

An objection may be ventured: that he holds that the Israelites had a very scant conception, if any, of life after death. There are a few texts which justify this generalization, but their force is exaggerated, and leads to a misinterpretation of the Hebraic mind. It would seem rather that opinions among the Israelites were several on this gravest of all problems to men to whom the full light of revealed doctrine was withheld. Some saw the whole world of human experience in its materiality and saw nothing but the material, including the phantasms of the mind by which the immaterial is presented to flesh-girt intellects. Hence arises materialism at any stage in human society. But the perception that there is something more than matter, the certitude of a spiritual existence which could not but be personal because all that is known to man is dependent on either himself or his cause, was more rapid a conclusion for the Israelite than for any other primitive people, and a belief in another world than this was common among them, far more surely than among their neighbours, precisely because they knew the true God.

Many, if not most, cultures evolve a strong sense of an after-life, nonetheless tenaciously held because its nature is obscure, and wrapped in the forms peculiar to the mentality of each it is not easily discernible to us. The Hebrews began with this piece of natural theology, and some went beyond it, especially the prophets and mystics who perceived that the God was the God of knowledge, that the content of intellect was imperishable, and that neither the divine knower nor the known—that is, oneself—could ever cease to exist. To live in God's knowledge is to live for ever, since one can neither know or be known unless one exists. Such views are found in Psalms 38, 14—a denial of an after-life; in Psalms 15, 11, and 116, 15, its affirmation; in Psalm 48, 14-16, despite textual obscurity, the most acceptable reading would present the idea of a death-like life in Sheol, from which the psalmist is delivered; but not, for either good or evil, extermination. These are but a few instances. Dr Kissane, however, writes as if the first were typical, whereas it is exceptional. So too with the view that the Old Testament promises the blessings of earthly life, rather than of the future. Both positions seem to derogate from the fact of the supernatural life of its human authors and the distinctive qualities arising from inspiration.

SILVESTER HUMPHRIES, O.P.

LE PROPHETE JEREMIE, sa Vie, son Oeuvre et son Temps. By Jean Steinmann. (*Lectio Divina* No. 9: Editions du Cerf, Blackfriars; n.p.)

The blurb introducing each number of the series *Lectio Divina*: 'The kind of reading, that is accompanied by thoughtful consideration of what one reads, is what is meant by *Lectio Divina*. In the patristic age and during the middle ages this kind of reading with meditation was the main

object of study among the clergy; it formed the basis of their preaching and teaching, and it provided the material for their thought as well as for their prayer. In our own days, the need for a return to biblical sources is making itself daily more keenly felt, both among the clergy and among the laity; and in this they have the encouragement of the recent encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*. The present series is an endeavour to meet this need and to help readers to understand the Bible as a whole. The series will therefore include, first, studies of the text, making full use of the latest historical researches, then, works of biblical theology, and lastly, studies of the text from the angle of the recently revived "spiritual interpretation"?

This gives an idea of the important thesis underlying the whole series. The present volume on Jeremias, as its subtitle 'his life, work and times' implies, is in the category of exegetical works including a study of the historical background. The author's own 'Avertissement' will best formulate its method:

"This volume forms a sequel to that published on Isaias [by the same author] in the same series. There will be found here, as in the preceding volume, a complete translation of the prophet's writings, distributed and inserted into a connected account of his life and of the history of his times. The confused order of the sections of the Book of Jeremias is even greater than in the case of Isaias, but it is only when the inspired writings are properly attached to a living historical background that they can be read easily and fully understood. . . .

"The French translation of the poetry of Jeremias attempts to adopt a style of sufficient literary quality, not entirely to obscure the beauty of the original. In this matter it owes much to the masterly translation of Condamin. . . .

'Annexed to the work on Jeremias himself I have provided translations of the prophecies of his contemporaries Sophonias, Habacuc and Nahum. The same could have been done for the work of Ezechiel, who began his career at the end of that of Jeremias; but Ezechiel requires a book to himself. Deuteronomy should also have been commented within the framework of the life of Jeremias, but here again too vast an undertaking would have been involved.

'But maybe this book will bring within easier reach a closer knowledge of that prophet whose profundity of thought and agony of spirit has no parallel among all the prophets of Israel.'

The excellence and clarity of this summary by the author has left little for the reviewer to say after giving a translation of it, except to observe how skilfully the programme has been carried out in actual fact. It should, however, perhaps be noted that the Book of Lamentations is (as most usually nowadays) regarded as a later composition attributed to Jeremias

because of its subject-matter (p. 239), and that when studying Habacuc the canticle in Habacuc 3 is regarded as genuine work of the prophet (p. 111), and lastly, that considerable attention is paid to the position of Deuteronomy in the history of the Josian reform: it is maintained that while the book contains certain nuclei of the most primitive origin, traceable back to the time of Moses, these documents were worked over and expanded probably in the time of Ezechias and after, and that this was further enriched after its promulgation by Josias in the time of Jeremias and came thus to partake of his manner, receiving its final form only in the period after the exile (pp. 92-3). The concluding chapter of the book studies the composition of the Book of Jeremias as we have it now and indicates the part played by 'inspired disciples', writers influenced especially by the deuteronomic school, in supplying certain passages now included under the prophet's name.

SEBASTIAN BULLOUGH, O.P.

LE PROPHETE EZECHIEL. By J. Steinmann. (*Lectio Divina* No. 10: Cerf, Blackfriars; n.p.)

For some, Ezechiel is the greatest of the prophets, for others he is not worthy to be called a prophet; for all he is a puzzle. Not one of these three affirmations is without some support and all three are explained in part by the prophet's background. Ezechiel inevitably wears a double aspect: he straddles two epochs, two lands, two literatures, almost (we might say) two theologies. Doubtless this will bring variety and interest but it is sure to bring confusion, too. The oracles of Ezechiel date from the years before and after the destruction of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. After that fatal year Israel's feckless optimism yielded to despair. Now it is characteristic of the genuine prophet that the heart remains fixed upon the unchanging God amongst all human changes; he is neither pessimist nor optimist but realist. If, therefore, the voice of Ezechiel is the voice of threat at first and the voice of promise afterwards (chapter 25 onwards), the change is not in him but in his times: it is one and the same counterweight controlling the wildly swinging moods of Israel. If to this dualism of emphasis we add Ezechiel's excursion (in the closing chapters) into the realm of apocalypse; if we add also the prophet's almost complete silence regarding his own career, we shall readily understand the difficulties of interpretation and the varying evolutions of Ezechiel's work.

M. Steinmann's three hundred pages are an admirable guide to 'the baroque Prophet'. The French public has already appreciated his *Isaïas* and *Jérémie* in this series, as also his *Daniel* in *Temoins de Dieu*. His work is always a model of *haute vulgarization*: personal work on the text itself, easy familiarity with the great commentaries, shrewd perspective, humanistic and living presentation. We note with satisfaction the author's