

A critical and exegetical commentary on the Book of Psalms, by C. A. BRIGGS, D.D., and E. G. BRIGGS, B.D., in two volumes (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1906 & 1907), is a very useful addition to the International Critical series. The author tells us that it is the fruit of forty years of labour; and as would be expected, it is packed with erudition and critical research. After a note on the names of the Book of Psalms, the introductory sections deal with—*A* the Text, *B* Higher Criticism, *C* Canonicity, *D* Interpretation. In *A* are discussed the ancient versions, the poetry of the Psalter, divided and composite Psalms, and errors and glosses. The treatment of the second of these forms the outstanding feature of the work. Dr Briggs's theory, founded on the previous investigations of Anton, Ley, and others, is that every Psalm is composed of clearly marked strophes, each strophe consisting of measured lines. The measure is defined not by syllables but by tones—three, four, five, or six in each line. Every word, except for the most part monosyllables, contains one tone, a few long words, however, containing two. And each of these measured lines is divided by a caesura. He has brilliantly made the theory good as a general principle, and it adds a fresh delight to the study of the Psalter. But it will not detract from its value to say that in some cases the author has worked the theory with a too mechanical precision. He finds it impossible to admit that the poets of the Psalter ever produced a loose line or an unsymmetrical strophic arrangement. One may doubt this without denying the probability that the text suffered much from errors and glosses. An instance or two will illustrate the point. In xiv 3 after סר he adds סנ (from liii 4) to complete the pentameter. But in the next line, for the same reason, three out of the four monosyllables must be given a tone. Would it not be simpler to admit that the lines form, as they stand, a tetrameter couplet? In xxiv 4 כפ"ס and אש are to be omitted, because 'a tetrameter couplet in the midst of trimeters is altogether improbable'. xxvii 9 requires some manipulation if trimeters are to be rigidly adhered to throughout the Psalm. כ"י must be read for עברך (also required by *rhyme*), והיית and אלהי must be omitted, and אל תבש"י must be read with two tones. But if the latter is possible, אל חסתר and אל חם may also be read with two tones, and the strophe, with no emendations, will consist of four tetrameters, which (if Dr Briggs is right in omitting v. 10 as a gloss) stand artistically enough between two trimeter strophes. xxx 1-8, in the Masoretic text, are composed as follows:—v. 2, two trimeters; v. 3, a pentameter; v. 4, a tetrameter and a trimeter; v. 5, two trimeters; v. 6, two tetrameters; v. 7, a pentameter; v. 8, a pentameter and a tetrameter. Dr Briggs is led by his theory to reduce this to an exact system of tetrameters, by omitting v. 3, 5, and 7 as glosses which adapt the Psalm to more general use,

and interrupt the strophic arrangement—by giving a tone to וַי and וַי in v. 2, by adding וַיְהִי at the end of v. 4, and by omitting וַיְהִי at the beginning of v. 8. It is not the theory of tonic measures that is here at fault, but the insistence on the unvarying regularity of the strophes. Symmetry could easily be retained in a variety of ways, and a different strophic arrangement could be reached by a treatment much less drastic. In cxix by means of emendations and transpositions an artificial arrangement is produced according to which the eight words employed to describe the Law all occur, once each, in every strophe; and all the lines in a strophe rhyme with the syllable ָ — or ֹ . But the very large number of alterations which the theory requires makes one hesitate to accept it.

In *B* are discussed the different kinds of Psalms—‘Song’, ‘Miktam’, ‘Maskil’, the Psalms of David, the Korahites, Asaph, the Elohists and the Director, Hallel and Pilgrim Psalms, and also Doxologies and musical directions. And lastly, the evolution of the Psalter is traced to its final stage. In discussing the dates of the several Psalms Dr Briggs rightly lays considerable stress on their style and vocabulary in relation to those of other books of the Old Testament. He is led to assign them to ten different periods, i.e. the early, middle, and late monarchy, the exile, the early, middle, and late Persian periods, the early and later Greek periods, and the Maccabean period. In the first of these he places vii, xiii, xviii, xxiii, xxiv^b, lx^a, cx; of which he allows vii, xiii, xviii, xxiv^b, lx^a (apart from glosses) to be Davidic. cx he assigns to a poet, not later than Jehoshaphat, who ‘lets David speak his hopes as those in which the people of the seed may join’. He holds that this justifies our Lord’s argument in Mk. xii 36 f. To the Maccabean period he assigns xxxiii, cii^b, cix^b, cxviii, cxxix, cxxxix^e, cxlvii, cxlix.

In *C* are included some useful remarks upon the protestations of righteousness and the imprecations which occur in the Psalter.

D consists of a *résumé* of methods of interpretation, which forms a full bibliography.

It may seem ungracious, when so much has been provided, to ask for more. But it is difficult not to wish that the translation was smoother and more English. Accuracy is important, but it is distracting to meet with such renderings as ‘And (flashed) flashes and made them rumble’ (xxiii 14^b), ‘Happy the people knowers of the sacred shout!’ (lxxxvii 16), ‘In generation of generations are Thy years’ (cii 24^b). And—a matter of greater moment—the Introduction would be enriched if it included a more analytical study of the Messianic elements in the Psalter. The use made of the Psalms by our Lord and the Apostolic writers is fully tabulated. But, except incidentally in the commentary, there is little indication of the part which so many of the Psalms must have

played in expressing, and in some cases moulding, the national Messianic hopes

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The Zodia, or the Cherubim in the Bible and the Cherubim in the Sky, by E. M. SMITH (Elliot Stock, London, 1906), is a book which, with its charts of the constellations, at first sight attracts us with a promise of scientific investigation; but in the first few pages we are plunged into a species of popular theology, recommended by much inconsequent reasoning. The author has read many books on Assyriology, and marked many resemblances between Bible facts and facts of astronomy and the calendar, but he has framed an erroneous theory to account for them. The 'coincidences' could not all be sustained; though many of them must be admitted. So early a writer as Hippolytus sought to refute the heresy that the Bible stories are astral allegories (p. 84). Our author believes that the story of the Fall is written on the sky (p. 196). The Eden story seems to be taken literally; Adam, Noah, Abraham, are accorded a real human existence; a literal Deluge is not called in question. Yet the early civilization of Egypt is accepted; and 3800 A. D. as the date of Sargon of Agadè; and the still more ancient records of Babylonia. The author believes that there was a primitive revelation, from which both Genesis and some of the Chaldean writings draw their inspiration; and that all human history follows a plan sketched by the finger of God in the Zodiac first of all.

The theory of the book is erroneous and fantastic. What then is the explanation of the coincidences or the frequent astral reference of Scripture phrase and illustration? It must be sought in the ancient background of thought against which the Scripture narrative is projected. There had been a worship in which the ritual marked the seasons of the year; the regularity of Nature revealed the will of heaven, time was measured out to men by stars and sun; the sun was lord of the year and representative of Deity. The full Zodiac was the full year of four quarters; and the cherubim united four in one to represent the deity. The worshippers came into relation with the signs, and the sons of Jacob became associated with the Bull, the Lion, &c. After long time the Ram sign displaced the Bull, through the precession of the equinoxes; and the ram of the flock assumed a deeper symbolic meaning in ritual sacrifice. We might soon get upon the track, and recover so much of the ancient background of thought as would serve to give truer definition and meaning to Bible records.