

MISCELLANEOUS.

BOOK REVIEWS.

THE BOOK OF GENESIS. For Bible Classes and Private Study. By *Samuel A. B. Mercer, Ph.D., D.D.* Milwaukee: Morehouse Publishing Co.; London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1919. Pp. xiii, 193. Price, \$1.25.

This volume is the first of a series of handbooks constituting another attempt to establish the university in the home—or, if not the university, at least the seminary. The object of this series is to deal with questions of the Bible and early Oriental civilization in such a way as “to make the results of expert investigation accessible to laymen,” as well as to assist “those of the clergy who feel the need of direction in their reading.” The general editorship has been entrusted to the care of Dr. Samuel A. B. Mercer, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Literature in the Western Theological Seminary, Chicago. Each volume is “planned as a guide to eight months’ work of an hour or more a day.” In every case specialists will be employed who will endeavor “to present their subjects in the most effective and profitable way which is consonant with the best methods of leading the student to diligent work, careful thinking and thoughtful expression” (Preface).

The volume before us, dealing with the Book of Genesis, presents its subject-matter in the form of daily readings; each assignment is followed by a discussion outlining the author’s interpretation of archeological, ethical, social and religious questions involved; suggestions for written and other exercises are added at the close of each lesson. Besides the whole material of Genesis proper, an Introduction is prepared along the same lines, intended to acquaint the student with Old Testament problems in general. A copious list of Review Studies closes the volume.

The prevailing standpoint is that of the liberal Protestant theologian, i. e., an effort is made to reconcile the irrefutable conclusions of modern Biblical research and natural science with the basic religious and moral teachings of Christianity as a revealed religion. Thus we read on page 13: “The Bible is inspired and valuable not as a book of modern science, but as a religious book, containing a religious message for all time. Between the intelligent student of the Old Testament and the intelligent scientist there is absolutely no conflict in the matter of Jewish science.” Again, on page 25: “The first act of creation after the organization of the universe was thought to have been light. There need be no misgivings about unsuccessful attempts to reconcile Biblical science with modern science. In this Genesis account we have an expression of the best Hebrew information of the sixth century B. C.” These passages may be complemented by one on page 23, defining the “spirit of God” in Gen. i. 2: “Mankind has learned only gradually to know the true character of God. The Jews of the sixth century B. C. had not arrived at a conception of a trinity of persons in the Godhead. The term ‘spirit of God,’ in this passage, meant to the Hebrews the invisible creative power of God. It did not mean to them what it means to us. Our Lord revealed the true character of God, and told

us of his Holy Spirit. . . ." But the key-note of the whole volume (and, we presume, the whole series) is really sounded in the opening paragraphs of the Introduction, where we read (pp. 3f) :

"In the beginning God revealed himself in his universe which he brought into existence. According as the universe developed in manifold ways, so God's revelation of himself developed. Now, at an early stage in man's development, his mind gradually began to discover and to become aware of God; and according as the mind of man grew, so his understanding of God increased. God's revelation of himself and man's discovery of God were, thus, progressive and gradual. . . . Now, many ancient peoples have left permanent records of their ideas of God, and notable among them are the Israelites. Those records which give a peculiar spiritual, truly religious, and a satisfactorily moral ideal of the character of God, and of his relations with men, we call inspired. The test of inspired writings is the religious response to them in the heart of man."

This test of inspired writings is interesting, for in actual application the term "the heart of man" must be taken to signify "the heart of any man living to-day," and in the last analysis the whole matter of divine inspiration is thus acknowledged to be of private concern. In other words, it is not only "Biblical science" that may be discarded, but any passage, whatever its import, may be discarded just as well if it fails to awake a religious response in the modern reader. In fact, the whole volume may be said to constitute a guide as to which passages to discard and which to keep.

We have no quarrel with the author as to the selections which he suggests. Whoever agrees with his premises will find in the little volume much food for thought, even if it is not as independent as the author has tried to make it. Time only will tell whether the compromise embodied in the book has any chance of living. While rockbound orthodoxy may feel its foundations shake, the claims of science can hardly be said to be satisfied—and they will not be silenced either. But it must be granted that the author has solved his self-imposed task with remarkable skill. He does demonstrate the abundant wealth of Hebrew lore in material apt to stimulate modern religious and social thinking—dependent of the question as to the exclusive character of this material.

THE ORIENT IN BIBLE TIMES. By *Elihu Grant*. Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1920. Pp. xii, 336. Price. \$2.50 net.

In the present volume the author undertakes "to help people who are interested in the Bible to see the Hebrews among their neighbors, and to give a rapid, unified impression of the course of events in the Biblical world" (p. vii). As a matter of fact, the volume might well be described as a literary sightseeing trip through the early history of the Near East, for the aim to address "busy people of to-day" (*ibid.*) is constantly kept in mind. The personality of our guide is apt to heighten our interest, considering the fact that Dr. Grant, an expert on Biblical archeology, was himself a resident of the Bible land for a number of years.

The days are past when it was thought possible to gather all information needed regarding the Bible from the Bible itself. So it is not surprising to see the author include practically the whole territory from Persia to Greece, and from the Red Sea to the Euxine, within the scope of his studies. The material thus defined he divides into sixteen chapters of which we mention only the following: The Oldest Civilizations and Modern Interest (I); The Re-

lations of Egypt with Asia (IV); Life in Earliest Babylonia (VI); The Classical Age of Babylon (VII); The Neighbors of Palestine from Ocean and Desert (X); Establishment of the Hebrews in Palestine (XI); Reconstruction Under the Persians (XIII); Old and New Palestine, Features and Customs (XIV); Social and Religious Conditions of the Jews (XV); Political Background for New Testament Times (XVI). At the end of each chapter, Suggestions for Study and Book Lists are added.

As may be apparent even from this partial list, the prevailing interest is centered on the history of civilization as such, i. e., on the development of trade, politics, social institutions, international relations, intellectual and spiritual achievements, etc., of all the various nations involved. It goes without saying that in this way an enormous amount of reading and learning has been thrown together and condensed. To give a specimen of the author's style and mode of thought, we wish to quote his presentation of the religious revolution of Amenhotep IV (Ikhnaton) in the fourteenth century B. C. (pp. 58f):

"The idiosyncrasies of this king have been attributed to various causes, to the influence of his mother, or of his wife, or both. We do not know the facts concerning the origin of his system of thought. He departed from the orthodoxy of his day and founded the cult of the solar disk. He was a youth of lofty intellectual ambition, idealistic and rigorously logical. He came to the throne at the height of the empire and ruled seventeen years. He lacked political acumen or any adequate interest in the practical side of government. He was enamored of speculation. A propensity to closet philosophy led him to become an academic theologian. . . . Of course, he ran counter to all popular thought, which was very pluralistic, when he insisted upon a monotheistic interpretation of life. . . ."

"The dominating conception of the new system was that the sun itself is the life-giver and embracer of all lands and peoples. Distinctions of our day, such as materialist, spiritualist, deist, etc., could hardly be applied to the thought of that age. It was the actual material sun and its heat and force which Ikhnaton adored. To that extent he would seem comparable with a materialist, but he was the most advanced idealist of history to that time. We do not know that he held any idea of the omnipresence of the deity but simply believed that the sun's rays, that is, its power, went everywhere throughout the daytime. At night the sun was absent from the world. Had Ikhnaton lived in our age we might say that he was a deist at night. Logically perhaps he ought to have personalized the night or darkness and the foes within them or to refer all to a hostile force, but we do not know that he did this."

Transcending, however, any benefit from actual information transmitted, seems to be the spirit of free research pervading the whole volume, as it finds expression, e. g., in the author's final remarks on Professor Torrey's revolutionizing studies on Ezra (p. 287):

"Whatever else may be said of any or all of these theories in *Ezra Studies*, the resultant picture is a much more attractive one than the picture that is displaced. This result so common in criticism is of course not the guiding motive, but rather an earnest search for the truth, which may have been undertaken at first because of the suspicion that something was wrong with the traditional scheme of things."

It is the combination and interaction of our knowledge of facts, fragmentary as it may be, and wide-awake common sense in their interpretation, which form the chief charm and distinguishing feature of the book, teaching their own lesson, and thus helping the reader to help himself.

The book includes thirty illustrations from photographs, mostly representing landscapes in modern Palestine, and aptly reminding us, as the author remarks, "of the connection between the ancient and the present times."