

TWENTY-ONE YEARS OF THE "EXPOSITOR."

ON the completion of twenty-one years' occupancy of the editorial chair of the *EXPOSITOR*, I may be allowed to write a few words of preface to the new series. I do not intend to survey the history of the periodical in detail, nor, tempting as the subject is, shall I essay any close record of the changes in religious thought during these years. I shall only indicate as briefly as possible the intention with which the *EXPOSITOR* has been carried on, and will be conducted in the future. Much might be said of the long and splendid list of contributors. Among them are included many of the most prominent scholars of this country, of the United States, and of the Continent. Among the dead I remember many with special affection and gratitude—among them Lightfoot, Westcott, Godet, A. B. Davidson, Milligan and Henry Drummond. Not a few of the most important books of the period have been reprinted in whole or in part from the *EXPOSITOR*, including works by Professor W. M. Ramsay, Professor George Adam Smith, and many more. The investigations first appearing in the *EXPOSITOR* are referred to in every standard commentary and dictionary, while the volumes have their place in theological libraries all over the world.

When in 1885 I became editor of the *EXPOSITOR*, it was plain to me that much space would have to be devoted to the Higher Criticism. My honoured friend and predecessor, Dr. Samuel Cox, who himself aided me with his contributions, designed the magazine mainly as a vehicle of popular, yet scholarly expositions of Holy Scripture. In this line he was himself an acknowledged master. In his time discus-

sions of such subjects as the fate of the wicked were followed with extraordinary interest. The Higher Criticism of the Old Testament was only beginning to make an impression. The slow headway made by the new criticism in this country is very difficult to understand. Colenso's books made but a slight impression even on open-minded scholars. F. D. Maurice, while chivalrously desiring to defend Colenso's position in the Church of England, absolutely loathed his opinions. Dr. Samuel Davidson, though allowed to have his say in the most powerful literary journals, hardly touched the average view. Dr. Cheyne, by his writings in the *Academy* and by his books, did as much as any one to bring the subject before serious students. But it was not till the trial of Dr. Robertson Smith by the Free Church of Scotland that the public as a whole began to see that there were problems calling for solution. I was for four years a pupil of Robertson Smith, and witnessed the progress of the long controversy, which ended in a compromise by which he retained his position as a minister, and was removed from his chair as a professor. But even when Robertson Smith published his book *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, most of those who stood up for liberty declined to accept his teachings. They could not believe in the extraordinary amount of literary fertility during the exile demanded by the critical construction of the History of Israel.

Robertson Smith was removed from his chair, but among Hebrew scholars his views made steady progress. There are still a few eminent scholars who decline to accept the newer theories, but hardly one whose opinions have not been much modified. Practically the critical view of the Old Testament is taught from every Hebrew chair in this country. In the EXPOSITOR qualified writers on both sides have been given a hearing. A new chapter in the history of Old Testament criticism has been opened by the publication

of the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, with other manifestoes by Professor Cheyne, but the controversy is only beginning.

In 1885 British scholars were resting securely in a conservative view of the New Testament. This view was fortified by the great Cambridge trio, Westcott, Lightfoot and Hort. Their vast learning and authority overawed opposition, and there was very little on the other side that could be called weighty or scholarly. But now it is contended that the principles applying to the Old Testament must also be allowed to operate on the New Testament record. The Johannine problem has passed through various phases, the last, perhaps, more favourable to the old view than that which preceded it. It requires no great foresight to see that the controversy ahead of us will be concerned with the documents that make up the New Testament. The attention which has long been claimed for the Old Testament is rapidly being transferred to the New.

As to the extent to which the laity have been influenced by criticism, it is not easy to speak. Many Christians live in a settled, peaceful country, undisturbed by the border warfare. Many have found belief made much easier by the acceptance of the new positions, and popular apologetics have undergone a transformation. The style of pulpit exposition which one might almost say was inaugurated in Dr. George Adam Smith's volumes on Isaiah has brought the living message of the Old Testament home to many minds who previously found it a sealed book. On the other hand, a very large number have angrily resented the work of the critics. I suspect, indeed, that so far as the vast majority of the religious public is concerned, the methods of the critics are not understood, and their conclusions are rejected. It must be remembered that to follow the critical argument as far as ordinary readers can follow it, requires a considerable mental effort. It means, in short, some knowledge of the critical method. When to

this is added the undeniable fact that critical conclusions appear to revolutionize accepted beliefs, there need be no wonder if issues are often confused. How far certain critics themselves may be to blame, I do not venture to say. So far as the orthodox churches are concerned, it may be said with confidence that the conclusions of criticism have been accepted by their scholars only when they could not help it. Almost every scholar has begun by taking a much more conservative position than that which he occupies at this moment.

There is no reason to fear for the Bible, or for Christianity. The Bible is still the best loved of books. Competent expositions, whether given from the pulpit or from the Press, were never more valued. The living interest in the Bible steadily grows. People may be somewhat weary of criticism, but when the Bible is put to practical and devotional use by men who understand it, an eager audience is always ready. There never perhaps was a more extended appreciation of the moral power and spiritual value of Christianity. There never was a greater yearning after its succours. For Christianity no substitute, ethical or other, has been discovered. It is in sole possession as the one credible and effective religion of the world. May we not say that even the attitude of science has altered? Twenty or thirty years ago the splendid triumphs of science led to vast pretensions and to the claim of domination and sufficiency. But now the atmosphere is changed.

It is, therefore, with much hope that we commence this new and enlarged series of the EXPOSITOR. An effort will be made to make it still more helpful to preachers and to students, but the main lines on which it has been conducted will still be followed. We have been cheered by promises of help from our old contributors, and from many young and rising scholars. Among the readers of the EXPOSITOR have always been numbered many laymen, and if there is

one lesson which my experience has taught me it is the supreme importance for the Church of theological learning. No Church is wise that does not recognize the necessity of setting its best men apart for study and for teaching, and of trusting and supporting them generously. Questions are being asked, and will more and more be asked, which can only be answered by scholars. It may be hoped that this duty becomes clearer. There are reassuring signs—notably the establishment of a Theological Faculty in connexion with the Victoria University of Manchester. But there is still very much to be accomplished. Preachers are sent out too often most miserably equipped for the work they have to do. They may toil hard to acquire the missing knowledge, but in the stress of ministerial life they can never be quite successful, and they may easily become disheartened and give up the struggle. A correspondent of the *Guardian* of December 13 gives a mournful account of the present method of training in the Church of England. He says that at a representative meeting of Divinity Professors, Theological Lecturers and Examining Chaplains, it was resolved unanimously that the present system of training ordination candidates required drastic reform. He goes on to make the astounding statement that "in a diocese where candidates are recommended to read Hebrew, none of the Examining Chaplains knew Hebrew. There was one candidate who took the subject; and after some discussion on the difficulty he was eventually examined—not by the Examining Chaplains, but by the man who had been his Hebrew coach for some months past!" Nor is it enough to pass through a respectable course of theological study. The clergyman who does not keep up his studies will find that he loses influence over the best minds—that influence which remains only with those who are always humble, diligent, reverent and fearless seekers after truth.

THE EDITOR.