cannot be later than Samuel. Similarly the Danish professor of comparative literary history, Paul V. Rubow, in a number of contributions to Danish periodicals, has opposed the documentary analysis, in particular with respect to the book of Genesis, and has argued that this book is a unity of considerable antiquity. Over against all these contradictory views stands that which has been expressed by Cuthbert Aikman Simpson of the General Theological Seminary in New York; in his book on *The Early Traditions of Israel* (1948) he maintains "Yahwist" and "Elohistic", and in the Yahwist discerns between Y¹ and Y². We can hardly feel surprised that this state of affairs compels even a firm advocate of the documentary theory like Paul Humbert of Neufchatel to speak of a "downfall" (in a survey of critical studies on Genesis in the *Theologische Rundschau* of 1934).

In the case of other outstanding problems of literary criticism there may not be such a conspicuous change of opinion, but still there are some noteworthy symptoms. So the unity of Isaiah was energetically defended by A. Kaminka, formerly in Vienna, now in Tel-Aviv. He gave an exposition of his ideas first in the *Revue des Etudes Juives* of 1925 and later in the seventeenth international congress of Orientalists, held at Oxford in 1928. On account of a recognizable similarity of ideas in the first and the second part of Isaiah he concludes for the unity of the book. This unity is also maintained by the Dutch Jesuit, J. Kroon (1933), and by the British author, W. A. Wordsworth (1939). The unity of the book of Zechariah is advocated by three Dutch authors: G. Smit (1926), Prof. Edelkoort, successor of De Groot, who was taken away by a severe illness during the last world war (1945), and C. Brouwer in his thesis for the degree of Doctor of Divinity (1949).

With respect to the book of Daniel it deserves our attention that the former argument for the Maccabean date from the Aramaic has to be completely abandoned: S. R. Driver in his *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* thought himself justified in asserting that the Aramaic of Daniel is a *Western Aramaic* dialect, of the type spoken *near Palestine*, closely allied to the Aramaic of Onkelos and Jonathan, and agreeing in all essential points with the Aramaic dialects spoken to the east and south-east of Palestine, in Palmyra and Nabataea, and known from inscriptions dating from the first century B.C. to the third century A.D. (pp. 471 f.). But W. Baumgartner, at present Professor in Basel, who is the author of the part of Köhler's *Lexicon* which treats of the Biblical Aramaic, has demonstrated that it is impossible to make any difference between Western and Eastern Aramaic in the period before our era (in an article in the *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* of 1927); and what is more, H. H. Schaefer did not only corroborate this statement of Baumgartner, but also proved that the Aramaic of Daniel is in fact simply the artificial language which was introduced by the Persian king Darius I (in *Iranische Beiträge* I, 1929-30). This certainly may not be regarded as a definite proof of the authenticity of the book of Daniel, but it absolutely rules out the argument from the Aramaic for a date during the Maccabean period. Furthermore, it is interesting that many scholars nowadays assign an earlier date at least to the Aramaic part of the book; and in

connection with this James Alan Montgomery, who passed away in 1949, in his commentary on Daniel (1927) says: "it must be positively denied that Nebuchadnezzar and Darius are types of the infamous Antiochus, or that the trials of the confessors in the book represent the Maccabean martyrdoms"—which formerly was regarded as particularly manifest. Eerdmans, who has been mentioned before, also presented the thesis that the Aramaic part must be dated at the time of Nehemiah (the Hebrew part is assigned by him as by most other scholars to the Maccabean age); and sets forth quite a divergent interpretation of the image in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. ii) and of the four heads in the vision of Dan. vii: according to him the various metals of the image do not represent successive empires, but princes from one and the same dynasty, the dynasty of Nebuchadnezzar, and the stone which smote the image is none other than the Persian king Cyrus; the four beasts in Dan. vii are viewed by him as four empires but existing at the same time: Egypt, Media, Lydia and Babylonia; the ten horns on the head of the fourth beast are ten local princes of Babylon, this he associates with the title "king of kings" born by the bearer of the central powers in Babylon (cf. Ezek. xxvi. 7); the eleventh horn, before whom three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots (Dan. vii. 8), must then be King Nabunaid, who usurped the throne by revolution and murder. These ideas of Eerdmans, by which the contents of Dan. ii and vii are altogether located in the Babylonian period, were expounded by him in a book on the Religion of Israel (in the Dutch language, 1930)¹ and likewise set forth in the eighteenth international congress of Orientalists, held at Leiden in 1931 (a brief survey in the English language can be found in the Acts of this congress, published in Leiden, 1932, under the French title *Actes du XVIII^e congrès international des Orientalistes*). This opinion of Eerdmans is not referred to with approval; it would take too much space to present existing objections; but it deserves our full attention as it manifestly shows that the late date of Daniel is not so certain as is often suggested.

Yet of more significance than the turn of the tide with regard to the proposed results of literary criticism is the fact that interest in such criticisms seems to be considerably diminishing in scholarly circles. This is, in the present writer's opinion, the most striking feature in Old Testament study to-day. It was

¹ Cf. Eerdmans' English work, *The Religion of Israel* (Leiden, 1947), pp. 222 ff.

already De Groot who in his above-mentioned inaugural address expressed his presumption that there was to be observed a certain fatigue regarding the old problems of literary criticism. This surely does not mean that scholars nowadays have a dislike of literary analysis of the books of the O.T.; theoretically they will acknowledge its necessity and value, and upon occasion they undoubtedly will be inclined to break a lance for it; but real scientific interest is presently moving in another direction: it aims rather at the investigation of the contents of the O.T. This is typically illustrated by the important book *Record and Revelation* (1938), the predecessor of *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, referred to in the opening sentence of this article. Even the title of this volume shows that what the authors are up to is rather *what* the Old Testament has to say than *how* it has been established. And in glancing over the contents it can immediately be observed that relatively little attention is paid to literary analysis: not more than eighty pages are devoted to "the literature of Israel", presenting two essays by Johannes Hempel, on "The forms of Oral Tradition", and on "The Contents of the Literature", whilst only a third essay by Otto Eissfeldt has to do with "Modern Criticism" (35 pages). For the rest, the subjects which are treated refer to history and religion of Israel, Old Testament Theology, language and exegesis of the O.T., Archaeology, etc. A contribution on "The New Sources of Knowledge" leads the way, in which something is said with respect to origin and development of the alphabet, ancient inscriptions, Ras-Shamra, and the ostraca of Lachish. It is manifest that this is a coherent whole of fixed design, and it cannot be accidental that only a very modest place is yielded to literary criticism. Now this is entirely in harmony with the literature of the last decades. The number of publications on problems of literary criticism is relatively small. Simpson has produced an extensive volume; Louise Pettibone Smith and Ernest R. Lacheman have published an article in the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* of 1950 on "The Authorship of the book of Zephaniah", in which they argue that this book must be regarded as a pseudepigraphon from about 200 B.C., quite along the line of "extreme skepticism" (as it is even qualified by Robert H. Pfeiffer in his rather critical *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 531) which is followed by Charles C. Torrey with respect to Ezekiel. But on the other hand there is an abundant harvest of books and articles dealing with the

contents of the Old Testament, and in particular devoted to the examination of various notions appearing in it. So we may point to the fine volume of Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (1944), in which he successively dwells upon the Holiness of God, the Righteousness of God, the Salvation of God, the Covenant-Love of God, the Election-Love of God, the Spirit of God, concluding with a short treatise on the Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament as they appear in the New Testament. Next to such a summarizing contemplation there may be mentioned a lengthy series of detailed studies of Sedaqa, Mishpat, Chesed, Kebod Yahweh, Yir'at Yahweh, Tora, Toda, Nefesh, Leb and Lebab, and so on; even the the Teru'a, the war-cry (or the sound of trumpets) has been the subject of an inquiry by Paul Humbert.

There is something more which attracts our attention in the title of the volume *Record and Revelation*. It is the appearance of the word "revelation". This again is a remarkable phenomenon of our days: Old Testament study is clearly inclined to reckon with the element of revelation. H. Wheeler Robinson himself, the editor of *Record and Revelation*, published in 1946 a book on *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*. But he certainly is not an exception; quite a number of other authors have written on the problem of revelation in the Old Testament; we mention, e.g., Willy Staerk, Harris Birkeland, Walter Eichrodt. For this there are two reasons: the anti-Judaism of the German Nazis, and the theology of Barth. In connection with the anti-Jewish attitude of the Nazis a flow of papers appeared on the significance of the Old Testament. It began about 1930 when Brunner wrote on the significance of the Old Testament for our faith (in the periodical *Zwischen den Zeiten*), and soon some of the most eminent German Old Testament scholars like Procksch, Hempel, Meinhold and Sellin took part in the discussion. The Dutch Professor De Groot published two pamphlets, the first entitled: *Is the Old Testament antiquated?* (1933), the second: *Away with the Old Testament?* (1941). And after the second World War was over, Rowley wrote his book on *The Re-Discovery of the Old Testament* (1946). In this way the anti-Jewish extremism of National Socialism, that libelled the Old Testament as "the book of the Jews", led to a renewed appreciation of it. And Barthian theology by its peculiar construction has made it easy for many Old Testament students who cannot abandon literary and even historical

criticism of the Divine Book to acknowledge nevertheless its revelatory character. This, however, makes plain that the return to the element of revelation mentioned above has necessarily to be regarded with cautious reserve. This is not a complete return to the evangelical view of the Bible, as can be seen from an article written in the Australian *Reformed Theological Review* (1950) by G. A. F. Knight on "The Interpretation of the Old Testament". This author argues that it does not matter whether all occurrences narrated in the Old Testament actually happened as is related; the only thing required is: what is the teaching we can gather from it? Such a view is not in harmony with the belief in the trustworthiness of the Bible. Therefore, however grateful we may feel in considering the recent tendency towards more conservative views, which makes itself manifest in Old Testament study to-day, it cannot satisfy us, and we feel the more obliged to put forth all our efforts in a real scholarly research of the Old Testament which does not in the least detract from its divine authority.

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