

But this is a digression indeed. I recur to that view of the Lord's commission, which, alike for the pastor and the layman, is at once the simplest and the most sacred—the carrying to the world, as by a messenger who is also a living witness, of the message of the grace of God. Specially for my ministerial brethren I venture thus to point to it once more. May our idea of our ministry never be lowered from this; never allowed to sink into the idea of a merely administrative and ceremonial function, or into that of only philanthropic enterprise. May we live and labour as those who deal indeed with sin and with salvation, and in our Master's Name; as those who know in our own instance how the human heart needs remission, and how it must and does find it in Christ alone. May we minister as those who know their own souls and their own Saviour, so as to enable them to deal with the souls of others; above all, who can say, as those first disciples of the Chamber could, "We have seen the Lord, who was dead but is alive for evermore, and our heart is glad in the sight of Him; now then we are ambassadors in His stead; in His stead we pray you, be reconciled to God. For God hath made Him to be sin on our behalf who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

H. C. G. MOULE.

ART. V.—RICHARD BAXTER.

WHEN Professor Jowett, the distinguished Master of Balliol, occupied the pulpit of Westminster Abbey last summer, he took occasion to celebrate within its walls the honoured name of Richard Baxter. He reminded his hearers that two hundred years had almost elapsed since the great leader of the Nonconformists had been called to his rest. He then proceeded to give a brief sketch of the history of Baxter's life, dwelling especially on that singular narrative of his changes of opinion, which he drew up himself in his old age, and which may be said to be unique in English literature.

Following the example of Professor Jowett, we propose to consider a few points in the life and teaching of this remarkable man, which may not be devoid of interest to serious readers. It will be needless to dwell at length on the details of Baxter's long and troublous life, but a rough sketch of his career may be acceptable. I shall follow in part the admirable outline of the Master of Balliol. It will be noticed that the life of Baxter coincided with a long period of political trouble. He was born in 1615, and he died in 1691. Shortly after his

ordination we find him at Kidderminster, where he ministered for many years with great success. Wonderful stories are told of his preaching. "It may be said, as of the people of Nineveh, who believed under the preaching of Jonah, that so did the people of Kidderminster believe under the preaching of Richard Baxter." For a time he acted as chaplain to the soldiers of the Parliament, when his influence was chiefly directed towards modifying the spirit of sectarian bitterness. After the Restoration, during the short period that toleration was granted to the Nonconformists, he was offered the Bishopric of Hereford, which he declined. He still laboured for peace, but on the 16th of August, 1662, known as "Black St. Bartholomew's Day," Baxter and two thousand Nonconformist ministers were forcibly expelled from their parishes. This is what the late John Richard Green, in his "History of the English People," has to say about the evicted clergy: "The rectors and vicars who were driven out were the most learned and the most active of their order. The bulk of the great livings throughout the country were in their hands. They stood at the head of the London clergy, as the London clergy stood in general repute at the head of their class throughout England. They occupied the higher posts at the two Universities. No English divine save Jeremy Taylor rivalled Howe as a preacher. No person was so renowned a controversialist or so indefatigable a parish priest as Baxter. And behind these men stood a fifth of the whole body of the clergy, men whose zeal and labour had diffused throughout the country a greater appearance of piety and religion than it had ever displayed before."

We cannot follow Baxter in the dark days which followed the fatal mistake of August 16th. His life during the next three years may be best described in the touching language of St. Paul: "In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils by false brethren. . . . Beside these things which are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." One event, however, cast its bright light upon his darkened career. There was a lady of gentle birth, by name Margaret Charlton. She was not more than twenty, and Baxter was nearly fifty, but "she gave herself to God and to him." And for seventeen years, at home and in prison, during every vicissitude of trouble and persecution, this good woman devoted herself to his happiness and care. The pages of Lord Macaulay's History relate, with their usual brilliancy of colouring, the brutal treatment to which Baxter was subjected at the hands of the infamous Jeffreys, and we need here only refer to them. It is, however, pleasant to learn that

the last years of his life, though passed in much bodily suffering, were yet free from the pain of persecution. He employed his time, when increasing infirmities prevented more active labours, in pouring forth those theological tracts and treatises which have made him the most voluminous of English divines. At last, at the age of seventy-six, after a life of extraordinary labour, harassed by persecution, and torn by almost constant pain, this truly good man and servant of God, one of the greatest of English theologians, passed "to where beyond these voices there is peace."

One of the first points which strike the student of Baxter's life is the enormous amount of literary work which he accomplished. Baxter was among the most afflicted of the sons of men. The mere list of his chronic diseases is appalling. "He was diseased literally from head to foot," says his quaint biographer, Mr. Orme; "his stomach flatulent and acidulous; violent rheumatic headaches; prodigious bleedings at the nose; his blood was so thin and acrid that it oozed out from the points of his fingers and kept them often raw and bloody; his legs swelled and dropsical," etc. Mr. Orme might well add that further particulars might be disagreeable, and content himself with saying that Baxter was certainly one of the most diseased and afflicted men that ever reached the full limits of human life. And yet his mind rose triumphantly above his bodily infirmities, and in spite of chronic suffering he wrote perhaps more volumes than any other English divine. Like St. Paul with his thorn in the flesh; like our great Puritan poet in his blindness; like Alexander Pope, who pathetically described his own existence as "that long disease, my life"; like the German Schiller, and our own Carlyle, Baxter's spirit could not be fettered by the chains of physical suffering. His literary activity was extraordinary. He published no less than one hundred and sixty-eight volumes. The immensity of his labours may be better realized if we compare them with some of his brethren who wrote a good deal. The works of Bishop Hall amount, we are told, to ten volumes octavo; Lightfoot's extend to thirteen; Jeremy Taylor's to fifteen; Dr. Goodwin's would make about twenty; Dr. Owen's extend to twenty-eight, but Richard Baxter's, if printed in an uniform edition, could not be compressed in less than sixty volumes, making more than from thirty to forty thousand closely-printed octavo pages.

Both Addison and Johnson thought highly of Baxter's writings. When Boswell once asked the sage which of the works of Richard Baxter he should read, Dr. Johnson replied: "Read any of them, for they are all good." For modern readers, however, the one hundred and sixty-eight volumes, with the exception, perhaps, of "The Saint's Rest," "The Call

to the Unconverted," and one or two hymns, have "ceased to belong to men, and have become the property of moths."

"The Saint's Rest," as a devotional work, will ever rank among the first products of its kind. With the exception of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," it is probably unsurpassed in English literature. It was the first of Baxter's writings, and the story of its composition, as related by its author, is worth transcribing. "While I was in health," he says, "I had not the least thought of writing books, or of serving God in any more public way than preaching; but when I was weakened with great bleeding, and left solitary in my chamber at Sir John Cook's in Derbyshire, without any acquaintance but my servant about me, and was sentenced to death by the physicians, I began to contemplate more seriously on the everlasting rest which I apprehended myself to be just on the borders of. That my thoughts might not too much scatter in my meditation, I began to write something on that subject, intending but the quantity of a sermon or two; but being continued long in weakness, where I had no books and no better employment, I followed it on, till it was enlarged to the bulk in which it is published. The first three weeks I spent on it was at Mr. Nowel's house at Kirby Mallory in Leicestershire; a quarter of a year more, at the seasons which so great weakness would allow, I bestowed upon it at Sir Thomas Rous's in Worcestershire, and I finished it shortly after at Kidderminster." Thus in less than six months, and those months of constant suffering, with no books but his Bible and concordance—the marginal citations, he tells us, were put in afterwards—Baxter wrote the most useful of his multitudinous works, and one which, had he written nothing else, would have placed among the first of English divines. "It is a book," said Dr. Bates, "for which multitudes will have cause to bless God for ever." As a specimen of the exalted style of the work, the very title of which reflects the weariness of the writer, we will select the following beautiful quotation, which occurs in the concluding chapter: "As the pretty lark doth sing most sweetly, and never cease her pleasant ditty while she hovereth aloft, as if she were there gazing into the glory of the sun, but is suddenly silenced when she falleth to the earth: so is the frame of the soul most delectable and divine while it keepeth in the views of God by contemplation; but, alas! we make there too short a stay, but down again we fall, and lay by our music."

Of "The Call," Baxter himself said that God blessed it beyond all his other writings, except the "Saint's Rest." In one single year twenty thousand copies of the book were sold, and it was afterwards translated into almost every European

language. Baxter also wrote much poetry, of which one hymn, "Lord, it belongs not," which may be regarded in the light of a piece of genuine autobiography, is familiar to all:

Lord, it belongs not to my care
 Whether I die or live ;
 To love and serve Thee is my share,
 And this Thy grace must give.
 If life be long I will be glad,
 That I may long obey ;
 If short—yet why should I be sad
 To soar to endless day ?¹

There is another feature in the character of Baxter which demands a few words of recognition—his wise and Christian toleration. Though living in an age when toleration was almost unknown, though the victim of persecutions enough to embitter the most saintly disposition, this good man was specially conspicuous for his wide and Christ-like charity. It was his supreme desire, in the troublous times in which he lived, to use his great influence for peace and toleration. Forms and ceremonies he regarded as of quite secondary importance, if only men would agree to live a life of practical Christianity. When preaching before the House of Commons in Westminster Abbey, he used words which are as worthy of attention to-day as they were in the time of the Commonwealth: "Men that differ about bishops, ceremonies, and forms of prayer may," he said, "be all true Christians, and dear to one another, and to Christ, if they be practically agreed in the life of godliness, and join in a holy, heavenly conversation. But if you agree in all your opinions and formalities, and yet were never sanctified by the truth, you do but agree to delude your souls, and neither of you will be saved for all your agreement." Though a Nonconformist, Baxter could not understand that spirit of narrow exclusiveness which was so marked a feature among his brethren. He bids them read the lives of the saints and martyrs, and become acquainted with the writings of the Fathers, and even to study the biographies of some of the old pagans. It is needless to say that his liberality of opinion and breadth of toleration were often misunderstood. "Zealous churchmen called him a Roundhead, while many Nonconformists accused him of Erastianism and Arminianism." Even his biographer, Mr. Orme, regrets that his writings were not distinguished by a "larger infusion of evangelical doctrine." But surely Baxter's was the most excellent way. "While we wrangle here in the dark," he says, "we are dying,

¹ Two verses are here printed because in several hymn-books they are not printed as Baxter wrote them.

and passing to the world that will decide all our controversies, and *the safest passage thither is by peaceable holiness.*"

But nowhere is the beauty of Baxter's character more clearly shown than in that narrative of his own opinions, which he drew up in his old age. That story, as we have said, is unique in English literature. We see the old man, with the like calm judgment that pervaded his whole life, and in love and charity with all men, looking back on the vista of his past life, and judging himself with an impartial eye. "He sees more clearly his errors and prejudices when at a distance from them, as we sometimes have a wider and clearer view of the landscape when the sun is going down." The narrative is so full of instruction that we cannot forbear from quoting one or two characteristic passages. "The older I grew," he says, "the smaller stress I laid on those controversies and curiosities (though still my intellect abhorreth confusion), as finding greater uncertainties in them than I at first discerned. The Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments are now to me as my daily bread and drink; and as I can speak and write over them again and again, so I had rather read and hear of them than of any of the school niceties." Now that he is older, he regards many things in a different light to what he did as a young man. He is more sensible of his ignorance, and recognises the insufficiency of some of his earlier writings. He has less regard for frames and feelings in matters of practical religion, and lays more stress on the unchanging love of God. He has learnt to attach but little importance to gifts of utterance, and to professions of religion; and he no longer thinks, as once he did, that all who can pray fluently are saints of God. He is less narrow in his principles of church communion than formerly, and is more deeply afflicted at the disagreements and squabbles of Christendom. "The contentions," he says, "between the Greek Church and the Roman, the Papists and the Protestants, the Lutherans and the Calvinists, have wofully hindered the kingdom of Christ." He now lays less stress upon external modes and forms of worship; and is ready, if need be, to hold occasional communion with Greeks and Lutherans, and even with Anabaptists. The contempt and the applause of men are for him of still less moment now that he is so near the great white throne of God.

But we must draw these comments to a close. They will not have been penned in vain if they lead anyone to study more in detail the life of the great Nonconformist, whose portrait, it has been truly said, cannot well be drawn in miniature. And in these days, when a desire for Christian unity is happily growing in our midst, we know of no

biography that may be studied with more advantage than that of Richard Baxter.

JOHN VAUGHAN.

ART. VI.—“THE EARLY HISTORY OF ISRAEL.”

The Early Religion of Israel. The Baird Lecture for 1889. By JAMES ROBERTSON, D.D. Blackwood. 1892.

NO book could be more welcome to lovers of truth than Dr. Robertson's Baird Lecture. For nearly fifteen years the now dominant critical theory has had the advantage of the support of the boldness of Wellhausen, the patient research of Kuenen and the wide learning and critical insight of Robertson Smith. If the theory has not won over the clergy and laity of England, the fault is not in its defenders, but in itself. It has been ably expounded, and it has been illustrated, if not supported, by a mass of learning of every kind. It has been fortunate, undeservedly fortunate, in its champions.

It has been far otherwise hitherto with the theories, such as they are, which have been set up in opposition to it. English writers on the conservative side have not as a rule taken the trouble and time necessary for the investigation of the subject. Indeed, few of them have had a thorough grounding in the preliminaries. Schools in which Hebrew is studied in England may be counted on the fingers of one hand, and even at Oxford and Cambridge the number of men who read Hebrew is ridiculously small, but in Germany the study is a common one in the higher schools, and some even of the smallest of her universities produce Hebrew works of real importance. The truth—the odd truth—is that Germany is interested in the Old Testament literature, while England hitherto—I judge by results, or no results—has been profoundly indifferent to it.

Dr. Robertson's book is to be welcomed in the first place because it shows that deep interest in the Old Testament which has hitherto been lacking. In the second place it is welcome because it goes to the root of the present controversy. The discussion of the mere form of the books of the Old Testament does not necessarily touch any vital question, but an attack on the historic faithfulness of their contents as a whole affects our estimate of the nature and history of God's revelation to men.

The Baird Lecturer begins by reminding us that we have two theories of the History of Religion in Israel. (By “theory” Dr. Robertson means a general conception which professes to