

## TO THE READER

THE conviction that the Bible is there to be read rather than to be read about is the only reason and justification for this book. But why then *this* book?

The Prophets mirror their own times with their problems so vividly, and they often express their thoughts so poetically, that some help is needed by the reader who has not had a theological training, if many parts are to be really intelligible to him. Then, too, the Church, not content with the many obvious Messianic prophecies, early took over the rabbinic maxim, "No prophet prophesied save for the days of the Messiah," and through most of its history has distorted what it could of the prophets to refer to Jesus Christ in His first or second coming, and has normally ignored the remainder, except for occasional texts, which were useful as pegs to hang sermons on. To take the Prophets simply and straightforwardly and to reap the spiritual reward of so doing is even to-day so difficult for many that some guidance is needed.

I have not written this book as an introduction to modern views about the prophets and their writings. There are quite enough books on the subject already. But certain far-reaching views on some of the prophetic books have become so widely known, at least by hearsay, that they could not be ignored, especially as they affect, whether accepted or rejected, our understanding of the prophetic message. Some will disagree with what I have dealt with and what I have omitted; probably all will disagree with some of my conclusions. As regards the former, I have learnt much from the difficulties of my own students; as regards the latter, though I have learnt from many, I have become the blind follower of none, and the only criticisms I shall regret are those based on the blind acceptance of the views of others however eminent.

In fairness to my non-technical readers I have given them the possibility in vexed questions of studying the views of others for themselves. The books mentioned in the footnotes have been chosen for the most part with an eye to whether they are likely to be available in libraries.

The chapters on the Major Prophets, and the Appendix, in their original form, first appeared as lessons in the Bible School of *The Life of Faith*. That they should have been

expanded by the addition of chapters on the Minor Prophets is due mainly to the encouragement given by Mr. F. F. Bruce, Head of the Department of Biblical History and Literature, University of Sheffield, and Rev. H. F. Stevenson, Editor of *The Life of Faith*. Let this book be my expression of thanks. If I do not express thanks to others, it is not that I am not indebted to many, but to too many, and to have picked out some for mention would have been invidious.

The way in which this book has grown has inevitably involved inequality of treatment between prophet and prophet, with the longer prophets being the worst sufferers. I do not regret this. The shorter prophets are normally the least known and less has been written about them. In addition, if I interest anyone sufficiently to stir him to further reading, he is much more likely to spend money on a book to help him with one of the longer than one of the shorter prophets.

You will not really understand this book unless you read it with your Bible open at the same time, and you will understand it better if you use the R.V., R.S.V., and sometimes N.E.B.

The Bibliography at the end is intended only to give you a list of books that may help in a deeper study of the text of the Prophets. They do not necessarily agree with my views and expositions.

The dates given may not agree in all points with the average reference book. They are based on Edwin R. Thiele: *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*.

I hope my more learned readers will not sniff at my use of "Jehovah." Though Jahveh, or Yahweh, whichever you prefer, is nearer to the real form of the name, it is not at all certain that it is the real form. So if I had chosen your preference, I should have sacrificed the very real spiritual connotation that Jehovah has for many without having achieved absolute accuracy.

It only remains for me to hope that your reading will bring you nearer to Him of whom all the Prophets spoke in sundry ways and divers manners, and that the ways and will of God will become more clear to you. If so, my work will not have been in vain.

#### NOTE TO FOURTH EDITION

In this second paperback edition the text has once again been carefully revised though the actual changes are few. I am grateful to God for the book's continued usefulness.

H. L. ELLISON.