

number of obvious improvements in translation have made it nearly indispensable to the thoughtful Englishman who wishes to understand his Bible; and the practice which obtains in many schools of making use, side by side, of the two versions, has stimulated study of the words of the Bible among the young.

But, on the whole, it is probable that the main value of the Revised Version is negative. The ordinary Englishman, excluding the small minority of students and teachers, does not want two Bibles, and until the Authorised Version is authoritatively replaced by a version which will give general satisfaction he will prefer the familiar words, phrases, rhythms, and blunders of that to which he has been used. The Revised Version has shown us what the Church and the people do

not want; they will be content to have errors corrected, but they want the changes reduced to the minimum of the absolutely necessary. But beyond the demonstration of this tendency in the Church, and the various helps which it has given to students, I do not see how the Revised Version can be called a success.

XIII.

By Rev. T. T. SHERLOCK, B.A., Congregational Church, Smethwick.

In reply to your request as to the use of the Revised Version, I have to say that I used it in public worship from the day it appeared. I never found any strong objection to its use. I find it in most pulpits. I believe its use is spreading.

The Moral and Devotional Value of the Old Testament.

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THE subject on which I have been invited to read—viz. the moral and devotional value of the Old Testament to the Christian Church—is one, I need hardly say, which it is impossible to treat with any approach to completeness in the limited space of twenty minutes. All that I can do is to illustrate briefly some of its more salient aspects, conscious all the time that I am leaving much unsaid, and fortunate in the thought that those who follow me will have an opportunity of supplying my omissions. Without in any degree derogating from the absolute ideal of life and conduct presented in the New Testament, I shall endeavour to show, in the time at my disposal, that the Old Testament possesses distinctive characteristics of its own, which must ever secure for it a paramount position and influence in the Church.

In the first place then, and generally, the Old Testament has a value peculiar to itself, from the fact that the truths which it inculcates are set forth with great variety of external form, and with superlative grace of imagery and diction. These features, though it is true they are but external ones, must not be underrated in our estimate of the Old Testament as a whole. The preacher, not less than the poet or the orator, makes it his

aim to impress, by a choice and appropriate literary style, those whom he addresses; and had the truths which the Bible enunciates been presented in an unformed, uncultured literary garb, without the melody of rhythm and diction which actually accompanies them, we may be sure that its influence upon mankind would have been very much less than it has been. The variety of form, and the literary excellence, displayed in the Old Testament, are both surprising. There is history and biography, both penetrated more or less visibly by ethical and religious ideas; there is the oratory of Deuteronomy and the Prophets, the aim of which is to enforce more directly the same truths; there poetry of varied types—lyrical, elegiac, and even, in a rudimentary form, dramatic—in which the emotions, fired by religious ardour, or suffused (Song of Songs) by a warm moral glow, find deep and pure expression. And each of these literary forms possesses, all but uniformly, that peculiar charm and grace of style, which entitles it to be ranked as “classical.” History, oratory, poetry, each is of a type which, in its kind, cannot be surpassed. The bright and picturesque narrative of the historical books, the grand and impressive oratory of the Prophets, the delicacy and lightness

of the Hebrew lyric, vie alternately with one another in fascinating the reader, and compelling his admiration and regard.

But it is time to turn from the form of the literature of the Old Testament to its substance. And here it must at the outset be observed that the provinces of morality and religion are in the Old Testament so closely associated that it is difficult to separate absolutely its moral and devotional aspects, and to treat them independently; moral duties are, for instance, often inculcated or exemplified in a manner which directly stimulates the devotional impulses; but, as far as possible, I will deal with the two aspects of my subject successively.

I.

1. The Old Testament is of permanent value on account of the clearness and emphasis with which it insists on the primary moral duties, obligatory upon man as man; and not only on what may be termed the more private or individual virtues, but also on the great domestic and civic virtues, upon which the happiness of the family, and the welfare of the community, alike depend. Truthfulness, honesty, sincerity, justice, humanity, philanthropy, generosity, disinterestedness, neighbourly regard, sympathy with the unfortunate or the oppressed, the refusal to injure another by word or deed, cleanness of hands, purity of thought and action, elevation of motive, singleness of purpose,—these, and such as these, are the virtues which, as we know, have ever evoked the moral admiration of mankind, and they are the virtues which, again and again, in eloquent and burning words, are commended and inculcated in the pages of the Old Testament. And corresponding to this high appreciation of moral qualities there is its correlative, a hatred of wrong-doing, and a profound sense of sin, which is stamped, if possible, yet more conspicuously upon the literature of ancient Israel. I wish I had time to quote illustrations; but after all they would be superfluous; for those who hear me will, I am sure, be conscious already of familiar echoes sounding in their ears, and substantiating what I have said. I will only observe that such teaching is to be found in all parts of the Old Testament.

2. The Old Testament affords examples of faith and conduct, of character and principle, in many varied circumstances of life, which we may in

different ways adopt as our models, and strive to emulate. It is not, of course, pretended that the characters of the Old Testament are devoid of flaws or blameless. Some are limited by the moral and spiritual conditions of the age in which they lived, others exhibit personal shortcomings peculiar to themselves; but these faults are generally discoverable as such by the light of the principles laid down in the Old Testament itself, and none ought to be mistaken for virtues by members of the Christian Church, who alone, on the present occasion, come into consideration.

3. The Old Testament is of permanent value on account of the great ideals of human life and society which it holds out before the eyes of its readers. I allude in particular to those ideal pictures of a renovated human nature, and transformed social state, which the prophets loved to delineate—the pictures of human nature, freed from the imperfections and corruptions which actually beset it, inspired by an innate devotion to God and right, and ruled, not by law as a command dictated from without, but by moral impulses, springing up instinctively within the breast; the pictures of human society, no longer harassed by the strife of opposing interests and parties, or honey-combed by oppressions and abuses, but held together by the bonds of love and friendship, each eager to advance his neighbour's welfare, and the nations of the earth united in a federation of peace, under the suzerainty of the God of Israel. These ideals have, alas, not yet been realised so completely as the prophets anticipated. The passions and wilfulness of human nature have proved in too many cases obstacles insuperable even by the influences of Christianity; but progress, we may trust, has been made; and meanwhile these ideals remain, the wonder and delight of the ages—to kindle our aspirations, to brace our efforts, to point out to us the goal which human endeavour should exert itself to realise, and which human society may one day hope to attain.

4. The Old Testament must always share with the New Testament the position of forming a standard of pure and spiritual religion, in contradistinction to all formalism, or abstract systems. The parts of the Old Testament which might lend themselves, and in the later period of Jewish history did lend themselves, to exaggeration or perversion, in the direction of outward ceremonialism, are just those which were abrogated by the

coming of Christ ; and for those who do not live under the Levitical dispensation, the danger from this source has consequently passed away. The more directly moral and spiritual parts of the Old Testament display still the freshness and the power which they possessed when they were first written. The pure moral perceptions of the prophets, the unadulterated spiritual intuitions of the psalmists, must ever form a standard of faith and action, recalling men, when in peril of being led astray, to trust in the external rites of religion, or to forget the true nature of spiritual service, to a sense of the real demands which God makes of His worshippers, and of the character and conduct in which He truly delights.

II.

I turn to consider the value of the Old Testament for devotional purposes. And here our thoughts move naturally, in the first instance, towards the Book of Psalms, in which the ripest fruits of Israel's spiritual experience are gathered together, and the religious affections find their richest and completest expression. It is difficult within the compass of a few words to characterise the Psalter with any adequacy. In the Psalter the religious affections manifest themselves without restraint, and the soul is displayed in converse with God, disclosing to Him, in sweet and melodious accents, its manifold emotions, its hopes and its fears, its desires and its aspirations. In the Psalms we hear the voice of penitence and contrition, of resignation and trust, of confidence and faith, of yearning for God's presence and the spiritual privilege of communion with Him, of reverential joy and jubilation, of thanksgiving and exultation, of confession and supplication, of adoration and praise ; we hear meditations on the great attributes of the Creator, on His hand as seen in nature or in history, on the problems of human life, and on the pathos of human existence ; and we hear all these varied notes uttered with a depth, an intensity, and a purity, which stand unparalleled in religious literature, and which the poets and hymn-writers of subsequent ages have been content to look up to as to an unapproachable model. Love and trust and faith, and such like sacred affections, are set before us in the Book of Psalms not as commanded or enjoined as a duty from without, but as exercised, as the practical response offered by the believing

soul to the claims laid upon it by its Maker, as the spontaneous outcome of the heart stirred by god-like emotions. The historical critic may question, and question justly, whether the Psalms are so largely as is commonly supposed a product of the earlier period of Israel's history : He will not question the justice of Dean Church's judgment when, in his well-known essay on the Psalms, he claims that they lift us into an atmosphere of religious thought and feeling which is the highest that man has ever reached, and that for their faith in the unseen, their perception of the character of God, and the manifold forms in which their affections expand and unfold themselves towards Him, their authors stand above the religious poets of every other age or clime, and enjoy a pre-eminence from which they can never be dethroned. As a devotional manual, as a manual displaying the soul in closest and yet freest and most manifold converse with God, the Book of Psalms must retain permanently in the Church the unique, unapproachable position which it has ever held.

Although, however, the devotional spirit finds its highest as well as its most familiar expression in the Psalter, it is by no means confined to this part of the Old Testament. As I remarked before, there are many parts of the Old Testament—for instance, the descriptions by the prophets of the marvellous attributes of the Deity, His glory, and majesty, and mighty acts—which, though not directly designed for devotional purposes, nevertheless arouse the emotions of adoration and wonder, and stir the devotional instincts. Thus the Book of Job, especially if read with the aid of a sympathetic commentary, such as that of Professor A. B. Davidson (in the *Cambridge Bible for Schools*), will be found to contain, side by side with outbursts of defiant boldness, passages of supreme poetic delicacy, and instinct with devotional feeling, the sense of God's omnipresence and vastness, the moral significance of suffering, the pathetic yearning of the patriarch's soul to hear the voice of the Creator calling him again to His fellowship after the long period of seeming estrangement. The exilic chapters of the Book of Isaiah also contain frequent passages of the highest devotional suggestiveness and beauty. There are besides numerous ideas, corresponding to different aspects of the devotional temper, which are presented with unique clearness and emphasis in the Old Testament. Consider, for instance, the warmth

with which, in Deuteronomy, the love of God is insisted on as the primary motive of human action; how, in the same book (nine times), and in writings influenced by it, the devotion of the whole being to God is expressed by the significant phrase, to search after, to serve, or to love Him, "with *all* the heart and with *all* the soul;" how, also in the same book, the injunction is reiterated, to "rejoice before God" (viz., at a sacrificial meal), with a grateful and generous heart; how, in other books—for time compels me to speak generally—the fear of God, the observance of the ways, the commandments, the precepts of God, the resolution to obey Him and hearken to His voice, the desire to seek and to find Him, the determination to do His pleasure and to know Him, the privilege of the righteous to have access to God and to call upon Him at all times (Job xiii. 16, xxvii. 10; Ps. v. 7 ["can" or "do," not "will"]), the blessedness of rejoicing, and even of delighting, in Him (Isa. lxii. 10, etc.; Isa. lviii. 14; Job. xxii. 26, xxvii. 10; Ps. xxxvii. 4), the joyousness of His service, the grateful sense of His protection or of His regard, are again and again expressed, and dwelt upon with an ardour which is never satisfied, with an enthusaism which is unrestrained, with a devotion which knows no bounds. And it is, too, the high merit of the devotion of the Old Testament that it is always a manly devotion; in contrast to the tone of some modern writers, who have sought unwisely to surpass their models, the sentiment is never effeminate, the pathos never exaggerated or morbid. It is no small achievement, it may be observed in passing, to have framed what may almost be termed a complete devotional nomenclature, which formulates tersely and forcibly the great duties and offices of a spiritual religion, and which, moreover, with surprising elasticity, lends itself readily to adoption by another language. This, however, is what the religious teachers of ancient Israel have achieved. The illustrations

which I have taken are but a few of the many devotional ideas with which the pages of the Old Testament abound, and which from the freshness, the force, and the reality with which they are there set forth, must ensure for it undying vitality, and ever prevent it from becoming obsolete or devoid of worth.

If, then, in conclusion, I were to sum up briefly the grounds on which the moral and devotional value of the Old Testament seems to me to be permanently assured, I should say that these were partly its fine literary form, partly the great variety of mode and occasion by which the creed and practice of its best men are exemplified, partly the intensity of spirit by which its teaching is penetrated and sustained. As a purely literary work, the Old Testament combines the rare merits of including passages of high moral and spiritual worth, at once attractive and intelligible to the simplest capacities, and of being written in a style which must ever command the respect and appreciation of the most cultured. Then, secondly, the truths which it contains are not presented in an abstract garb, as a collection of moral or religious maxims, to be apprehended merely by the intellect; they are presented under every variety of circumstance and form, as part of the actual life and practice and belief of men representing a nation through the entire course of its chequered history. And they are presented, lastly, with a spirituality of motive, an intensity of conviction, a warmth and inwardness of feeling, and a singleness of aim, which cannot but impress deeply every reader, and evoke corresponding impulses in his own breast. Upon these grounds it seems to me that so long as human nature continues, endowed intellectually as it now is, the Old Testament must remain an ever-fresh fountain-head of living truth, able to invigorate and restore, to purify and refine, to ennoble and enrich, the moral and spiritual being of man.