JOURNAL OF

THE TRANSACTIONS

OF

The Victoria Institute

OR

Philosophical Society of Great Britain

VOL. LXXXVIII

1956

LONDON:

PUBLISHED BY
THE INSTITUTE, 22 DINGWALL ROAD, CROYDON, SURREY

934th ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

OF THE

VICTORIA INSTITUTE

AT

THE CAXTON HALL

WESTMINSTER, S.W. 1

ON

MONDAY, 16th JANUARY, 1956

PROFESSOR W. D. MCHARDY, M.A., B.D., D.Phil., in the Chair

SOME MAJOR MODERN TRENDS IN OLD TESTAMENT STUDY

By

THE REV. H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE
22 DINGWALL ROAD, CROYDON, SURREY

SOME MAJOR MODERN TRENDS IN OLD TESTAMENT STUDY

By The Rev. H. L. Ellison, B.A., B.D.

SYNOPSIS

Old Testament studies were stagnating thirty years ago, but they have so revived and extended that no single individual can cope with them to-day. Literary criticism has lost its pride of place both owing to the influence of archaeology and its own inherent weaknesses. Archaeology, though not throwing much direct light on the Old Testament, has allowed us to see it against its contemporary background. The concepts of Oral Tradition, Comparative Religion and Type-Analysis have led to new approaches to the Old Testament. There has been significant work on the Prophets and the Psalms, and the revival of Old Testament Theology has been the most significant feature of the period. The paper closes with a rather fuller description of the present position in Textual Criticism, Grammatical and Lexicographical studies, Translations and Commentaries.

In my college days, some thirty years ago, I was given to understand that Old Testament studies had virtually dried up and that anyone specializing in them might expect to find himself merely rehashing the work of his predecessors. Though there was an element of strong exaggeration in this, it was not altogether unjustified. The nineteen-twenties represented the lull before the storm, during which influences were building up which have in recent years transformed the scene, widened the field of study enormously, and swept Old Testament studies along new paths, the end of which no man can foresee.

The very vastness of the field makes it impossible for this paper to make a complete survey of these modern trends. I shall confine myself to those I consider most significant, even though thereby I shall doubtless be criticized not merely for what I write but also for what I include. I have no intention of acting as a prophet about future developments, for normally those scholars that know most are least prepared to commit themselves in such matters. Above all, my task is mainly descriptive rather than critical, although I shall obviously not be able to refrain from judgments from time to time.

I am above all aware that this paper is destined for readers who, however great their acquaintance with the text of the Old Testament, have for the most part only hearsay knowledge of my subject. I give therefore a theoretically undue prominence to the practical results of modern trends and pay insufficient attention to those aspects that will always remain the domain of the specialist.

Though for convenience my material has been divided under various headings, it must be clearly realized that they are largely arbitrary, and that above all nothing in the nature of water-tight compartments exists. Many of my statements will only be fully intelligible in the light of the paper as a whole.

Literature

The whole subject has been surveyed in considerable detail in *The Old Testament and Modern Study* (1951), a volume of essays edited by Prof. H. H. Rowley; it deals with the past thirty years of work in the Old Testament field (cited as OTMS). Three Introductions to the Old Testament should also be mentioned, the first and third being particularly valuable for their bibliographies. That of Pfeiffer (2nd edition, 1948) is probably the last major work of its type that will substantially represent the position of Wellhausen and S. R. Driver. That of Bentzen (1948) derives its special importance from the modified and sometimes critical picture it gives of the modern Scandinavian school, a picture that can scarcely be obtained in its entirety elsewhere in English. For the conservative, Young's (1949) will be of special interest for its very wide reading and sane judgment.

Literary Criticism

Though literary criticism plays a relatively minor role in modern Old Testament study, popular thought sees in it the centre, mainspring and real interest of critical studies. For that reason I am according it pride of place.

It would be in measure a false picture, but no one could be blamed, if after reading a classical exposition of the literary criticism of the Old Testament like S. R. Driver's *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (1st edition, 1891; 9th edition, 1913), he decided that it was based on a study of the Old Testament entirely divorced from its setting in life, and that the only criteria used were linguistic and stylistic with the scholar's own concepts of the probable and reasonable.

This attitude, in whatever measure it existed, more with some scholars, less with others—but its real existence cannot be denied—has been seriously discredited by some of the studies to be mentioned later. But even if it could have been carried on in an ivory tower isolated from all other influences, certain weaknesses inherent in the whole approach would have seriously impaired its authority. In what follows I shall confine myself almost exclusively to the literary criticism of the Pentateuch. It is here that the main weight of scholarship has fallen and the most far-reaching conclusions drawn. The whole validity of its traditional methods depends on the measure in which it can carry conviction by its work on the Pentateuch.

It is probable that its greatest exponents would reluctantly have agreed that an inherent defect of the method is an inescapable subjectivity, which may easily be recognized once we pass from the general to the more detailed analysis of a passage and compare the opinions of different scholars. As a result not all the prestige of the classic Graf-Wellhausen theory could restrain the scholar seeking new fields to conquer in this branch of Old Testament studies.

On the one hand new sources have been discovered in the Pentateuch: L (Eissfeldt), K (Morgenstern), S (Pfeiffer). On the other the established sources have been shaken in various ways. J and E now appear quite regularly as J_1, J_2, E_1, E_2, and not infrequently further subdivisions are found. The amount of Deut. left for the law-book discovered in Josiah's reign has been in some hands drastically reduced. P has been divided into P^A and P^B with considerable portions left over (von Rad), or into seven with subdivisions (Baentsch). Even more drastic is the increasingly frequent denial (e.g. by Volz, Rudolph, Winnett) of the existence of E as a recognizable document, and even of P as a historian (Volz).

Not only have the sharp lines of the Pentateuchal documents been blurred, but the efforts to get behind them and to decompose them into their original materials has tended to reduce them to collections of materials of varying age—strata is the technical term—and the old concept of documents has largely been lost. This means that the dating of the Pentateuchal " documents " has ceased to have much meaning, for it tells us nothing of the dating of the constituent parts. This is peculiarly of importance where P is concerned. The virtual admission of the existence of the priestly system, if not the priestly document (P) in the pre-exilic period is ultimately fatal to the still dominant Graf-Wellhausen theory.

The many-sided challenge to a date for D shortly before 621 B.C. and the willingness to place H (Lev. 17—26) not merely before Ezekiel, but even earlier than D (so Oesterley and Robinson), is an indication of the extent to which scholars are prepared to venture down lines of research, which a few decades ago would have seemed closed to them.

Though, as Pfeiffer, North (OTMS, pp. 80 f.) and Bentzen (II, pp. 60–63) show, the average older scholar is not inclined greatly to modify his views on the Pentateuch, yet it is clear that there is a growing tendency towards lack of confidence in the traditional methods of literary criticism. We are likely to find an increasing number of scholars, like the Jewish Martin Buber, who essentially ignore it. It is worth quoting Bentzen, to a great extent a champion of the old (II, p. 61): " We must refrain from the minute separation of ' documents ', cutting out verses, half-verses, and single words in order to establish a complete disentanglement of ' books inside the books ', as is done, e.g. in the Polychrome Bible."

Literary criticism had never been pursued so intensively in other parts of the Old Testament, and hence there was far less agreement as to the results to be drawn. As a result there is less realization of the change of

atmosphere here. But the approach of Noth and Alt to Joshua and Judges or of the Scandinavian school to the Psalter can only be called revolutionary.

Little of real value from the conservative side has appeared in this period on the problems of literary criticism, but there has been a welcome growth of readiness to adopt a more positive attitude towards them. Young's work already mentioned is an example of this.

Archaeology

The chief cause of the change in Old Testament studies has been the great advance in Near Eastern archaeology. Since 1920 this has been in two different directions. For the first time Syria and Palestine have been brought as fully into the ambit of archaeological knowledge as had Mesopotamia and Egypt last century. Then the sheer quantity of material discovered and assimilated has made the history and daily life of the Fertile Crescent from the third millennium B.C. onwards something living. Pre-history became proto-history, and proto-history, history.

The direct bearing of archaeology on the Old Testament has been relatively small. Climate and history have made Palestine a land that offers few hopes of major discoveries to the archaeologist. (The climate of Jericho and Qumran is not typical, and Qumran lies aside from the highways of daily life.) The frequently made claims that archaeology has proved the truth of the Old Testament have little foundation in the sense in which they are normally intended to be taken.

What is really important is that we are now able to set the life, history and literature of the Old Testament into the contemporary setting of the Fertile Crescent. In certain cases we find direct confirmation of Biblical statements; in a few cases like that of the Exodus and conquest the evidence is far from clear. But when we take the Old Testament as a whole, we find that it bears everywhere the stamp of a product from the time and setting from which it professes to proceed.

There are many scholars who have no first-hand knowledge of archaeology and on whom it has made little impact. But the more its facts become known the more the tendency has grown to accept the essential accuracy of the Old Testament and to regard it as a historical document of high order. Albright can say (*Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, p. 176): "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Old Testament tradition. Divergencies from basic historical fact may nearly all be explained as due to the nature of oral tradition, to the vicissitudes of written transmission, and to honest, but erroneous combination on the part of Israelite and Jewish scholars. These divergencies seldom result in serious modifications of the historical picture."

Though probably only a minority would go as far as Albright, it is not unfair to say that whereas formerly it was assumed by the majority of

scholars that the Bible was historically unreliable unless it could be proved true, rapidly to-day the onus of proof is being moved to the doubter.

The real importance of archaeology for Old Testament studies to-day is that it provides a background against which and a framework within which it can be studied. It will be possible to indicate only some of the new paths opened to the Old Testament scholar.

Oral Tradition

For the older literary criticism it was axiomatic that it was dealing with written documents. These were normally assumed to date back to 1000 B.C. at the earliest; everything earlier was dismissed as due to oral tradition, to which little importance could be attributed. Even the archaeological stress on the early beginnings of writing was largely circumvented by the claim that the cultural level of Israel before the time of David would not have admitted the practice of writing.

The whole picture has been transformed by the stress of the Scandinavians on oral tradition. They maintain that writing only obtained its modern significance comparatively late. It served as a check on human memory and was a precaution in time of crisis, but the true vehicle of tradition was oral. Its constant repetition in public in the presence of others who knew it was a guarantee of the purity of its preservation. In addition oral tradition of this type offers a far better guarantee of the purity of the transmission of the text as we now have it than did writing in its earlier forms. This theory holds that even when the various portions of the Old Testament were written down the oral tradition remained normative for a long period of time.

There can be no doubt that this theory is too firmly anchored in the known facts of the Ancient Near East not to win its way to a great extent. There are, however, two criticisms to be made of it. Widengren has brought strong evidence to suggest that quite apart from legal enactments (where, after a certain level of culture has been reached, it can be taken for granted), both in poetic and prophetic compositions writing and oral tradition may have been combined from the first. The other is that much of their application of oral tradition in practice seems to carry little probability with it.

An area where the rehabilitation of oral tradition and archaeology has met with particularly fruitful results is that of the patriarchal narratives. There is an increasing number of scholars prepared to follow Albright and H. H. Rowley in recognizing in them narratives of major historical value.

The bearing of the new views on oral tradition upon textual criticism is dealt with later.

Comparative Religion

Julius Wellhausen with his immense talents was able to leave a permanent impress on most branches of Old Testament studies. But the hypothesis most closely associated with his name, both in his lifetime and now, in his theory of the development of Israelite religion. This was a combination of the popular evolutionary ideas of the time with a Hegelian dialectic. The theory was only possible because no certain knowledge of old Canaanite religion was available. This allowed Wellhausen to base his views on the evidence of ancient Arab religion, in which field he remains an acknowledged authority.

The archaeological discoveries at Ugarit (Ras Shamra) have permanently altered the position. There are differences of interpretation of the material already discovered, and our views may need minor modification as a result of the most recent discoveries there, but the evidence so conforms both to the remnants of a later period and to what could have been *a priori* deducible, that we may be certain that no major surprises await us. Though those trained in the views of Wellhausen will find it in many cases difficult and even impossible to reconcile themselves to this new archaeological knowledge, and will continue to reaffirm the old theories of development, it is safe to say that they have no longer any relevance for the Biblical period.

The most important deductions from the discoveries at Ugarit are that the background of the Old Testament is throughout, until the rise of Cyrus, one of developed polytheism, and that this background was fundamentally a unity throughout the Fertile Crescent, however much it might vary in its various lands and in different periods. This latter had in fact already been assumed by many even before the discussions at Ugarit confirmed the theory at least in its broad outline.

As a result of this widened outlook it is now possible to obtain a very much clearer picture of that popular religion in Israel which was so consistently denounced by the prophets. Though there remain elements where considerable doubt will have to continue owing to lack of definite archaeological evidence, it is now abundantly clear that the idolatry condemned by the prophets was in its main essence not a forsaking of Yahweh, but some form of assimilation of His worship to the general pattern of the Fertile Crescent. This in turn implied the assimilation of the character and attributes of Yahweh to those of the pagan and especially Canaanite gods. Cultus and theology cannot be disassociated, the former being merely the outward expression of the latter.

The real focus of controversy in Old Testament studies to-day is in the realm of the " legitimate religion " of Israel. In varying degrees the concepts of comparative religion have replaced Wellhausen's theory of development (not that he did not appeal to comparative religion, when it suited him). Though the historicity of the figure of Moses is recognized

probably by all responsible scholars, there has probably never been as much subjectivity in the interpretation of his work.

A. Alt's identification of the apodeictic law within the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20–23, 34), the Code of Holiness (Lev. 17 : 26) and Deuteronomy—in contrast to the casuistic law which he attributes to the Canaanites—is generally accepted. His linking of it, in some form, with Moses is still, however, by many regarded with strong suspicion. Though not a few names of front rank can be cited as supporting a Mosaic origin of the Ten Commandments in a shortened form, others are doubtful or hostile. Pfeiffer can even maintain the extreme view that there is no evidence that they were known to Jeremiah.

There is general agreement that Israel's general civil law, the casuistic law, was borrowed from the Canaanites, though not necessarily in the precise form in which we now have it. It should, however, be pointed out that not only would the law suit the time of Moses, but also that the only " evidence " for a Canaanite origin is our almost complete ignorance of the details of Canaanite law.

It is universally recognized that the general picture given by the cultus and its ministers in Israel bears a strong general resemblance to the general cult pattern of the Fertile Crescent in general and that of Canaan in particular, strong corroborative evidence being available from Jewish tradition in the Mishnah and elsewhere. On the basis of this, much stimulating study is being devoted to a reconstruction of those portions of Israel's culture that find no complete description in the Bible or in tradition. The two most important fields of study are Israel's great autumn New Year feast of Tabernacles and the position of the king within the cultus. Much that is proposed seems to be well-founded, but for me some of the theories propounded are just fantastic.

A minority, while acknowledging the similarities between Israel's cultus and that of her neighbours, stresses the undoubted differences and refuses to attribute these to writers in and after the Exile. It maintains that the stamp of Sinai extends to all parts of Israel's religion and that the accommodation to the general cult pattern is merely superficial; the prophets were correct in considering the popular religion as being something different and apostasy.

The majority considers Israel's pre-exilic religion as being a struggle between two discordant elements, the Mosaic, developed by the prophets, and the cultic, derived from the Canaanites. For them the conflict was not terminated till the exile, and the pre-exilic cultic picture was then distorted by the writers of the " priestly " school.

There remains a minority that almost completely discounts the Mosaic element in Israel's religion. It may be a champion of the traditional Wellhausen theory like Pfeiffer, who sees like his master the beginnings of spiritual religion in the written prophets. On the other hand it may be exponents of the Scandinavian school who are so preoccupied by the similarities between Israel and its neighbours that they have no eyes for

the differences. They are even less able to explain the rise of Israelite monotheism than were Wellhausen and his school. The views of this minority find little whole-hearted acceptance just because it is felt that they do not really do justice to the facts.

Mention should be made of the view of the American archaeologist W. F. Albright, which has found its classic expression in his *From the Stone Age to Christianity*. Basing himself on the general archaeological evidence of the Fertile Crescent as well as on the Old Testament, he believes that the religion of Israel was monotheistic from the time of Moses, even though the popular mind was always inclined to fall away into polytheism or semi-polytheism. This runs counter to the general trend of present Old Testament scholarship, but has the support of a number of younger men, especially among Albright's pupils.

Type Analysis

One of the most interesting by-products of archaeology has been the development of type-analysis or *Gattungsforschung*. This goes back to Gunkel, who insisted that in the conservatism of the ancient world, and particularly in its religious conservatism, literature had to conform to recognized forms and purposes. For the proper understanding therefore of the Old Testament it is necessary both to identify the various forms of literature that appear and to suggest the conditions under which, and for which, they were likely to have been composed—their *Sitz im Leben*.

Our greatly increased knowledge of Ancient Near Eastern literature has verified the general correctness of Gunkel's approach, especially in the Wisdom Literature and the Psalms. Type-analysis has helped to impose a check on unduly subjective exposition and literary criticism. In the psalms it has led to the attribution of a pre-exilic date to a high proportion of them. Engnell, perhaps perversely, claims that only Ps. 137 is clearly not pre-exilic. Elsewhere, by identifying the cultic purpose of a passage, it has made division among a number of sources virtually impossible.

Here again, however, as with the data of comparative religion, there is a strong tendency to underestimate the uniqueness of the Old Testament and to apply criteria that would be in order elsewhere, with unhappy results.

The Prophetic Literature

However much certain scholars may have devoted themselves to other areas of Old Testament studies, the prophets still occupy the pride of place they have held for at least a century. Very much in recent literature is merely a reassessment of older study and a reappraisal of old problems.

It is doubtful whether much of the modern literature is really worth the labour that has been lavished on it, and except in minor details the position of the better older commentaries has hardly been impaired. Lack of space prohibits more than a brief reference to the more important modern developments.

(*a*) *Cult Prophecy.* The recognition of the place of popular prophecy in the cultus lies outside our period, but since it has hardly penetrated to more popular levels, a passing reference is justified. The use of archaeology has enabled comparative religion to make it as good as certain that the prophet stood beside the priest as a cultic person at the sanctuaries. Since the canonical prophets do not condemn the existence of the popular prophets, but only their misuse of their position, it is only reasonable to suppose that they accepted the presence of the prophet beside the priest in the Yahweh sanctuaries as legitimate.

To-day, however, Haldar is the protagonist of the view that the pre-exilic canonical prophets were themselves cult prophets. Though there can be no *a priori* objection to such a view, and while I am prepared to consider the possibility in the case of some of the minor prophets, I consider the view is impossible in the case of Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah and improbable with most of the others.

The theory is less important in itself than in its being a powerful reinforcement for the view going back to Nyberg and Birkeland that the prophetic books do not represent the words of the prophet whose names they bear, but their words handed down, enlarged and actively transformed to fit new circumstances by their disciples. For Haldar their disciples are replaced by the groups of cult prophets of whom they formed part. Such a view is reconcilable with the inspiration of the prophetic books, but it seem to cut across much of the evidence of their contents.

Another deduction from the theory that the canonical prophets were cult prophets is that their messages are to be interpreted in a cultic setting. Apart from the possible exception of Obadiah and Nahum the exponents of the theory seem to be unable to find much exegetical support for it.

(*b*) *The Psychology of Prophecy.* Our period has seen a great deal of work on the psychology of the prophetic experience, but for the most part I consider it inconclusive and disappointing. The very importance given to the eighth-century prophets by Wellhausen and his school often led to a view of their inspiration not markedly dissimilar to the usual Jewish view enunciated by Maimonides (twelfth century A.D.), that they were men of exceptional spiritual gifts and training. The modern scholar on the other hand is inclined to minimize the obvious differences between the popular and canonical prophets and to explain both by the same yardstick. Much of the discussion has been vitiated by its having been carried on largely by theologians who were not professional psychologists, and by psychologists prepared to regard prophetic phenomena as abnormal rather than supra-normal. In addition the use of the word ecstatic has been

fatal; it is a word which is so vague in its own nature that it either leads to views in flat contradiction to the prophetic books themselves or it becomes a mere truism.

We may expect the problem of the psychology of prophetic experience to become a major subject of study in the near future. Efforts up to the present to solve the problem have done little more than to disprove those views that unduly stressed the prophets' intellectual approach to religion.

(*c*) *Isaiah.* Though any denial of the division ot the book into three main parts attributed to separate authors (ch. 1–35, Isaiah; ch. 40–55, during the exile; ch. 56–66, after the return) is regarded almost as a sign of mental aberration, the older view of accidental juxtaposition has been abandoned. To-day a complicated inter-relation of groups of disciples is postulated. Indeed it is hardly an exaggeration to say that we are returning to the conception of the unity of the book, though not of authorship.

The fairly general recognition of the Servant Songs (at least 42: 1–4; 49: 1–6; 50: 4–9; 52: 13–53: 12) as a separate unity within Deutero-Isaiah has enabled scholars to deal more objectively with the figure of the Servant. A large majority now holds him to be an individual, though from this point interpretations diverge. It is gratifying, however to see a growing willingness to see a Messianic figure in him.

(*d*) *Ezekiel.* The book of Ezekiel has become the centre of modern critical study in the prophets. At present the two main tendencies seem to cancel one another out. One school would deny the bulk of the book to the prophet, attributing it to later disciples, another (excellently expounded by Pfeiffer) would recast the outline of the prophet's activities, making him in the earlier part of his career a prophet to the doomed city of Jerusalem rather than to the exiles. In addition some have sought to move the book back to the time of Manasseh or forward to that of Alexander the Great. My own feeling is that when the dust has had time to settle we shall find that scholarly opinion as a whole will probably have remained true to older views.

The Psalms

Nowhere can the difference between Old Testament studies in the heyday of Wellhausen and to-day be more clearly seen than in the treatment of the Psalms. Then they were " the hymn-book of the Second Temple ", an expression of " post-prophetic " piety. Now they are for many, especially among the Scandinavians, the key which unlocks the inner secrets of Israel's religion.

The reason for this change is above all, that together with the Wisdom literature, the Psalms offer the closest parallels to the literature of the Fertile Crescent and can in many cases be reasonably interpreted in the light of these parallels. In addition their study proved attractive because

while the prophets had to be studied within a rigid framework of Pentateuchal criticism of which men were growing doubtful and weary, the Psalter gave an opportunity for unfettered study. It is my conviction that if the Graf-Wellhausen theory of the Pentateuch is ever rejected by the majority of scholars, the modern study of the Psalter will have contributed more to this than anything else. As it is, there is an obvious contradiction in the views of many scholars to-day, for I cannot see how their interpretations of Pentateuchal criticism and of the Psalms can be reconciled.

The psalms have been moved backward in date. Not only is the possibility of Maccabaean psalms denied (a conclusion that seems supported by the Qumran discoveries) but it is generally accepted that the Psalter is firmly anchored in the pre-exilic cultus, (though not by Pfeiffer), whatever the proportion of post-exilic psalms may be.

Many scholars, led by the Scandinavians, go much further. For them it is axiomatic (and surely they are correct) that the royal psalms must come from the period of the monarchy. They are, however, prepared greatly to extend the category of the royal psalms, for they recognize in the first person singular, especially when it alternates with the first person plural, the voice of the king leading the prayers or praises of his people. From these there has been evolved a picture, for which there is much other evidence, of the cultic position of the king, though in the hands of some it has been carried to lengths that denies other evidence.

It is certain psalms too that have supplied the main evidence for the reconstruction of an Enthronement Feast of Yahweh during the Autumn New Year festival. Though the majority of scholars have refused to accept Mowinckel's theory in its fulness, it is clear that few reject it in its entirety. It opens vistas for much stimulating study in the future, and personally I consider it virtually certain that Israel did celebrate the sovereignty of Yahweh during the feast of Tabernacles, even though it may not have been in the way suggested by Mowinchel.

Old Testament Theology

Theology, whether biblical or dogmatic, presupposes that behind the phenomena which it describes and brings into a system, there is some unifying spirit and goal. The views of Wellhausen could at the best find these in evolution and a Hegelian dialectic, a poor basis for Biblical theology. As a result the classic works on Hebrew religion, of which that by Oesterley and Robinson is the last in English, have been, with the exception of A. B. Davidson's *The Theology of the Old Testament*, merely a description of Hebrew religion and its development.

To-day there has been a radical change in outlook. Though there are many scholars who stand outside the movement, and though much of Old Testament study is carried on as though this change had not taken

place, increasingly it is being recognized that the theological interpretation of the Old Testament is the real goal and justification of Old Testament studies. This shows itself along three paths.

The feeling mentioned at the beginning of this paper that the Old Testament field of studies was exhausted went hand in hand with a conviction among many that the Old Testament had lost all relevance for the Church. It took the challenge of the *Deutsche Christen* under Hitler to the Old Testament to waken up the Church both inside and outside Germany to how far it had drifted. Since then the question of the relevance and place of the Old Testament in the Church has been a major subject of debate and study. Unfortunately it cannot be said that it has penetrated very far into the consciousness of the average church member, whether liberal or conservative. This is largely due to both sides living in the outmoded conflicts that had raged round the views of Wellhausen and his school. It is probable that the Old Testament will never find its true place in the Church until these theories are decently and finally buried.

In increasing number there are appearing monographs on Biblical theology in which certain aspects of Old Testament teaching are examined and co-ordinated. In other words a serious effort is being made to grasp what the spiritual elements in Israel understood by the theological terminology it used. Its value lies in its freedom from any obligation to make its findings square with any *a priori* conception of what the New Testament teaches and still less with the philosophical moulds of some system of dogmatic theology.

Finally there are the efforts to produce theologies of the Old Testament. These fall sharply divided into two classes. There are those that seek to construct a theology of the Old Testament alone, and there are those that consider that without a Messianic, i.e. Christological focus, the task is impossible. Though none of the works yet produced in this field can be called entirely satisfactory, they have gone far in deepening our general understanding of the revelation of God. There can be little doubt that increasingly the centre of gravity of Old Testament studies is moving towards its theological side, and here I see the surest promise of its future health.

Textual Criticism

Thirty years ago it was still an article of faith with not a few scholars that the Massoretic text, i.e. the traditional Hebrew text that can in most essentials be inferred back to about A.D. 200, was in a perilous condition. As Rowley with some self-confessed exaggeration puts it (OTMS, p. 1): " Towards the text of the Old Testament, as represented by the Massoretic Hebrew, there was a rooted suspicion, and commentators vied with one another in the ingenuity with which it was emended. Where any version

could be invoked in favour of a change its support was welcomed, but where no version could be laid under contribution it mattered little. Any guess was to be preferred to a text which was assumed to be untrustworthy." An interesting example of this attitude is the readiness with which the semi-conservative H. M. Wiener appealed to the Septuagint and other versions, whenever it suited his theories.

The pendulum has swung right back and the discovery of the Lachish ostraka in 1935, and the Qumran scrolls[1] in 1947 have only strengthened the general modern belief in the essential reliability of the traditional consonantal text and the general reliability of the vocalic system that has been added to it. Bentzen sums up well (I, p. 101): "Many instances show, according to what has been said, that texts have suffered corruptions in the course of the centuries. But as emphasized above: it has never touched religiously, or rather theologically relevant matters. And the view more and more gains ground that the *Massoretic text* upon the whole is the best form of the text, even if versions in many single cases may have a better reading." More briefly Albright can say (OTMS, p. 25), "We can rest assured that the consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible, though not infallible, has been preserved with an accuracy perhaps unparalleled in any other Near Eastern literature."

The publication in 1937 of the 3rd edition of *Biblia Hebraica* was a major event in Old Testament textual studies. It gave the student for the first time access to the oldest known form of the Massoretic text, that of Ben Asher, and with it an easily handled critical apparatus containing both the main MSS. and versional variants and the chief conjectural emendations of value. The latest edition includes the main variants from the Isaiah A MS and the Habakkuk commentary discovered at Qumran.

A completely new edition is, however, needed. There have been second and third thoughts on emendations that once seemed attractive, though others have more than held their own. The Isaiah B MS from Qumran strongly suggests that the beginnings of the Massoretic text go back not to the second century A.D. but to the second century B.C. This with improved textual criticism of the versions and growing textual knowledge, shows that a more conservative attitude towards the text is called for. I give two examples of this recognition. Rudolph in his commentary on Jeremiah (1947) treats the text more conservatively than he did when editing the text of Jeremiah for *Biblia Hebraica* ten years earlier. The Revised Standard Version shows an attitude towards the text which must have surprised many scholars by its moderation; in this respect I feel it may even have been too conservative.

The textual criticism of the Hebrew text has been greatly helped by improved textual criticism of the versions. It has now been realized that a variant in them need by no means necessarily imply a variant in a

[1] No special reference is made in this paper to the Qumran discoveries, for, apart from textual and to some extent linguistic matters, their importance is really for New Testament studies.

Hebrew MS. It might equally come from an idiosyncrasy of the translator's or from an error in the MS transmission of the version itself. Lack of space compels me to confine myself to the Septuagint, the oldest and most important of the versions. The student has since 1935 the critical edition of Rahlfs at his disposal, while for the expert the massive Cambridge Septuagint, the first volume of which appeared in 1906, draws near its conclusion.

Grammar and Lexicography

The study of the cognate Semitic languages has made giant strides in the past half century. Many of the problems of Hebrew grammar have found their solution when seen in a wider comparative setting, and we have a far better understanding of the *hapax legomena* and the difficult vocabulary of the poetic books than when the standard lexicon of Brown, Driver and Briggs was finished in 1907.

Unfortunately it is not easy for the English student to obtain access to all this new knowledge. We have Gray's *Introduction to Semitic Comparative Linguistics* (1934), but the standard Gesenius-Kautzsch's *Hebrew Grammar* (2nd English edition, 1910) has not been brought up-to-date. The reprint of Brown, Driver and Briggs has corrected many typographical errors, but we have not yet received the promised supplement. Koehler and Baumgartner's *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (1953) goes a long way towards bringing us the latest lexicographical knowledge, but it can hardly be regarded as a definitive work.

English Translations and Commentaries

The wealth of new ideas on the Old Testament has been too great for ready assimilation. As a result they have not had time to find adequate expression either in translations or commentaries.

Only four translations need be mentioned. J. Moffatt's *New Translation of the Old Testament* (1924) has had a wide circulation, but I suspect its popularity has come mainly through the translation of the New Testament. It is gravely handicapped by idiosyncrasies of its author and above all by its being made at least a decade too early. It bears the stamp of dead theories and in spite of its real merits is not likely to survive for long.

The Old Testament: An American Translation, edited by J. M. P. Smith (1927), is little known in England. It is probably a better work than Moffatt's, but it suffers also from having been made too early.

R. A. Knox's *The Old Testament newly translated from the Vulgate* (1949) has the invincible drawback of being a translation from the Vulgate. Further, though Knox is a master of English and one of the best translators of our day, he has not that knowledge of Hebrew that his task demanded.