

CURRENT ISSUES.

THE division of our Bible into chapters is convenient. Both for public worship and for private devotional reading it serves to break up the text into useful sections, especially in the historical and the prophetic and the epistolary books. But sometimes the division is not happy. It is even misleading, as Professor A. T. Robertson shows in the article he contributes to this number.

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Calvin used to warn readers against making any break, for example, between the tenth and the eleventh chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He was right. For the argument of the eleventh chapter, with its magnificent roll-call of historical illustrations, flows straight from the closing verses of the previous chapter. We should read right on: *We are not of them that shrink back unto perdition; but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,* etc. All that is said of faith, in what follows, brings out the truth that it inspires men and women to patience and hope, when they are tempted to withdraw or to hesitate before appearances of a threatening kind.

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But there is a still more patent case in the Old Testament. It occurs in the second part of the book of Isaiah, in the "Servant of the Lord" passage, which begins at lii. 13, not at liii. 1. "The arrangement in the Authorised Version," says Dr. Peake in his recent essay on *The Messiah and the Son of Man*, "is perhaps the most unfortunate example of incompetent division of chapters in the whole Bible." Why? Well, liii. 1 begins, "Who hath believed our report?" Or rather, as we ought to render the Hebrew, "Who could have believed what we were told?" The extraordinary career and destiny of the Servant, now to be

described, are an utter surprise. And the *we* are the kings and nations described in lii. 15 :

*Many a nation will be amazed at him,
and kings shall be speechless before him ;
For what had never been told them shall they see,
and what they had never before heard shall they learn.*

As they recover from their first surprise and confusion at the unprecedented vocation of the Servant, they exclaim, " Who could have believed this ? " The rest of the passage is a quotation from their cry of adoring wonder. It is an effective expression of penitent surprise on the part of pagans who have seen the exaltation of the Servant and who have been led thereby to own God as their Lord.

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In the third series of his religious papers and addresses, called *Fifty Years After*, the veteran Jewish rabbi and scholar, Sir Hermann Gollancz, reprints a sermon on religious education. His text is taken from Numbers xxi. 19 : " and they journeyed from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth." A mere record of stages in the itinerary of the Israelites ? Not so for Sir Hermann Gollancz. He takes them " midrash-like," for the sake of their etymology, to illustrate a vital lesson of religion.

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" Mattanah " means a gift, " Nahaliel " means an inheritance from God, and " Bamoth " means heights. Now the holy Torah or Law of God is a " gift " to each generation, a gift which is realised to be an " inheritance," and this enables the devout to reach the " heights " of the higher life on earth. That is, religious education, based on the Torah, as Sir Hermann Gollancz says to his Jewish audience, based, we may say, on the Bible, is a fresh gift to each age. Our first sense of it is the sense that it is God-given, meant directly for us here and now. Then we reach the truth that it has been the possession of God's people in the past ; it is an inheritance from the days of old, with great traditions behind it, not a new discovery of our wise age but a lasting inheritance which each age has to make its own. And it is now, as it has always been, " the only possession on earth which has the power to lead man onward in this life until he reach ' the heights ' of spiritual living."

But what are these "heights?" Not always what the Church of the day imagines them to be. Sometimes the "inheritance" of the past leads to a wrong view of the higher life, which requires to be corrected. Now and then the "inheritance" ceases to be regarded as a fresh "gift" of God, with powers of new insight, and the result is a conventional, mediocre conception of the demands and possibilities of the "heights" on which God expects His people to live. Again, in the reaction against this, there may be an exaggerated and unwholesome vision of the "heights," as if they were incompatible with human duties and affections.

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One instance of the latter is noted by Dean Inge in the paper upon Augustine's Confessions which he contributes to "Classics of the Inner Life." The unpleasant part of the book, he admits, "the part in which his standard of right and honour seems to diverge painfully from what commends itself to us," is the saint's treatment of the poor woman who had been faithful to him for fifteen years. He broke with her callously. Indeed he broke off all ties with the other sex. Why? Because it was the teaching not of the Church so much as of contemporary idealist philosophy that any connexion with a woman was degrading. The moral man who desired to live on the heights of wisdom must renounce all women. Hence Augustine's heartless behaviour. He had inherited a false view of spiritual duty and achievement.

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As Dean Inge points out, "a sort of fanaticism about celibacy was in the air" towards the end of the fourth century, "and it affected Pagans and Christians alike. The flood rose higher still before the end of Augustine's life. 'The wings of the soul must touch no bird-lime' is typical of the language used." That is, an austere, ascetic misconception of purity had entered into the inheritance of the saint, and it affected for the worse his ideal of the heights to which he was called. His morality, or, at any rate, his ideas of morality, spoiled his religion. These ideas, Dean Inge allows, were drawn from the view of the philosophic life as laid down by Plato, Plotinus, and others. They were not due to the Bible, which is a reminder that the "inheritance" of the Church, in any age, requires to be carefully

analysed, so that the fundamental "gift of God" may be realised in it. Only thus can any true advance be made to the appointed "heights" of religious experience. The Church sometimes has to be reminded of the plain moral standards of the world, before which it may make a poor show, in matters like honesty and honour. But sometimes the Church has to criticise and supersede these standards, in order to be true to its higher calling, sometimes even to re-act against a current philosophy or ethical tendency.

*THE TEN BEST BOOKS ON THE VALUE AND USE
OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.*

THE writers of the books here recommended all attribute to the Old Testament a unique value in the sphere of religion and morals, although they recognise that much of its religious and moral teaching has been superseded and is imperfect, as judged by the highest standards. Their general aim is to show that the outstanding and really significant elements in the Old Testament are those that are best and highest. The recognition of a lower element of primitive belief and practice in the Old Testament and the conviction that some parts of what has been regarded as authoritative teaching are, or may be, hurtful to the conscience and thought of a modern reader, frequently leads to neglect or depreciation of the higher elements that exist in the Old Testament. The first three or four books here mentioned are intended to counteract this tendency.

G. A. Smith's well-known volume,¹ although amongst the earliest of its kind, is still notable for the variety and suggestiveness of its contents. The writer first explains his critical position and defends his view that in the period from Moses to the eighth century B.C. God established and

¹ George Adam Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, 1901.