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Old Testament Prophecy.

BY THE REV. J. A. SELBIE, D.D., MARYCULTER.

THE indirect influence which the late Professor A. B. Davidson exercised upon the religious community, mainly through those who had been his pupils in Edinburgh New College, is being powerfully reinforced by his posthumous works. The impression produced by that remarkable volume of sermons entitled *The Called of God* is still fresh in our minds when we have put into our hands a publication¹ (see title below) whose appearance has been awaited with only less eagerness than that with which we still look for the promised volume on *O.T. Theology*.

Hebrew Prophecy is a subject of which Dr. Davidson was in a special sense the master. His article on 'Prophecy and Prophets' in the fourth volume of the *Dictionary of the Bible* is regarded by many as *the* article in that volume. The present work contains twenty-four Lectures, taken, as the editor informs us, direct from the manuscript used by the author in his classes up to the last. It is thus claimed for them that they embody his latest views. In the absence of any clue [but surely this could have been obtained from the note-books of students] to the order in which they were delivered, the editor has given them an order which 'seems quite natural and sufficiently logical,' and 'it is believed that they have been put into something like the sequence in which they were originally given.' 'In all probability [we should say "most assuredly"] the whole series, as now published, was never read to any one class . . . he must have been in the habit of selecting sometimes one branch of the subject and sometimes another for full treatment, and then going rapidly over the rest, as time permitted.'

Chap. i. deals with 'Prophecy as a factor in human history.' On p. 3 there are some striking and helpful remarks on what is a stumbling-block to some, God's special choice of Israel—

'I think some of our confusion of thought and misapprehension of God's ways to man has arisen from failing to

¹ *Old Testament Prophecy*. By the late A. B. Davidson, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D., Professor of Hebrew, New College, Edinburgh. Edited by J. A. Paterson, D.D., Professor of Hebrew, New College, Edinburgh. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903. Price 10s. 6d. net.

conceive the unity of the human race, and to regard the Jewish people as merely the point of union, merely the elevated conducting-rod, so to speak, pointing to heaven, and drawing down an influence to be distributed speedily over the whole earth. . . . The choice was not of them exclusive of humanity, but of them as a part of humanity—as a type of humanity—as the leaven of humanity—in a word, a choice, not of them to the exclusion of humanity, but a choice of humanity as included in them. The choice of the Jews was no more exclusive of the human race than the choice of the man Abraham was exclusive of the Jewish nation; the whole development was included in the original germ.'

Passing in chap. ii. to deal with 'Prophecy as the dominating factor in Israel's history from the time of Moses onwards,' Dr. Davidson discovers three critical periods in the history of the nation from the Exodus to the Exile: (1) the close of the period of the Judges, marked by the career of *Samuel*; (2) the crisis in the Northern kingdom, caused by the introduction of the worship of the Zidonian Baal, whose great opponent was *Elijah*; (3) the closing years of the kingdom of Judah, signalized by the career of *Jeremiah*. The following chapters (iii.-vi.) sketch the history of prophecy (which is practically the history of religion) in the time of Deborah, of Samuel and Saul, of David, of Elijah and onwards. The name 'prophet' and its definition are discussed in chap. vii. The *nēb'im* of the time of Samuel have justice done to them as something superior to the howling dervishes of Islam, while inferior to Samuel himself. The true prophet unites in himself the following characteristics: 'a man of God, a servant of Jehovah, a messenger of God, an interpreter of God, a seer of the things of God, a speaker of the things of God to man' (p. 89). In this connexion we come upon one of those striking passages which light up the pages and arrest the attention of the readers of Dr. Davidson—

'Perhaps the days of prophecy are over now. Truth has been won—it has appeared. The veil has been torn from God's face. One has lived who said, "I am the Truth," "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Prophecy culminated and perhaps really expired in the Prophet of Nazareth. Yet the history of prophecy renews itself in the individual soul at least many times. There is the dawning of truth, awful or beautiful, the corresponding excitation, the growing of the light until at last God's face is seen in

peace. But just as here, so it was in prophecy. Excitation was no essential of it, neither was the abstracted state or vision. The first prophet and the last, like unto him, seem both to have received and to have uttered truth with a calm demeanour free from all perturbation of mind or excitement of manner. Truth came to them through no medium. Its rays were pure. One was Himself the Truth, and with the other God spake face to face. So, too, the one was comparatively pure spirit, and the other perfectly. The rays of truth passed from their minds suffering no refraction; and, when truth entered, it found no incongruous elements, and there followed no disturbance. But with other men that could not yet be' (p. 88).

In chap. viii. ('The position of the prophet in the State') the difficult question is touched upon, how the true prophets of Jehovah had the assurance that the word they spoke was His. And, after a careful examination, the conclusion is reached that their assurance was not different in kind from what believers experience now. 'The prophet who was really moved by the Spirit knew certainly that he was so, the prophet who was not so moved might imagine himself to be. . . . It is quite incredible that the numerous class of prophets who were undoubtedly false were all intentionally so.' This last statement is fully substantiated in a later chapter (xvii.). In chap. ix. the reader will find all that is necessary on 'The prophetic state,' including such conditions as ecstasy, the vision, etc. Dr. Davidson appears to have deliberately ignored the 'cataleptic theory' of Klostermann, Duhm, and others. In dealing with 'Prophetic style,' and 'The interpretation of natural symbolism in prophecy,' Dr. Davidson is not a whit too severe in denouncing the method of prophetic interpretation which in its mechanical prosaic fashion destroys the poetical imagery of the prophets and allegorizes the symbolism of nature into human relations (*e.g.* making mountains = worldly kingdoms, stars = ruling powers, *et hoc genus omne absurdum*). Specially worthy of study are chaps. xiii. ('Typology in nature and revelation') and xiv. ('Typology in Scripture'). The mysteries of those often misapplied terms, 'type' and 'anti-type' are thoroughly cleared up; and the predictive element in the Scripture types is conclusively shown to have lain in their *imperfection*.

'The Isaianic problem' is discussed in chap. xv. with a conclusiveness which will confirm those who are already convinced of the truth of the critical theory of a Deutero-Isaiah, and which, along with the conciliatory and painstaking manner

of the argument, should at least disarm hostile prejudice, if it does not wholly persuade unbelief.

Passing over the classification of the Canonical prophets (chap. xvi.), and the chapter on 'False prophets,' we come to what to many will appear the most important part of the book, chaps. xviii.-xxiii., treating respectively of 'Messianic prophecy,' 'The various kinds of Messianic prophecy,' 'The Messianic King,' 'Deutero-Isaiah's outlook on the future,' 'The Servant of the Lord,' 'The work of the Servant of the Lord.' Here Dr. Davidson is at his best throughout, treading the most difficult paths with sure step, and leading us to conclusions which are at once just to the historical interpretation of the Old Testament and to its fulfilment in the New Dispensation. This is specially evident in his treatment of the great problem of the 'Servant of the Lord.' In agreement with Budde, Ed. König, and other notable Old Testament scholars, he finds insuperable objections to the view that the Servant is thought of by the prophet as an individual, whether contemporary or future. His own view of the prophet's conception of the Servant is stated thus—

'He is, first, Israel under certain conceptions, chosen of the Lord and endowed with the knowledge of His word, and therefore His servant, His prophet, and messenger to the nations.

'Then this conception, abstracted from the individuals in Israel who were not true to it, is personified and treated by the prophet as a Being, a true Divine creation. This is the servant Israel, always existing within the mass of individuals in Israel, a hidden man of the heart in Israel all through its history. . . . This true Israel was at all times represented by Israelites. It was not a mere conception. The conception had embodiments in saints and prophets and martyrs for the truth. It testified and it suffered; it sank into despondency as if labouring in vain, and yet in the saddest and darkest moments of its history it set its face as a flint, knowing that He was near that should justify it. . . . The description of the sufferings of this servant is given chiefly in chap. 53. . . . The individual aspect of the servant is much stronger here than elsewhere. This was natural. Because here the servant is contrasted with Israelites and not with the heathen. . . . It was quite natural that the prophet's ideal Being should become more and more individual in his hands, as he concentrated his mind upon it and more and more realized the moral elements in his creation.'

'To the prophet . . . gathering up all the sorrows together, the patience, the meekness, the teaching, the sufferings unto death of godly men, the body of the servant incarnated, it was as if this person, always incarnate in Israel, had borne the sins of the individuals, and they were redeemed.

' . . . The prophet conceived himself standing at the end

of Israel's history, with only one momentum of it now to occur, the restoration and final felicity in God's presence.

'We know that Israel's history had not then ended. But the moral conditions of its taking end, which the prophet perceived, are true conditions. The real end will correspond to the ideal. We are already able to see his conceptions verified. The necessity of the redemptive history, that sins should be borne, has been satisfied. One truly corresponding to the prophet's ideal Being, the Divine in Israel incarnated, sinless and suffering for the sins of the people, has taken their sins away.

'... The Christian solution is already here in its conceptions. And it is here, though not absolutely in the Christian form, in a form not far from it—in a form as near it as could be expected in this age with its necessities; for one of the necessities of this age, as of all ages of the history of the people of God, was that they should feel that they had a *present* redemption. For the ancient Scripture was written not entirely for us, but for the ancient people; and the prophet throws the Christian ideas into the living history of that time, making the people see them embodied there, and enabling them to feel that salvation was a thing real to them in their own day.'

Finally, chap. xxiv., on the 'Restoration of the Jews,' is one to which not a few will turn with interest to learn what are the conclusions of so cautious and sober an inquirer on a question which has occasioned such numerous and hot controversies.

Turning to the editing of these lectures, we have to say that, upon the lines on which he has chosen to work, Professor Paterson has done his work well. Perhaps he might have done better. No doubt, the publication of posthumous lectures, especially lectures by one like Professor Davidson, is a somewhat delicate task. We can very well understand Professor Paterson's reluctance to take any liberty with the materials at his disposal, or to obtrude his own personality between Dr. Davidson and his readers. It may be questioned, however, whether those scruples have not weighed with him to the extent of robbing the book of that finish and well-rounded character which Dr. Davidson would certainly have given to it *as a book*, had it been published in his lifetime. Each lecture being in a sense complete in itself, a certain amount of overlapping was inevitable, and to this we have no objection. In fact, some of the points discussed are so complicated and many-sided that the reader is benefited by having them presented over and over again, and in different aspects. But there are instances where clearness and consistency would have been promoted by slight omissions or additions, or modifications, which could have been

accomplished without any disloyalty to Professor Davidson. Such changes, we feel certain, would have been made by the author himself. At the very least we should have expected an editorial note here and there to prevent misunderstandings. As Professor Paterson very justly remarks in his preface, 'these lectures may be read with pleasure and profit by educated laymen, who have no acquaintance with the Hebrew language.' Now, we will suppose such a reader anxious to learn what Professor Davidson has to say about the predictive element in prophecy. Well, here are three pronouncements on the subject—

'Prophecy is not identical with *prediction*. Prediction is the least element in it. *I do not know that it is an essential element in it at all*' (p. 11).—'The prophet was essentially a *man of the present*, conditioned in his deliverances by the necessities of his time, to which he applied general principles of truth, and only lifting the veil of the future when it was needful to cheer or soberize the hearts of his contemporaries by the sight of what should certainly come' (p. 91).—'The *essence of prophecy is prediction*—prediction not only of the far distant consummation and glory of the kingdom, but also of the nearer steps necessary to this' (p. 294).

We do not imply for a moment that there is any real contradiction involved in those various statements, but there is enough of the appearance of it to justify the question, 'How shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen?' We think it only due to the weak brother that even the risk of his stumbling should be removed. And we are certain that the way to this could be discovered without much difficulty.

On one or two subordinate points Professor Davidson had a slight surprise in store for us. Twice at least he speaks of *Samuel* as well as *Samson* as a Nazirite. Again, the worship conducted in the temple at Shiloh, and afterwards at Jerusalem, is spoken of without hesitation as *imageless*. We wonder if he maintained to the last this opinion, against which so much can be said. A conclusion in which we find it impossible, with all the good will in the world, to agree with him, is that there is no great divergence between the two accounts given in 1 Samuel of the introduction of the kingship. Is it quite fair again, to acquit David of any supposed scandal in connexion with the presence of *tērāphim* in his house, and to throw all the blame on his wife? Few, we imagine, will be disposed to follow Professor Davidson in his identification of the four empires of Daniel with the Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the empire of

Alexander and his four generals, and the Seleucid empire.

These lectures contain fewer examples than we should have expected of that dry humour and pungent sarcasm of which Dr. Davidson could avail himself so readily. But they are not wanting. For instance, regarding those who hold that the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah stands for some individual of the time, he remarks that 'such opinions are valuable only as a kind of guide. To the mental character of their authors, which they do not tend to set in a very favourable light.' Dealing, again, with those who insist at all costs on the *literal* fulfilment of certain prophecies, he says :

'Of the persons who so speak, we must say that they sacrifice their reason to their faith; and they probably injure the truth more by their irrationality than they advance it by the spectacle of their faith.'

But in the atmosphere in which this book places us, it seems almost profane to touch on petty details of the work of either the author or the editor. It is a book to which we shall return again and again, to hold communion with one whose spiritual insight into the phenomenon of prophecy is so profound, and whose language is always worthy of its subject. Nowhere have the prophets of Israel found so sympathetic an exponent as in these lectures of Professor Davidson.

At the Literary Table.

The Code of Hammurabi.¹

THIS is a very able and welcome book. Mr. Cook takes his stand upon the critical view of sources in the Pentateuch. Although he claims no independent knowledge of Assyrian, by which he means that he has not done any work on cuneiform tablets, yet he is thoroughly conversant with published Assyriological works, and uses the best results with singularly little misconception. He practically gives the whole of the Code in quotations, with the transcribed Babylonian text of the original. Hence any student who wants to know what the Code says on any one point, can have the full information by turning to the index. This is a very great advantage. Alongside the relevant portions of the Code are set biblical parallels. The other ancient codes of law, and especially the very interesting Roman Syrian law book of the fifth century, are quoted in illustration.

Mr. Cook has also made an excellent beginning on the only useful method of ascertaining the real meaning of the Code. He has collected from all available sources the data afforded by the very numerous legal documents contemporary with the Code, or later. This he has done with surprising skill. The value of this kind of evidence is in-

estimable, and it is a grave fault that so many editors of the Code seem to be unaware of its existence. If we had it not, we might be tormented by doubts whether the Code was ever more than a literary document. They prove that it was an integral part of the daily life of the people, and that it was practically the law of the land unchanged to the end of Babylonian history.

It is rather a pleasant sensation to read a book which contends for the value of the Israelite tradition. The once dreaded critical school are now an orthodoxy, and defend their views against the new attack of the Babylonizers. They do so with consummate skill. Mr. Cook finds very little, if anything, in the Hebrew laws which can be regarded as borrowed from the Code of Hammurabi. He does indeed consider that for its bearing upon the laws of the Old Testament, the Code exceeds in value even the discoveries of Babylonian creation-legends and deluge-myths. He uses it as a touchstone to try the validity of the theories which would make Israelite culture closely dependent on Babylonia. If the Hebrew law is derived from Hammurabi's Code, then that dependence was very powerful. But if no direct connexion can be shown, then 'only the strongest arguments will allow us to accept those views in accordance with which Palestine had been saturated with Babylonian culture and civilization centuries before Hebrew history took its rise.'

Mr. Cook means to be strictly fair to the con-

¹ *The Laws of Moses and the Code of Hammurabi.* By S. A. Cook, M.A., Fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, Member of the Editorial Staff of the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. London : A. & C. Black, 1903. Price 6s.