

The Doctrine of the Prophets
A.F. Kirkpatrick
The Presbyterian and Reformed Review 5:138-139. [1894]

Prof. Kirkpatrick's book may be called a combination of general and special introduction to part of the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. The lecture form, in which these essays were originally delivered, has imparted to them a freshness and clearness, a freedom from all unnecessary detail, which will make them attractive even to the unprofessional reader. We have found the perusal not only enjoyable, but also highly instructive; and were confirmed in our opinion that the study of Isagogics would profit much if a joint treatment of the external questions and of the contents of Scripture could be more largely applied.

The Introduction gives information about the critical views presupposed in the lectures. The human side of prophecy is strongly emphasized and in words that might make us fear more serious results than the author has in reality reached with these maxims. As it is, Obadiah and Joel are given the earlier date and treated as the oldest of the prophets. The contents of Isaiah are divided over three periods, that of Isaiah proper, that of the exile, and that of the postexilic period, in which last chap. 24-27 are claimed to have originated. The minor portions of the Book of Isaiah, the genuineness of which is denied, are left undiscussed. Zechariah 9-14 as a whole is assigned to the times after the exile. Far more serious, however, than these particular conclusions seems to us the general statement "that it is difficult to see how our Lord and His apostles (with reverence be it said) could have done otherwise than accept the current nomenclature of the time. The critical questions and the issues which they raise were not before them, and their acceptance of what was then universally believed, cannot be legitimately regarded as precluding critical inquiry. . . ." This does not cut so deeply as the appeal to the doctrine of Kenosis that has lately come into vogue. It is merely a revival of the old rationalistic principle of accommodation. It does not even say that Christ was ignorant in matters of criticism. Still such a view cannot but work a complete revolution in our whole conception of Christ's prophetic office.

That Hosea and Amos and the oldest prophets in general do not create or introduce new religious ideas, but simply call back the apostate people to the old, is duly insisted upon. Too indiscriminate, we think, is the repeated statement that all prophecy is conditional. In other passages the author admirably states how the prophets declare even in times of the greatest apostasy that Jehovah will nevertheless remember His covenant for His name's sake, or for David His servant's sake. There is an absolute as well as a conditional element here. If the author's interpretation of Isaiah 7, making the virgin either a young woman of that time or a freely chosen figure, be correct, the New Testament is incorrect in connecting this prophecy with the virgin-birth of our Saviour. A slight modification in the direction of Orelli, who understands by the virgin the congregation of Israel, and finds the element corresponding to the virgin-birth of Christ in the miraculous rise of the typical Immanuel, would have avoided this implied assumption of error. Occasionally exception might be taken to the literary judgment expressed, as, for instance, when it is said of Jeremiah, that he was a man of no great intellectual power as a poet. But these are isolated cases. As a whole the book is a model of appreciative and sympathetic treatment of the subject.