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Old Testament Theology.¹

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR A. B. DAVIDSON, D.D., LL.D.

EXCEPT by giving them an original work of his own, Professor Paterson could not have laid Old Testament students under a greater obligation than he has done by translating Schultz. His translation is most excellent, such as testifies not only to his knowledge and skill, but also to his care and conscientiousness. In respect of clearness, indeed, it is sometimes better than the original; for the somewhat oratorical style of the eloquent German writer occasionally betrays him into a certain haziness of expression, which the translator has cleared away. As it is, the book will be read with pleasure and, it need not be said, with profit, not only by professional students, but by all intelligent persons who have interest in the Old Testament.

Though Schultz names his book *Old Testament Theology*, he does not conceal from himself, nor from others, that all that can be aimed at is some exhibition of the religion—the religious beliefs, presentiments, and aspirations of the Old Testament people. As the people existed historically for more than a thousand years, and during all this time their Scriptures were being produced, it is evident that a true account of the Old Testament religion must be largely historical. As this literature too, though written by men specially endowed, arose out of the unbroken national conscientiousness which the successive writers shared, it is equally evident that the religion expressed in it was an organic growth. Schultz expresses these two points by defining his task to be “the historical-genetical representation of the religion of the Old Testament.” Writers on Old Testament religion have always felt the difficulty of combining the requisite historical treatment with the exhibition of the religious sentiments and beliefs. In his earlier editions, Schultz divided the history into zones by drawing parallel lines across it, and exhibited the whole circle of religious ideas as they appeared in each of these historical periods. This

method necessarily led to much repetition, because many of the doctrines do not make very great advance, particularly the doctrine of God. Indeed, it may be said that, though growth and progress be characteristic of the religion of the Old Testament, the extent to which this is the case is apt to be exaggerated. The *expression* of religious ideas was, of course, largely occasioned by historical crises in the life of the nation, but the origin of ideas and the expression of them were not always contemporaneous. But, no doubt, historical events and the rise of new institutions, like the monarchy, suggested new conceptions, such as that of the Messianic King, just as the sorrows of the Exile, and the sense of sin which they awoke, along with the hope of forgiveness and restoration, suggested the profoundest of all Old Testament figures, the suffering Servant of the Lord.

In his later editions, such as the present, Schultz has sought to meet the difficulty in another way. He first of all gives a sketch of the historical life of the nation throughout its whole course, taking note of what are the significant turns in the history, but especially of the significant *figures* arising in it,—priest, king, prophet, suffering Servant, and the like,—and showing both how these great figures were connected with the history, in some instances created by it, and how one stage of the history moved on into another, carrying with it the great conceptions which had arisen within it. This most instructive sketch occupies the first volume of the author's work. Thus, having done some justice to the historical side of his subject, and connected organically with the history, if not all the thoughts of the Old Testament religion, at least all the great thoughts and the conspicuous figures which had a religious meaning extending into the New Testament period, and indeed only seen in their full significance there, the author comes to exhibit the religion of the Old Testament itself as a system of beliefs and ideas. He assumes that, some time after the Return, the Old Testament literature was virtually complete, and that it may be treated *en bloc* as a homogeneous whole, and passages drawn upon indifferently from any part of it to support whatever doctrine or belief is under investigation. This particular treatment of

¹ *Old Testament Theology; the Religion of Revelation in the pre-Christian Stage of Development.* By Dr. Hermann Schultz, Professor in Goettingen. Translated by Rev. J. A. Paterson, M.A., Oxon., Professor of Hebrew, etc., in the United Presbyterian College, Edinburgh. Two vols. T. & T. Clark. 1892. 18s. net.

doctrine occupies the second volume. The author's facile pen and animated style may so charm the reader here that, without careful consideration, he may overlook the immense amount of preliminary study and labour that underlies the eloquent paragraphs. Though externally popular and of singular literary finish, the author's work within is a laborious and able study of the whole subject.

Schultz divides the religion or religious history of Israel into three great sections, which he calls Mosaism, Prophetism, and Levitism, which last eventually passed into Legalism and Judaism. The term Mosaism is not very happy as the name of a particular period or stage of the religion. The whole religion of Israel was Mosaism, which even itself was not altogether a novelty, but drew from the period before Moses. Prophecy was Mosaism on its moral side (which was its essential side)—at least the prophets themselves thought so; and Levitism or the ritual law was Mosaism on the side of worship—at least all the ritual writers, even when expanding and giving theoretical finish to older laws, are of opinion that their work is nothing else than Mosaism. Again, it would be quite reasonable to call the whole religion of Israel Prophetism, for the idea which the Old Testament has of Moses is that he was a prophet; and if it be true that there arose in Israel no such prophet as Moses, it is equally true that the prophets were "like unto" him; and the truest idea we can form of the prophet of any age is that of one who stood to God and man as Moses stood, the mediator of God to the people, and having their whole religious destinies committed to his hands. Prophetism and Mosaism are essentially one. Prophecy did not begin with Amos. The oldest writer of the Pentateuch is a prophet, one of the most brilliant of them, though he used history as the vehicle of his teaching to a greater extent than his successors did. And even the ritual law was prophecy in a particular form. Schultz, as well as others, shows a tendency to expose the defects rather than exhibit the merits of the ritual law, and to dwell on its *externalism*, which awakens his repugnance—rightly so soon as mere externalism can be spoken of. But does any one believe that men like Ezekiel and the authors of the Priests' Code, or, if not the authors, those who gave theoretical completeness to the ritual

law at the period of the Return, were not persons in dead, moral earnestness? The ritual laws must be judged by their purpose and necessity, and this must be learned from the history that lay behind them. These laws are the embodiment in their idea of prophetic teaching, particularly of the prophetic protest against the heathenism which had invaded the ancient ritual service throughout the land. Such laws have a purpose, partly positive and partly negative—embodying positively in worship the prophetic teaching of the unity and ethical nature of Jehovah, and on their negative side raising a bulwark against the inroad of former corruptions. That such laws degenerated eventually into an *opus operatum* may be true, but the tendency of all positive institutions in religion is in the same direction as even the Christian ordinance of baptism shows. But what kind of religious life might be nourished under the law may be learned from some of the later psalms, and from the beautiful characters, men and women, which early New Testament history shows us gathered around the cradle of Christ. It is always instructive, however, to hear what thoughtful persons have to say about the defects of the Old Testament religion; only, in judging external forms, it is necessary to go somewhat behind them, and inquire what their motives were, and what the ideas which they sought to embody. The author's treatment of Levitism, perhaps, scarcely fulfils this requirement, and his division into Mosaism, Prophetism, and Levitism, though a very good external one, has no principle beneath it.

Schultz's treatment of the Old Testament religion is, on the whole, extremely fair; if he has a bias, it is towards minimising rather than exaggerating its contents. Some will be of opinion that there is more history and less legend in the early narratives of the Pentateuch than he thinks; that some of Israel's religious treasures, such as the Decalogue, were older than he allows; and altogether, that there was fuller body and a more definite sharpness of outline in the religious beliefs of the people than appears to him to be the case. Perhaps, at the present time, this slightly negative bias may be held really to constitute a merit. Readers of this work, anxious to know what of religion the Old Testament really contains, may assure themselves that it contains all that Schultz finds in it—and perhaps a little more.