

PROFESSOR A. B. DAVIDSON ON THE
PROPHET EZEKIEL.

PROFESSOR A. B. DAVIDSON'S anxiously-expected Commentary on Ezekiel, in the *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, has at length, we are glad to see, appeared. Needless to say, it is in every respect worthy of the author of the *Commentary on Job* in the same series, and will be not less a boon to students. For Prof. Davidson is no *dilettante* commentator: he brings, on the contrary, rare qualifications to the task which he has undertaken. He has from his youth been a devoted student both of the language and of the literature of the Old Testament; he is critically-minded, yet sober; he has a singular power of unravelling and grasping the thought of the author whom he essays to explain; and he is properly conversant with the literature of his subject. Hence his Commentary on Ezekiel, like his former one on Job, stands ahead of all other English commentaries on the same book. The notes are models of terse, but incisive and adequate exegesis. The introductions to the various prophecies explain sufficiently their character and drift. The text of Ezekiel, while often as lucid and flowing as can be desired, is at other times so strange and obscure as to be nearly or altogether untranslatable: the ancient Versions, especially the LXX., frequently preserve readings which are manifestly superior; and much has been accomplished with their help by modern scholars, as Ewald, and particularly Hitzig and Cornill, for the restoration of the prophet's text. Even, however, when all has been done by these means, many obscure passages remain, in which the corruption appears to be too deep-seated to be removed, with any confidence, even by conjecture. Prof. Davidson's notes show that he is well acquainted with all questions of textual criticism relating

to Ezekiel—the prophet is fortunately untouched by the problems of the “higher criticism”: and though his exposition is designed primarily for English readers, the Hebrew student who peruses the notes attentively will find them a most helpful guide, and will generally be able without difficulty to discover the reading which Prof. Davidson adopts, and learn his judgment upon the alternatives involved.

It is refreshing to find a scholar who, while not rash in proposing innovations, nevertheless expresses his mind unambiguously with reference to the integrity of the Massoretic text. From the note on i. 14 in either the *Speaker's Commentary*, or the *Commentary* edited by Bishop Ellicott, the reader would not imagine that the text was open to any suspicion. Prof. Davidson does not state more than the simple truth when he writes: “The verse both in regard to terminology and construction is untranslatable. The word rendered ‘ran’ has no existence, and that translated ‘flash of lightning’ is equally unknown.” Again, on vi. 9, “Such a sense as ‘been broken with’ is altogether impossible; and the middle sense, ‘break for myself,’ is equally to be rejected.” The first of these renderings, found (substantially) in the Authorized Version, is unhappily retained in the Revised Version: the second is adopted by Dean Plumptre in Bishop Ellicott's *Commentary*. On xvi. 16, “The rendering given [*should not come*] can hardly be extracted from the words, which are probably corrupt in some way, though already read by LXX. (with a different vocalization)”; and on xvi. 47, “the strange word *kāt* is utterly unknown.” As these examples show, the reader, however little conversant with Hebrew he may be, is at once placed in possession of the facts about a passage. On xiii. 20 Prof. Davidson accepts the very neat and convincing conjectural emendation of Cornill, אַתָּן חֲפָשִׁים for the unexampled אֶת־נִפְשֵׁים (for the Hebrew idiom involved,

see Jer. xxxiv. 9, 10, 11, 14). On iii. 12 he appears ready to endorse the excellent suggestion made some fifty years ago by Luzzatto, and shortly afterwards, independently, by Hitzig (בָּרִיךְ for בְּרִיךְ: cf. x. 4, 16, 17). Although, however, he thus considers that the Massoretic text very frequently needs correction, and allows that at least sometimes, as in chap. xxxii. (p. 232), it has been burdened by glosses, he rightly refuses to assume corruption to the extent that Cornill does, or to adopt the same drastic remedies for its cure. But it is true that Ezekiel (as we now read his text) presents passages which baffle even the best scholars. In such cases Prof. Davidson is skilful in bringing home to his reader the same uncertainty of which he is sensible himself (*e.g.* on vii. 11, xxi. 10). The difficult passages in chapters xl.-xlviii., descriptive of the restored Temple, and redistribution of the land, are explained (with frequent correction from the LXX., the assistance of which is here indispensable) as lucidly as the circumstances admit. On chap. xix. (cf. xxvi. 17, xxvii. 32), a reference to the article of Budde in the *ZATW.*, 1882, p. 1 ff., where the rhythmical form of the Hebrew elegy was first definitely established, and which is manifestly presupposed in Prof. Davidson's note, would have been useful to the student.

Readers of the *EXPOSITOR* will know, from the papers which he has from time to time published in it, to what good effect Prof. Davidson has studied the theology of the Old Testament, and how instructive his articles on the characteristic teaching of its different parts always are. The present volume contains many valuable remarks on the method and aims of Ezekiel, and on his characteristic doctrines, partly comprised in the "Introduction" (pp. ix.-lv.), partly cast into the form of longer notes, prefixed or attached to particular prophecies. Chapter ii. of the Introduction is on Ezekiel's History and Prophetic work, with some account of the nature of the symbolism and

visions, in which, beyond all other prophets, Ezekiel delights. Of the visions, Prof. Davidson takes a reasonable view: he holds that in all cases the descriptions rest upon a substantial foundation of reality, but allows that when in after years the prophet reflected on the facts and recorded them, he gave them literary expansion and embellishment (pp. xxix., 53). Chaps. iii. and iv. are headed, respectively, "Jehovah, God of Israel," and "Israel, the people of the Lord"; and the Divine attributes which the character of the prophet's mind leads him to bring into greatest prominence, and the manner in which he viewed the relation of Israel to its God, are examined and illustrated. In the notes on chap. xviii. (pp. 124 f., 132 f.), and xxxiii., it is explained how Ezekiel conceives the moral freedom and responsibility of the individual before God. From the note on xxxvi. 27, it appears that Prof. Davidson agrees with those scholars who assign to Joel a date subsequent to the exile. In the course of the commentary on the prophecies against foreign nations (chaps. xxv.—xxxii.), and on the restoration of the kingdom of Israel (chaps. xxxiv.—xxxix., xl.—xlviii.), very useful and suggestive notes on the import of prophecy in general, as well as on the prophecies of Ezekiel in particular, are often to be met with (*e.g.* pp. 178–180, 190, 215 f., 255 f., 273 f., 279, 287–291, 349 f.). Most students of the prophets' writings must have been impressed by the difficulty arising from the frequent non-correspondence of the prediction with the fulfilment, especially when the *details* of the prediction are taken into account; and on pp. 190, 215 Prof. Davidson takes occasion to insist on the important principle that there is nearly always some *ideal* element in predictive prophecy: the too prosaic interpreter will often find himself—or, at least, will be found by others—to be landed in an absurdity. "Prophecy is always ideal in its delineations." It is true, the prophets "*imagined* the fulfilment as they describe it.

This, however, is part of their idealism ; the moral element is always the main thing in their prophecies. What they predict is the exhibition of Jehovah's moral rule of the world ; the *form* in which they close this exhibition may not be quite that given by history" (p. 190). We must not, Prof. Davidson is careful to warn us, allegorize what is evidently meant to be literal : we must not, for instance, in chaps. xl.-xlviii., treat purely as symbolical and figurative either the natural or the supernatural element in the picture : we must rather explain what to us seems the strange combination of the two from the prophet's own point of view. "The restoration expected and described by the prophet is no more the restoration that historically took place than the restoration in Isaiah lx. is the historical one. Both are religious ideals and constructions of the final state of the people and the world. Among other things which gave rise to what appears to us an incompatible union of natural and supernatural were two fundamental conceptions of the Hebrew writers. They could not conceive of a life of man except such a life as we now lead in the body. This bodily life could be lived nowhere but upon the earth, and it could be supported only by the sustenance natural to man. . . . The other conception was that true religious perfection was realised only through Jehovah's personal presence among His people, when the tabernacle of God was with men. To us a bodily life of man upon the earth, such as we now live, and a personal presence of Jehovah in the most real sense in the midst of men, appear things incompatible. To the Hebrew mind they were not so, or perhaps in their lofty religious idealism the prophets did not reflect on the possibility of their ideals being realised in fact. The temptation, however, to allegorize the prophetic pictures of the final state, and to evaporate from them either the natural or the supernatural elements, must be resisted at all hazards" (p. 289). The descriptions in chaps. xl.-

xlviii. are meant by the prophet literally: the regulations laid down by him are intended partly for the efficient maintenance of the worship due to Jehovah, partly for the purpose of securing that the salvation and blessedness of the restored people, which is conditioned by the presence of Jehovah in His temple in their midst, be in no way impaired by the proximity to Him of aught that may render unclean or profane.

The plan of the series in which Prof. Davidson's Commentary appears, prevented him from treating questions of text and philology so fully and explicitly as he could have done, and as students of the original may, perhaps, sometimes require: in other respects, he has supplied the reader of Ezekiel's prophecies with a Commentary containing all that he can either need or desire.

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