

SAMUEL ROLLES DRIVER

1846-1914.

It may be said of Driver, as of many great scholars, that his life was uneventful. He was born (in 1846) of well-to-do parents, went to school at Winchester, thence gained a scholarship at New College, where he afterwards became a Fellow, and continued to live in Oxford till his death in 1914. He travelled little, had no very striking experiences, and was never much before the general public. His was in fact the usual academic career, though marked by unusual distinction. Yet from another point of view, and quite as truly, no man was ever more vividly, more acutely alive, more strenuously active in the work that he had to do, or (at least in his later years) more persistently exposed to the shocks of controversy in consequence of it. This keenness of interest has been well shewn in the portrait of him painted by Britton Rivière in 1909-10, and now hanging in the lodgings of the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Christ Church.

Most people, outside University circles, know of him as the champion of the higher criticism of the Pentateuch, but this was a development which was rather forced upon him, although it came to occupy most of his energies. It was not Driver's way to adopt a point of view and then set out to find reasons for doing so. His life was one of systematic preparation and progress. He was a great biblical critic because he was first a great Hebrew scholar, and he would not have been so great a Hebraist if he had not been a fine classical scholar. It was his early training in classical Moderations and Litterae Humaniores at Oxford which, combined with the natural straightforwardness of his mind, gave him precision in Hebrew Scholarship, enabled him to estimate evidence, and caused him to reject without hesitation theories which could not be supported by facts. This straightforwardness, accuracy, precision, he succeeded in communicating to others. He could not tolerate anything slovenly in the work of his pupils or fellow-scholars. If Driver read your proofs you had to be careful. Any rash conjecture, any over-statement, any loose argument would elicit the remark, 'Oh, you know, you can't quite say that,' and you altered it. His own proofs must often have been a sore trouble to printers. He would add or delete, correct or re-write

remorselessly again and again, until he was quite sure that he had expressed exactly the meaning he wished to convey.

It is perhaps not generally known that he came of a Quaker family, and many of his characteristics are such as one associates with the best members of that Society: his reverence and common sense, and even a certain shrewdness which made him a good man of business as well as a great scholar. His natural reserve may also be part of the same heritage. To most people he seemed cold, almost unfeeling, but this was very far from being the case. To his friends he was loyal and affectionate, to his family he was devoted, but feelings never prejudiced his sense of justice, any more than reverence interfered with biblical criticism.

It is not proposed to give here a bibliography of Driver's work. Indeed it would be impossible to do so, for much of it (and by no means the least valuable part) was done in helping others, and is only known, if at all, from a sentence in a preface. The amount of patient labour which he lavished in this way is almost incredible, for there has hardly been a book published in Oxford during the last twenty-five years on Hebrew or biblical subjects which does not owe something to his guidance. Apart from numerous contributions to periodicals and books of reference, the list of his independent publications is remarkable. A few only will be mentioned as being typical of the various sides of his activity.

After becoming Fellow of New College in 1870, he was for some years engaged in tutorial work, but found time to work at Hebrew, reading especially the mediaeval Jewish commentators with the help of the late Dr. Neubauer, who had recently settled in Oxford through the influence of Pusey. The chief result of their collaboration was a work on the 'Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah' according to Jewish commentators, to which Pusey contributed an introduction (1876-7). This literature, however, did not afford sufficient scope for his special qualities of mind, and he did not long continue to be interested in it. The work in which he shewed those qualities to the best effect is his 'Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew' (1874), undoubtedly his finest piece of scholarship, and a sure foundation of all Hebrew syntax. It put him at once in the front rank of Hebrew scholars, and it was largely owing to the reputation he gained by it that he was invited to join the Old Testament Revision Company (1876). He was still young enough (at the age of thirty) to be strongly influenced by another young member of the Company, W. Robertson Smith. The latter's boldness and originality, combined with great learning and breadth of view, were a valuable stimulus, and did much to deter-

mine the course of Driver's subsequent development. At the same time Driver himself had a very decisive influence on the work of the Company. Another member of it speaks of his 'great mental excitement at the meetings', and those who knew him can well imagine the keen earnestness he would display in the discussion of difficulties. The Revision continued till 1884, and it was this experience, together with his association with Robertson Smith, which more than anything else decided his exclusive devotion to biblical criticism. When Pusey died in 1884, Driver's work on the Revision, and his now famous 'Hebrew Tenses', chiefly accounted for his appointment as Regius Professor.

Important in another way was his 'Commentary on the Books of Samuel' (1890). This was valuable as a commentary, a style of work in which he excelled, but even more for the introduction in which he gave, for the first time in English, a compendious account of Hebrew palaeography. It was the first of a long series of commentaries—on Leviticus (1894), Deuteronomy (1895), Joel and Amos (1897), Daniel (1900), Genesis (1904), Job (1906), Minor Prophets (1906), Jeremiah (1906), Exodus (1911). In 1891 appeared his 'Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament', which for the first time made the results of criticism generally accessible even to those who are not specialists. His principle may be said to have been *quod ubique quod ab omnibus*. It was never his object to startle the world. Nothing could have been more distasteful to him. He aimed at sifting facts from theories, and presenting what was certain in the best form, content to under-state his case rather than to gain an effect by straining the evidence. In this sense the Introduction especially was a masterly summing-up, remarkable for its lucid treatment of obscure questions, and of permanent value as an example of sound method. That Pusey should have been succeeded in the professorship by Driver was indeed a sign that the old order had changed. Even those who could not accept the teaching of the modern school had begun to feel that there was a problem to be solved, and not a new one either, though Pusey put it aside. It was the first duty of his successor to deal with the problem, to shew that it is possible to treat the letter of the text as human literature without prejudice to belief in the divine spirit in it. Thus in biblical criticism, as in all enquiry, it was Driver's aim not to close discussion, but to open the way to it. He was precise in decision where the facts allowed, but always ready to consider the bearing of new facts. It was the principle of free enquiry for which he strove, and he would have been content to mark a stage on the road if he found he could not reach the goal.

The publication of the Introduction, though it was no new development of his views, at once marked him out as the protagonist of the 'Higher Criticism' in England, and he was exposed to all kinds of abuse from persons who were unable or unwilling to understand his work. To a man of his modest, retiring nature such a position was excessively painful. He did not resent criticism, still less did he regard it as a personal affront, but he was distressed that any one should mistake a plain issue, or misrepresent an argument. He was always willing to believe that perhaps he had not expressed himself clearly enough, that his opponent was as genuinely in search of truth as he himself, and he would take infinite pains (often by a private letter) to explain his meaning more fully. Much as one often regretted the time spent in controversy of this kind, the result of it no doubt was to spread an interest in biblical criticism, and it was in this way that Driver, in spite of himself, became known to the world outside scholarship.

One other book must be mentioned as illustrating a different side of his character. He was not by nature given to popular exposition, but his 'Parallel Psalter' was a work of this kind. He was himself scrupulous in the use of language, and had a keen appreciation of English literature, so that the beauty of the Prayer-book version of the Psalms specially appealed to him. At the same time his scholarly instincts were troubled by its manifest defects as a translation. He therefore produced a translation of his own closely following that of the Prayer-book and printed opposite to it, with the minimum of notes and discussion. It shews him at his best, and one cannot doubt that it was a labour of love.

He married in 1891. Up to that time he had lived wholly for his work, taking no thought of his health. He now became less of a recluse; under the gentle care of his wife his health improved wonderfully, and he seemed younger and brighter. What is perhaps more remarkable, in spite of the distractions of domestic life, his literary activity greatly increased—in fact, nearly all his best work was done after 1890.

He received honorary degrees at Dublin (1892), Glasgow (1901), Cambridge (1905), Aberdeen (1906), and became Fellow of the British Academy in 1902. His work was no less appreciated abroad, and though he had no facility in speaking foreign languages, he was on friendly terms with most foreign scholars in his subject. When he attended (for the first time) the Oriental Congress at Algiers in 1904 he was chosen unanimously president of his section. It was a small thing, but it gave him genuine pleasure, and (such was his

modesty) caused him some surprise. In 1910 he was made a Corresponding Member of the Prussian Academy.

He died in 1914 before the war was in sight, and thus was spared the peculiar distress felt by all who have had intimate relations with Germany. By his ceaseless activity he did a great work, and he lived long enough to see the fruit of his labours. Old Testament scholarship under him was entirely transformed, and by his example, his teaching, and his encouragement he built up a school to carry on his principles. The problems may change, but the spirit of free enquiry, for which he contended, must always remain the first condition of all progress.

A. COWLEY.