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Commentaries on New Testament Books

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international politics, and the immensely satisfying interpretation of history in the latter part of the book, the book of Isaiah is particularly timely for our generation.

Perhaps the greatest study of Jeremiah in English is that by J. Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion* (Cambridge University Press). It is not always easy reading, but no effort is too great if it leads to an understanding of this most spiritual and sensitive prophet. Dr. H. Wheeler Robinson wrote three small books, published by the S.C.M. Press: *The Cross of Job*, *The Cross of Jeremiah* and *The Cross of the Servant*. These have now been gathered together and published as *The Cross in the Old Testament* (S.C.M. Press, 1955). This is emphatically a book to read and use. Also very valuable is the same author's *The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* (Duckworth). Of a more general nature is Fleming James' *Personalities of the Old Testament* (Scribners, 1939), a popular study but based on sound scholarship.

A. S. HERBERT.

COMMENTARIES ON NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

RECOMMENDING commentaries is almost as difficult as writing them. Different people look for different qualities: some demand painstaking detail, others an inspiring grasp of a whole argument; some want scholarly caution, others daring novelty; some expect sermons ready-made, others merely a key to the correct understanding of the written word. Any choice of commentaries must be, in consequence, to some degree subjective, and when space is limited, as it is on the present occasion, a writer cannot hide his prejudices in a complete catalogue that will suit all tastes.

In dealing with the New Testament we naturally turn first to the study of the Synoptic Gospels. The acceptance of the priority of St. Mark by the great majority of Protestant scholars has led to much concentration on its sixteen (or fifteen and a half!) short chapters, with the result that we have so many extremely good commentaries that the difficulty is not to find an adequate one to suggest, but to decide which of a number of really satisfactory volumes to omit. Our wisest procedure is probably to confine ourselves to mentioning four that appeal in different ways: A. E. J. Rawlinson's classic contribution to the Westminster series, the detailed and exhaustive treatment of the Greek text by Vincent Taylor (Macmillan), the interesting presentation of St. Mark's story by B. H. Branscomb (Moffatt New Testament), and (though some may be surprised to find too slight a book in such august company!) A. M. Hunter's concise, live volume in the Torch Bible Commentaries. Perhaps the amount of attention given to St. Mark has hindered as adequate a treatment of the other two Synoptic

Gospels. At any rate, as far as work in English is concerned, St. Matthew and St. Luke do not present us with the same embarrassment of riches as does St. Mark. Nevertheless we have three small commentaries on St. Matthew, each of which is good in its own way, that of B. T. D. Smith in the Cambridge Greek Testament, that of F. W. Green in the Clarendon Bible, and that of C. E. P. Cox in the Torch series, and Baptists should need no one to remind them of the volume in the Moffatt Commentary written by one of our own best-loved teachers, Theodore Robinson. Hunter has given us a first-rate little commentary on the Sermon on the Mount under the title *Design for Life* (S.C.M.). Of the older works, Plummer's *Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* will probably be found most useful. On St. Luke we have a first-rate commentary on the Greek text by J. M. Creed, while for those who have little or no Greek there is William Manson's work in the Moffatt series and H. Balmforth's in the Clarendon Bible. Nor must B. S. Easton and Plummer be forgotten. To these works on the separate gospels must be added the invaluable study of the Q material from the pen of T. W. Manson, originally part of the *Mission and Message of Jesus* and now issued separately by S.C.M. in *The Sayings of Jesus*.

While we have nothing in English to equal Bultmann's *Johannes-Evangelium* (despite its faults) in its brilliant union of critical scholarship with intense religious understanding, we are fortunate to be able to use a number of exceptionally fine commentaries on the Fourth Gospel. Here, as in our treatment of St. Mark's Gospel, we may seem to be making an arbitrary selection, omitting some works, particularly older ones, which are more than worthy of mention. We plead limitation of space as our excuse. J. H. Bernard's two volumes in the International Critical Commentary are of great value for their thorough examination of the Greek text, but tend to be rather pedestrian. In complete contrast, *The Fourth Gospel* of Sir Edwyn Hoskyns (Faber & Faber) is a well-stored treasure house in which the discriminating can find endless riches, but from which the less cautious may bring false gems, speculative to the extreme. A safer choice for the average minister would be R. H. Strachan's *Fourth Gospel: its Significance and Environment* (1941, S.C.M.), which, though on a smaller scale and much less suggestive than Hoskyns, is excellent. He might also find helpful the *Gospel According to St. John*, by R. A. Edwards, newly published by Eyre & Spottiswoode. Needless to say, no preacher should overlook William Temple's *Readings in St. John's Gospel*, which at times seems to catch something of the strangely moving quality of the Gospel itself. One more book forces itself into this paragraph and cannot be left out in any discussion of St. John. C. H. Dodd's *Fourth Gospel* is, of course, not a commentary, but is far more valuable than most and will prove a most rewarding study.

Some recent work on the Acts of the Apostles will be found extremely helpful. The little Torch Commentary is of value out of

all proportion to its size: we may be particularly grateful for its insistence that St. Luke's story of the early days of the Christian Church is primarily a religious book. The more detailed and elaborate comments of F. F. Bruce, both on the Greek and the English texts, in spite of what sometimes seems an over-aggressive conservatism, are scholarly and able and serve to balance the monumental *Beginnings of Christianity*, which must continue to dominate all studies of Acts for decades.

Outside the Pauline corpus, the epistles that have been best served in commentaries of the last few years are undoubtedly 1 Peter and the *Johannine Epistles*. E. G. Selwyn has given us a commentary on the Greek text of 1 Peter (Macmillan) which is as good as any ever done on any part of the New Testament, and his work may be supplemented by the smaller but good works on the English version by F. W. Beare (Blackwell) and C. E. B. Cranfield (S.C.M.). As we might have expected, C. H. Dodd's *Johannine Epistles* in the Moffatt Commentary is both profound and readable, an indispensable key to the study of these three letters. A simple, but helpful discussion is that of C. J. Barker (Lutterworth), and we mustn't forget, in our enthusiasm over Dodd, the excellences of Brooke's exhaustive contribution in the International Critical Commentary and of Plummer's comments in the Cambridge Bible and the Cambridge Greek Testament. The view has been expressed that the major epistle of which treatment has been most disappointing is that to the Hebrews. Hunter even goes so far as to suggest that recent work fails to lead us as close to the author's meaning as did A. B. Davidson (Handbook for Bible Classes) and B. F. Westcott, but that may be too pessimistic a judgment. The choice of the present writer would be Moffatt (I.C.C.), Theodore Robinson (Moffatt Commentary), and, despite its date, Peake in the New Century Bible. The discussion of the letter by F. D. Narborough in the Clarendon Bible is good, but very brief. In addition to these existing commentaries, and to demonstrate something of their defects, William Manson's *Epistle to the Hebrews* should be read for a more recent and a promising approach to the meaning of the letter. On the very different Epistle of James we should select Ropes (I.C.C.) on the Greek, and Knowling (Westminster Commentaries) on the English.

In considering the writings of St. Paul we naturally think first of the letter that has had such an influence on the history and thought of the Christian Church, the Epistle to the Romans. To read C. H. Dodd's exposition (Moffatt Commentary) is an exhilarating experience which no student of the New Testament should miss. Those who understand St. Paul's Greek should supplement Dodd's brilliant clarification of the thought of the letter by the use of Sanday and Headlam (I.C.C.) or Denney (Expositor's Greek Testament). Romans, of course, has never been without commentaries that are also theological utterances of the first order. It is

bold to prophesy, but the probability is very real that Karl Barth's torrent of word and thought, translated for us so ably by Edwyn Hoskyns (Oxford), will join their number, and our period is fortunate also in having the superb, if controversial, exposition of St. Paul's thought from the pen of Nygren, recently translated from Swedish. While much of the best work on the Pastoral Epistles has been done in this country, the finest of the commentaries are those from the other side of the Atlantic; for in addition to the excellent Moffatt Commentary by E. G. Scott we now have the outstanding contribution of B. S. Easton (S.C.M.), written with that scholar's typical thoroughness and clarity. Space forbids more than a list of recommendations on the other epistles: on Galatians, Duncan (Moffatt), and the new short volume by J. A. Allan (S.C.M. Torch Commentary); on 1 Corinthians, Robertson and Plummer (I.C.C.) and Moffatt (Moffatt); and on 2 Corinthians, Plummer (I.C.C.) and Strachan (Moffatt), with Denney (Expositor's Bible); on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Neill (Moffatt); on Philippians, Michael (Moffatt) and Maurice Jones (Westminster); on Ephesians and Colossians, E. F. Scott (Moffatt) with (for Ephesians only) J. A. Robertson (Macmillan).

There remains, apart from some minor letters, only the Book of the Revelation. Here the folk in our churches need guidance perhaps more than anywhere else. The greatest single work, of course, is the International Critical Commentary by R. H. Charles, a work of great erudition and authority, written by one who was an expert in this particular field. But we are singularly fortunate at the moment to have at our disposal a number of excellent simple expositions: Kiddle and Ross (Moffatt Commentary), Hanson and Preston (S.C.M.), and the book by E. F. Scott which must be mentioned, although it is not a commentary proper and which cannot be too highly praised as an introduction to the Apocalypse, *The Book of the Revelation* (S.C.M.).

Let it be confessed, before we conclude, that sometimes even the best of the commentaries we have mentioned may seem boring. How often a commentator seems to find great interest in what does not interest us at all! Indeed, there are occasions when a mass of apparently irrelevant detail tends to obscure rather than reveal the living message of the Bible. Yet, when all is said and done, a commentary is only a tool, sometimes quite uninteresting in itself, but indispensable for the making of many an exciting discovery. Without it our sacred book, written centuries ago in a different intellectual clime from our own, would withhold many of its treasures from us. We must never forget that the commentator himself is often more conscious of his failures than are his readers. The preacher, who knows only too well the heart-breaking realisation of how far his spoken pulpit words have fallen short of the inspiring quality of the text they were intended to proclaim, should be the first to appreciate the commentator's difficulty and to accept gratefully what he has

to give; and when, as happens oftener than we realise, the miracle takes place and the word becomes alive, the minister should be the first to see and acknowledge, not only the erudition of the great scholar, but the inspiration of the man whose mind has been illumined by the Holy Spirit.

S. I. BUSE.

CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY

IN our July issue Principal Champion wrote concerning ministerial candidates who seek entrance to a college affiliated with the Baptist Union. The same regulations, of course, apply to the Irish College, Dublin.

Similar guidance should be given to those who intend to sit for the Baptist Union Qualifying Examination. Evidence will be sought of the sense of vocation, aptitude for the high and holy office, and loyalty to the denomination. In addition, the minister should be satisfied as to the adequacy of the reason for not applying to College, and he should stress the fact that nothing can equate the advantages of collegiate training. A full explanation should be given of the serious test contained in the examinations, including a knowledge of New Testament Greek. After securing the blessing of his own Church the candidate should seek interview by the Ministerial Recognition Committee of his local ASSOCIATION. If he is approved there he will then be interviewed by the Ministerial Recognition Committee of the Baptist Union, meeting in London. That Committee will, if it is so led, give him permission to accept a pastorate and prepare for the examinations of the Union for non-collegiates. If he gives satisfactory pastoral service in one Church for three years and passes the required First Examination his name will then be placed on the List of Probationers. After another three years' satisfactory pastoral service and passing the Second Examination his name goes on to the Full List. The man in question is then in every respect on an equality with his collegiate brethren.

For all candidates, collegiate or non-collegiate, the financial aspect should be emphasised. While none is rejected because of inability to meet the considerable expense involved, yet every man is expected to do his utmost to make a fair contribution towards the same. University students during vacation willingly engage in remunerative posts to enable them to bear at least a part of the cost of training, and candidates for the Ministry should be prepared to do the same.

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