

Book Review

SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE BIBLE

The title of this book,¹ as noted above, is *Sociological Study of the Bible*, and the first sentence of the preface describes it as an "evolutionary study of Christianity." The extent of the ground that the author attempts to cover may be seen from the headings of the main sections into which it is divided, viz.: "Preliminary View of the Bible Problem"; "Elements of the Bible Problem"; "Development of Bible Religion"; "The Spread of Bible Religion"; "The Bible and Its Religion in the Modern World." It will be seen at once that this is a comprehensive survey of a very wide field, and that the full discussion of such a series of subjects would call for a library rather than a single volume. The audience addressed is the great body of intelligent people who are interested in the interpretation of the Bible and the study of social questions. The author wishes to remedy the weakness and division that spring from the fact that "hitherto, scientific investigators of the Bible have not occupied the technical standpoint of pure sociology; nor have sociologists been familiar with the scientific approach to the Bible" (p. x). The statement will no doubt be accepted by all that the workers in the field of Old Testament criticism have, after centuries of severe toil, prepared rich material for those who are, in the largest sense, interested in the history of society and religion; and further, those men who are working at the literary and historical side of the subject need to remember that they are dealing with human life as an organic movement and not with mere isolated words or facts. One must, of course, admit that there is a place for "pure" philologists and "pure" historians, etc. I confess, however, that I cannot quite see the meaning of "pure" sociology. "Pure" mathematics I understand to be the science of space and number carried on without reference to any particular concrete problems. But "sociology" without the concrete content furnished by history, politics, economics, etc., would be an empty abstraction. In reviewing a book one does not wish to be captious or to forget the great ability and industry

¹ *Sociological Study of the Bible*. By Louis Wallis, formerly Instructor in Economics and Sociology in the Ohio State University. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1912. Pp. xxxv+308. \$1.50 net.

that is involved in the making of such a book as this. It would satisfy one's feelings to say "this is a book that deals with a great subject in a large way, it brings keen intelligence and wide learning to bear upon a subject that is now recognized to be of supreme importance." But perhaps some general remarks and slight criticisms may be allowed from one who is in full sympathy with the main intention of the book, the aim, that is, to quicken interest in the Bible as a great story of human life and to make the idea of "development" a living revelation and not a mere phrase. Some of us who have never lectured on "sociology" find that we have been dealing in our own way with the main ideas involved; and it is just as well to remember that the study of tribal, social, and national life is very much older than the use of this particular term (p. ix). Of course, the term could not be made prominent until the need was felt for co-ordinating the various branches of social science. The present writer in referring to a stimulating, suggestive book, *Politics and Religion in Ancient Israel*,² commended it as likely to bring home to theological students, sometimes in a startling fashion, the fact of religious development, which must be accepted intelligently by the expositor of the Old Testament; Professor Orr, in his review, met this with a "God forbid" which suggests that his idea of "progressive revelation" is a thing of abstract theology and not of real human life. (On Professor Orr's method of dealing with Old Testament subjects see pp. xvii, 12, etc.) Our author accepts the fact of a real development proved by the criticism of the documents, and he seeks to explain the action and reaction of the varied facts and forces which produced the Hebrew religion. This book takes its stand upon the broad results of Old Testament history and criticism; the author gives an outline of these for the benefit of his readers. "The scientific sociologist, approaching the Bible from the outlook of his own line of work, takes for granted the generally established results of literary and historical study of the Bible." He shows us how by a change of emphasis material belonging to one department passes over into another. "The following chapter, for instance, on the 'Making of the Old Testament' relates to a theme which would appear to fall entirely within the scope of literary introduction, but, by emphasizing that the Old Testament puts forward a series of *moral verdicts* on a social process already lying in the past we adjust the literary problem within the sociological perspective."

The author, while paying his tribute and acknowledging his debt to the great workers in the Old Testament field, such as Wellhausen,

² Rev. J. C. Todd. Macmillan, 1904.

Robertson Smith, and many others, evidently thinks that the great body of them are still too much under the influence of "metaphysics" or "theology." Speaking of certain explanations of the course of the history as due to "the genius of the great prophets" or "their peculiar experience of God," he says: "It is only with feelings of respect for the modern school; and of gratitude for its indispensable service to the course of scientific learning, that the writer ventures the opinion that this view of Israel's evolution belongs in the realm of theology and metaphysics only, and that it has no standing as a matter of science and history." It would require a careful essay to review properly this one sentence. Is this then a Comtian sociology, and does "pure" mean, not free from sectarian prejudice and traditional dogma, but free from all theological ideas? Can we confine ourselves to the mere statement that the Hebrews, like other people, believed that there were gods? And yet on p. xxxi we read that this book "views the Bible as an organic item of human life, identified in its nature and purpose with the Reality that underlies the history of the world." Does not this sound rather "metaphysical"? We do not object to it on that account, having no prejudice against "metaphysics"; but we can scarcely regard it as "pure sociology." That the author is also prepared to do justice to "the genius of the prophets" may be seen from the statement that "the imagination of Israel's prophets took fire, and blazed up in a great spiritual flame that has pierced through the ages and illuminated the history of the world." Many such noble and suggestive sayings flash out here and there in the book which show how difficult it is for any living man to keep within the limits of "pure sociology" or any other arbitrary division of knowledge and life.

In our opinion the best chapters of the book are those that deal with the author's real subject, viz.: "Kinship Institutions of Israel," "Industrial Institutions of Israel," etc. There is much here that one would like to quote in an appreciative spirit but the limits of a brief review restrain us. One would also like to discuss the author's statements concerning the "individualism" of the early prophets and his classifications of prophets into "regulars" and "insurgents." The attempt to cover the whole field of Jewish and Christian history in a series of brief statements does not seem to be satisfactory, unless these are meant to be used as the basis for lectures in which the needed amplifications and explanations can be given. For example, we have as the heading of three separate short chapters "Judaism Rejects the Social Problem," "Catholicism Rejects the Social Problem," "Protestantism

Rejects the Social Problem.” Surely we must say that all these systems attacked the social problem and struggled with it. Not in the modern democratic spirit or in the range that it now lies before us could it be handled in the past. They did not solve it perfectly; it is ever in process of solution and we gladly recognize that studies of the past such as those given by our author will give practical help; but to say that the *problem was rejected* seems to be a peculiar use of language. The fact is that general statements do not carry us very far in dealing with one of the most complex subjects. If modern science and philosophy teach us anything, it is not to make our distinctions too sharp when we are dealing, not with separate things, but with the varied movements of life. There are many other appreciations and criticisms that we might give, showing the stimulating character of the book, but we must refrain, and conclude with the hope that it may serve the purpose that the author has in view and be the means of quickening interest in the study of the continuous life of humanity.

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