



shell, and to rest in the spiritual conceptions of the Bible. However this may be, his devotion to the Old Testament remained throughout his life, and he became one of the most influential English expounders of the new critical views.

He entered on his life-work at a favorable moment. For two hundred years eminent English thinkers had favored and to some extent practised a certain freedom in dealing with Biblical material, especially by laying stress on its higher side; there had been, however, no definite conflict of opinions on this subject before the nineteenth century. The theory of Astruc and the works of certain Continental scholars (especially De Wette, Ewald, Kuenen, Wellhausen, and Renan) had become known in England,[2] and gave an impetus to research. The result was a conflict in the ecclesiastical world. The first clash occurred in a Nonconformist body. Professor Samuel Davidson, of the Lancashire Independent College, had undertaken to edit a new edition of Home's Introduction and was asked to rewrite the volume dealing with the Old Testament. His treatment of the Old Testament, which was freely critical, was pronounced dangerous by the Committee of the College with such emphasis that he resigned his position (1856). In the Church of England, while the Tractarian movement concerned itself little with Biblical criticism, its anxiety being to maintain what it held to be the purity and authority of the Church, a storm was raised by the publication of *Essays and Reviews* (1860); one of the contributors was condemned in the Court of Arches but sustained by the Privy Council. Finally came on the Colenso case. Bishop Colenso was declared deposed by the Bishop of Capetown for his volume on the Pentateuch, and was reinstated by the Privy Council. This put an end to ecclesiastical prosecution in England for what was called critical heresy; liberty of Biblical research was established (1865). A few years later in Scotland Robertson Smith was removed from his chair in the Free Church College at Aberdeen for articles in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; but this action proved ineffective — freedom came to be recognized generally in Scotland.

Such was the atmosphere in which Cheyne began his Old Testament work. It was his commentary on Isaiah, the third edition of which appeared in 1884, that first established him as a scholar of importance. The variety

of his learning, the vital character of his style, and his frankness and courage in the expression of opinion, gradually commended the work to a wide circle of readers, and his ideas, though they called forth opposition, were accepted by a considerable body of students in England and elsewhere. In later years he modified some of the critical views expressed in the commentary, but continued to hold his main conception of the constitution of the Book of Isaiah; so, for example, in his edition of the revised Hebrew text which was published in 1899 in the Sacred Books of the Old Testament. Some other prophetic writings (Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah) he treated in a similar critical manner. In 1888 his volume on the Psalter appeared under the title *The Book of Psalms or The Praises of Israel*, and secured immediate recognition by its fine religious spirit, the incisiveness and directness of its style, and its freedom of thought. Other works which revealed his geniality were *The Hallowing of Criticism* (1888), *Aids to the Devout Study of Criticism* (1892), and *Founders of Old Testament Criticism* (1893). His little volume, *Jewish Religious Life after the Exile* (in the series *American Lectures on the History of Religions*, 1898), though popular in style is helpful to other than general readers. He was one of the first to bring out clearly the value of the Book of Chronicles for the history of Jewish religious ideas in the period in which it was written (the third century B.C., according to Cheyne).

His helpful Old Testament criticism was brought prematurely to a close by his adoption of the theory (due largely to Winckler) that the main part of the records concerning the early history of Israel refer to a district in southern Judah called in Hebrew by a name (*misr*) which usually means Egypt. This district is connected with the Kenites, from whom, it is widely held, the Hebrews derived their initial cult of Yahweh; and the name of one of the clans of the region, *Jerahmeel*, by its similarity in form to Israel and other Old Testament names, suggested to Cheyne that it gives us the central point of the Israelite development. Thereupon in a series of volumes (*Critica Biblica*, etc.) he proceeded to rewrite the early history, substituting the name *Jerahmeel* for a great number of the names in the Hebrew text, undeterred by difficulties confronting such substitution. Though this procedure was generally condemned by scholars, Cheyne held on to it to the last. This unfortunate surrender to a baseless hypothesis was and is

deplored by his friends as a mere waste of fine critical power. But it is generally felt that this lacuna in his critical work must not blind us to the value of the contributions he has made to Biblical science.

His latest literary output (in the volume mentioned at the head of this notice) is probably to be regarded not as a quite new departure, but rather as the formulation of ideas that had been long held by him more or less consciously. Though he had surmounted his early doubt, he seems never to have been in full sympathy with the Church creeds. His various writings show an increasing divergence from prevailing opinions; he was seeking what he thought or hoped to prove a larger scope and a purer atmosphere, and he fell in readily with certain Oriental conceptions and systems that had been making their way gradually in the Western world. He became a member of a Brahmanist Society, and was in intimate relations with the founder of the Bahaist Movement and with his son. He held that peace among nations could be secured only through religious union. Each of the great religions of the present day, he thought, might learn from the others, and a common faith would make all men brothers. Though he affirmed the superiority of the founder of Christianity to all other religious teachers, he seems to have been especially attracted by Bahau'llah and his formulation of religious truth — "one God, and he a God of love." This is by no means a new idea, but it seemed to Cheyne to acquire a new vital energy as preached by the Bahaists, and in his latest volume he supports it with enthusiasm. He does not discuss the details of the hoped-for movement towards universal peace; he does not, for example, consider whether history shows that social fusion and religious unification have always gone hand-in-hand. But whatever the difficulties in his theory and the obstacles to the fulfilment of his hope, the reader cannot fail to be impressed by his religious breadth and the nobility of his purpose.

In considering Cheyne's work as a scholar we must bear in mind the variety of his interests and his diverse intellectual tendencies. He was an omnivorous reader in his own special subjects without losing his hold on general literature — he was, for example, a student of Dante. He seized on new discoveries in ancient history and used them with effect for the illustration of his own researches. He was attracted by new theories, especially when they attached

themselves to generally accepted facts; and his vivid imagination sometimes so clothed these theories with life that they seduced him into precarious generalizations and into unfortunate special pleading. His sympathy with broad ideas was strong, yet it sometimes led him to hasty conclusions which easily became a hindrance rather than a help to progress. He was a simple-minded man, holding to his own views with naive tenacity, aware of the existence of other views, but seemingly not looking on them as things that claimed his serious consideration. Opposing opinions he treated with kindness, never, so far as I have observed, speaking of their authors with bitterness or even sarcastically. His prevailing tone toward his literary opponents was one of gentle wonder and regret that they could fail to see data and inferences as he saw them.

In Cheyne's long career we have to recognize valuable contributions to Biblical criticism and exegesis made in his earlier books, and to honor him for his devotion to all that he believed to make for the discovery of truth and the well-being of men.

#### Notes

The Reconciliation of Races and Religion. Thomas Kelly Cheyne. A. & C. Black, London. Pp. x, 214. 6s.

In America also they were not unknown. It will be remembered that the translation of De Wette's Introduction by Theodore Parker and Frederick Frothingham appeared in Boston in 1848-48.

#### 2. Page scans

#### METADATA

Views6559 views since posted 2015-03-04; last edit 2015-03-06 01:24 UTC;

previous at [archive.org.../toy\\_thomas\\_kelly\\_cheyne](http://archive.org.../toy_thomas_kelly_cheyne)

Language

English

Permission

public domain

History

Proofread 2015-03-04 by Jonah Winters.

Share

Shortlink: [bahai-library.com/4503](http://bahai-library.com/4503)

Citation: ris/4503

select Collection:

Archives  
Articles  
Articles-unpublished  
Audio  
Bibliographies  
BIC  
Biographies  
Books  
Chronologies  
Compilations  
Compilations-NSA  
Compilations-personal  
Documents  
East-asia  
Encyclopedia  
Essays  
Etc  
Excerpts  
Fiction  
Glossaries  
Guardian  
Histories  
Introductory  
Letters  
Maps  
Music  
Newspapers  
NSA-documents  
NSA-letters  
Personal  
Pilgrims  
Poetry  
Presentations  
Resources  
Reviews  
Scripts  
Software  
Statistics  
Study  
Talks  
Theses  
Transcripts  
Translations  
UHJ-documents  
UHJ-letters  
Video  
Visual

[Writings](#)

[home](#)

[sitemap](#)

[series](#)

[chronology](#)

[search:](#)

[author](#)

[title](#)

[date](#)

[tags](#)

[adv. search](#)

[languages](#)

[inventory](#)

[bibliography](#)

[abbreviations](#)

[links](#)

[about](#)

[contact](#)

[RSS](#)

[new](#)

— Thomas Kelly Cheyne (Used by permission of the curator)