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Biblical Scholarship in the Indian Church.¹

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THE appearance of the four under-noted volumes is of more than usual interest. It is of the utmost importance that the best home scholarship be adequately represented in the foreign field. This is not easy. Difficult as it is for the active ministry at home to keep abreast of the work of Biblical scholars, it is doubly difficult on the mission field, where innumerable other problems of the most perplexing and intricate kind are continually pressing upon the hard-worked missionaries. There is also the risk of obscurantism. When we remember how completely this spirit dominates, not indeed the ministry, but large sections of the membership of the home Church, and how many devoted men, in certain areas of the mission field, cling tenaciously to obsolete or obsolescent views of Scripture, and how easily this spirit is encouraged amid a pressure of duties that leave little time for study, we cannot but rejoice over every evidence from missionary lands of genuine interest in modern Biblical scholarship, and more especially where that desire is accompanied by the propaganda spirit, which seeks to spread among others the enrichment and enlightenment by which it has itself been blessed. That is why we extend so cordial a welcome to these books of Canon Sell. The Canon, who is an authority on Muhammadan history and religion, has already won an enviable reputation as an Arabic and Persian scholar, and it is fortunate for the Indian Church that he is now directing his scholarship upon the practical interpretation of the Old Testament. The first volume comes commended to us by the Bishop of Tinnevely, the second by the Bishop of Madras, and the fourth by the Bishop of Travancore.

Teachers of the Bible and of theology at home have frequently the experience of being consulted by missionaries as to the best means of presenting what is now most surely believed among us, and of being urged to make some contribution that would prove useful in the lands across the sea; but the

sanest of these teachers recognize that this work can be best done by the more scholarly missionaries themselves, who have a first-hand knowledge of the native religions and peoples, and that it will probably be done some day even better still by native converts, when they have assimilated the scholarship of the West. While there is practically nothing in the books under review which could not have been written in England, it is all to the good that they were written upon Indian soil and with India constantly in view. They are written, as the Prefaces inform us, 'primarily for the Indian clergy'; and the Bishop of Madras, in commending the volume on *The Minor Prophets*, reminds us that 'there is a close correspondence in many respects between the social conditions of Judah and Israel in the days of the prophets and those of India at the present time, and the words spoken in those days under the inspiration of the Spirit of God are equally needed in India to-day.'

It is of good omen, too, that these volumes deal with the Old Testament. That the chief business of a Christian missionary is to present distinctively Christian truth, and that the New Testament will therefore be his principal manual of instruction, goes without saying. But it will be an evil day for the Christian Church, whether at home or abroad, when the Old Testament is neglected. And it is more than pleasant to find the prophets coming to their own again in the continent on which their voices first were heard.

The Songs of the Outlaw, and Other Songs, embody, within the compass of 134 pages, a study of forty-eight psalms, six being 'Songs of the Outlaw' (Pss 52. 56. 34. 7. 54. 31), ten 'Songs of the King' (18. 24. 20. 21. 51. 55. 53. 3. 4. 28. 23), 'Song of Asaph' (80), eight 'Royal Songs' (93-100), the fifteen 'Songs of Degrees' (120-134), the 'Song of an Exile' (137), five 'Songs of Praise' (146-150), and two 'Songs of the Persecuted' (74. 79).

In each case the writer's aim is to view each psalm in the light of the historical events connected with it, and to apply its truth to the circumstances of our own lives. There is no attempt at detailed or exhaustive comment. Indeed, the old type of Commentary seems to be passing. Even in Commen-

¹ (i) *The Songs of the Outlaw, and Other Songs*; (ii) *The Minor Prophets*; (iii) *The Life and Times of Jeremiah*; (iv) *After Malachi*. All four volumes are by the Rev. Canon Sell, D.D. (Madras S.P.C.K. Depository, Vepery; R.1 each.)

taries written by professional scholars it is more and more coming to be recognized that much more is needed than the mere accumulation of relevant and irrelevant information, and that unless some sort of justice is done to the religious spirit of the book commented upon, the labourer labours in vain. Kittel's great Commentary on The Psalms in the 'Kommentar zum Alten Testament' series edited by Sellin, could be read throughout for 'edification,' in the narrower as well as in the wider sense of that word. So Canon Sell does not linger over trifles.

But while he is thoroughly alive to the modern criticism of the Psalter, his own instincts, as the title of this book suggests, are conservative. He prefers, indeed, the Maccabean date for Pss 74 and 79; he believes Pss 93-99 to be early post-exilic, incidentally admitting the difficulty of finding any definite date for Ps 94 at all; he regards the Pilgrim Psalms (120-134) as 'most appropriate to the anxious conditions of the community after the Restoration.' But, partly because he lays more stress on the superscriptions than modern scholars allow to be defensible, he clings to the Davidic authorship of not a few psalms. David is the outlaw who sings the songs discussed in the first section of his book. Indeed, he opens the discussion, in commenting on Ps 52, with the words, 'This is the first of a number of psalms connected with David's flight from Saul.' One who has been for years accustomed to the drastic relegation of almost the entire Psalter to the post-exilic period, might be inclined to take umbrage at so dogmatic a statement, and to regard it as boding ill for the value of the book. But this would not be altogether fair. For its value does not lie in its criticism, but (i) in its appropriation of the Psalter's spiritual values, and (ii) in its conviction, which most scholars share, that behind each psalm lies some historical, as obviously some inner and personal, experience, and that, if we could only recover it, the psalm would gain in vividness and power. If in the attempt to recover it, Canon Sell has gone the way of Delitzsch and Dr. MacLaren, at least we cannot deny that the attempt has been dictated by a sound instinct and not in the spirit of obscurantism. If for him the only question affecting Ps 23 is whether the psalm was composed in the earlier or later part of David's career, and if he still claims Ps 51 as the song of David's penitence, it is not because he does not know that 'others look upon the psalm as expressing the sin of the nation, praying for forgiveness and

restoration from exile.' In dealing with the sub-Christian temper of Ps 137⁷⁻⁹, which, of course, he makes no attempt to extenuate, he suggestively adds: 'When we remember all that Israel had suffered, we shall not wonder that in the history of a warlike nation such utterances occur. *The real wonder is that they are so few.*'

The volume on *The Minor Prophets* shows that Canon Sell has read Professor Robertson Smith and Sir George Adam Smith to good purpose. Here again, however, there is to be detected the same conservative strain as we noted in his treatment of the Psalms. He remarks, e.g., that 'the Levites explained the law; the prophets enforced it.' If 'the law' is here taken in the sense which it usually carries in the minds of those who draw such contrasts, few scholars would endorse the statement. Again, Canon Sell accepts the earlier date for Joel, whom he regards as a predecessor of Amos; the Book of Micah he treats as a literary unit; and the great ode in Hab 3 is viewed as integral to the book, and Habakkuk's own. But on these questions every man who examines the evidence on both sides, as the Canon has done, is entitled to his own opinion; and in any case the religious quality and homiletic suggestiveness of the exposition are in no way affected by such decisions.

The summaries of the contents of each prophetic book are well done, even when, as in the case of so perplexing and confusing a book as Hosea, they are difficult to do; and the permanent value of even the least of them is happily indicated. Of Haggai he says that 'he speaks to the point, deals with the circumstances of his day, and succeeds in getting men to do their duty'—three by no means despicable qualities. His view of Jonah is sound. That book is 'a great missionary plea,' written after the return from exile, and our Lord's use of it is regarded as not binding us to a belief in its entire historicity. 'We use traditions of the past, poetic creations and the like to enforce our teaching. Shall we deny to our Lord that which we do ourselves?' The unworthy tone of Mal 4³ is perhaps not sufficiently emphasized.

In his discussion of Nahum, Canon Sell takes occasion to illustrate the appositeness of the prophetic message to the circumstances of our own time; it may turn out indeed to be more apposite than the Canon's words allow for. The lesson of the book, he tells us, is that 'a righteous Lord ruleth over all; a lesson we see in force in our

own day, when a mighty empire—proud, selfish, and brutal—has fallen at last to the ground. Our song of triumph may be in softer tones than that of Nahum; but we with him can rejoice that the yoke of the oppressor has been broken, and that by the grace of God right has prevailed over might.' But the world has little to gain by the substitution of one tyranny for another. Right is still being imperilled and defeated by might, and the moral order may yet have to be vindicated by the collapse of other tyrannies than Germany's.

In one point Canon Sell is too tender to Nahum. He passes too lightly over his 'nationalism' in the words, 'Judah is idealized, for no mention is made of her sin or her need of repentance and reform.' The great prophets were never guilty of an omission like that. It is not an adequate explanation to say that 'the prophet lived far away.' The plain truth is, as Professor T. H. Robinson has recently said (*Prophecy*, p. 114), that Nahum is the representative of a purely patriotic type of prophecy, which the true prophets would have denounced as false prophecy. 'What Jeremiah would have said about Nahum is beyond dispute; he was almost certainly amongst those prophets whom the latter denounced.'

Taken as a whole, these studies on *The Minor Prophets* would form an admirable guide to teachers or preachers who were preparing to conduct a class or a congregation over that too little known territory.

A specimen of somewhat more detailed study is offered by Canon Sell in *The Life and Times of Jeremiah*—one of many evidences that that great prophet is at length coming to his own. Here, as in the other volumes, the Indian Church is in view. 'Surely the prophet's view of the nations should be an inspiration and encouragement to the Indian Church and an earnest call for faithfulness on its part.' This prophetic book is a revelation of an uncommonly great and sensitive spirit, besides being the record of a singularly important historical period, for many details of which indeed it is our only authority. In the course of a running exposition, Canon Sell deals successfully with both these aspects of it. There is space to call attention to two points only. (i) He says, in speaking of the prophet's imprecatory prayers, that, 'if we see any slight traces of personal vindictive-

ness, we must remember that he is not to be judged by the standard of the Gospel age, but by that of his own.' This is true, but this consideration might be fruitfully supplemented by the truth at which Canon Sell hints, but which is presented more explicitly by Sir George Adam Smith in his 'Teaching of the Old Testament in Schools', where he explains Jeremiah's delirious words as due, in part, to the absence of a faith in the life to come. (ii) Again, on the difficult question of Jeremiah's counsel to his countrymen to surrender to the Chaldeans, he simply says, 'Jeremiah came to the sad and bitter conclusion that safety lay only in non-resistance.' This passive and seemingly unpatriotic attitude of the prophet merits further discussion, and receives it in a striking article, also by Sir George Adam Smith, in the *Expositor* for July, where he argues that Jeremiah was really justified in his pacifist counsel by the fact that for him 'the divine right lay with Nebuchadnezzar,' as Zedekiah, by his revolt, had broken the solemn oath which he had made to the Babylonian monarch, swearing by the name of the national God, whose name he bore. Zedekiah 'had broken a covenant not only human but divine.'

The volume *After Malachi* deals with the Apocrypha and the Apocalyptic books, sketching their historical background and giving a brief résumé of the more important of them. This short discussion of the inter-Testamental period would be helpful to others as well as Indians; but the writer has the Indian Church mainly in view. He hopes that 'the constancy and heroic struggle of the Maccabees to gain their religious liberty, their patience under trial, and their absolute belief in the power, wisdom, and love of God may be a support and inspiration to the whole Indian Christian community.' When we find the Bishop of Travancore, in a similar strain, writing, 'In the days to come we know not what tribulation the Indian Church may be called upon to endure in the advanced stages of its conflict under the banner of the Cross,' we wonder whether grave events are anticipated or impending. Whatever comes, books like these will enable their readers to meet it in the spirit and faith of those ancient Hebrew men who overcame; and it is much to be hoped that Canon Sell will continue this good work of popular exposition, for which he is so eminently fitted.