

# The Princeton Theological Review

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## SPIRITIST THEOLOGIANS

Theologians have rarely been very popular persons, while they lived, and of late years have been very unpopular. After they were dead,—using the word in its ordinary sense,—some of them have become more popular and gained a fame, wide and lasting, in inverse ratio to their former infamy. Now there is arising among us a new order of theologians at present very popular, who derive their popularity from the fact that they are either dead,—still using the word in the ordinary sense,—or consider themselves to be so related to the dead that they can speak for them, become their amanuenses, see to the publication of their posthumous books, and act in a general managerial capacity for them. Thus the dead in a very realistic sense are now speaking (so it is believed) not as having joined

the choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead who live again  
In minds made better by their presence

but as claiming to revisit the glimpses of the moon, visibly and audibly. Miss Agnes Repplier has with inimitable grace and wit complained to her large circle of admiring readers of “the determined intrusion” of “Dead Authors” who “force an entrance into our congested literary world competing with living scribblers.”<sup>1</sup> It must now be added that the spirits have taken to teaching and lecturing on theology using their agents among the living as partners or organs. They announce their presence by apparitions in haunted houses and elsewhere, by sitting, or standing, for their photographs, usually quite uninvited, by showing

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<sup>1</sup> *Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1918.

make its history a series of contradictions, can never speak with finality. It substitutes human speculation for divine authority, the sanction of the shifting modern view-point, for the tremendous certitude, "thus saith the Lord." Its "yea and amen" of today may be its "anathema" of tomorrow. And men want finality, and certainty when they face the deep and ultimate problems of life and death, duty and destiny, sin and salvation. This, reform Judaism cannot give them. It does not "claim to offer the final or absolute truth." Men also want help; and a religion of self-help and self-sufficiency, however flattering to man's pride and self-righteousness has no message for the sin-sick and despairing. Reform Judaism will appeal strongly to the ninety and nine "just persons" who needs as they think no repentance. But for the "sinner" it has no message. Its doctrine of self-help is an affront to his helplessness and offers no relief from the burden of his sin. For one ensnared in "the sensuousness of earthly existence" it is no comfort to be told that "he will suffer annihilation like the beast," unless he is constantly "striving toward the highest." For that is the one thing which it is impossible for him to do. Reform Judaism is emphatically not a religion of redemption. For the "down and out," it has no message for they cannot help themselves. It is the glory of Christianity that it is a religion, *the* religion of redemption. To the helpless and despairing sinner it comes in "sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love" ready to save unto the uttermost through the grace which God supplies in his eternal Son.

It will be recalled that one of the results of Moses Mendelssohn's attempt over a century ago to liberalize and rationalize Judaism was that almost all his immediate descendants left the Synagogue for the Church. Mendelssohn stood as Dr. Kohler tells us "at the beginning of the new era." "In the Mendelssohnian circle the impression prevailed, as we are told, that Judaism consists of a system of forms, but is substantially no religion at all" (p. viii). What wonder then that Mendelssohn's descendants became Christians! Dr. Kohler assures us that reform Judaism is not a religion of redemption. As he describes it, it is little more than a religiously colored doctrine of self-help. It is in this very fact that true Christianity finds and should recognize its unique opportunity: not, to compromise with reform Judaism; but, to offer to the reform Jew who is vainly seeking to save himself the Gospel of Salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

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OSWALD T. ALLIS.

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## EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

*The Book of Genesis.* By SAMUEL A. B. MERCER, Ph.D., D.D., Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament in the Western Theological Seminary, Chicago. Milwaukee: Morehouse Publishing Co.

This little volume is one in the "Biblical and Oriental Series," whose object is "to make the results of expert investigation accessible to

laymen." "Each volume constitutes a unit, and is planned as a guide to eight months' work of an hour or more a day." After some directions to the student, among them directions to provide himself with four or five other books as helps, there follow 232 Studies, consisting each of a list of passages in the Bible and in the helps to be read, of some brief statements and comments, and of questions to be answered in writing. The compilation seems to be well done from the point of view of the author.

The aim of the work is not to acquaint the student with the book of Genesis so much as with how the school of critics who reject the historicity of the book may yet get religious value from it. If a student will work through these studies and accept their teachings, he will know a great deal about the contents of Genesis, much more about the theories and arguments of this school of critics, and next to nothing about the contrary views and the reasons for them. Indeed he will suppose that all intelligent people have given up belief in the historical trustworthiness of the book. At the same time, if he accepts the theory of Dr. Mercer—the high Anglican view,—that the Church has authority and is able to guard its children against the errors of its sacred books, he will have the same faith in the Church with which he began, less faith in the Bible, and more faith in the spiritual ingenuity of the critics.

It would be well if critical scholars who believe in the historicity of the Scriptures would prepare such guides to study, as didactically able as this, only giving their readers more direct contact with the books of Scripture and less with even their truer theories about Scripture.

*New York City.*

F. P. RAMSAY.

## PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

*A Book About the English Bible.* By JOSIAH PENNIMAN, Professor of English Literature in the University of Pennsylvania. New York. The Macmillan Company. Cloth, 12 mo. Pp. 444. Price, \$2.25.

This admirable handbook will prove of interest and helpfulness to all who desire to study the Bible from the view-point of literature, as indeed the greatest English classic. The author deals with the book as a whole and with its separate parts, with fine literary discrimination and with an appreciation of the content and message of the individual books. After discussing the sources and background of the Old Testament and the New, the writer deals with the poetic forms and sources of imagery and then outlines the content of the different books. He then adds a series of chapters dealing with the history of the Bible as translated into the English languages, considering the various versions including a chapter on "Modern Revisions of the English Bible, 1881 to 1917."

*Princeton.*

CHARLES R. ERDMAN.