

BOOK REVIEWS.

THE CARES OF THE WORLD. By John Webster Hancock, LL.B., Barrister-at-Law. James Speirs, London, 1876.

One of the most marked and hopeful features of the present time is the interest taken by laymen in discussing questions which used to be considered the monopoly of preachers and theologians. When a clerical writer discourses upon "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches," ordinary readers are too apt to consider it simply "his rôle," and to pay correspondingly little attention; but when a barrister-at-law takes up this and kindred subjects, and speaks of them plainly and earnestly, as a business man to business men, about what most intimately concerns him and them, it is instinctively felt that he must have something important to say. And so we think he has, and has said it well. The sixteen papers contained in the neat volume before us, some of which, at least, appear to have been reprinted from serials of some years back, discuss ably and forcibly the practical questions which concern our life as citizens of this world, in connexion with that higher life which is to fit us for another sphere, and which it is of such paramount importance to cultivate here and now. Of the theological speculation which is so common there is hardly a trace, if we except the theory respecting guardian-angels; and those who regard such speculation with suspicion may consider this volume quite "safe." But of wise and practical demonstration of the bearing of the religious life on the every-day matters of the life of this world there is a great deal. There is nothing of the peculiar phraseology of a school, nothing to indicate the author's own theological leanings, except perhaps his undisguised contempt of all that is formal and unreal. His style is plain and direct, without any attempt at rhetorical graces, but with a certain naive simplicity of its own that gives it individuality and strength. His analysis of human life and human actions is profound and searching, and shows close observation and earnest thought, a knowledge of human nature that implies much self-knowledge, and a strong realization of the spiritual life and spiritual realities of which he speaks, which gives life and force to his words. We may stop to consider and question some of his statements, as, for instance, that "it seems to be a general law that our self-love should bear an exact proportion to our intellect, so that if we possess a large and active capacity for understanding truth, which tends to elevate us to heaven, a counter-poising weight of evil lusts requires the practical application of every new

truth to prevent them from dragging us down to hell." But we must always respect his application of principles to life and experience; as in the passage which shortly follows: "Mere thinking does not purify. We may therefore seem to ourselves to realize the promise, 'They shall mount up with wings as eagles,' but until we have learned to 'wait upon the Lord' we speedily 'faint and are weary.' We may, indeed, eagerly pursue our investigations of spiritual truth as a science, and seem not to slacken, but rather to increase, in the ardour of our pursuit, though our will and its affections receive no heavenly modifications from that which we learn; but in this case two things are certain—*first*, that a vast extent of highest and sweetest contemplation can never open to us, nor can we have the least conception of its existence, because that is revealed only to 'the pure in heart;' and, *second*, that at length we fly by night, and therefore not towards but from the sun, for such as is the quality of our will such is the quality of our thought."

From this extract it will be seen that the book is one which demands some exercise of thought, and so will not commend itself to the indolent lover of "thinking made easy," but only to those who enjoy what is suggestive and stimulating to mental circulation. The author's style is also, perhaps, hardly "spicy" enough for a taste formed in a sensation-loving age. Yet perhaps there may be among those who are weary of perpetual "spice" and periphrases, a tolerable audience for a man who clothes his thoughts in plain downright phrase, and thinks more about what he has to say than the way of saying it. His avoidance of set or "cant" phrases often gives freshness to his manner of stating old truths, as, for instance, where he speaks of the "spiritual" as being distinguished from the "natural" man, by "the powers of a spiritual mind hitherto undeveloped. Powers which corporal nature cannot give, but which are the direct gifts of that formative spirit which broods over the chaos of the fall in every man, and strives to create in him a clean heart and a right spirit." The papers on "Particular Providence," and on "Affliction the Great Purifier," may be read with profit by both Christians and sceptics. The former may be benefited by the contrast which he draws between the ideal Christians whom his imagination created as the result of their professed beliefs, and the average Christians whom he actually encountered; although he tells us that he *sometimes* found his early dreams realised. Some may be startled, too, by his unquestionable and unquestionably proved position, that "*Every rebel-*