

ART. VI.—DIDON'S LIFE OF CHRIST.

Jésus Christ. Par le R. P. DIDON. Paris : Librairie Plon, 1891.

THERE is something about this book which is very fascinating, as is shown by the success which has attended it. It was published this year in two volumes, quickly followed by a smaller edition in one volume, of which many thousands have been sold, and now an English translation has just been issued. At a time when many are inclined to ask, Can any *new* thing come out of Nazareth? such a popularity must result from an unusual merit or novelty; it is probably due to the latter, the book being written by a priest of the Church of Rome. Accurate as the author is, and familiar with the latest results of English and German as well as French scholarship, he cannot lay claim to any originality of exegesis, or brilliance in theorizing. The traditional views are deftly defended, and set in picturesque and earnest phraseology.

If we compare Père Didon's work with the latest three "Lives" by English divines it will certainly not suffer in some respects. Archdeacon Farrar's ambitious rhetoric ill accords with the solemn and sweet simplicity of his subject; and, though he has caught the glitter of the classical world, yet it is the French writer who can make us breathe the cool, pure air of the Judean hills, and hear the little waves splash on the beach of the Sea of Galilee, and see the Master moving about doing good to the people. Again, Dr. Geikie's careful and thoroughly English book, able as it is, lags behind in the direction of literary grace and fire, and for the same reason, though Dr. Edersheim is more learned and original in his own special line than any of the four, he will not be appreciated by so wide a circle, perhaps, as his latest successor. Didon is both accurate and interesting, precise and poetic, evidently knowing all that is to be said, and yet attractive in the manner of saying it. An important feature, too, for readers who above all things value Scriptural truth, lies in the fact that, though a Romanist, Didon evidently, for some reason or other, avoids, as much as possible, all points of debate.

The author begins by an Introduction, in which he deals with the part played by criticism and history in a life of Jesus Christ. Here, perhaps, many would think he was seen at his best; he is perfectly fair and candid, yet gives nothing away. The old shield, sword and buckler are brought out, but newly-scoured and furbished. The style is judiciously mixed; curt, epigrammatic phrases alternate with passages of genuine eloquence.

In the Introduction, the manuscripts, contemporary evi-

dence, prophecy, miracles, *à priori* evidence, and subsequent results of Christianity are all considered in their bearing upon the life of our Lord. The whole really forms a very clear synopsis of the arguments for and against our Lord's divinity as they stand at present. We give as an example a sketch of his treatment of miracles :

If prophecy exists, why not miracles? If there is a prophesied Christ, why not a wonder-working Christ? This interrogation is put, not to the pantheist, materialist, positivist, sceptic, unbeliever or believer—to man. Then the question is dealt with: Does the miraculous happen? and the following answers are imagined :

I. "Miracles are impossible." This is the answer of the pantheist, or positivist. From the standpoint of those systems it is logical, but it is not the reply of man. Who has proved these systems themselves? It is an insult to human dignity that they should treat as knaves and fools all those who said they saw the miracles. But what will pure and impersonal reason say? That a Superior Being is capable of intervening in the laws which He Himself has laid down.

II. "They have not been observed;" present-day science has not met with them. But what does a scientific experience of a few men and a few years prove against an array of past centuries? Nowadays we see no being arise like unto Jesus; yet Jesus has lived. To set the experience of a day or a century against the experience of the history of humanity is so naïve that it disarms criticism.

III. "The Gospel miracles are like the false cycles of miracles." But we must draw an essential distinction between the miraculous and the marvellous: the former is essentially conceivable, implying in itself no contradiction, possessing a *raison d'être* and a moral direction; the latter is often absurd, we cannot find the cause which produced it, its tendency is either useless or immoral. The miracles of Jesus reveal divinity; those attributed to Buddha or Mohammed reveal ostentation, or intimidation. Christ's miracles are *signs*, and, moreover, Christ without His miracles is not Christ. Finally, he sums up by showing that the miracles were written of on, or immediately after, their event; they are in themselves conceivable, and aim at the virtue, instruction and safety of mankind; they are related by men whose holy life and martyrdom attest their sincerity.

The preceding, of course, is only an abstract of the clear and full argument with which Père Didon meets those who, like Matthew Arnold, lay down the axiom that miracles do not happen. He devotes a good deal of attention to this abstract view of the theory of miracles, which indeed everyone will

acknowledge to be of the first importance in discussing the miracles themselves. Unless that point be settled one way or the other, it is of little use discussing the details of the different wonder-works. If one man holds it as an axiom that miracles do not happen, and another that the miraculous is possible, they can never agree, and cannot even enter upon any profitable argument. It would be like trying to learn Euclid without admitting that the halves of equal things are equal.

As an example of the more fervent and impassioned parts of Didon's work we translate the following close to the Introduction :

"Towards Christ, as the Church keeps Him, I want to turn the eyes of this generation.

"She is called ill, He will cure her ; old and taking pleasure in nothing, He will make her young again and bring back her dreams of greatness,¹ for His disciple is a man of eternal hope ; she is accused of being positive, of believing only in the palpable and visible, the useful and pleasurable, He will teach her to see the invisible, to taste the immaterial, to understand that the most useful man to himself and others, to country and humanity, is he who knows how to deny himself, and that of all blessings which refined minds can appreciate, the highest is the sacrifice of self ; she is called mad after pleasure and money, perhaps that is why her strength is failing, for pleasure kills, and money may lead to every vice ; Christ will teach her to disdain pleasure and to use her riches well. In any case, the world is exposed to a thousand griefs, agonies and despairs. All who boast of the joy of living are well aware that this joy has terrible drawbacks, and that the more happy a life is, the more cruel is the death which shatters it. Christ alone teaches the joy of suffering, because He alone inspires the soul with a divine life that no grief can extinguish, that is fortified by trial, and that contemns death, since it allows us to contemplate death with hearts full of hope."

The "Life" proper is divided into five books. The first deals with the period in which our Lord appeared, His birth, youth and education. A general sketch of that epoch is given, in which four great facts are selected for special treatment ; the Roman policy, paganism, Greek philosophy, and Judaism. These are investigated, because, says the author, "the life of Christ does not only form the last scene of a national drama which took twenty centuries to play, from Abraham to the

¹ "Il lui rendra ses vingt ans et ses grands rêves."

destruction of the Jews—it deals with universal history, of which it is the centre and the summit.” The writer is seen to great advantage in this book; with a reverently realistic pen he draws an accurate picture of the Divine Child growing up in His village home, and waiting His appointed hour. While He is getting ready for the task “one of those voices which stir multitudes and bend consciences is breaking up the road and summoning the soul of the nation.”

Accordingly the next book is entitled “Jean le Précurseur et l'avènement de Jésus.” In the course of his remarks on our Lord's baptism Didon writes: “Quiconque, à l'appel du Christ, sortira de ses vices, de son ignorance, de son égoïsme, par le repentir, le sacrifice et la foi, quiconque entrera dans la parole de Jésus, verra, comme lui, le ciel obstinément muré s'ouvrir; les fils de la terre et de l'humanité corrompue deviendront des fils de Dieu, ils entendront, au fond de leur conscience, l'Esprit murmurer ce titre ineffable, et apprendront de lui à nommer Dieu leur Père céleste.”

The third book deals with the Galilean mission and the “Kingdom of God.” The miracles and parables with which this period abounds are treated in a manner that is full of suggestion for the preacher. There can be found not only beautiful ideas, but terse and epigrammatic sentences. For example, speaking of our Lord's fondness for open-air preaching, Didon writes: “Les murs d'un Synagogue étaient trop étroits pour la plus grande parole que la terre ait jamais entendue; il lui fallait le ciel libre, la solitude pleine d'échos, la mer avec le murmure des vagues.” On the deeds of benevolence wrought by Christ in the plain of Gennesaret we read, “The way in which He understands His Royalty is to walk surrounded by all those who are in need. This explosion of goodness is the crown of the Galilean mission.” We select one or two other phrases. “Neither a wise man nor a prophet can save the world; only God.” “Jesus demands heroism, and when He imposes it on man He does so by reminding him that he must act like God.” “They hoped that the movement would die a natural death, but on the contrary it increased, and those who opposed it were brought face to face with this dilemma, to accept God's messenger, or to put Him to death.” “God is known and understood only by those who bear Him living within them.” “The kingdom of God is the kingdom of love, under its most essential characteristic, pardon.”

In the fourth book, the author deals with the struggles at Jerusalem, which preceded our Lord's trial and execution, and on that stormy period he remarks, “Strange! the lowest of the people, sinners and harlots, understood; and the highest, the

self-styled righteous, pontiffs and doctors, cannot see it. It is always so; the manifestations of God to humanity enlighten simple souls and repentant consciences; they blind the minds that fancy themselves to be strong."

When the disciples came to Jesus and asked whether they were few that would be saved, He answered, Strive to enter in yourselves. On this Didon writes very truly:

L'unique question pour l'homme est d'être incorporé au Royaume. S'il entre, il trouvera la vie dans la joie de l'éternel festin, à la table du Père, avec Abraham, Isaac et Jacob, et tous les prophètes et tous les élus des quatre coins du monde. S'il reste dehors, chassé au loin, il aura en partage la douleur sans fin et le désespoir. Mais que l'homme prenne garde: l'entrée dans la maison paternelle et dans le palais du Royaume est difficile, car la porte est étroite. Cette porte est la foi en Jésus—le Messie pauvre et inconnu, humilié et souffrant. Pour que l'homme pénètre par cette porte, il faut qu'il se réduise à rien, qu'il s'anéantisse dans la parole de Jésus et lui sacrifie tout. S'il refuse au renoncement total, il n'entrera pas. Les contemporains du Maître l'ont prouvé; le grand nombre a reculé devant le sacrifice de la foi, préférant, à la doctrine du Sauveur, ses rites, sa science et ses vices; il n'a point été admis à la gloire du Royaume.

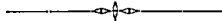
In a similar style our author speaks of the saying of Jesus that wherever the carcass is, there will the eagles (or vultures) be gathered together. Didon applies this to God's punishment: "Par cette image énergique empruntée à la nature galiléenne, le Maître ne formulait-il pas une des lois terribles du gouvernement de Dieu, la loi des destructions nécessaires? Malheur à ceux qui ne se rattachent pas à la vie! Le cadavre, c'est tout ce qui, dans l'humanité, n'a pas l'Esprit vivifiant de Dieu; les vautours sont les forces destructives qui accomplissent sur ces morts, partout où ils se trouvent, les volontés vengeresses de l'éternelle justice."

There is a coincidence of thought between our author and Newman, in noticing that the usual level of Christ's human humiliation is relieved by brilliant flashes of divinity which serve to heighten the perception of His condescension.¹ Newman selects the Epiphany as an example of this, Didon the Transfiguration. Many other points might be noticed, but in this short summary it must be enough to say that the

¹ See the great Hooker: "For as the parts, degrees, and offices of that mystical administration did require, which he voluntarily undertook, the beams of Deity did in operation always accordingly either enlarge or restrain themselves."—*Eccl. Polity*, v. 54.

whole of this fourth book is written in picturesque and vivid style, and yet so that, due regard being had to the slight tendencies of Romanism displayed, one feels that he is always treading on common Christian ground.

It is when we turn to the fifth and final division, "The death of Jesus, and after," that a sense of weakness specially strikes us. If we were about at any length to criticise this work, it is certainly here that we should chiefly turn. The thought is thinner than elsewhere, the treatment is hurried, and worst of all, very little is made out of the Resurrection. The Ascension is dismissed with a few meagre remarks. It is difficult to say why this is; and we can assign no reason, unless it be the fact that the Church of Rome has been, and always must be, from the necessities of an unscriptural system, feeble and defective in dealing with the Resurrection and the Risen Life. The author would not feel compelled to intimately describe the tremendous results of the Resurrection who can write such passages as that with which he closes his Introduction: "Je remets ce livre au jugement infaillible de l'Eglise, approuvant ce qu'elle approuve, rejetant ce qu'elle rejette, me souvenant des paroles de Jésus: 'Qui vous écoute, m'écoute: qui vous méprise, me méprise.'" In short (though this is most prominent in the fifth book) one cannot help being reminded that the author is one of the order of Frères Prêcheurs, that his work is recommended by a warm letter from the Pope through his secretary, Cardinal Rampolla, and that though his Romanist faith is reticent, it is yet present. A.



THE SEVENTY WEEKS OF DANIEL.—(A correction.)—The Rev. W. T. HOBSON writes to us: "I find I have made two very careless mistakes in my figures on p. 75 in my article in THE CHURCHMAN for this month [November] on 'The Seventy Weeks of Daniel,' for which I ask your pardon, and that of your readers, and which I shall be much obliged by being allowed to correct. 1. I wrote as follows: 'Reckoning 490 years from . . . Mr. Guinness' *terminus a quo*'—B.C. 457—'brings us to the year 39, if not to the year 45.' This is obviously wrong. I should have said, 'brings us to the year 33, or rather to the year 39'—Mr. Guinness' date for the Nativity being B.C. 6 of the ordinary chronology. Mr. Guinness himself, in his 'Appendix' Calendar, gives A.D. 34 as the end of the seventy weeks, and A.D. 29 as the date of the crucifixion. But adding the above-mentioned six years to each of these dates, we have A.D. 40 as his end of the seventy weeks, and A.D. 35 as his date for the cutting off of the Messiah. 2. I also wrote: 'Reckoning, however, from B.C. 444, which we have seen good reason for maintaining as the true *terminus a quo*, seven weeks and sixty-two weeks, or 483 years, bring us exactly to Mr. Milner's time for "Messiah the Prince," i.e., His crucifixion, or to the year A.D. 29, which Mr. Guinness rightly assigns as the date of the crucifixion.' But I find that not 483, but 473 years, bring us to that date. My mistake has arisen from too readily assuming Mr. Guinness' date, B.C. 444, as the twentieth year of Artaxerxes.

Taking instead, as I ought to have done, Archbishop Ussher's date for the twentieth of Artaxerxes, A.M. 3550 or B.C. 454, then deducting four years (according to Alford, Farrar, etc.) for the truer date of the Nativity, and adding thirty-three years for the earthly life of our Lord, we have exactly 483 years, or the required 7 + 62 weeks, to Messiah the Prince and His 'cutting off' a few days after His public entry as King into Jerusalem. Wherever the date 'B.C. 444' occurs in my article as my date for the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, my readers are requested to read 'B.C. 454' instead."

Notes on Bible Words.

NO. XV.—"HAPPY."

THE word "Blessed" in the Sermon on the Mount is μακάριοι. Vulg. *beati*. Jeremy Taylor says:

Our excellent and gracious Lawgiver, knowing that the great argument in all practical disciplines is the proposal of the end, which is their crown and reward, begins His sermon, as David began his most divine collection of hymns, with "blessedness." And having enumerated eight duties . . . He begins every duty with a beatitude, and concludes it with a reward; to manifest the reasonableness, and to invite and determine our choice to such graces which are circumscribed with felicities. . . .

In Ps. i. 1, μακάριος (beatus¹; heureux;) "Blessed is the man," R.V. marg., "happy."

עֲשֵׂה, says Gesenius, is upright, or straight on; to be successful, to be fortunate; *happy*: to be congratulated. See Gen. xxx. 13, Asher. "Happy am I; for the daughters will call me happy."

The same word, μακ., in St. John xiii. 17, is rendered *happy*: "Happy are ye if ye do them!" R.V. "blessed."

For μακάριος, also, see 1 Tim. i. 11; "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God." Tit. ii. 13, "that blessed hope." 1 Pet. iii. 14, "but and if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye"; iv. 14.

Prov. iii. 13, "Happy is the man," literally "*blessings of the man*."

In 1 Cor. vii. 40, R.V., as well as A.V., has "she is happier."

In Acts xxvi. 2, "I think myself happy," is ἡγημαι ἑμαυτὸν μακάριον; but in St. James v. 11, "we count them happy" (R.V., *blessed*) is μακαρίζομεν: Vulg., *beatificamus*.¹ This verb—to pronounce blessed (Luke i. 48)—is the Sept. for עֲשֵׂה.

In Rom. iv. 9, declaration of blessedness is μακαρισμός: Gal. iv. 15.

The New Testament use of this word, μακάριος, throws light upon Christian *happiness*, and will help to understand such songs of trust² as that which closes thus:

There are briars besetting every path
That call for patient care;
There is a cross in every lot,
And an earnest need for prayer.
But a lowly heart that leans on Thee
Is happy anywhere.

¹ For *beatus*, the student may compare Hor. Od. iv. 9, *recte beatum*, and Ep. ii., *beatus ille*, "Happy the man . . ."

² Prov. xvi. 20, "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he."