

## Bible Commentaries

PRESIDENT HARPER'S work on Amos and Hosea<sup>1</sup> will unquestionably take its place at once as the best critical exposition of those two prophets that has yet appeared in English. It is painstaking, accurate and thorough in scholarship, fair and sound in judgment, full and impartial in the statement of contrary opinion, and mindful of its text, not as a series of exegetical puzzles, but as a document in the history of humanity and humanity's two noblest religions. It fulfills a much larger purpose than the primary one of a commentary, which is to explain the text; it seeks to show the position of these particular prophets in the development of the religion of Israel, and is therefore practically a history of the Hebrew faith from its beginnings to the close of Hosea's work, about 735 B. C. It may be questioned whether so much should be included in the scope of such a commentary, and whether 605 pages are really necessary to make clear the essential message of 23 chapters of the Bible, less than 14 pages as printed in the Revised Version. One would look more naturally to the commentaries on the earlier historical books for discussion of the place of Elijah and Elijah in the development of Hebrew religion, and to works on the Hexateuch for an estimate of the religious contribution and significance of the Decalogs, the Book of the Covenant, and the Judæan and Ephraimitic Narratives. President Harper is 100 pages along before he reaches Amos. Yet undeniably a clear opinion must be had of the religion implied in these earlier documents before the work of the first literary prophets can be appreciated, and it is perhaps ungenerous to complain of receiving more than one has a right to expect.

It is difficult to refrain from discussion of the story of the growth and

formation of Israel's faith, as told by President Harper in clear, bold strokes and with frequent original suggestion. But even to outline his sketch of how the Hebrews came to their worthy faith would transcend the limits of a review. It can only be said that in general President Harper represents the views of modern critical scholarship. In minor matters he touches upon controverted points on nearly every page, and his views on many particular passages will be questioned. In the matter of the distinctively new in Amos it is doubtful if President Harper's exposition will stand. He says that the new in Amos was "that spirit of observation and recognition of general law, of philosophical insight and reasoning, which became the so-called wisdom-spirit when nationalism had passed away and the doctrine of individualism was beginning to assert itself. Amos is almost as much sage as he is prophet." (p. civ.)

But this is to blur the image of Amos which stands out from every paragraph of his genuine utterance—the image of a man of ethical fervor, of passion for righteousness, the Hebrew prophet *par excellence*. In effort not to credit Amos with anything which his predecessors had seen or taught it must not be forgotten that the herdman of Tekoa felt some very old things with an intensity the world had not known before, and that in the intensity of his feeling, in the fusion of ethical and religious conviction in the white-heat earnestness of his soul, is his essential message of the righteousness which rules the earth and is in truth the living God—a message which is confused rather than described by making him half-prophet and half-sage.

President Harper's text-book on the *Priestly Element in the Old Testament*<sup>2</sup> appears in a third and considerably enlarged edition. It is a valuable aid to the historical study of the worship, ritual and laws of the Old Testament and is especially full in its references to authorities.

Professor Ramsay is perhaps the greatest living authority on the geography and history of Asia Minor, and he has now applied his special knowledge of the ancient communities of that region

<sup>1</sup> A CRITICAL AND EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY ON AMOS AND HOSEA. By William Rainey Harper. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$3.00.

<sup>2</sup> THE PRIESTLY ELEMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT. By William Rainey Harper. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. \$1.00.

to the interpretation of the *Letters to the Seven Churches* as found in the second and third chapters of the Book of the Revelation.<sup>3</sup> He holds to the authenticity and integrity of the Apocalypse, as against the prevailing recent view that it embodies Jewish apocalypses. His interpretation of particular passages is open to question, but his historical, geographical and archeological material on the churches addressed in these letters is very full and valuable. He is at one with all recent critics in regarding the book not at all as prediction but as a description of Christianity in its opening struggle with Rome.

A little book thoroughly to be recommended is Professor Porter's *Messages of the Apocalyptic Writers*.<sup>4</sup> It will be found very enlightening as to the books of Daniel and the Revelation, and will interpret them to any intelligent, fair-minded person not as puzzles of prediction but as interpreters of their own times. In no department of Biblical study has historical criticism better justified itself than in the interpretation of these strange, much abused writings.

The *Bible Problems* considered by Canon Cheyne<sup>5</sup> are principally the Virgin Birth and the Descent into Hell. These features of the Gospel narratives are explained as adaptations of Babylonian myths—a view advocated in Germany by Winckler and Gunkel, but which has not as yet gained general acceptance.

The commentaries on the Pauline epistles by the late Dr. Joseph Parker<sup>6</sup> are the first issues of a new "Practical and Devotional Commentary on the New Testament," edited by Dr. Robertson Nicoll. They give a paraphrase of the text and "improving" applications to modern life.

Mr. Balmforth's volume<sup>7</sup> consists of a

<sup>3</sup> THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA AND THEIR PLACE IN THE PLAN OF THE APOCALYPSE. By W. M. Ramsay, D.C.L., Litt.D., LL.D. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son. \$3.50.

<sup>4</sup> THE MESSAGES OF THE APOCALYPTIC WRITERS. By Frank Chamberlain Porter, Ph.D., D.D. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. \$1.25.

<sup>5</sup> BIBLE PROBLEMS AND THE NEW MATERIAL FOR THEIR SOLUTION. By T. K. Cheyne, D.Litt. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$1.50.

<sup>6</sup> THE EPISTLES TO THE COLOSSIANS AND THESSALONIANS. THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS. Both by Joseph Parker, D.D. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son. Each \$1.25.

<sup>7</sup> THE BIBLE FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE HIGHER CRITICISM. By Ramsden Balmforth. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$1.25.

series of fourteen addresses made with the design of popularizing the results of the higher criticism of the Old Testament. Illustrations are chosen from the various classes of literature and periods of history, and some of the principal facts brought to light in recent study are presented fearlessly and with no little skill.

✱