

SOME RECENT OLD TESTAMENT LITERATURE.

THE volume on Psalms xc.-cl. completes Prof. Kirkpatrick's commentary on the Psalter in the *Cambridge Bible*. The whole is now also published in a single volume, which, unfortunately, is printed on a larger page than the rest of the series. It is hardly necessary to say that Prof. Kirkpatrick's work ranks in the matter of careful and thorough scholarship with the most successful of these commentaries. For the most part it is written from a sound critical standpoint. We entirely sympathize with the author's evident scepticism as to the various theories which "discover a metrical system in the Psalms, on the basis of quantity, or of number of syllables or accents"; and also with his acceptance of the principle that a heading "Moses" or "David" does not show that a psalm was composed by the Lawgiver or the King, as the case may be. Our author's unqualified acceptance of modern critical principles is shown by the fact that he does not commit himself to the Davidic authorship even of Psalms xxiii., li., and cx. Sometimes, however, we are made to feel that an ingrained habit of thinking on traditional lines has unconsciously warped the critical judgment, e.g. in the ascription of Psalm ci. to David.

Prof. H. G. Mitchell of Boston has a predilection for publishing commentaries on the first ten or a dozen chapters of an Old Testament book. Probably this is the amount of work he takes with a class during one session—an ample allowance if everything is as carefully and thoroughly discussed as it is in the book before us. Thus Prof. Mitchell's volume on Isaiah i.-xii. is now followed by *The World before Abraham*,¹ a commentary on Genesis i.-xi., with an introduction, a new translation indicating the documents, J, P, etc., and full notes. While much of the

¹ Constable, London, 1901, 5s. nett.

contents will be specially useful to students, the greater part of the book is quite intelligible to the general reader, who will be able to enjoy and profit by it, without being bewildered by technical matter.

Dr. Hermann Gollancz's *The Ethical Treatises of Berachya*¹ is a most interesting and useful work. It includes an introduction dealing with the life and work of Berachya, and the Hebrew text of his two ethical treatises, the *Compendium* and the *Masref*, printed in ordinary square Hebrew characters, with explanatory notes and an English translation. The introduction gives a glimpse into the wonderful intellectual activity of mediæval Judaism, and is also an example of the application of the Higher Criticism to literary problems. Most diverse opinions have been held as to Berachya; what his exact name was; whether there were one, two, or three Berachyas; whether he lived in the twelfth, thirteenth or fifteenth century; and whether his home was in England, France or Spain. Dr. Gollancz decides that "The literary development of Berachya's activity probably took the following course. He started as a translator of such philosophical works as the *Questions of Adelard*. . . . At the same time he probably pursued grammatical, Talmudic and simple exegetical Biblical studies. . . . He then proceeded to philosophical compilations, . . . and he seems to have concluded his literary activity with the fable and apologue." The character of his work points "to the years 1160-1170, and to Lunel [in the South of France], or the surrounding district, as the time and place of Berachya's activity." Dr. Gollancz also holds that Berachya did not know Arabic, and that his correct style and title was "Berachya, son of Rabbi Natronai ha-Nakdan."

Berachya is not important as an original contributor to the development of the science of Ethics. His *Compendium*

¹ David Nutt, London, 1902, 21s. nett.

is mainly the ethical and religious portions of Saadya's *Emunoth Vedeoth*, with some additional quotations from Bahya's *Choboth Ha-lebabeth* and the works of Ibn Gabirol. The *Masref* (or Refiner) repeats *verbatim* whole sections of the *Compendium*. This *Masref* is not so much an abstract of other men's work as the *Compendium*; the plan and arrangement are Berachya's; but, as we gather from Dr. Gollancz, it is rather a systematization of current teaching than an exposition of original ideas.

Berachya's chief service to his own generation was very much the same as that which this volume may render to our own—he made the Judaistic philosophy and theology of the early Middle Ages, especially that of the great scholar Saadya, accessible in a compact and attractive form. Here the curious reader may find, done into idiomatic and forcible English, specimens of the rabbinical method at its best. Berachya or his authorities are fond of laying down a principle and then adducing a string of proof texts, often interpreted according to a somewhat literal exegesis. There is a curious feature about these quotations; Berachya belonged to a family whose special business was to see that the Hebrew Scriptures were copied accurately; he was himself a Biblical scholar, yet his quotations often differ from the current Massoretic text. Like another pupil and doctor of the Rabbinical schools, the Apostle Paul, Berachya seems to have sometimes emphasized and at other times ignored the exact words of the passages he quoted. Again, while there is much formal deference to the Torah, and occasional insistence on details, these treatises are by no means dominated by pettifogging absorption in minutiae, but discuss broad questions in a liberal spirit. If space permitted we would gladly multiply interesting quotations, but we can only venture on one or two. Thus arguing for monotheism, he writes: "If the world had had more than one Creator, there would have been differences of opinion

among them upon the subject of the creation of beings, and the creation of the world would never have become an accomplished fact" (p. 242). Again, Berachya is much exercised about the sins of Old Testament worthies, which he treats with remarkable frankness.

Berachya quotes (apparently) a Rabbinical opinion "that we should not hold a man guilty who deviates somewhat from the truth for the purpose of obtaining favour, provided that his faith be not thereby impaired or be altogether lost by reason of this thing. For we find that the prophets were sometimes led that way, when not prophesying." The examples of Abraham, Jacob and David are cited. Berachya does not seem to have been satisfied; he dwelt long on this theme, until he despaired of being able to fathom such points. "If such failings and shortcomings," says he, "were manifest in the case of the great men referred to, how shall we find fault with the meaner class belonging to the rest of mankind?" At last Berachya found a solution of the difficulty in a saying of Saadya's "that God created the prophets prone to failings, frail like ourselves . . . for the purpose of demonstrating to us that, when they act in any uncommon way, they do so by virtue of some power not their own . . . that it is the action of the Creator."

The title "ethical" applied to these treatises is misleading; they also deal with Theology. For instance, the thirteen chapters of the *Masref* deal with "The Basis of Life, the Eye, the Heart, Limitation, Justice, Oppression, Poverty, Honour, Conversation, Grades, the Soul, Hope, the Resurrection." The Hebrew text, with the translation and notes, will also serve for a reading-book in Rabbinical Hebrew. Berachya's style is comparatively easy. One could wish that Dr. Gollancz had added an index and an abstract of the two treatises.

Principal Douglas' *Samuel and his Age*,¹ and the late Dr.

¹ Eyre & Spottiswoode.

Sharpe's *Student's Handbook to the Psalms* (2nd ed.) are written from the standpoint of traditional criticism. The *Handbook* is an introduction, and does not include a commentary; prefixed to it is a brief but interesting life of the author by Dr. Sinker, the Librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge. Dr. Sharpe was evidently both a scholar and a devoted pastor, one of a class to which the Church of England is deeply indebted.

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