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THE DOMINION PRESBYTERIAN,
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Ottawa, Wednesday, Feb. 26th, 1902.

A MASTER IN ISRAEL.

Although Dr. Davidson of the Free Church College, Edinburgh, was over seventy years of age, the news of his sudden death has come as a shock and surprise to his admirers on this side of the Atlantic. We were hoping that he would be spared to complete to his own satisfaction the "Commentary on Isaiah" and the volume on "Old Testament Theology." If these works had come forth from his sound scholarship and mature judgment they would have been of great service to other workers in the same field. Let us hope that something of the work thus prepared will be available for publication, as there are many problems in that connection upon which he would utter wise words. This is how the news of his death is communicated by the Edinburgh correspondent of the British Weekly.

"Sunday, Jan. 26th. To-day a great light was quenched in Scotland. For well-nigh half a century it has burned with unflinching brightness; and it has kindled a host of other fires. A man of genius, he combined therewith the spirit of a little child. No teacher so thrilled his students, as he made the prophets of the Old Testament live again. It is probable that latterly he had over-worked himself. On Saturday he retired to rest specially contented because he had finished the proofs of the 'Temple' Isaiah for which he had been pressed. On Sunday morning, shortly after eight o'clock, he suddenly complained of sharp pain in the back, and in a moment was translated. His face wears an aspect of deep peace which the great weary master had latterly sought."

Dr. Davidson took his M. A. degree in 1849, at the age of 18, and in the more than half a century that has passed since then, he has toiled with immense success in many fields of learning, but especially in the field of Hebrew literature. The proper handling of Old Testament subjects in these days needs careful scholarship, literary skill, philosophic insight and reverent sympathy. All these qualities Dr. Davidson possessed in the highest degree and he placed them all at the service of his students and of the Church. Dr. G. A. Smith says:

"Some lines of Old Testament Science—though he was expert and capable in all—he did not pursue. But in those to which he gave himself, he was, by a singular combination of gifts, easily pre-eminent. There was no more thorough linguist or grammarian; his knowledge of Arabic and Syriac was only less perfect than that of Hebrew. In criticism the keenness and sanity of his judgment were unflinching. In textual emendation, as in exegesis, his ability to detect arbitrariness, excess, want of proportion, or injustice to the standpoint and circumstance of the original author, were the joy of all who followed him in his expositions. Combined with these gifts, he had a deep vein of mysticism, a very real religious genius, whose originality, however, his intellectual justice never allowed to impose or force a meaning upon any passage."

This is a certainly very high testimony from one competent to judge, but it was not necessary to wait until the great man's death in order to find similar testimony. Many years ago the late Dr. W. G. Elmslie wrote an elaborate eulogium on his old master in which he said:

"He has taught his students patience and self distrust; he has inculcated in them intellectual humility; he has inspired them with a wise dread of that hard dogmatism, believing or unbelieving, which is not faith but rationalism. He has showed them that unbelief has its difficulties as well as belief. He has accustomed them to doubt their own doubts. Better than a more positive thinker could, he has prepared the ministry of the future to encounter a period of strain and transition. For the temper best fitted for such an ordeal is not the unbending hardness of cast iron, but the elastic toughness of steel. They will be ready to give all to criticism that is its due, without fancying that change of form is loss of faith, or fearing that the progress of science will banish the mysterious and supernatural from our world. If the Church of Christ within our borders should pass through the present trial of faith without panic, without reactionary antagonism to truth, and without loss of spiritual power, a very large share of the credit will belong to the quiet but commanding influence of the Hebrew Chair in that College, which rises so picturesquely on the site of Mary of Guises' palace in Edinburgh."

Many more testimonies to the same effect we might quote. Only one more will we give, that of Prof. Bennett, a Congregationalist, who presents the same thought as Dr. Elmslie, with a somewhat different emphasis.

"His own critical position was eminently moderate; while he held the main principles of the modern school, and perhaps did more than anyone else, to secure their general acceptance. He was, if anything, ultra cautious in applying them. He would only commit himself to results that seemed absolutely certain, and he was apt to dismiss extreme positions, and rash speculations with that quiet sarcasm of which he was master."

It is not our business to attempt a full, careful estimate of Dr. Davidson's wonderful work; we are proud of the memory of such a man, and we feel that he belongs not simply to our own Church but to the great universal Church of Christ. He did his work quietly in an unpretending fashion from day to day, and if glory came it came unsought. As a man who put all his powers conscientiously into every piece of work Dr. Davidson leaves to all of us a great and inspiring example.

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THE LATE DR. A. B. DAVIDSON.

There has lately fallen upon the United Free Church of Scotland, a loss in its magnitude and in the keenness with which it is felt, similar to that which so lately befell our own church by the death of Rev. Dr. Robertson. Their labors lay in spheres wide apart. That of one lay in the study, in the college class-room; that of the other was in the wide open field of action and of incessant activity throughout the whole extent of our Presbyterian Church in Canada. Very suddenly, and without warning, on Sabbath morning January 26th, Dr. A. B. Davidson, Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis in New College, Edinburgh, Scotland, passed to his rest. From old country papers to hand we glean some particulars which it will be of interest to all our readers to know, whether they knew him before or not. For he was a man of power, and his name and fame have spread far and wide.

Born in Aberdeenshire in 1831, he passed through the course usual in early life for a Scottish boy, in humble life, who had set his heart upon being a scholar. First, the parish, then the Grammar school, and next the University, and in all he had a most distinguished career. For some years after taking his degree he taught the Free Church School in his native parish of Ellow. Always a hard worker, before he was twenty-five, he was master of French, German and Italian. In 1857 he was licensed to preach, and for six months did duty as assistant for Rev. Dr. MacGillivray, Aberdeen. But oriental languages, Hebrew especially, claimed his chief devotion, and in 1862 he published a commentary on the book of Job, which, although never completed, marked him out as a Semitic scholar of the first order, and led to his appointment, in 1863, first as assistant, then as colleague and successor to the famed Rabbi Duncan of the Free Church New College, Edinburgh, in which, up till the time of his death, Ian MacLaren says, "It is no disparagement to many scholars living and dead who have taught in that place of sacred learning, to say this day, that he was its most famous man, and its singular glory." Tributes are paid to his scholarship and memory by such men as Professor Driver, Dr. George Adam Smith, Stalker, Watson, Cheyne, Margoliuth, Bennett, Salmond and others. "In him," says Dr. Bennett, "another of the great personalities of the Victorian era passes from our midst." Rev. Dr. Stalker says, "He was the true originator in the English-speaking countries of the critical movement, which is now making such vast and rapid progress in them all." Testimonies of a similar kind could be added from the pens of many of the most competent judges to show how great and ripe a scholar has passed away in Dr. Davidson.

Though his published works are thought by his admirers to be but a "scanty harvest" of the splendid promise of his first book, yet he was a voluminous writer of books, which include works in Hebrew, articles in periodicals of a profound and learned character, and in Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias. It is hoped that, beside these, one or more works more elaborate and worthy in some respects of his character as