

A New History of Israel.

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MANY must have felt the difficulty of giving counsel when asked to recommend a suitable book on the history of Israel. The books are many, and the respective merits of some of them are generally recognized; but in the middle of 1903 what was the book to recommend? The answer was not easy.

It would not be strange if the difficulty remained as great as ever. The new work of Professor H. P. Smith¹ is not a history of Israel; it is an Old Testament history. Moreover, it is not an independent work. It is the second Old Testament volume in a theological library. Its being second, and following the first after an interval of twelve years, may seem strange, especially as meanwhile no less than eight other volumes of the series have appeared. The reasons for the delay, however, are obvious. Professor Francis Brown and Bishop Ryle have had their hands full of other work; Professor Smith has meanwhile given us his *Samuel*; and the other contributor is the late A. B. Davidson. In any case, we at the end of 1903 cannot regret the postponement of vol. 2 till now, since if it had appeared eleven years ago it would for that very reason now be inadequate. One has only to think of the investigations connected with such names as Kusters, Meyer, van Hoonacker, Winckler, Budde, Cheyne, Willrich, Marquart, Gunkel, Steuernagel; of the two biblical encyclopædias, two practically complete series of commentaries, one incomplete English series, and the Polychrome Bible; of two biblical archæologies and two handbooks on Palestine, besides other works and endless learned articles, to see how inadequate a history written simultaneously with Driver's *Introduction* would necessarily be now.

One wonders, however, whether if the series had been planned now the title of the book would have been what it is. The title of Guthe's work in the German theological series is *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*; and why might not Smith's have been a History of Israel? Smith explains in the preface

¹ *Old Testament History*. By Henry Preserved Smith, D.D., Professor of Biblical History and Interpretation in Amherst College. Pp. xxv, 512. ('The International Theological Library'; T. & T. Clark, 1903.)

that something different is wanted. The subject is to 'be treated in its relation to our religion.' To understand the limitations within which the author worked, it must be premised further that in the same series there are to be volumes on 'Contemporary History of the Old Testament,' 'Theology of the Old Testament,' 'Biblical Archæology,' 'Contemporary History of the New Testament,' 'The Study of the Old Testament,' and 'Biblical Encyclopædia,' which last will give the history of the various studies, including 'history.' It is necessary to remind oneself of this programme to avoid the danger of criticising the History for the absence of what was excluded, not by the writer, but by the general editors of the series.

Smith truly says, 'Every new advance in criticism involves a rewriting of history' (p. vii); 'The analysis of the critic must constantly be checked by the historian's synthesis' (p. xi). 'The ideal historian . . . is the one who is able to distinguish degrees of probability' 'without the monotonous and irritating repetition of "perhaps," "probably"' (p. xiii). 'The purpose of the present volume is to put into narrative form the results of recent Old Testament study' (p. vii). How far has he succeeded?

The book strikes the reader as being remarkably free from prejudice. Its statements of opinion appear to rest, in so far as the reader can judge, on a judicial examination of carefully collected evidence. The narrative runs smoothly. The outline is not blurred by a maze of details or prolonged discussions. The proportion of parts to whole is well maintained, and the reader is carried along from one development to another till he finds himself in the days of Herod, when the thread is somewhat abruptly cut. The editors' remark in the preface to the series, which is not reprinted in this volume, that 'the text will be made as readable and attractive as possible,' is justified.

The outline of the history is, on the whole, intelligible, and the development of ideas as the various creations of Hebrew literature are described in their proper places gives one the feeling that we now really know a good deal about Israel. Some

of the clearness of presentation is due to the author's judicious way of using modern terms, such as sheikh, wezir, emir, backsheesh, jinn, durbar, harem, in preference to the accustomed terms, which are often worn counters. For example, when he calls the royal sanctuary built by Solomon a cathedral, the metaphor helps the student to remember that the other sanctuaries were not only in the country, but also here and there in different parts of Jerusalem itself. The many references, especially in the footnotes, to parallels in other histories serve a similar purpose. The Philistines, for example, are compared to the Northmen in our own history; and the history of Islam is frequently drawn on for illustrations. As a possible textbook for those who have to teach the history of Israel, Smith's book will be a great help.

The considerations which must determine the use of the Hebrew sources are discussed carefully, and the principles laid down are sound: we must first recover the history of tradition, and then inquire for the facts which lie behind the tradition. Smith's history, however, differs from that of Kent, for example, in not formally discussing the sources in detail. That is left, presumably, to Driver, Brown, and Ryle. The discussion of Gn 1-11 is fresh and interesting. Its position at the beginning of the work is a result of the title. In a 'History of Israel' it would have been more naturally taken, as by Guthe, later—*e.g.* in connexion with J or P.

The discussion of the 'Patriarchs' is perhaps the best general treatment in English. The conclusion is that Israel and others settled in Palestine as nomads from the East, and became more or less amalgamated with the Canaanites. The criticism of the Exodus narratives is more detailed. Smith concludes that 'there may have been'—he evidently thinks there was—an Israelite clan that sojourned in Egypt. It was 'not improbably' led forth by a religious leader. At Kadesh it formed with other clans an alliance sanctioned by Yahweh, the storm-god of Sinai (p. 72). The connexion between this, however, and the 'two streams of migration' that 'have issued from Arabia from time immemorial' (p. 73) is not very clear. One stream threatens Palestine directly; the other flows northwards, but, baffled there, reaches Palestine by way of Damascus and Bashan. Professor Smith has, obviously, carefully weighed the discussions on the various questions connected with the beginnings

of Israel; but his method precludes, in many cases, anything more than a hint of his reasons for his judgments. On the question of Muṣri, for example, he simply says (p. 66) that the sources do not recognize such a North Arabian kingdom. One is therefore somewhat surprised (and pleased) to find later (p. 247, note 3) that 'some of the biblical passages that now speak of Egypt may have originally referred to such a district in Arabia.' We have not noticed anywhere, however, any indication of such passages; we are simply referred to the article 'Mizraim' in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. In the present position of the questions involved, the 'exodus' and the 'settlement' are perhaps more satisfactorily discussed together. It seems a pity to decide to 'retain the conventional term' 'conquest' (p. 75) when 'settlement' is so much more suitable. We are not surprised to find that Professor Smith thinks (p. 83) that Judah entered from the south. The use made of the Amarna letters in criticising the stories of the settlement is excellent—only, the reader would be apt to suppose that the people to whom Smith refers are always in the letters called Ḥabiri. Not only Asher but also its brother Gad is plausibly regarded as 'adopted' into Israel; but surely the remark that 'in historic times the [transjordanic] district belonged to Reuben' is insufficiently considered. It would be hard to find contemporary evidence of that. On the whole, the account of the settlement and the earliest period is one of the strongest parts of the book.

In the account of Saul, David, and Solomon the plan of following the Hebrew literature seems to lead to rather undue detail, and here in particular Smith hardly seems to carry out fully enough his very sound distinction between the earliest tradition and the facts lying behind it. The account of the period of the monarchy we cannot, of course, criticise in detail. Of the schism Smith rightly says: 'At the time of the revolt there was no consciousness of anti-religious motive on the part of the northern tribes, and probably no accusation of apostasy was made by Judah.' We may quote the interesting judgment that 'Jeroboam deserves a place among those patriots who have roused a suffering people to throw off the yoke of oppression' (p. 180). The account of the relations with the Aramæans seems, on the other hand, rather too favourable to Israel: 'It can hardly be called unreasonable, therefore, to suppose that Ahab was

the moving spirit in the alliance' (p. 195). The footnote on the chronology strikes a sound note (p. 202); but perhaps more might have been said on the question without trenching too much on Driver's *Introduction* volume. The development of religious ideas, as evidenced in the literature, is skilfully dealt with. The story about the priest sent to teach the new settlers in Ephraim is wisely rejected. One must question, however, the statement on the next page (232), that 'with the incorporation of Ephraim into the Assyrian province called "Beyond the River," it ceases to belong to the history of Israel.' Smith himself admits that the always mixed population simply became more strongly mixed, and that the new settlers adopted the worship of Yahweh. Surely one of the most pressing needs is precisely more light on the true history of Northern Israel after its incorporation in the Assyrian empire.

The account of the adoption of the Book of Instruction under Josiah, and its far-reaching effect, does not dispose of all aspects of the question,—it assumes the other handbooks in the series,—but it is clear and fresh. The change, *e.g.*, in the 'passover' festival, 'is as if the American Thanksgiving from being a family reunion festival should be changed to a great pilgrimage to some national sanctuary' (p. 267). 'Politically, the action taken by Josiah was a new departure—practically nothing less than the adoption of a written constitution for the people' (p. 272). The adoption of Deuteronomy is shown to have been the first step towards 'the adoption of legalism, and the supremacy of the Scribes' (p. 274).

It need not be said that the period immediately following the incorporation of Judah in the Babylonian empire receives careful study. It was to be expected that Smith would take the view that the rebuilding of the temple of Jerusalem was the work of the Jews of Judæa. This view is now familiar to English readers. The belief that Judah was not, any more than Israel, depopulated does not of course imply that Israel did not feel that it had fallen under sore chastisement. How men of thought tried to solve the problem of Israel's sufferings is well told in the account given of the Books of Job and Deutero-Isaiah. Merely noting, with some surprise, that Smith is content to regard the whole of the second part of Isaiah as the work of one man, written at different times, but all after the age of Cyrus, we must hurry on to the chapter entitled 'Nehemiah and After.'

No part of Smith's work will be read with more interest. He follows the view of Marquart, Torrey, and others, that Nehemiah's master was Artaxerxes II. Mnemon. Cheyne, in 1902, like Kent, in 1899, in his history, decided in favour of

Artaxerxes I. More important is the position taken up by Smith with regard to Ezra. Kent, writing in 1899, said: 'It is significant that, with the one exception of the tradition preserved by the Chronicler, in the writings of the next two or three centuries the name of Nehemiah is immortalized, while that of Ezra is ignored.' Professor Smith says: 'What, then, is the historical fact which the story of Ezra represents? It is this: During the century after Nehemiah the community in Judah was becoming more rigid in its exclusiveness and in its devotion to the ritual. Ezra is the impersonation of both tendencies.' According to this view, then, Ezra must submit to the same fate as Moses, so far as the Torah is concerned. It is very interesting that the second volume in this series should thus take rank with the first of twelve years ago in formally introducing a startling theory to the English general reader. The question is of course important; but its importance must not be exaggerated. 'The great historical fact remains that in this period the codification of ancient customs and regulations reached its conclusion,' 'or at least reached a provisional conclusion' (p. 400). The question is one the interest of which is mainly historical.

There is no diminution of interest in the account of the Greek period—an age of migration and cities—and the Maccabæan, with their important contributions to Hebrew literature. After that the sketch becomes more rapid; but then the history of New Testament times will take up the story.

To sum up now the impression produced by the book as a whole: Many things one misses: a systematic account of sources, especially non-biblical; an account and discussion of rejected theories; authorities, biblical and other, for the statements made; a definite picture of the life of the people and its conditions; a fuller recognition of the fact that Israel was part of a great world in the life of which it shared. While we miss these things, we perceive that they are to be supplied by the other volumes of the series. On the other hand, we have a clear, interesting, instructive account of the growth of Israel, embodying a series of careful judgments on the countless problems that face the man who tries to understand the life of that remarkable people. The 'History' takes its place worthily by the side of Driver's *Introduction*. The student of to-day is to be congratulated on having so valuable an addition made to his stock of tools.

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