Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:

https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology

https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb

PayPal

https://paypal.me/robbradshaw

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE literature on Amos is already extensive, but it is some time since any adequate, or at least elaborate, commentary has appeared in English. The first edition of Driver's commentary appeared thirty-two years ago; it is fifteen years since Edghill's commentary appeared, and the revised edition of Sir George Adam Smith's brilliant 'Book of the Twelve Prophets,' published last year, is not exactly a commentary. In the meantime new problems have emerged—the problem of the possible influence of Egyptian prophecy upon Hebrew prophecy, the problem of the origin of eschatology and of its place in Hebrew prophecy, the problem of the psychology of prophecy, and the nature of the prophetic consciousness. To these might be added the problem of metrical structure, and the need for a fresh consideration of many incidental points due to the progress of textual criticism and the advances made by historical and archæological studies. There is clearly room for a new book on Amos, and we have it in the *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Amos*, by the Rev. Richard S. CRIPPS, M.A., B.D., to which we extend a hearty welcome (S.P.C.K.; 15s.).

Apart from the peculiar fascination of the problems to which we have alluded, Amos is on many grounds pre-eminently worthy of study. Cornill has described him as 'one of the most wonderful and inexplicable phenomena in the history of the human spirit.' He is the oldest and surely one of the very greatest of the literary prophets; next to Jonah, his book is perhaps the easiest to read and his thought the easiest to follow; he emphasizes the importance of social righteousness with a quite titanic power, and he raises in the acutest form one of the most crucial questions of Old Testament study—the prophetic attitude to ritual and sacrifice.

Alike on the more familiar and on the more recent problems, Mr. CRIPPS, who is obviously master of all the relevant literature, has much that is valuable to say. Not the least interesting feature of his lengthy Introduction, in which the major problems are connectedly discussed, is his discussion of the date of Amos. This is much more than a mere question of chronology, for it touches the nature of the prophetic consciousness and the content of the prophetic message. The farther back Amos can be put, the less can Assyria have been on his horizon, and the doom which he repeatedly holds over guilty Israel will be, though doubtless real enough, yet vague, a doom to be executed by some power of which Amos is sure, but which he does not distinctly envisage. And conversely, the later we can set the prophet, the more probable will it be that Assyria is the instrument which is to effect the Divine chastisement upon Jehovah's people. As against those who would put the appearance of the prophet about 760 or even 750 B.C., Mr. CRIPPS argues skilfully for the date 742 or 741. By this time Tiglath-pileser had been three or four years upon the throne of Assyria, and so clear-eyed a seer as Amos, deeply convinced of the sin of Israel,

must have read in his accession the death-warrant, or at least the heavy and bitter chastisement, of his people. The prophets can interpret the signs of the times, to which their contemporaries are blind.

Another important feature of the discussion is Mr. CRIPPS' treatment of the attitude of Amos to Judah. While inclined, with most scholars, to reject the authenticity of the oracle against Judah in $2^{4f.}$, he makes the point again and again that the impartial Amos must have included Judah within the scope of his stern message. He would have been the last man to exempt any guilty nation, even his own, from a doom she deserved. The references to Israel, Mr. CRIPPS thinks, should usually be taken to cover the whole of Jehovah's people, Judah no less than Israel. This is a point worthy of serious consideration.

On the vexed question of the attitude of the prophets to the sacrificial system, Mr. CRIPPS is not so emphatic as many recent, and especially most German, scholars have been. He admits, of course, that Amos' allusion in 5^{25} to Israel's religious experience in the wilderness proves that for him sacrifice was not *necessary*; but in commenting on 4^4 he asks, 'Is he not upbraiding his hearers for sacrificing at the sanctuaries in *such a manner* as to be displeasing to Jehovah?' Even if this milder interpretation of the mind of Amos be accepted, it is at any rate gratifying to find Mr. CRIPPS admitting that 'in general it may be said that the great prophets, however interpreted, were closer to God's truth than were the priests' (p. 341). He 'would hesitate,' he says elsewhere, 'to believe that God in any sense really wished for, still less commanded, ritual slaughtering. It was a very widely spread ancient rite; and, at most, He allowed it.'

With regard to Egyptian influence on Hebrew prophecy, there is no need to deny its abstract possibility. There is almost certainly some literary connexion between the religious poetry of Israel and Babylon, and between the Wisdom literature of Israel and Egypt, and there are undoubted resemblances between Hebrew prophecy and the few extant fragments of Egyptian prophecy; but, whatever may be said of the form, so far as the contents are concerned Egyptian influence is negligible. The differences are far more striking than the resemblances, and in the most crucial point of all, the difference is most conspicuous. As Mr. CRIPPS puts it, 'in Egyptian oracles the moral note, though sometimes struck, always remains low and scarcely audible.'

One of the most valuable parts of Mr. CRIPPS' discussion is that which deals with ecstasy, vision, and audition in the prophets, or what we may broadly call the psychology of prophecy. In what sense are the five visions of Amos to be interpreted? Was the prophet a 'seer' in the sense in which Amaziah contemptuously addresses him? Were his 'visions' just ordinary experiences of drought, a plague of locusts, etc., upon which, with his ethical insight and passion, he put an ethical interpretation, or were they in some sense abnormal or ecstatic experiences?

On this delicate point Mr. CRIPPS wisely declines to dogmatize, but he offers interesting analogies from the experience of St. Francis, St. Theresa, St. Catherine of Siena, Juliana of Norwich, George Fox, the Sadhu Sundar Singh, and other Christian mystics. He makes the probable suggestion that, 'on "seeing" the thing, Amos thereupon fell into the vision state, in which he was under the Divine influence' (p. 218), and argues with much plausibility that the condition of psychic vision provides a vehicle for God to communicate a revelation to His prophet. God neither leaves His servants entirely to think out their own gospel, nor is He content merely to stimulate the healthy processes of their minds. There is more than that. How much more may be indicated by two quotations.

One is from Mr. G. C. Joyce. 'However much subjectivity there was in the form which the vision assumed, it does not, therefore, become the mere product of human imagination and destitute accordingly of authority. To those who profess their belief in a Spirit who "spake by the prophets," it is clothed with the dignity of a revelation.'

The other quotation is from Professor J. B. Pratt. 'May it, then, perhaps be that the mystics are the seers of our world, and that whenever they open the eyes of their souls, the Eternal Light pours in; and that though we blind ones learnedly describe, generalize, and explain their experience by regular psychological laws which take account only of the psycho-physical organism, still the light is really there and the mystic apprehends it directly, even as he says? This question is not for psychological discussion. Nothing that the psychology of religion can say should prevent the religious man from seeing in his own spiritual experience the genuine influence of a living God.'

Professor C. C. J. Webb, well known as Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford, and as a Gifford lecturer, has published three lectures which he delivered at the University of Durham last November under the title *Religion and the Thought of To-day* (Milford; 2s. 6d. net). The subjects of the lectures are 'The Study of Religion: Problems and Methods,' 'The Debt of Modern Philosophy to the Christian Religion,' and 'The Problem of Religion in Contemporary Thought.' Professor Webb has an irritating habit of burdening his sentences with elaborate qualifications, which makes him a little difficult—or at least laborious—to read. But he is worth reading, and these lectures are particularly worth reading, especially by teachers and preachers of religion. We propose to summarize the third of the lectures, that on 'The Problem of Religion in Contemporary Thought.'

Professor Webb begins with a vivid contrast. He goes back a hundred and fifty years, and contrasts the situation of religion then with its situation to-day. A hundred and fifty years ago religion was universally accepted as a normal feature of human life. To profess no religion was something strange and abnormal. No State was to be found that did not acknowledge some form of religion. And, even when the tenets of the religion were criticised, at least there was a deference given to its authority in outward show. The situation is different to-day. Most States count impartiality or indifference on religious matters to be a fundamental principle of their policy. There is no attempt at coercion, and disbelief of religious doctrine is too common to excite surprise or to incur obloquy. This does not necessarily imply that religion is vanishing among men. On the contrary, it may be said that it has gained by the defection of a host of merely nominal adherents. But the contrast holds good all the same.

The situation of religion to-day will be clarified if we follow Professor Webb in a further contrast. There were two outstanding facts about the religion of the eighteenth century. One was the general assumption that the reasonableness of religious faith could be proved to any man of competent intelligence quite apart from his possession of any specifically religious experience. 'Proofs' of the existence of God established that belief on metaphysical grounds. And with reference to Christianity in particular, it was held that on ordinary principles of historical evidence it could be put beyond doubt that miracles had occurred which evidenced the supernatural nature of Him who performed them. Religious belief was a matter of intellectual proof.

The other fact about the eighteenth-century religion was the beliefs which were taken for granted as embodying the essence of religion, and especially of Christianity. (1) One was the *transcendence* of God, who is a Being quite distinct from the world which He had created by an exercise of His will. (2) The second was that Christianity stands or falls with the authority of Scripture, which was a revelation from above and entirely exempt from error. And (3) finally, that the ultimate sanction of religion was the eventual happiness or misery of the individual in another life. It was on this ground that appeals for acceptance of religious truth were based.

Now in all these respects, in regard to both of these facts, and all these beliefs, the situation to-day is totally different. To begin with, the 'proofs'

of the existence of God are discredited by contemporary thinking. Kant's damaging criticism was the first blow to shake them. But they have been shaken. And to-day it is accepted that to force religion on a reluctant mind by such reasonings and apart from some religious experience in the person is a vain proceeding. It would be as idle to attempt this as to expect to create by arguments an appreciation of poetry or music.

The new defence of religion rests on other grounds. It does not aim at compelling men to admit God's reality by argument, but rather calls on them to recognize in themselves something which makes God real. God is to be *found* within the soul rather than *inferred* from phenomena. Obviously this God is an *immanent* rather than a *transcendent* God. And that emphasis is one of the great religious changes of the last hundred years. It has been immensely aided by the doctrine of evolution. Evolution manifestly goes far more readily with an immanent God, just as creation goes easily with a transcendent God. This belief in an immanent God has, then, been fostered both by the abandonment of the old idea that the existence of God would be proved by intellectual means, and by the discovery that life has been a development by continuous process.

The idea of evolution has had another important result. It has created a new *historical sense*. It came to be seen that to write the history of anything it is necessary to see its connexion with what went before and how it grew out of its predecessor by a gradual and continuous growth. Now this new historical sense had far-reaching effects on the study and criticism of ancient literature, and especially on the Bible. And this has marked a revolution even greater and more momentous than the Reformation of the sixteenth century. The whole previous conception of the authority of Scripture has been modified. The change may be put roughly thus : that the fact of some statement being in the Bible does not necessarily guarantee its truth, or even its religious value, and that something which is true and right does not need the sanction of its being in Scripture to be accepted.

Once more, a very great change has taken place in our view of the future. We do not believe that the salvation of the individual in a future life is the chief end of religion and the ground of its appeal to the unconverted. And this is due to the disappearance of the traditional Christian 'other-worldliness,' for which this world and its concerns are only a passing interest ; we are 'pilgrims and strangers' in this world ; our real interest and concern are in eternity. The beginnings of the modern reaction against this view go back to the Renaissance. In Europe generally *double-mindedness* became characteristic of men's outlook ; that is, they had a twofold life, one of interest in this world, the other of belief in another. But gradually this was left behind in favour of a view which found the centre of gravity in religion in the present, in an experience which is 'eternal life,' and which includes all man's present concerns. The Great War gave a blow to this 'immanentism' (as Professor Webb calls it). Many serious minds began to doubt the value of the easy-going philosophy which finds God in everything and in everybody, and sees the hope of the world in the forces of civilization. There has been a marked reaction against this 'present worldliness,' and a tendency to revert to a belief in transcendence, to emphasize the otherness, the strangeness, the irrationality in religion. Otto and his 'numinous,' Barth and his uncompromising theology of grace as discontinuous with the whole process of civilization, are portents. It is, therefore, the task of our age on the one hand to secure the gains of the past, the conviction of the autonomy of religious experience, and the recognition of God's immanence ; and also on the other to rise above a mere faith in civilization and to grasp the essential truth of transcendence, that God is above us, a Reality other, yet not wholly other, than ourselves.

In his most recent volume, *The Primitive Church*, reviewed in this issue, Canon Streeter succeeds in investing what might easily be a dull discussion with a good deal of human interest. His main subject is the primitive Church Order, and through-

out the discussion he keeps in view the rival claims in this reference of Episcopalianism, Presbyterianism, and Independency. When he comes to the position, in the primitive age, of the Church in Syria, he encounters the dominating figure of Ignatius, and gets a chance, which he seizes with both hands, of an interesting study in human motives.

The letters of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, written on his way to martyrdom in the Colosseum at Rome, *c.* A.D. 115—four from Smyrna, three when he had reached Troas—are described by Canon Streeter as, next to the Epistles of Paul, the most vivid piece of literature, considered simply as a human document, that has survived from the early Church; and they pose a question which is one of the most controverted in early Church history, namely, whether the Church Order in primitive times was definitely Episcopalian or not. That it was so these letters in themselves would lead us to believe; on the other hand, emanating also from the Church in Syria, not long before the Ignatian letters, there is the *Didache* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, with its testimony in favour of Independency. Hence arises a difficult problem, apart from the problems raised by other early documents which may be read in support of the Presbyterian claim.

The problem of Church Order raised by the coexistence in Syria of the *Didache* and the Ignatian letters is relieved, according to Canon Streeter, by two considerations. The first is that the monarchical episcopate in Ignatius' day was a comparatively recent institution at Antioch, and not yet securely established. Two facts supporting this view are: (1) that in the traditional lists of Bishops of the great Sees only one name is given between Ignatius and the Apostles; (2) that six of the seven letters are filled with exaggerated and passionate exaltation of the bishop's office, as though the monarchical status and authority of that office was as yet not sufficiently ancient to be secure.

The second consideration mitigating the difficulty of the historical problem aforesaid has to do with the personal idiosyncrasy of Ignatius himself. In this connexion Canon Streeter would make five points, prefacing his exposition with the remark that 'Ignatius, like many who have achieved high fame, was clearly of the neurotic temper. His letters on every page reveal a high-minded personality keyed up to that peculiar intensity which is a symptom of that temper. Genius is often a concomitant of the neurotic constitution. Not that genius is the result of the neurosis; but that same hypersensitiveness to impressions, which makes the genius quick to perceive what other men ignore, exposes him in early life to injury from experiences which would leave unscathed persons of more ordinary clay. A piece of grit that will derange a watch will not affect a traction engine.'

(1) The first and most obvious evidence that Ignatius was a man of abnormal psychology is the prophetic seizure he alludes to in writing to the Philadelphians (vii. 1); and that he was subject to prophetic seizures appears in his letter to the Ephesians (xx. 2). Like other 'prophets' of his time, he had an overwhelming conviction of possession by the Holy Spirit. Such an experience is analogous to that of the medium in modern times.

(2) Another trait suggestive of psychological abnormality is the reference in Trall. v. to mystic visions, of which with an unhappy mixture of pride and humility Ignatius at once boasts, yet declines to reveal the content. His claim to have experienced mystic visions shows to us that he was addicted to trance-practice.

(3) Still another abnormal trait is the existence in Ignatius' mind of 'the will to power.' Like many religious leaders since, he painfully and conscientiously ***wills*** to be humble, but in Trall. iii. 3, Rom. iv. 3, ix. 1, and other passages thoughts of self-esteem surge up, and it is not less self-esteem when it prides itself on not being proud. Even in Trall. iv. we still seem to be listening to a man who publicly disclaims a virtue expecting that his hearers will repudiate the disclaimer.

(4) With Ignatius the desire for martyrdom has risen to the height of passion (Trall. x., xii. 3). It is not, however, out of a neurotic desire to suffer ('masochism'), but out of the desire to attain what was the highest personal distinction in the contemporary Church.

(5) Finally, it would appear that the psychoneurotic tendencies latent in Ignatius' mental constitution were intensified by his experience of prisoner-baiting on the long road to Italy (Rom. v. 1). 'The tension of a soul sorely overstrained rings in every sentence of this pathetic, yet still heroic, figure. We cannot but note the unconscious egoism in many a sentence; yet it is the egoism of a noble mind unstrung.'

Now Canon STREETER asks us to bear in mind the psychological idiosyncrasy of Ignatius in considering the references in his letters to Church government. In particular it is to be remembered that nervous overstrain commonly results in a loss of the sense of proportion, and not infrequently in an obsessive concentration on certain dominant ideas. To Ignatius the monarchical episcopate is literally an *idée fixe,* which accounts for the extravagance of his language in regard to the episcopal office (Eph. vi. 1; Magn. vi. 1; Trall. iii. 1; Smyrn. viii. 2–ix. 1). The same topic recurs, significantly enough, when, on the occasion already alluded to, he was speaking under the control of the prophetic spirit—and the subconscious mind is always the citadel of the *idée fixe.*

'When a man on his road to death is seen using every opportunity to impress one idea with all the prestige that martyrdom would give him; when he enforces it in language neurotically extravagant; and when there is evidence that his subconscious as well as his conscious mind is dominated by the same idea, we may well conclude that it stood to him as the summation of his life's work. But if the consolidation of an ecclesiastical discipline centred in the monarchical bishop was the ideal for which Ignatius had lived, and which he hoped by a martyr's death firmly to rivet on the Church at large, it is a fair presumption that it was a thing which he had had to fight for in his own Church at Antioch.'

Books that have influenced our Epoch.

Matthew Arnold's 'Literature and Dogma.'

BY PROFESSOR JAMES MOFFATT, D.D., UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, NEW YORK.

Literature and Dogma was published in 1873. Like *Unto This Last,* it had been running in the 'Cornhill Magazine' before it appeared in book form. Within less than twelve months the volume had been three times reprinted, and ten years later a cheap edition was issued, with a new preface, so steady was the demand for it in England. Professor Saintsbury pronounces it the worst book Arnold ever wrote, but there is no disputing its vogue half a century ago. One may admit that as a literary piece it will never rank with four other products of 1873, with Morley's *Rousseau,* with Pater's *Studies in the Renaissance,* with Renan's *L'Antéchrist,* or with Hamerton's *Intellectual Life.* But, for all his amateurishness and persiflage, Arnold was in earnest, and he touched a subject of immediate interest to the English people in the nineteenth century. His reputation as a literary critic swung his book into a wide circulation, yet he did not set out to write a literary work. He was for the time being a lay preacher and teacher, who addressed an erring generation. *Literature and Dogma,* it must be recollected, came in the wake of *Essays and Reviews* and of Colenso's Old Testament sensations. *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 had particularly aroused the religious public by its presentation of scientific and historical criticism. For the first time the bearings of these upon the interpretation of the Bible were indicated, and the controversy had agitated all schools of