AND TO THY SEED, WHICH IS CHRIST

MODERN Old Testament scholarship has been too apt to ignore the labours of the 'pre-critical' period; much in the old exposition is of lasting value. It cannot be denied, however, that the older exposition, with a few outstanding exceptions, showed certain obvious weaknesses which vitiated much of its work. Perhaps the worst of these was its obstinate refusal to accept the Old Testament picture of Israel as it really was.

This may well be because the Church, unreformed and reformed alike, was seldom prepared to recognize how desperately ill and corrupt it was, when seen in the light of the New Testament. It was quite natural therefore to regard the denunciations of the prophets as illuminating the marginal and occasional in Israel's history, instead of recognizing that they show the people sick unto death. As a result the importance of the doctrine of the remnant was seldom adequately recognized. Strikingly enough that erratic genius, J. N. Darby, one of the founders of the Brethren movement, probably came closer than most to a grasp of this, but he obscured it by an exaggerated dispensational teaching.

Neither the legalistic Rabbinic Jew nor the modern anti-legalistic humanist has been very happy about the relationship of the Prophets, i.e. the Nevi'im, Joshua to Kings and Isaiah to Malachi, to the Torah. For the former the Prophets are little more than a commentary on the Torah, necessitated only by the people's failure to keep it. For the latter the more important figures among the prophets have normally been regarded as the enemies of the cultus and of all formal law. In fact the former by refusing to recognize the progressive nature of revelation, and the latter by yielding only lip-service to the reality of revelation, failed to see that Torah and Prophets mark two stages in revelation.

Though it never obscures the responsibility of the individual, the dominating conception of the Torah is the divine election of Israel. While Paul, from the standpoint of later revelation, can show from the Torah itself that 'they are not all Israel, which are of Israel' (Rom. ix. 6; cf. also Rom. ii. 28f.), it is very questionable whether one could come to this understanding purely on the basis of the Torah. That is why the orthodox Jew has never been able to free himself from a purely ethnic answer, when answering the question, Who is a Jew?, for to him the Torah is the sum of revelation. When we turn to the Prophets, in the sense given earlier, we find a story predominantly of failure and of God's choosing in its midst. The selfsame scholarship that has so clearly shown that the Former Prophets are not history in the common meaning given to that word today has all too often failed to recognize the all-pervading sense of failure. This is mainly so because this element normally forms the back-cloth, so to speak, and only occasionally occupies the centre of the stage. To recognize the consistency of the backcloth throughout the Former Prophets is, however, except for those who hold the theory of the Deuteronomistic history linked with Noth and his school, virtually to accept the inspirational element that so many would keep far from their interpretation of the Old Testament.

The first stage in this sifting is commemorated in Ps. lxxviii (cL especially verses 67-71), which in spite of the opinion of Oesterley is surely pre-exilic and one of the earlier of the Asaph psalms. This was continued in the disruption of the kingdom. However much this was a judgment on the Davidic dynasty, it was also a judgment on the Northern tribes, as the post-exilic chronicler recognized so clearly. The same truth is, however, expressed equally clearly and more succinctly by Hosea, when he says, 'Afterward shall the children of Israel seek .... David their king' (iii. 5), which is equivalent to saying that the whole history of the North from the time of Jeroboam I had been a groping down a blind alley.

There is, however, more to be said about Ho. iii. 5. The English reader may be pardoned, if he understands 'Afterward shall the children of Israel return' as referring to a return from exile, though the parallel in xiv. 1 should save him from this. Whatever the etymological origin of the Hebrew root shub — neither BDB nor Köehler are much help here — it is clear that in usage turning and not returning is the main thought. BDB is quite correct in suggesting 'to repent' as the appropriate translation in Ho. iii. 5 and similar passages. The sifting process is not one based on an unintelligible divine decree, but on human sin, and it can be reversed, at least up to a given
ternus,' by repentance.

Our first introduction to the concept of the remnant, i.e. of those to be saved out of a general judgment, is found in 1 Kings xix. 18, a verse where the term is used in a regularly serious and dramatically solemn way. The terms for remnant, she'ar or she'erit, are not used, we have the root in the verb, wēhish'ārīti, 'yet will I leave'. It is to be noted that the grounds on which the remnant is to be chosen is to have done entirely with its behaviour towards God. It has been unjustified to read a lower meaning into remnant, when we meet it in Isaiah.

The story calls for closer attention. Elijah's return to Hosea-Biniah and his acclamation of Israel is called the elect of Israel which is accepted by the people of the present. Elijah's acclamation could, as being essentially accurate, can only mean that the prophet returns to the place of the covenant to inform Yahweh that, so far as the ten tribes were concerned, His election had been an error. God puts against the failure of the prophet, a minute, but He does not deny the fact. The remnant con-
ception is not concerned primarily with God's choosing within a wider body, but with its complete failure.

It is hardly hesitative to accept the contention that Amos could hardly have spoken ix. 15-19 in Bethel, there is a growing tendency among scholars to recognize that S. R. Driver was wise in refusing to accept the arguments for a post-exilic date. Amos was no innovator, when he an-
counced the discrimination of God as He sat in judgment. Though the accusation against Israel (xix. 10, 14), an accusation which is accepted by God

In the light of the above it seems very difficult to understand how Jozc
say in A Theology of Election (p. 110), 'she'ar yashāv — a 'remainder will return' — means return to the land, but not necessarily to God.' Skinner (C. M., 'Remnant', BJQ, vi. 1936, p. 144) and others, though they acknowledge the coming destruction of Israel was certain and inevitable, yet not even the fate of the wicked would be accidental — 'But no pebble shall fall upon the earth' (Am. xix. 19, R.V.).

Once more the language would suggest that the invasions and repulse of the Assyrians were seen as a part of the process of God's

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fair to say that while for them the gift of the Torah was an act of pure grace on God's part, the keeping of it was something within the power and responsibility of man. As a result the concept of the remnant, a small group of faithful men in the midst of complete apostasy and judgment, played no part in their thinking.

The identity of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah xi.-iv is one of the most fascinating of Old Testament problems, not only in the sense of the New Testament fulfillment, but as the question of the relationship of the central figure of the Servant Songs to the prophecy as a whole. There are still those who maintain that he is Israel, with or without some qualifying adjective, but it is far more likely that he is a figure who personifies the national institutions of a future period. It seems probable that he exists in the Bible as an act of pure grace on God's part. The remnant of Hezekiah's day so responded to Manasseh's apostasy that there was neither remedy nor hope. A very popular modern view sees Isaiah setting up an inner circle of disciples (ls., vii. 16-18), which continues and explains the teaching of the traditionalistic view in Isaiah' during the exile. It is most striking, however, that this group leaves not a trace in the glossen of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and it seems very hard to believe that it really existed.

Ezekiel and Isaiah are in full agreement that the corruption of Judah was absolute. While the exiles with Jehoiachin were the hope of the future, it is made clear that their choice was the result of God's mercy. Before God was going to be pleased with what He would accept of the people of the exiles, the change would have to be a transforming miracle in them (Je., xxxi. 31-34; Ezk. xxxvi. 24-27). Already in the post-exilic histories and prophets we are warned that though the returning exiles might not be guilty of the same sins as their ancestors, their self-regeneration as the holy seed did not save them from falling far short of God's will.

The history of the Inter-Testamental Period shows us the development of these tendencies. One group, best represented by the Hosea school, took the time of Antiochus as the judgment and hope for the future. Another, represented by the Hellenists of the Qumran Covenanters, but their conviction that they possessed esoteric knowledge taught them by the Teacher of Righteousness. That their teacher was a man of outstanding spirituality may be seen from their anticipations of the New Testament in the understanding of the prophetic books. Where they differed from the Pharisees it is necessary to grasp that while for them the gift of the Torah was an act of pure grace on God's part, the keeping of it was something within the power and responsibility of man. As a result the concept of the remnant, a small group of faithful men in the midst of complete apostasy and judgment, played no part in their thinking.
explained as the outcome of God's gracious act. He is the fulfiller of the Old Testament and in His light all others, as individuals or groups, are shown in their failure and bankruptcy.

Our Lord's choice of the title 'Son of man' has caused and will continue to cause much controversy. There is growing unanimity, however, that it cannot be separated from the vision in Dn. vii, even though it may not be fully explainable in terms of this vision. In the light of Dn. vii. 17, where the four beasts are interpreted as four kings, it seems impossible to interpret the one like unto a Son of man merely as the saints of the most High, as has been the predominant modern interpretation until recently. Both in the case of the beasts and the one like unto a Son of man the kingdom is personified in and represented by its king. But, and here is an essential point, the saints of the most High are never expressly identified with Israel. It is no answer to say that no other identification is possible. In this apocalyptic vision in which every term has its meaning this silence cannot be just shrugged off. True enough they are Israel, but not Israel by virtue of physical descent, but because of what their king has made them. In calling Himself the Son of man our Lord is looking beyond Himself to His people, but they are not a people which He has merely collected from within Israel but a people which He has created for Himself.

This is not the place to discuss how far or whether we may legitimately apply the title Israel to the Church, though I believe that however near the New Testament approaches such a usage, it always finally avoids it. In the final vision of the Church the old and the new seem to be united (Rev. xxi. 12-14), but how that union comes seems not to be revealed. In Romans Paul, after having displayed our Lord as the only Saviour, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, turns to the problem of Israel. After pointing out that God was always choosing within the people that bore that name, he suggests the ever widening scope of His work in their midst. At the present time it is 'a remnant according to the election of grace' (Rom. xi. 5), but this remnant is in itself a guarantee that the day is coming when 'all Israel shall be saved' (Rom. xi. 26).

Until the day of consummation it is unlikely that we shall be able to say with certainty exactly what we are to understand by 'all Israel', except that we can affirm with safety that it does not refer merely to the accident of physical descent. But that it refers to the people of the Old Covenant who have entered into the fulness of the New seems certain. To extend its meaning in the framework of Romans ix-xi to Gentile believers is to create an exegetical nightmare. God's election of a people does not create automatic privilege in physical descent, but His constant sifting of the people, its narrowing down to a remnant, a remnant of one at the last, is a guarantee that His electing grace will also in the fulness of time reach its purpose in the people as a whole.

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