

## A. B. Davidson, D.D., F.F.D.

BY PROFESSOR THE REV. S. D. F. SALMOND, M.A., D.D., F.E.I.S., ABERDEEN.

THE Church of Thomas Chalmers has done nothing more honourable to herself of late than when, some months ago, she nominated her Professor of Hebrew in the New College, Edinburgh, to be the Moderator of her Supreme Court for the year. There are few voices that would have been listened to with such interest by thoughtful men, whether within her borders or without. All who know in any measure what Professor Davidson has been to troops of students who have gone forth from the grey college planted on the heights east of Edinburgh Castle, looked forward to the General Assembly of 1897 as one that was certain to rank among the most notable Assemblies of the Free Church of Scotland, and anticipated in the official addresses of the occasion memorable and characteristic deliverances on subjects of vital and anxious interest to many earnest men in these days. There are questions on which Professor Davidson has a pre-eminent title to speak. He has felt their onset himself, and has made them his lifelong study. They are questions of faith, that go to the quick of the distractions incident to times of changing ideas, perplexities which lie heavy on devout souls and make their steps uncertain, which beat, too, with special force on the minds of reverent and inquiring youth. On such questions light and instruction are peculiarly needed from the wise and patient who have thought them out, and Dr. Davidson's counsels would have been words in season eagerly received.

Unhappily, he has not been able to undertake a position that carries heavy burdens with it, and is so strange to his usual ways. The disappointment has been great, the regret deep and widespread. But it is a satisfaction that the opportunity at least has been offered, and that his Church has given so pleasing a proof of her generosity and discernment. For Professor Davidson is not one of those to whom such honours most frequently or most naturally fall. He is in no sense a man of ecclesiastical affairs. His appearances in any of the Courts of the Church have been like angels' visits. The idea of speaking in the official meetings of the brethren would never occur to him. The only

occasions which have tempted him to take any responsible part in Presbytery, Synod, or Assembly, have been those rare times when something of exceptional moment has had to be decided, and there has been a plain reason that even the most retiring men should let the Church know what their mind was, and what side they favoured as that of truth and progress. He has none of the qualities which usually commend a man to ecclesiastical dignities. He has been selected for the highest honour which his Church has to bestow, and selected with most gratifying spontaneity and cordiality, simply because she recognised in the secluded scholar one of the most distinguished of her sons, and wished to discharge in some degree her debt of gratitude to one who has done for her ministry and for sacred learning a service which it is impossible to overrate. It is well with the Church that knows the most hidden influences at work within her to be the strongest, and places among her foremost benefactors the thinkers and teachers who make the minds of her youth.

It is the time, therefore, to say something of Professor Andrew Bruce Davidson. Yet it is not much that one has to tell of the man himself or of his life. He has been from first to last a student, with as little of a story as students usually have. He is a Scot to the backbone, with a large pride in his country, a passionate joy in hill and moor, in loch and flood, in song and story, and all that is most characteristic of the land of the tartan. When things go weary with him, and Ewald and Wellhausen, Kuenen and Duhm become as other men, and the pursuit of the thousand and one tracks of illusive light, which ingenious speculation has thought to open through the thickets of Penta-teuchal and Prophetic problems, loses its zest, put one of the Waverleys or a lilt of Robert Burns into his hand, and his heart leaps up again. He is, moreover, a North of Scotland man, with the unmistakable qualities of the eastern side of that rugged section of the country. He has some of these qualities in marked measure. He has the set strength of purpose, the push, the endurance that belong to the men of the north-east; their

untiring, indomitable energy, their sedate hopefulness, the patient tenacity with which they keep to a task, their keen logic, their inwardness and self-repression, their dry humour, a humour that is never noisy or boisterous, that never makes a show of itself or talks itself out, but flashes suddenly out of seeming apathy and surprises by cutting straight to the heart of things. He has also the Aberdonian gift of self-defence, the instrument of which is a certain subdued caustic vein, a sharp sense of men's weak spots, an eye for the ridiculous side of things. The national motto—*Nemo me impune lacessit*—is emphatically the watchword of the strong, shrewd, measured Aberdeenshire man, and Dr. Davidson, the quietest and least self-assertive of men, is no stranger to this handy faculty. To try a pass with him has its inconveniences. Some have made the venture, and have found themselves brought to their knees by one's swift thrust of Dr. Davidson's rapier. It is a small, keen blade that hangs by his side, and it is seldom used. But when it becomes necessary to handle it, its work is done with a flash, and done so neatly that the man whom it smites almost takes pleasure in his skilful disablement.

For the rest, he is at once a strong and a gracious personality, with qualities of head and heart that win him the respect of all, the devoted and grateful friendship of many. He has a clear, sincere eye, that sees through show and circumstance; an obvious impatience of all that is pretentious and unreal, but a genuine regard and a kindly consideration for the least gifted who honestly do what they can. His intellectual equipment has been singularly suited for the work he has been called to do. Insight and imagination and poetic feeling have gone hand in hand with logic and the critical faculty, while shrewd sense has kept all in measure and balance, and secured him from the crudities and irregularities into which others who have had to grapple with the same questions as he have sometimes slipped. Withal, too, there is a certain heat in the withdrawn, equable Scotch nature, a generosity and a geniality which beat within the undemonstrative Scotch exterior and make themselves felt, an indefinable something about him that kindles and attracts.

Brought up in Ellon, an Aberdeenshire parish with a certain, simple beauty of its own, Andrew Davidson had the usual course of education in

country school, and afterwards in one of the two universities of which the city of Aberdeen could boast till less than forty years ago—an education of a limited range as things now go, but strong in the fundamentals, and especially strong in exact, grammatical Latinity. He was an apt learner, and soon showed also the instinct of a teacher. On graduating in Aberdeen, he devoted himself to the ministry of the Free Church, and studied in the New College, Edinburgh, when its Chairs were filled by men like William Cunningham and John Duncan. His association with the latter was one of the fortunate, let us rather say the providential, things of his life. Of Rabbi Duncan, the singular character about whom so many hypothetical stories are told, it is not too much to say that he was one of the richest minds of our time; a man with the visions of genius, though also with its erratic ways; a man of extraordinary learning, but without the aptitude for systematic, circumstantial teaching; a thinker teeming with ideas of original order and lofty scope; the simplest, devoutest, most reverent, most unworldly of natures; a man at his best in occasional utterances and flashes of luminous converse. Books like Dr. Brown's *Life*, Professor Knight's *Colloquia Peripatetica*, and Dr. Moody Stuart's *Recollections* have made Rabbi Duncan's name known far beyond Scotland. But he deserves to be better known still. In this richly-gifted man, himself another of the remarkable Aberdonians, one utterly loyal to his own Church and Creed, but of a noble, catholic spirit, that put the Christian before the Calvinist and the Presbyterian; a philosophical sceptic, as he is described, who had taken refuge in theology; a man who had passed through the deep waters of negation, and who said of himself that he danced on the Brig o' Dee with delight when he was convinced that there was a God, Andrew Davidson found a congenial spirit and stimulating intellect, as well as an instructor in Hebrew.

In due time he was licensed as a preacher. But he never had a charge of his own. Neither has he given himself largely to pulpit work. He has been much sought after as a preacher, and he is often under the pleasant necessity of giving help to his numerous students, who are always anxious to have him. And his visits on such occasions are a delight to himself as well as to them. But in this matter, as in others, he cultivates the shade. Like the nightingale, he has his note, but is a

bird of a shy feather. It is seldom that he is persuaded into occupying the prominent pulpits in our great cities. When he does preach, it is for the most part in rural parishes, and to humble people. It is perhaps to his own loss that he has not preached more, and that he has had small experience of the pastor's work. It is certainly to the loss of others that he has been so unambitious to step forth and deliver his message from pulpits of commanding position. For he has a message to deliver. His discourses once heard by intelligent and devout minds are not likely to be forgotten. They are given with a quiet force and a restrained emotion which touch and quicken. They tell by their penetrating analysis of character and motive, their spiritual heat and motion, their chastened style, and by a gift of interpretation that brings the Word of God in its life and essential meaning into the heart of common things. The preacher's faculty is most felt when he takes some Old Testament passage, expounding the deep voices of the psalmists, applying the visions of ancient prophets to the confusions of modern times, or bringing out the intrinsic relations of the Old Testament and the New, the continuity of the Divine purpose, the Divine law, and the Divine grace in past and present forms of the kingdom of God.

Andrew Davidson's sphere, however, was to be other than the pulpit and the pastorate, and it was early determined for him. Soon after the completion of his theological course he became associated with Rabbi Duncan as tutor in Hebrew, and in 1863 he was elected to the Professorship of Hebrew and Oriental Languages which that remarkable man had held in the New College. There were those who had their misgivings about the elevation of so young a man, and one with the qualities which were already discovering themselves in the forceful assistant, to a position of such responsibility and importance. But if ever a professorial appointment justified itself in Scotland, it was this one. The young student soon made the Hebrew chair one of commanding power, and the Hebrew language one of the most attractive subjects. And he has been true to the confidence so early placed in him. He has sought nothing beyond what was first given him. For thirty-four years he has held the same position, and has made it a centre of intellectual and spiritual quickening

of no common kind. He has filled these years with faithful work, illuminating instruction, fruitful study, and has exercised an ever-widening influence.

What is the secret of his success? He has confessedly an eminence that comes to few men placed as he is. He has drawn to him hundreds of grateful learners. Many of the best minds in Scotland, and far beyond, look up to him as the instructor who has opened to them new visions of religious truth, and been most instrumental in forming their faith. The most distinguished of those who have walked with him in the same fields of study regard him with respect and gratitude. So much is this the case, so many call him master, that those who know him only at a distance wonder at it. What explains his influence and justifies the estimate made of him?

We shall find this in the work which he has done as a writer, and in the quality of that work more than in the quantity. It is of considerable amount, though it is far short of what we should gladly have got from him. It embraces the book by which he first gave scholars an idea of what was in him, his brilliant but unfinished *Commentary Grammatical and Exegetical on the Book of Job*, of which the first part appeared in 1862, and the second never followed; and another early performance of much acumen, on the *Hebrew Accents*, the only Scotch performance of the kind since the days of Thomas Boston. It includes his *Introductory Hebrew Grammar*, which has been widely adopted as a class-book in theological colleges of many denominations, and has run into fourteen editions; and his *Hebrew Syntax*, a volume with the same admirable clearness, precision, and teachable quality, which fills a gap in English scholarship. Between these two came his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, one of the Handbooks for Bible Classes. These works have been followed by his commentaries on *Job*, *Ezekiel*, *Nahum*, *Habakkuk*, and *Zephaniah*, in the Cambridge series; and his Bible-Class Primer on *The Exile and Restoration*; to which must be added a mass of articles—many of them of the highest importance—contributed to publications like *The Imperial Bible Dictionary*, *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, *The Expositor*, *The Expository Times*, *The Critical Review*, and others which it is unnecessary to name.

Professor Davidson's contributions to the literature of the subjects which have so long engaged his mind may not amount in bulk to what students of the Old Testament could wish. They are of more considerable extent, however, than at first appears, and they have qualities more than sufficient to make a distinguished reputation. But it would be vain to give any analysis or estimate of these within our present limits. If we retain the good graces of the editor, something may be attempted in that way in another paper. Here it is enough to say that, important and enlightening as Dr. Davidson's writings are, the secret of his remarkable influence is to be found in the first instance in his academic work. He is a born teacher. The genius for the teacher's work displayed itself early, and it has been the main impulse of his life all through. It is by the desk more than by the press that he has put his mark on his time in his own province of work and study. He has been pre-eminently strong in the professor's chair, by reason both of the matter he has had to impart and the manner in which he has communicated it. The qualities of a great teacher are possessed by him in unusual measure and the happiest combination. Easy mastery of his subject, lucid and attractive discourse, the faculty of training men in scientific method, the power of making them think out things for themselves, are united in him with the gift of holding their minds, quickening their ideas, and commanding their imaginations. He keeps pace with his pupils, and makes them feel that if in him they have their master, they have in him no less a fellow-inquirer, who is in genuine sympathy with them and understands them. Flashes of insight, rare turns of expression, phrases that stick like arrows, sudden sallies of quiet humour, check the wandering attention and charm the listener; while to all is added the fine contagion of his spiritual feeling for the message of the Old Testament. Dr. Davidson's classroom has been the birthplace of many minds. From it not a few of the ablest Old Testament scholars of these recent times have got the impulse which has made them what they have become. Men like the late Professor Elmslie, of London; Professor Skinner, his successor in the Hebrew Chair in the English Presbyterian College; Professor Harper, of Melbourne; Professor Walker, of Belfast; Professor George Adam Smith, of Glasgow; and, greatest of

all, Professor William Robertson Smith, are among his pupils. He would be the last man to think of founding a school or of drawing attention in any way to his own name. Yet a school has formed itself; so many are they who rejoice to be known as Davidson's men. Nor is it only these that should be named in this connexion. Scholars occupying positions of influence in the English universities, and in theological colleges at home and abroad, preachers of mark, and men of letters, are also among those who own themselves his debtors. Men have come and gone in the New College; but Dr. Davidson reigns supreme. It is no injustice to others to say this. The eminent men who have been his colleagues would be the first to confess that it is so. Successions of students have passed through the gates of the New College, and have gone into various kinds and spheres of work in this country and in others; but the best of them have carried with them their enthusiasm for Dr. Davidson, and have acknowledged the more earnestly as years have run on that of all their teachers he has done most for them.

It has been a happy thing for the religious life and thought of Scotland that a man of Dr. Davidson's gifts and character has occupied the Chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis in the leading college of his Church. He has had the responsibility of leading the way in scientific criticism in this country. His lot has been cast in times of disturbance, when long established ideas of the Divine Revelation in the Old Testament were giving way, and other modes of looking at the Bible, new methods of criticism, new conceptions of the Law, the Prophets, the Messianic Hope, and much else in the Hebrew Scriptures, were coming in. Such things tried men's faith as well as their understanding. They tried his own. He had himself to pass through the sifting-time before most others here, and he was able, when the crisis came, not only to keep his own head clear, but to guide others and bring them deliverance. He has not merely saved many young men from the decline of faith and painful confusions of the religious consciousness. He has made the Old Testament a new and living thing to them, and has led them into larger conceptions of God and His truth. His own openness of mind and hospitable attitude to new ideas have conciliated youth. His sanity, his aversion to all extremes, the just

sense that makes him pause where less regulated natures are apt to run into wild speculation and loud assertion, have been a saving discipline to many in the critical period through which we have been passing.

It is a great service he has rendered in this way. It has been all the greater that he has joined prudence with courage and reason with readiness. He was the first to teach in any proper and continuous way in Scotland the methods of the Higher Criticism. He was among the first to acknowledge the reasonableness of its main conclusions. When others were silent, or doubtful, or hostile, he saw what had to be conceded to the new views as regards both Law and Prophecy, and he had the wisdom not to keep his students uninformed. But he has never been drawn away into exaggeration. It has sometimes been made a matter of complaint that he has been over-cautious, that he has not spoken out oftener, that he has not gone all the way that some others have gone. But it has been a happy thing for us that he has been a teacher of this kind, quick to distinguish between the certain and the hypothetical, the well-founded and the baseless, the use and the abuse of a just principle. The saving salt of humour which has been given him in good measure has kept him from being carried away into extravagance. The self-restraint which is natural to him has been one of the best notes of his criticism.

He has a better appreciation than is often

possessed by critics, of the limits which are imposed upon Old Testament science, by the comparative scantiness of the Old Testament literature. He has wisely taught his students to be slow to accept all the inference which might be drawn with reason in the case of larger literatures. A peculiar charm and vitality, too, are given to his teaching by the personal interest which inspires it in the religious meaning of all that is distinctive of the Old Testament books. Nowhere is he stronger or more instructive than when he deals with the religious ideas of these books and the religious life of which the ideas are the expression. In all his work we see the master's grasp of the language he has to handle, the trained faculty of the critic, the certain pace of the historical interpreter, and a rare insight into the genius of the Hebrew people and the Hebrew literature. But best of all, we find everywhere this living appreciation of the religious spirit and Divine purpose of the Old Testament; and the gift of making others sensible of the same. So he has taught us to use the Old Testament as a book that has to be studied in the light of its own times, its own ideas, its own historical growth; but a book charged with a Divine message, which lives and cannot perish, which is intended for every age, which also becomes clearer to us, and of more obvious and immediate value, the more faithfully we take the literature containing it on its own plane.

## Recent Foreign Theology.

### Two Works on the Talmud.

To know the Talmud is to know Judaism; but who knows the Talmud or even its simpler text, the Mishna, thoroughly? Formerly the helps for studying this great work, the 'Talmudicum Mare,' as it has been called, were few and poor. The works at the foot of this notice will make every man without excuse who has not at least a general knowledge of the history and principles of both Mishna and Gemara.

1. Dr. STRACK'S book<sup>1</sup> is like other works of his,

<sup>1</sup> *Einleitung in den Thalmud.* Von D. Hermann L. Strack. Zweite, teilweise neubearbeitete Auflage. J. C. Hinrichs,

compact, accurate, and up-to-date. First of all, he gives us the divisions of the Mishna, which also are, of course, the divisions of the Talmud, although all the Mishna is not commented on in the Babylonian, and much less in the Jerusalem, Talmud. The six *sedarim* (or orders), the tracts (*massitôth*), into which each *seder* is divided, the *perâkîm* and Mishnas,—all these are separately explained. On pp. 9-12 there is a very useful table, in which the sixty-three tracts are arranged under their several *sedarim*, and according to which volume of the twelve, into which the Babylonian Talmud is split Leipzig, 1894. London: Williams & Norgate. Small 8vo, pp. 136. Price, unbound, 2½ marks (2s. 6d.).