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Recent Foreign Theology.

The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel.

Of all the great figures of the Old Testament, Ezekiel is the most obscure and the least familiar. A special welcome will therefore be extended to the latest addition [1] to the *Kommentar zum Alten Testament*, in which that epoch-making prophet is handled by a master, whose commentary represents the fruits of a profound and exhaustive study extending over many years. Professor Herrmann begins by recognizing the almost desperate difficulty of his task, a difficulty occasioned in the first instance by the almost unparalleled insecurity of the text. Of the two recensions, represented by the Massoretic text and the Septuagint respectively, the latter embodies the ultimate textual truth more adequately than the former, but both are far enough away from it, as both, and especially the former, have been overgrown by very numerous redactional accretions. The difficult question has to be faced, however, whether these elements are entirely due to later redactors, or whether some of them at least may not have come from Ezekiel's own hand; and Dr. Herrmann argues that the latter alternative must be kept open as a possibility. These redactional elements, if they are Ezekiel's, look like the work of an old man, but Ezekiel, with his passion for symmetry and system, was just the man to keep working at his original sketch. This is especially true of chs. 40–48; for while, allowing for a few later touches, chs. 1–24 are essentially as they came from the hand of Ezekiel, the later chapters are the result of a gradual process.

This initial difficulty of the book is further enhanced by Ezekiel's extraordinarily complex personality, which is partly—but only partly—accounted for by the transitional nature of the times in which he lived. It is a commonplace to say that Ezekiel was both prophet and priest: but, as against Duhm, Dr. Herrmann maintains that he is essentially a prophet with a dash of the priest, rather than a priest with a dash of the prophet; even in chs. 40–48 we hear the voice not only of the priest, but of the prophet; and in defence of this view, Dr. Herrmann can point triumphantly to the famous vision of the Valley of Dry Bones in ch. 37, which, except for the theophanies, is 'the most stupendous thing in the prophetic literature.' Elsewhere, in the Preface, he remarks that in this chapter 'one of the mighty ones of the Bible' still speaks to the German Christians of to-day; the faith and hope which inspire it, and which he would have his countrymen recapture, are as astonishing as they are splendid.

Dr. Herrmann has braved the displeasure of the metricists, by printing the whole book as prose. He is well aware, of course, that much of it is in verse—perhaps even more of it, he says, than we suspect, for an original metrical arrangement may not infrequently have been disturbed by interpolations, or at any rate by errors of text. But our knowledge of Hebrew metre is still so defective that metrical reconstructions of the text are seldom satisfactory to any but their authors; the introduction of metrical considerations into the criticism of the text would lead to illimitable caprice, and has therefore been deliberately avoided. The translation itself has aimed at accuracy, rather than beauty: Dr. Herrmann intends later to offer a translation of the book which will do more justice to its literary quality. It is a great pity that the enormous cost of printing rendered impossible the introduction of illustrations which, at certain points of this difficult book (*e.g.* 1 and 40–48), would have been peculiarly welcome.

The older style of commentary which jumbled together textual, grammatical, and exegetical discussion is happily being superseded by a better. Dr. Herrmann's method is to follow his translation by notes, often necessarily elaborate, on the text, and then to proceed to the exegesis proper, which deals with the material in paragraphs usually covering several verses, with the result that the extraordinarily abundant historical, archæological, and other material of the prophecy is presented in a connected and eminently readable form.

Of the numberless interesting points raised by the exegesis there is space to mention only two or three. The famous puzzle of the 'thirtieth year' with which the book opens is solved by dating from the year

[1] *Ezechiel, übersetzt und erklärt*, von D. Johannes Herrmann, Professor der Theologie in der Universität, Münster (A. Deichert'schen Verlagsbuchhandlung, Dr. Werner Scholl, Leipzig, Königstr. 25).

of the Deuteronomic reform, a natural date for a man who belonged to priestly circles. Again, the obscure Gog is not a mythical figure, but, coupled as it is with definite geographical names, is to be regarded as a northern nation (cf. Jer 50^3) destined to destroy Babylon before it is itself destroyed upon the soil of Israel. This is interesting and suggestive, in view of the fact that Ezekiel does not directly threaten Babylon as he does Egypt and Tyre; but her downfall must be implied in the political transformation which is to usher in the restoration of Israel, and it would seem to be effected by Gog. Another fruitful suggestion is that ערלים which occurs several times in chs. 28, 31, and 32 should not be interpreted as 'uncircumcised,' but that it is connected with the Ass. *arallû*, 'the underworld,' and means 'dwellers in the underworld.' Further, Dr. Herrmann will have nothing to do with the view that Ezekiel suffered from catalepsy. He believes that the prophet had a hand in the composition of Lv 17–26, or at any rate of ch. 26; but the very complicated question of the relation of Ezekiel to the Pentateuchal laws there was no adequate room to discuss. Incidentally he reminds us, as we have been lately reminded by Eissfeldt, Sellin, Löhr, and others, that to-day less than ever can the problem of Pentateuchal criticism be regarded as closed. In discussing the question of the relation of Ezekiel to Jeremiah he throws out the interesting suggestion that one of the great needs of to-day is a thorough investigation of the literary relations subsisting between the prophets of Israel. Some of the writer's conclusions, especially in regard to the redaction of the text, may seem to be conservative, but he may claim with justice that they are as far removed as possible from a 'false traditionalism.' This very able commentary, stimulating at every point, should do much to clear up what many readers besides Schleiermacher have felt to be the 'obscurities' of Ezekiel.

In *Israël et la Vision de l'Humanité*,[1] Professor A. Causse of Strasbourg has sketched with fascinating lucidity the progress of Israel's reflexions on her attitude to the great world from the early days when she could write 'I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee,' to the days of Exile, when the great idea of her mission as Jahweh's Servant to enlighten the world broke upon Deutero-Isaiah, and to those later days when that idea was in some circles developed, in others blurred, and in yet others superseded by a reversion to an ideal not far removed from the unlovely religious particularism of the earlier time. The book is in a sense a study of the development of the missionary idea in Israel, of the political influences that contributed to the enlargement of Israel's mind, and of others that made the missionary idea so hard to welcome, cherish, and retain. Universalism is implicit in the piety of the Psalter and the moralism of the sages. The influence of the Persian and Greek empires was among the emancipating tendencies; also the adoption of Aramaic in place of Hebrew contributed to bring with it new thoughts and expand old horizons. But universalism was opposed at almost every point in the development by the champions of a narrow particularism. The generous vision of Deutero-Isaiah was followed in the next century by the exclusivism of Ezra, if also by the lovely charity of the Book of Jonah; and Daniel, one of the latest, is also one of the most intensely Jewish books of all.

Many illuminating thoughts, finely expressed, are dropped by the way. *E.g.*, 'in the very hour when Israel became a people without a land and Jahweh the God without a temple, the prophets discovered humanity, and Jahweh then appeared before the nations in all His power as the master of the world, the God of earth and heaven.' Again, speaking of Is 63, 'in face of his immediate neighbours it is hatred to the death. It is only when the prophet looks beyond habitual horizons towards distant peoples that the hatred is appeased and gives place to the propaganda spirit.' It is interesting to note that Professor Causse does not believe that the exiles of the northern kingdom were lost to history in the land to which they were banished. 'There is reason to believe,' he says, 'that the Jews of the seventh century found at Babylon a soil already prepared and groups of colonists of their own race.' That, he contends, is the probable explanation of the oracles of Jeremiah and Ezekiel which announce the reconciliation of Ephraim and Judah.

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[1] Librairie Istra, Strasbourg, 15 rue des Juifs. 8 fr.