

BRIEF NOTICES.

THE SPEAKER'S COMMENTARY. NEW TESTAMENT. VOL. II. (London: John Murray.) In the seven previous volumes of this large and solid work many excellent commentaries have already been given to the Church by the bishops and other clergy of the Anglican communion; but this last volume excels them all. The exposition of *the Acts of the Apostles*, by Dr. Jacobson, the Bishop of Chester, does not reach any very high level, indeed; but *Canon Cook's Introduction* to that Scripture is very able, and shews not only that he has mastered the best that the "higher criticism" has to say on the Acts, but that he can himself handle it with the ease and power of a master-critic. In short, the results of a good deal of reading and a good deal of thought are here conveyed in a very readable and telling form.

As was to be expected, however, it is *Canon Westcott's* commentary on *the Gospel of St. John* which gives this volume the first place in the series to which it belongs. Nothing better, in some respects nothing so good, has yet been written on that Gospel. The Introduction, which happily is of quite unusual length, is a masterpiece of scholarly and condensed criticism. It is difficult to say whether it is the more admirable for its wide erudition, or for the force of its logic, or for the subtlety and refinement of its style. The steps of the argument by which Dr. Westcott proves that the writer of the Gospel was (1) a Jew, (2) a Jew of Palestine, (3) an eyewitness, (4) an Apostle, and (5) St. John, seem to us quite irrefragable; while the subtlety and power of his critical faculty are conspicuously displayed in his definition of the object, plan, style, historical exactness, and characteristics of the most philosophical and spiritual of the four memoirs of our Lord.

The great and distinctive merits of the Commentary proper seem to be these: that beyond all other expositions known to us it settles the true text of the Gospel, and defines the true meaning of the text, while it analyses the sequence of the Apostle's thought with the most striking delicacy and precision. So far, indeed, is this analysis carried, and so delicate are the distinctions it draws, that, though no one can fail to read this exposition with profit, yet only those who have themselves *studied* the Gospel can possibly appreciate it at its true worth. *Godet's Commentary on St. John* must always hold a

high place for its fine spiritual insight and delicate appreciations of the discourses recorded by the Apostle—discourses so simple in form yet so subtle and profound in meaning. But even in the qualities in which Godet is at his best he is occasionally excelled by Westcott; as, for example, in the analysis and discrimination of the three parables contained in Chapter x. Verses 1-16, where the latter is even more clear, luminous, and penetrating than the former. Not that Godet has been superseded, or even perhaps, on the whole, surpassed, although here and there one can see that his latest successor works with keener instruments and uses them with more exactness. Canon Westcott is forward, indeed, to acknowledge his obligations to him, confessing that he owes more to him than to any other exponent of the Gospel. His work is on a larger scale than Westcott's, and has unrivalled merits of its own. Both are necessary, and even indispensable. But, with the two before him, no student or preacher need be at a loss. If he go to Canon Westcott for textual criticism, for exact definition of the meaning of words, and the force of grammatical construction, and for a brief yet accurate analysis of the sequences of thought, and then turn to Godet for inspiration and for large spiritual views of the passage in hand, he will find himself thoroughly equipped for his work, and need hardly trouble himself to consult other commentaries, unless indeed he mean to write a commentary himself.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF ST. JOHN. *By Erich Haupt.* Translated, with an Introduction, by *W. B. Pope, D.D.* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark.) We hail this volume with unusual satisfaction, not simply nor chiefly for its own merits as an exposition of a difficult and too much neglected Scripture, though these are considerable, but mainly for its method, and because we take it as a sign of better things to come. In Germany especially "*historical criticism*" has long run mad, with most disastrous effects. Of course, any man who undertakes a thorough and scholarly exposition of Scripture must study and weigh the work of all who have gone before him, from the Fathers downward, if, at least, they carry any weight or speak with authority. But it by no means follows that he should compel his readers to go through a course of labour only less severe than his own, by laying before them all the conflicting opinions he has found in his long quest. Yet this is the method of exposition which has prevailed in Germany, and which still prevails.

Its evil results are many and obvious. One of the least of them is that, by this historical recitation of varying and often contrary

opinions, commentaries are made so tedious and wearisome that none but professional students will look at them. A much graver result is that, as a rule, they hardly repay reading. In the hands of some authors this method degenerates into a mere polemic, in which, instead of illuminating the original text, they maintain a running fight with the commentators who have preceded them, and are often so busy in condemning *their* views that it is difficult to ascertain their own. It induces others to substitute mere erudition and industry for original thought and spiritual insight, to aim at weaving a catena of opinions rather than at bringing out "the mind of the Spirit." In still others it breeds that preference of theory over fact, which is the most fatal defect of critic or expositor; one man is drawn a little aside from the foundation on which he ought to build by a theory suggested to him by the *data* before him; another instantly attacks this theory with a theory still further off the lines; and thus theory is piled on theory, and book on book, till they are all in the air together, and come toppling down clean outside the foundation on which they all profess to stand.

These are only some of the ill effects of the obtrusion of the historical method of criticism and exposition. And even the best and greatest commentators of Germany, whom all students *must* read, have been more or less betrayed by this vicious use of an indispensable method. If any one were to separate even from such eminent expositors as Meyer and Delitzsch, Huther and Harless, all that is merely critical, philological, polemic, and historical—all, *i.e.*, which belongs to the mere apparatus of criticism, all that does not help the reader to an understanding of Scripture or even of their reading of Scripture, all, therefore, that ought to be used but not displayed—he would probably be very much surprised to find how small a proportion of their own work would be left, and how much more valuable this residuum would have been had it stood alone.

It is at least the aim of Haupt to dispense with this parade of learning and erudition, and to go straight to his end. And we sincerely trust that his work, and the very cordial reception it has met with in the most critical schools of Germany, may be taken as a sign that a new and better method is about to be adopted by scholars to whom we owe so much, and should feel that we owed so much more if they had not so often made life bitter to us by the weary labour they have exacted of us. The aim of this book has been fairly reached; its author is true to his method throughout. We hear from him, not what other men have thought and said, but what he himself, after weighing their several verdicts,

takes to be St. John's meaning. He makes an earnest and sustained endeavour to trace that meaning word by word and sentence by sentence; to arrive at the fundamental ideas of the Apostle—ideas often embodied in such words as *ζωή*, *φῶς*, *χρῖσμα*, *ἀλήθεια*, *ἀγάπη*, of which he makes a study; and to weave these fundamental ideas into a general and harmonious system of thought. The analysis of the Epistle is clear, luminous, masterly, its main defect being that it is somewhat more diffuse than it would have been in English hands of the same power; and the light often thrown on the fundamental conceptions of St. John is very helpful and welcome.

Dr. Pope's style is somewhat ponderous, and hardly fits him for any marked success as a translator.

THE BIBLE DOCTRINE OF MAN. *By John Laidlaw, M.A.* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark.) On the whole we take this to be the most sensible and reasonable statement of the Biblical psychology of man we have met. While Mr. Laidlaw shews himself familiar with the more important psychological systems of ancient and modern times, he yet gets his "doctrine" straight from the Bible. He sets himself, first of all, to interpret and harmonize the psychological assumptions implied in the language of both the Old and New Testaments, and then, though only as a subsidiary aim, to shew how these assumptions are confirmed by the best thoughts of the wise. The value of his work depends mainly, therefore, on his method of handling the Bible; if that be good, all is well. And it is good. His handling of the Scriptures which relate to the origin, constitution, fall, redemption, renewal, and future life of man is marked by a sobriety still more rare than the penetration and insight by which it is accompanied, and betrays a faculty for exposition which will, we trust, be developed and employed. It is especially noteworthy and commendable that he brings to the study of the Bible the true historical sense; and, while keen to see what there really is in the earlier Scriptures, steadily refuses to read into them the thoughts and meanings of later times. It is this quality mainly which renders his exegesis so trustworthy and so fair.

Our limits will not allow us to discuss the conclusions at which he arrives. Of these it will be enough to the initiated if we say that he takes the bipartite, as against the tripartite, view of the nature of man; and that for this view he finds very solid foundations in Holy Writ.