

INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT, by Georg Fohrer, translated by David Green. *S.P.C.K.*, London, 1970. 540 pp. 55s.

CRITICAL ESSAYS ON THE OLD TESTAMENT, by Ivan Engnell, translated and edited by John T. Willis. *S.P.C.K.*, London, 1970. 303 pp. 50s.

Each of these works, highly different in character, is in its way a valuable addition to the S.P.C.K. series. G. Fohrer's book is the translation of an introduction to the Old Testament which has become standard in German where it was published in this form in 1965. Engnell's essays are taken from the encyclopaedia *Svenskt Bibliskt Upplagsverk*, whose second edition he edited in 1962. Their importance is that Engnell has as good a claim as anyone to be called the founder of the Uppsala school of exegesis of the Old Testament, but exerted his influence chiefly through his pupils, writing little, and that in Swedish; even his encyclopaedia articles have, then, a certain value as the *ipse dixit* of the master.

Fohrer's work has the virtues and faults characteristic of German scholarship, a determination to list exhaustively every shade of opinion held on a subject, but yet an amazing clarity of presentation. G. Fohrer is scrupulously fair to those whose views he presents, but one sometimes wishes that he had devoted less space to discussion of views and more to proving that opinion which he himself adopts. But on the whole the treatment is magnificently comprehensive, and though the book does not make easy reading, it is an invaluable reference work. A full introduction is given on the literary types current in ancient literature, both biblical and extra-biblical, and each section (e.g. wisdom or poetic books) begins with a survey of literature of this genre in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the rest of the Near East. Then a most competent introduction is given to each book, in which formation, literary method, purpose and date are discussed. When so much is included it is perhaps ungenerous to complain that Fohrer is rigorously business-like, and allows little warmth or theological richness to invade his discussion; the book is not spiritual reading! In the confined space of a review one can do little more than mention interesting views which are well defended: 'the source stratum J' is dated as late as 850-800 (p. 152). Noth's theory of the Deuteronomistic history is refused (p. 194-195); these books 'never formed a literary entity'. The Song of Songs, for which a naturalistic interpretation is the sole reasonable one, was included in the Canon chiefly

because of its association with Solomon (p. 300). Qoheleth is explained by leaning heavily on the Gilgamesh Epic (p. 341). The quasi-magical effect of writing down a prophet's words attributed to the prophetic circles (p. 360) seems rather silly and unproven.

Very different from this careful arguing is the style of Engnell's articles. This is, of course, partly understandable, since an encyclopaedia cannot set out to prove everything it asserts. Clearly the articles intend to set out rather than to prove a position. The two poles round which they all revolve are oral tradition as opposed to written (a question on which G. Fohrer validly takes issue with him, *Introduction*, p. 39) and the cult, for Engnell was much influenced by the Myth-and-Ritual school of the 1930s. Thus the essay on Old Testament Religion is dominated by an extreme statement of the dependence on Canaanite religion (p. 35ff); this raises the interesting question of how far one can admit that human factors governed the development of Hebrew religion, not surely as far as saying that 'the Mosaic religion simply cannot be explained without assuming the existence of an initial figure of Moses' stature' (p. 38), in which no initiative is left to God at all. Omnipresent is the supposed New Year Festival; it is the key to the interpretation of the psalms (chapter 5) and the exodus narrative is a 'historicizing representation of an original cultic myth' at the New Year Festival (p. 203ff.) whose details concern a ritual procession with parallels at Ras Shamra. The same is true of the wilderness wanderings (p. 213). It is unfortunate that the evidence for this enthronement and New Year feast in Israel is so meagre; even for non-Jahwistic Canaanites Engnell can cite only Judges 9:27, and on page 183 he admits that material is scarce. There are surely dangers in the *a priori* assumption of a uniform religious pattern which extended also to a people who considered themselves so different from their neighbours. The whole standpoint of the articles, therefore, more interesting as illustrating the point of view than convincing as reliable scholarship.

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