

# 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:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

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

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*PROFESSOR S. R. DRIVER.*

QUARTER of a century ago Old Testament scholarship was represented in Great Britain by four men of the highest distinction. The first to be taken from us was Robertson Smith, the hardest of all our losses to bear, for he was cut off when he was opening up new fields of research, more fruitful for the illumination of the Old Testament than the works he had specifically devoted to that subject, where also his familiarity with the whole Semitic field and with anthropology combined with his intimate knowledge of Scripture to initiate far-reaching theories. He died with only a portion of his great work on Semitic religion completed, and who knows with what other masterpieces of learning unwritten, with which, had longer life been granted him, he might have enriched us? To his teacher, Dr. A. B. Davidson, length of days was given, and the value of his work in training the ministry of his Church and in quietly preparing for the revolution which criticism has brought with it can hardly be over-estimated. His books and articles were justly treasured, yet they scarcely revealed the full measure of his power; and of the two volumes, to which we were looking as affording him an ampler scope for his genius, one was not written, and the publication of the other has been but a dubious service to his memory. But when he, too, was taken from us we could still console ourselves with the reflection that Dr. Cheyne and Dr. Driver were left to us. To the stimulus, the learning, the masterly and suggestive interpretation, the dauntless courage of the

former, many of us had long owed much. But while we can never think of him without veneration and gratitude, he soon began to tread a path along which it was not possible for even his most devoted admirers to accompany him. And now that Dr. Driver has followed Robertson Smith and Davidson within the veil, we cannot but feel that the last word has been written in one of the most notable chapters in the Biblical scholarship of our land.

The scholar, whose premature death we are mourning with a sense of irreparable loss, was born on the 2nd of October, 1846, so that he was only sixty-seven when he died; and till shortly before his death it seemed as if he would be spared to complete the heavy programme of work to which he was committed. He was educated at Winchester, and New College, Oxford, where he had a distinguished career, winning the Hebrew scholarships and Syriac prize, and being elected in 1870 to a fellowship at New College, which he held, with a tutorship from 1875, till he succeeded Pusey as Professor of Hebrew and Canon of Christ Church in 1882, when he was only midway between thirty and forty. He began authorship early with an edition in 1871 of the commentary on Jeremiah and Ezekiel by Moses ben Shesheth. In the nature of the case the appeal of such a volume was not very wide, but in 1874 he won a far more extended fame by a treatise on *The Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and some Other Syntactical Questions*. This attracted attention not only in Great Britain but on the Continent, and gave the writer a secure position among the foremost authorities on Hebrew grammar. In 1876 he edited, in collaboration with Dr. Cheyne, the Old Testament portion of the *Variorum Bible*. It is not easy to estimate how much self-denying drudgery the production of this work must have entailed, or praise too warmly the accuracy and skill with which it was carried through. Later editions made it more useful still, and it

is to be hoped that the work may sometime be brought up to date, a task, it is true, now much more formidable than when it was originally undertaken. In this year also he joined the Old Testament Revision Committee, remaining a member of it till its work was done. One cannot help wishing that the work had been delayed till he and Robertson Smith and Cheyne and those who worked with them could have wielded a dominating influence. They exercised, no doubt, a wholesome restraint on the timid and reactionary tendencies of the older members; but, as Dr. Driver once said in a letter to me, the time was not yet ripe for a revision to be undertaken. In the following year he published, in collaboration with Neubauer, *The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah according to the Jewish Interpreters*. In 1880 he returned to the field in which his first work had been done with an edition of *The Book of Proverbs attributed to Abraham ibn Ezra*. Apart from articles and new editions of earlier publications there is little to record for several years. But from 1888 onwards the stream of publication flowed in considerable volume. In that year he issued his little work on *Isaiah* in the series known as *Men of the Bible*. This showed that on the critical problems of that book he accepted a critical position of a moderate kind, similar in fact to that taken by Gesenius in his classical commentary. In the previous year he had in some Sunday School lessons, prematurely brought to a close, indicated his acceptance of certain critical conclusions with reference to the Pentateuch (*Critical Notes on the International Sunday School Lessons from the Pentateuch for 1887*). This had in fact been clear from earlier articles and reviews, notably from his contribution to the *Journal of Philology* in 1882 on "Some Alleged Linguistic Affinities of the Elohist." But it was not till the publication, in 1891, of his famous *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* that his critical position on Old

Testament problems in general was clearly defined. The volume was an instant and a remarkable success. New editions followed each other with rapidity; the sixth, which was published six years later, was so thoroughly revised that it was set up from fresh type. The seventh edition came out in the following year, and was four times reprinted. The eighth appeared in 1909 considerably revised, though not so drastically as the sixth. The ninth, to which two important discussions had been added, was issued towards the end of last year. I have deserted the chronological order that I might mention some of his leading works on Higher Criticism together; but in 1890 he had published *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel*. It was specially valuable to the student of the language, but important also as an introduction to palæography and the principles of Lower Criticism, for the application of which the notoriously corrupt text of Samuel provides ample opportunity. The volume was hardly a commentary in the ordinary sense, but in value to the student of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament it is probably surpassed by none of the author's works. Happily before he passed away he had given us a second edition, thoroughly revised and enlarged, partly by incorporation of the results of discovery and research in the meantime, partly by very serviceable discussions of topographical problems. In 1892 his solitary volume of sermons entitled *Sermons on Subjects connected with the Old Testament* supplied a useful supplement to his *Introduction*. In collaboration with Mr. H. A. Wh te he prepared an edition of the Hebrew text of Leviticus for *The Sacred Books of the Old Testament*, which was followed in 1898 by the English translation and notes. In 1895 *The International Critical Commentary*, for the Old Testament portion of which he and Dr. Briggs were the editors, began to appear. Of the three volumes then issued he con-

tributed that on Deuteronomy, its companions being the brilliant volume on Judges by Professor G. F. Moore, and the famous contribution to the interpretation of Romans by Dr. Sanday and Dr. Headlam. Whether we may look forward to any part of his commentary on Job in the same series I do not know. He told me that when his new edition of Samuel was completed he hoped to take up the Job. But I rather fancy that other tasks intervened. I was disappointed that his little edition of Job was simply a republication of the Revised Version text with an Introduction and annotations. It was useful for the ordinary educated reader, for whom it was specially designed; but a new translation from an emended text is badly needed, in which, further, some attempt might be made to relegate the later insertions to an appendix and present the poem in something more nearly approaching to its original form. At one time he hoped to write the Commentary on Isaiah xl.-lxvi. in the *International*, but pressure of other work compelled him, to our great loss, to relinquish the task to other hands. He made three notable contributions to *The Cambridge Bible* in the volumes on *Joel and Amos*, on *Daniel* and on *Exodus*, the last of these being a particularly solid and thorough piece of work. For *The Century Bible* he wrote the Commentary on the last six of the Minor Prophets. For *The Westminster Commentaries* he edited Genesis. For *The Oxford Church Bible Commentary* he had promised to write on Hosea, Psalms, and Chronicles. These volumes were to contain new translations. Apart from Leviticus he had translated the Psalms (*The Parallel Psalter*, 1898), and Jeremiah (*The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah*, 1906). Two specially important contributions to Hebrew scholarship remain to be mentioned, his editions of Deuteronomy, Joshua, and Ecclesiastes for Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica*; and above all his co-operation with Dr. Brown

and Dr. Briggs in the preparation of the Oxford Hebrew Lexicon. Nor is the tale of his work even yet complete. He not only enriched Dr. Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* with characteristically learned, thorough, and sober articles, but he took an important share in revising the proofs. He wrote for the second edition of Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, for the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, and smaller dictionaries and also for magazines, notably the EXPOSITOR. A very balanced and lucid exposition of the light thrown by modern excavation and epigraphy on the Old Testament was given in the volume entitled *Authority and Archæology, Sacred and Profane*, of which he purposed issuing a revised edition. He returned to this subject in his *Schweich Lectures on Modern Research as Illustrated in the Bible* (1909). The record of achievement is truly remarkable when we have regard not simply to the bulk, which was great, but the quality of the work; and it becomes still more so when we remember how much of his time was absorbed by other duties or self-imposed tasks. Teaching and academic affairs took much time, much also was given to the performance of his editorial duties, as the prefaces to the volumes of the *International Critical Commentary* contributed by British scholars, reveal. I shall not forget how, when I was diffident about undertaking an important task that he had been forced to abandon, among other considerations which he urged to overcome my scruples was his spontaneous assurance that he would gladly give me his counsel on any point on which I desired to consult him. His correspondence must, I think, have been very large. Sometimes it was a crowded postcard, sometimes a long, elaborate letter, but always stimulating and instructive, with judgments which even when they only repeated what was familiar, were weighty because they were his judgments.

A man's greatest work is often not accomplished in the

sphere where his qualities are highest, nor is he always most pre-eminent in those gifts which shine most conspicuously to the public eye. The field in which Dr. Driver first attained distinction was that in which first and foremost he was a master. In philology, as in every subject he undertook, his industry was unshrinking. He made an exhaustive collection of his facts, expounded them with accuracy and precision. The greatest pains had been taken to get even the minute detail right, the facts were classified, their interrelations exhibited, and from the large induction of instances the law of the phenomena was deduced. But he was not a mere "hodman of science," though he did his spade labour himself. His delicate insight into grammatical laws, his fine discrimination of the value of words, his sympathy with the temper and spirit of the language rose to genius. This brilliant and finished scholarship was of great value both in his exegetical and his critical work. The scholar valued it highly; but had he limited himself to grammar and lexicon and the editing of texts, the world at large would have felt little or no interest in his achievements, however masterly. Few have the equipment to appraise pure scholarship, but it is comparatively easy to follow large parts at any rate of the critical case and estimate the strength of the arguments. And Dr. Driver was qualified, as probably no one else, to do the work which then needed to be done and to secure the triumph of criticism. He was fortunate alike in the opportunity and in his own qualities. The way had been prepared for him. The controversies about Samuel Davidson and Colenso had come and gone, but they had at least familiarised the English public with the fact that new views on the Old Testament were entertained by a growing number of scholars; though our insular self-complacency made it easy to assume that criticism made in Germany was likely enough to be fantastic, subjective,

arbitrary, and governed by illegitimate presuppositions. And the conservative victory, that at least seemed to have been won in New Testament criticism, was a reassuring omen for the rehabilitation of the Old Testament. But the Robertson Smith controversy had broken up the fallow ground, though more in Scotland than in England. The translation of Ewald's *History of Israel*, his *Prophets*, and his *Poets of the Old Testament*; of Kuenen's *Religion of Israel*, and *The Hexateuch*; and of Wellhausen's *Prolegomena*; Stanley's popularisation of Ewald; Robertson Smith's *Old Testament in the Jewish Church* and his *Prophets of Israel*; the ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, in which the best German criticism was made accessible to a wider public; the growing influence of Dr. Cheyne, whose commentaries on *Isaiah* and the *Psalms*, his *Job and Solomon* and his *Bampton Lectures*, it must be remembered, all antedated Dr. Driver's *Introduction*; had prepared the way for his survey of the whole field. The new views were already being taught to some extent in Universities and Theological Colleges. My own position was probably pretty much that of many others among the younger men. I had been convinced as to the truth of the critical view and was already teaching it. Among my Oxford friends at the time this attitude was fairly general. Accordingly when the *Introduction* appeared a large audience was ready for it.

And he was exceptionally fortunate in his qualifications for the work. No one else could have done for us in England what he did. His reputation as one of the world's foremost Hebraists gave assurance as to the impeccability of his scholarship, and he had the advantage of that close, intimate familiarity with the text itself which preoccupation with philology enforces, but which does not lie behind everything that is written on Biblical criticism. In the next place his own critical development had been of a kind to make his

judgment weighty when it came. For a considerable part of his career he had been fairly non-committal on critical questions. In *The Life of William Robertson Smith* the authors say, "It is of interest to note that it was not until 1882 that Professor Driver became convinced of the truth of the Graf-Wellhausen view of the dates of the documents of the Pentateuch" (p. 551). I am not aware on what grounds this date is fixed, as no reference is given. So far as public expression of opinion goes, that year is connected in my own mind with the publication of his article in the *Journal of Philology* on *Some Alleged Linguistic Affinities of the Elohist*. From that article it was quite clear that he accepted the literary analysis of the Hexateuch and, in fact, believed that the phraseological criteria sufficed, often with complete certainty, to distinguish the different writers (p. 202). And it was not his object to establish a particular view as to the date of P. His paper was a rather severe criticism of Giesebrecht's attempt to prove that the affinities of P in language are with writers about the period of the exile. No conclusion is offered on the main problem, but the general tone of it suggests an unfavourable rather than a favourable attitude to the Grafian theory. A definite solution he had apparently not reached when he wrote this article. He says: "The problems, literary and historical, presented by the *Grundschrift*, are complicated and difficult; and no solution that may be offered of them can for the present be regarded as other than provisional." Even in the preface to his *Bampton Lectures*, written just before the *Introduction* appeared, Professor Cheyne wrote of his colleague, "As a student of the language and grammatical sense of the Old Testament, I have long since had a high respect for his opinion; as a critic I do not yet know to what extent we agree. Slowly have time and study melted his conscientious reserve, and made him in a

double sense my comrade. But his excellent though in some points over-cautious handbook to Isaiah and his recent article in the *Contemporary Review* (Feb. 1890) leave no doubt to which side upon the whole his judgment inclines, and his known fairness and candour, and the solidity of his exegetical basis, will give special value to his book at the present juncture" (p. xxiv.). This slowness to advance and the caution with which he tested the solidity of the ground gave a peculiar weight to his adhesion when it was actually announced. Clearly he had no love of novelty for its own sake, if he moved forward it would be because he was driven by sheer pressure of the evidence. Another very noteworthy quality of his criticism was its objective character. His type of mind resembled Lightfoot's, and it had a peculiar attraction to English students. His positions were supported by hard facts and black and white reasons, admirably marshalled, lucidly expressed, judicially stated. With subjective, incommunicable impressions he had little to do; he always turned by instinctive preference to arguments that would appeal to the common sense of the average cultivated reader. Hence it was difficult, except for prejudice, to discount them as viewy. Above all he was endeared to the English mind by his moderation. Temperamentally cautious and distrustful of extremes, he studied both sides of his case, prepared to recognise what was good in each, to hold the scales evenly, and register the verdict with the impartiality of a judge. If he found, on the whole, for the progressives it might be inferred with some confidence that their case was pretty strong.

In other words, a quality which contributed as much as anything to the wide acceptance and high regard in which the volume was held was, from a purely scientific standpoint, a limitation. The book was reviewed in three notable articles contributed by Professor Cheyne to the *EXPOSITOR*

(February, March and April, 1892), and republished in a fuller form in *Founders of Old Testament Criticism*. There was no lack of candour about the articles, and one can well believe how unwelcome the writer felt his task to be. With hearty recognition of the admirable features of the book there went an undisguised exhibition of its critical shortcomings. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," and this was a friendly criticism. Leaving details aside, I felt when I read the articles that their general standpoint was right in the main. The book was too much of a compromise with conservatism. The author often did not accept the conclusions to which his general position would have seemed logically to commit him. He had a leaning to dates as early as he could accept without abandoning his loyalty to critical principles. It would sometimes happen that in his judicial statement his arguments would seem stronger for the view which he did not accept. Thus in his commentary on Amos, Wellhausen's case for referring the closing verses to a later hand was impartially stated, but on the whole it was felt safer to acquiesce in the genuineness. Yet this tendency to "blunt the edge of his criticism," to use Dr. Cheyne's expression, no doubt contributed not a little to the cordial acceptance with which the *Introduction* was greeted and the far-reaching influence which it exercised. The more timid felt that this gentle regard for the scruples and prejudices of the weaker brethren made criticism in his hands less dangerous and objectionable than in the hands of those who said all they thought with a ruthless disregard of conservative sentiment. No doubt others were aware that Satan is all the more seductive when he is robed as an angel of light. Another feature of his work I have always found it difficult to understand. This I can illustrate by a reference to the sixth edition of his *Introduction*. This marked a great advance on the first. In the intervening

period discussion had been specially active with reference to the prophets. 1892 had been distinguished by two such outstanding books as Duhm's *Isaiah* and Wellhausen's *Minor Prophets*, 1895 by Cheyne's *Introduction to Isaiah*. In the department of Old Testament Theology we had the first edition of Smend's *Alttestamentliche Religionsgeschichte* in 1893. When the sixth edition of the *Introduction* came into my hands I naturally looked to see how the author had handled the questions on which his first edition had been criticised as unsatisfactory; but I was still more interested to discover his attitude to views on highly important problems which, if not always novel, had been sustained with new and weighty arguments and commanded the adhesion of very eminent scholars. Here, however, I was doomed to disappointment. So far as Isaiah was concerned, lists of passages retained for Isaiah by Duhm and Cheyne were given, and their detailed analysis of the last twenty-seven chapters, also a full account of Cheyne's views as to Isaiah xxiv.-xxvii. But the most vital questions received bare mention and no discussion. These touched the authenticity of the Messianic prophecies in ix. and xi. and the authorship and date of the Servant passages. Of equal importance was the authenticity of Jeremiah's prophecy on the New Covenant. This was rejected by Stade without discussion in his *History of Israel*, but Smend devoted a long and closely argued note to it. While his arguments convinced me that a good deal in Jeremiah xxx.-xxxi. was post-Jeremianic, I could not believe that he had made out his case on the most important question of all. When I turned to Dr. Driver for strengthening in my faith I discovered to my dismay that the existence of the problem was not even mentioned. I find it difficult to understand the reason. He was not one of those futile people who fancy they have disposed of a view they do not like when they have labelled

it as "wild." His conception of criticism and what was due to eminent scholars was much worthier than that. But I confess that I have always been puzzled that, when questions not one-twentieth so important received careful statement and examination, questions of such pre-eminent moment for our reconstruction of Israel's religious history should either be passed over in silence or dismissed with the barest mention and no discussion. For an adequate treatment of the problems I have named, one student at least would have been more grateful than for almost anything else in the volume. I can only suppose that he thought of the views I have mentioned as critical extravagances with which time might be left to deal. Unfortunately in the meantime they have won adherents, and these among the most distinguished scholars.

I am sorry to be writing in what may seem an ungracious strain of a work to which our debt is so great, but I desire such words of gratitude as it may be fitting for me to offer to be entirely sincere, and not with indiscriminate eulogy to mar my tribute by hollowness or undue reticence. To what I have said another thing must be added. He did not propound critical theories of his own. He was rather the judge than the original investigator; but a judge with full expert equipment, who had worked through the subject independently, with ample knowledge of the case on all sides, and after a masterly summing up pronounced his verdict, remembering the legal maxim that possession is nine-tenths of the law.

Of his commentaries on their critical side it is not necessary to speak, for the qualities displayed in the *Introduction* were equally evident in them. On the exegetical side the student could count, it is needless to say, on a philological basis deeply laid and firmly constructed of the best materials. His scholarship, wide in its range, accurate, finished, and

delicate, found here full scope for expression, notably in the commentaries on the Hebrew Text, such as *Samuel and Deuteronomy*. His intolerance of anything slovenly or half-done often led him into elaborate research, sometimes on subjects where nine writers out of ten would have found their conscience much sooner satisfied. The elaborate discussions of the topography, which add so much value to the second edition of the *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel*, had their origin in his desire to illustrate the force of the phrases "went up," "came down." From this he was led on to his notes on sites in consequence of the many incorrect or questionable identifications in English maps, a subject which he also treated in several important articles. While the notes are brief, they embody the results of considerable research. So he tells us in his preface to the Commentary on Exodus that the note on one word, *stacte*, in Exodus xxx. involved a correspondence with Sir W. Thiselton-Dyer, in addition to much independent research. The scale of treatment might vary, according to the series to which he was contributing. But immense labour and the most painstaking investigation lay behind all he wrote. Qualities such as these made his commentaries indispensable, his notes were often condensed Encyclopaedia articles. But a commentator must have more than pure scholarship and massive learning, if he is to do the highest type of exegetical work. He must have the exegetical instinct, the faculty to think himself into the situation of the author, gradually to feel his way into his mind and look out through his eyes, and then with glow and enthusiasm interpret the ancient document to the modern mind. The interpreter of God's word should have in his measure the same penetrating quality; sharper than a two-edged sword, his exposition should cleave through the joints into the marrow, and cutting right down through the soul into the spirit lay

bare its inmost recesses. I would not claim that any interpreter fully rises to such an ideal, but the kind of exegesis that I mean may be exemplified by works of such pre-eminent quality as Duhm's *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah*, Cornill's *Jeremiah*, and Gunkel's *Genesis*. I think that Dr. Driver's mind was hardly of that type. He had, so far as one could judge from his published work, little if any speculative interest or passion for ideas. Where the commentator had to deal with objective facts of history or geography, of archaeology or institutions, there Dr. Driver was very successful. His characterisation of personalities was often as happy as his handling of events. His statement of conflicting views as to the interpretation of a passage was impartial and exact, his decision sober, and free from everything that was fanciful or arbitrary. And yet, if I must indicate the other side, I may perhaps suggest it by recalling Hort's very just and felicitous verdict on Lightfoot, that the leading characteristic of his commentaries was masculine good sense without either the insight or the delusion of subtlety. I found his Commentary on *Genesis* the most disappointing, and all the more so that he had been preceded by Gunkel. Of the greatness and originality, the sympathetic insight and exegetical genius, which Gunkel's commentary on *Genesis* displays, I almost shrink from saying what I think, lest I should seem to be extravagant. But I know scarcely any commentary of modern times that I should be prepared to rank along with it, even when allowance has been made for the defects of its qualities. If one had to fix on the name of any single exegete, who more than another represented Dr. Driver's ideal, I suppose it would be Dillmann.

Of the man himself one may speak with reverence and affection. His great gifts did not tempt him to indolence, they were a trust to be employed with the most strenuous

industry. He did not spare himself in his desire to be helpful to others. He was kind and considerate in heart, gentle and gracious in bearing. In controversy he was calm and fair-minded. He kept his integrity inviolate, not simply in the moral but in the more difficult intellectual sphere. He was genuinely humble and correspondingly generous in his appreciation of others. His Christian temper was so free from all ostentation, that it is only as one thinks quietly over his life and work that it becomes plain how deep and central and all-pervasive it was. His faith was drawn from the Bible, his spiritual life was nourished by it ; he walked with God in humility, in confidence and in peace, quietly and without display. He did a work for true religion and sound learning in our midst which no other had ; it in him to do. He rests from his long labours, assured of a gratitude that will not quickly fade.

ARTHUR S. PEAKE.