

EXILE AND RESTORATION, by Peter R. Ackroyd. *SCM Press*, London, 1968. 286 pp. 55s.

The starting-point for this book in Professor Ackroyd's mind was his discovery, in the course of his teaching of the Old Testament, of the book of the little prophet Haggai, apart from Abdias the shortest book of the Old Testament. Beginning from here he was led into a whole new examination and re-thinking of the prophets of the exile and restoration period, 'a study of Hebrew thought of the sixth century B.C.', as the subtitle has it. Too often the prophet Jeremiah has been considered to be the end of all-important writing in the Old Testament, and the period after him treated as a vacuum or at best as New Testament background.

The result of this rethinking was first delivered as the Hulsean Lectures in 1960-1962, which have been reworked to form this book. It is a methodical and well-arranged study of the biblical writings of the sixth century, historical, legal and prophetic, in which the different attitudes of the various authors towards the events of the exile and the return to Israel are considered. It thus makes no claim to be a complete examination of these authors and their theology, but deals only with this one aspect. The first part, which treats the theologians of the exile, is not particularly new, but then the author's chief interest is not here; he is providing only the background and setting, or the build-up, for his real interest, Haggai and Zechariah, the theologians of the restoration. But he succeeds in bringing out different themes and attitudes towards the shattering event of the exile. One does, however, wonder whether such an exhaustive treatment of the subject was necessary, whether the main lines might not have been adequately sketched in the format of an article. The prophets of the exile, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah, the tendencies of the Deuteronomistic historian and of the priestly legal writers have all been pretty fully treated lately, though not of course specifically from this angle.

Professor Ackroyd is on less familiar ground

in the second part, the restoration and its interpretation. It is, however, hard not to feel after reading his admirably clear discussion of Haggai and Zechariah 1-8, that those scholars mentioned in the introduction as failing to find anything of great importance in the restoration period, did after all have a point. If we see the Old Testament as a gradual advance in the revelation of God, in the understanding of his nature and the nature of the community which is his people, which reaches its fulness in the New Testament, it is not easy to see how the reflections of the immediately post-exilic writers on their own religious situation constitute a significant step on this journey. The exile did indeed lead to a deeper understanding of God and of his relationship to his people: he is no mere national god, tied to the institutions of Israel; it led also to a deeper understanding of the nature of his promises to his people: these are not to be realized merely by a continuation and increase of material prosperity, or in continuity with the Davidic line of kingship. The restoration after the exile, on the other hand, does not seem to have occasioned any major new departure. Professor Ackroyd touches upon, but might well perhaps have devoted a larger part of his discussion to, two aspects of Israel's hope in which elements present but less important in earlier theology become of major importance, the universality of the salvation which is to be mediated to the world by Israel, and the renewal of the whole world structure which is involved by this salvation. Particularly an examination of the latter, which becomes so prominent and so puzzling in the apocalyptic literature, would have been most welcome.

The reservations expressed in this review are perhaps out of place. The work is compendious and thorough, containing many illuminating discussions of passages. They spring from a desire to see the scriptures as a whole, centred upon Christ and his Church.

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