

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE Press notices of the late Dr. Hatch's work have invariably placed highest his Bampton Lecture on the *Organization of the Early Christian Churches*. But there is reason to believe that his last book, *Essays in Biblical Greek*, is quite as noble a monument to his genius and industry, and is likely to exercise as great an influence on religious thought. It had certainly a very different reception from the earlier book. The Bampton Lecture enjoyed all the advantage of a subject already made interesting and almost popular by Dr. Lightfoot. Its conclusions were quite startling, coming from one in the writer's position. So that it created nothing short of a furore, and was the religious book of the season; and Dr. Harnack gave it the exceptional honour of a translation into German. The *Essays* had none of these advantages. The only important review—that of Dr. Sanday—was unappreciative, the press was indifferent.

Yet these *Essays* have done a great service. They have drawn attention in a marked way to the linguistic value of the Septuagint. It may be said they have for the first time given it its rightful position as the great interpreter of the language of the New Testament. It is certain that in future all our best commentaries will find it necessary to show a much greater familiarity with this Greek translation of the Old Testament.

In Westcott's *Hebrews*, just issued by Macmillan, Dr. Hatch's method is fully recognised. The Septuagint receives its due. This is particularly noticeable in the valuable short essays with which the Commentary is enriched. Thus, one of the points

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upon which Dr. Sanday differed from Dr. Hatch was in the translation of the word *διαθήκη* in Heb. ix. 15 ff. In a long and most interesting note, Canon Westcott decides for the meaning of "covenant" there, as well as everywhere else in the New Testament, thus agreeing with Dr. Hatch, and following the LXX., not the classical usage. He shows that this very word is a good example of the superiority of the LXX. over the classical writers for an understanding of New Testament language. Why, it has been asked, did the LXX. choose *διαθήκη*, which meant "testament" in classical Greek, to represent "covenant" (the Hebrew *בְּרִית*) when there existed the very good word *συνθήκη*? "That," says Dr. Westcott, "is easily intelligible. In a *Divine* covenant the parties do not stand in the remotest degree as *equal* contractors (the sense of *συνθήκη*). God in His good pleasure makes the arrangement which man receives, though he is not passive (2 Kings xi. 17). Such a covenant is a 'disposition,' an 'ordainment,' an expression of the divine will which they to whom it is made reverently welcome."

Robertson Smith's new book, *The Religion of the Semites*, has been the subject of a sharp controversy in the *Academy*. Professor Sayce reviewed the book there, not very favourably, it must be owned, and Professor Smith replied next week in a letter as long as the review. But before the review had got into print, Professor Sayce was away to the East, and could not make a speedy rejoinder. Accordingly, Dr. Cheyne appeared the following week, not,

it may be believed, to champion Professor Sayce altogether. Rather he came as mediator, and found fault with both. He has not received the thanks of the only party to the controversy who has been able as yet to reply. In a very brief note Professor Smith declines "at present to complicate his controversy with Professor Sayce by dealing with the quite distinct issues raised by Dr. Cheyne".

Professor Sayce's criticism of the book is undoubtedly severe. He somewhat sarcastically commends Professor Robertson Smith for excluding Assyria and Babylonia from his survey of the religion of the Semites. "I believe he is right in so doing. It is dangerous for one who is not an Assyriologist to meddle with the cuneiform material." But Professor Robertson Smith has not always observed the rule he laid down for himself. And Dr. Sayce complains that he *has* meddled with the cuneiform material—in order to commit blunders. It is easy to see that Dr. Sayce believes Professor Smith to be guilty of some contempt for Assyriology. Whether or not that explains Professor Smith's incapacity to deal with the subject, it probably accounts for the severity of Dr. Sayce's criticism.

There is one point touched upon which is of considerable interest and importance—the meaning of the word *Asherah* (plu. *Asherim*) which occurs so frequently in the Old Testament. In the Authorised Version it is translated "grove". The R.V. simply transliterates the word. Thus at Exodus xxxiv. 13—"Ye shall cut down their groves" (A.V.); "Ye shall cut down their Asherim" (R.V.). At this place the Revisers give a marginal note—"Probably the wooden symbols of a goddess Asherah"; and they afterwards refer to this note whenever the word occurs. But this note has the appearance of a make-peace. The controversy about the meaning of Asherah is a keen one, and the question is whether it means a wooden symbol which may be used of any god or goddess, or is itself the name of a goddess. Professor Robertson Smith, in his new book, says it must have been either a living tree or a tree-like post. "The oldest altars stood under actual trees; but this rule could not always be followed, and in the period of the kings it would seem that the place of the living tree was taken by a dead post or pole,

planted in the ground like an English May-pole." Professor Sayce's criticism upon that is: "There are cases in which it is well not to oppose the evidence offered by the Assyriologists. The Tel-el-Amarna tablets have proved that Schrader was quite right in maintaining that Asherah was a goddess, the higher critics of the Old Testament notwithstanding." Canon Cheyne suggests, as a possibility, that there were *two* Asherahs, one meaning the sacred pole, and the other being the title of a goddess. This is right and proper, since Canon Cheyne is acting the part of a mediator. But it is amusing to notice his spelling of the word. Those who hold it to be the name of a goddess spell it Asherah; the "higher critics," who count it a pole or tree, ashera; Canon Cheyne writes it alternately Ashera or asherah!

"The higher critics of the Old Testament notwithstanding"—what does Professor Sayce mean by that? And what is the importance attaching to the meaning of this word at all? The answer is that in the Higher Criticism it forms the pivot of a great argument. Everyone remembers the frequent mention of groves or asheras in the books of Kings. The piety of a king is measured by them. Did he allow them to remain, or did he support the prophets in their desire to clear them away? So his religious character is determined. Now, if the Asherah was a goddess, it was distinctly heathenish and flagrantly opposed to the worship of Jehovah. But, if it was merely a tree or pole, it may have been legitimately used in the worship of Jehovah, and the prophets had no objection to it, and did not object to it. It is only the priestly authors of these books who *represent* them as objecting, because they cannot allow that God could have been properly worshipped anywhere out of Jerusalem. The ashera was not heathenish. "Every altar," to quote Professor Robertson Smith, "had its ashera, even such altars as in the popular, pre-prophetic forms of Hebrew religion were dedicated to Jehovah." It is impossible that, as such, Moses or the prophets could have found fault with it. Therefore its prohibition in, say, Deut. xvi. 21—"Thou shalt not plant an ashera of any kind of wood beside the altar of Jehovah," must be due to one who believed that Jehovah could not be worshipped under any symbol, or at any place but in Jerusalem, *i.e.*, to a post-exilic author. But, if the Asherah was a

heathen goddess, this argument for the late date of Deuteronomy is, of course, lost.

We hope to be able, in our next number, to present a review of Professor Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites* from a competent pen, so that we make no attempt to enter upon its merits, beyond saying that, to those who are not specialists, it will be found the most readable of all his books. Dr. Sayce notwithstanding, there is less "positiveness" about it than we are accustomed to, and the usual characteristics of learning, clearness, ingenuity, and suggestiveness are more and greater than ever.

The Homiletic Review for December contains a paper by the Rev. D. N. Beach on "The Literature of the Office and Work of the Holy Spirit". The author has strong belief in "the helpfulness of a considerable amount of reading" on the subject. For this purpose he recommends Hare's *Mission of the Comforter*, Smeaton's *Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*; Owen, and, lastly, Philip's *Love of the Spirit*. But he evidently has most confidence in the late Professor Smeaton's Cunningham Lecture. "Smeaton," he says, "for a comprehensive and thorough presentation of the whole subject—his is the best single book on it of which I know." The paper was originally read before the Boston Congregationalist Ministers' Meeting.

Surely the greatest preacher of our day is Canon Liddon. His December course of sermons in St. Paul's filled the building, and the crowds who came, came to hear the preaching, not the music, for they stayed the sermon through. But more conclusive testimony comes from the able editors. Always on the outlook for the best sermon that is being preached, four of them (and perhaps more whom we have not seen) chose Dr. Liddon on one day; so that the week after he delivered one of the sermons of the present course, it was to be found in print in four different periodicals. We know another in which it will certainly appear some weeks hence. Then it will be issued in a volume of the *Contemporary Pulpit Library*. And, last of all, Canon Liddon himself will publish it through the Rivingtons, his own publishers.

The January *Expositor* contains one paper of priceless value; and we do not mean the late Bishop of Durham's on the genuineness of St. John. It is Professor Agar Beet's discussion of the phrase "eternal destruction" (*ὄλεθρον αἰώνιον*) in 2 Thessalonians i. 9. Readers who hurry to the end of the paper to see what the writer's *position* is, will lose the good of it all. His "position," so far as this paper reveals it, is anti-universalist: "St. Paul asserts, or at least seems to assert, that the future punishment of sin will be ruin, utter and hopeless and final". But it is paying Mr. Beet no compliment to read this conclusion and then rank him among the "orthodox"; while it is doing him a great injustice to suppose that his position had anything to do with this conclusion.

The value of the paper is in its method, not its conclusions. The words are taken up one after another, first "destruction," then "eternal," and an investigation is made into their meaning, not according to etymology merely, but according to the *usage* of language. And this investigation is carried out so carefully, so thoroughly, and so impartially that we have no hesitation in saying that Professor Beet has placed one part of this vexed question beyond the reach of controversy. Some years ago the question of future punishment almost went into hysterics. The magazines with articles upon it ran up to the twentieth edition. Piles of books were written on it. But when the hysterical stage was past, it was impossible to see that the discussion had been much advanced, or any contribution made to it of permanent value. For it is not by hysterics that any progress can ever be made, but by patient, scholarly investigation. If the question should ever become a burning one again, let the spirit and method of Professor Beet be more closely followed, and then we may reach some reliable and permanent results.

DEAR SIR,—Allow me to call your attention to a remarkable sermon on 1 Cor. ii. 2, preached by Dr. Dale before the Wesleyan Missionary Society last spring, and published in the *Methodist Recorder* at the time. I like your MAGAZINE immensely; but would it not be well to introduce a "Young Ministers' Page" in the place of one of your numerous subjects for young people? We are a much ne-

glected class of "young people," and the other theological magazines are above our semi-starvation stipends. Yours truly, —, —, Wilts.

23rd Dec., 1889.

The suggestion is most attractive. We are sure something can be done in the interest of Divinity Students and Young Ministers; we have thought of it from the first, and have already some plans laid. If ministers and students will favour us with their ideas on the subject by the middle of February, perhaps we shall be able to do something in the March number.

The Welfare of Youth.

MONTHLY EXAMINATION PAPERS.

AN Examination Paper will be set monthly on the Life of David. The book recommended for use is *The Life of David*, by the Rev. P. Thomson, published by T. and T. Clark, price 6d. The name, age, and address of the Candidate must accompany the answers every month. Prizes will be given to successful Candidates monthly.

REPORT FOR JANUARY.

Senior Section.

I. MINNIE G. MEEK, care of Rev. Wm. Duncan, U.P. Manse, Maryhill, Glasgow.

Next in Order:—M. C. (Dundee).

Middle Section.

I. JAMES GRAY, 162 Skene Street West, Aberdeen.

Subsequent Order:—N. H. B. (Hamilton), A. M. M. (Hamilton), C. G. (Aberdeen), A. R. (Stirling), J. T. D. (Comstream), H. M. (Perth), A. N. L. (Glasgow).

Junior Section.

I. ALEX. C. MACKAY, Moss View, Dennistown, Glasgow.

Subsequent Order:—C. B. (Hamilton), L. M. (Hamilton).

EXAMINATION PAPER, V.

(Answers must be sent by the 13th February, to the Editor, Kinneff, Bervie, N.B.)

1. For what action is the name of Rizpah remembered?
2. Describe the preparations for Absalom's rebellion.
3. What is the history of Shimei? How does it reflect on the character of David?

Greeting, 1890.

BY THE REV. MARK GUY PEARSE.

The Sunday Magazine.

If heartiest love were onlie power,
A glatte New Year in everie hour
We'd make for thee;
All free from care, all bright and faire,
Each daie shoulde be.

And yet, though power were one with love,
Alas, how quicklie it shoulde prove
Each wanted eyes;
And fondest will shoulde yet work ill:
We are not wise.

Ye Deepest Love! ye Highest Power!
Ye onlie Wisdom! bless each hour.
He knoweth best:
So, daie by daie, in His own waie,
Thou shalt be blest.

Anecdotes for the Sunday School.

Suffer the Little Children.

By the Rev. N. WALKER, D.D.

A lady-missionary in the East tells that one day a woman came to her with a baby, whom she had found in a ditch. The poor child had been cast out by its own father—as thousands of others in heathen countries have been—because it was "only a girl". In begging the lady to take charge of the very unattractive object that was presented to her (it was naked and covered with mud), the woman said, "Please do take this little thing; your God is the only God that teaches to be good to little children".—*The Church Standard of the Children.*

Flowers.

By Professor DELITZSCH, D.D.

A flower may become a prophet of comfort, and the sight of it may cast a ray of light into the darkness of the human soul, the smell of it may give a foretaste of victory to the man who is wrestling to escape from this world. When the cholera was raging in Halle, my friend Professor Guericke has told me that he used to put a pink in his mouth, and protected himself from the miasma by its bright look and healthful scent.—*Iris.*

A ship was rounding Cape Horn, where, as you may know, the sun may not appear for many days together. It had encountered violent storms. The weather was so cold that icicles were hanging from the mast. A sailor-boy was ordered out upon one of the yardarms to reef a sail; but as he was hanging out there, over the stormy sea, he cried that he was about to fall. The captain shouted to him to hold on, ran up the rigging, and lashed the boy to the yard. When the captain was tying the rope round the lad's body he said: "If ever you prayed in your life, pray now!" "I cannot pray," said the boy, "but I can sing." And there the boy sang this verse of the paraphrase, learned in the Sunday school at Irvine:

The Lord commands the tempest forth,
And stills the stormy wave;
And though His arm be strong to smite,
'Tis also strong to save.

—Robertson of Irvine, Poet and Preacher.