

Post-Exilic Judaism

The Baird Lecture for 1934

Post-Exilic Judaism

BY

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To
PRINCIPAL MARTIN
AND THE
SENATE OF NEW COLLEGE
EDINBURGH

O dulces comitum valete catus

P R E F A C E.

THE title of this volume has been chosen in order at once to define its aim and to mark its limitation. Its leading purpose is to trace the character of the new polity which was constituted by the men who rebuilt the temple and restored the cult at Jerusalem. In order to discover this, it has been necessary to submit the documents which bear on the period to a fresh examination, to seek to determine their relative dates, and thus to explore the factors which contributed to the development of the new community. But the ultimate end of this inquiry has been to bring to light, so far as possible, the ideals and the convictions of the men who guided the movement. For it was these, as embodied in the restored institutions, which strongly influenced, though they did not wholly control, the life of Jewry, both in Palestine and in the diaspora.

The title, however, also serves to mark the limitation of the volume. It has not been found necessary to include any discussion of the work of Nehemiah. That leader's chief contribution was the rebuilding of the city-wall, but he does not seem to have intervened

in the work of reconstruction which was going on inside that wall. At the utmost he may have lent the weight of his authority as Persian official to the measures by which other leaders were restoring a Jewish polity. His Memoirs reveal a picturesque and vigorous personality, and serve to show the characteristic qualities of a devout Jew in that period. They are also suggestive to the historian in the glimpse they give of the Persian court and its relation to its provinces. But they contribute little to the understanding of post-exilic Judaism. That was well under weigh before Nehemiah arrived, and would have continued, although Jerusalem had remained an open town.

The author takes this opportunity to acknowledge his debt to the Baird Trustees who appointed him their lecturer. The discussion of an Old Testament question does not receive a ready hearing in a time which has so many and so urgent problems to face. When, also, a student's work departs widely from received opinion on its subject, he is apt to suffer peculiar neglect. For he must give in full the reasons which have driven him into dissent, and then he discovers that a discussion which necessarily involves some technical detail appeals only to those who desire more than results, even the reasons for these results. I am deeply grateful to the Trustees who have made it possible to publish a study which, without their confidence, would have been impracticable.

Yet this confidence implies a responsibility, since the Trustees administer a fund which was devoted to the purpose of maintaining the Christian faith.

The responsibility is no new one. It began when the author vowed allegiance to the Church of his baptism and his ordination: it was renewed when he was entrusted with the task of training Divinity students in the meaning of the Old Testament: it ends with the act of the Baird Trustees. When the author demits the task to which the Church commissioned him, he may not claim to have fulfilled his obligation, but he does claim never to have lost sight of it. The Old Testament is not merely one of the oldest and most influential religious manuals in the world: it is also one of the Church's final standards for faith and life. Unless these things are true, time spent in its study ranks with devotion to archæology. The time the author has spent with it has not been lived in the past. For the book remains alive, alive with the exultation and the agony of a great-hearted nation, alive with the voice of God, who through it speaks to men.

I have also to acknowledge the generous way in which my friend the Rev. Geo. S. Gunn, B.D., of Juniper Green, has come to my help, not for the first time, in the revision of the proofs. Mr Gunn's quick appreciation of the bearing of the discussion, as well as his exact mind, has been of great assistance.

ADAM C. WELCH.

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