

manliness, might be expected to lead to earnest endeavours for moral growth." And in reference to the baptism of Jesus by John, it is said: "That which repentance means in its true spirit, namely the rising from lower to higher moral states, Jesus experienced in common with the multitude; although he had not like them any need of the stings of remorse for past misconduct to drive him upwards. Repentance is but another name for aspiration."

As a set of Essays on the Life of Christ from this special point of view, the work has unquestionable merits. The style is fresh and vigorous, though occasionally marked by what seem to us faults of taste, among which we should be disposed to number certain touches of rhetorical woman-worship, such as "there was no circle of light about His head except His mother's arms." The effort to give human colour and vividness to the Life by painting the local scenery and surroundings, appears to us to be carried to a considerable length; but this is the fashion of the day. The most successful passage in the work in a strictly biographical sense is, we think, that in which a conception "not of Christ's person, but of his personality," is deduced fairly enough on the whole from what the Gospels tell us directly or by implication of his personal habits, bearing, look and gestures; though here again there is a tendency to exaggerate the social aspects of the character and to give the quality of "free companionship," an undue prominence and significance.

This work like *Eccle Homo* is totally destitute of the critical basis necessary to give any work on the subject a permanent value. The critical questions are totally ignored. The Gospels are taken without

scrutiny as "the collective reminiscences of Christ by the most impressible of his disciples," and the miraculous element is accepted, we might almost say, swallowed in the lump, the author sheltering himself rather ominously under the saying of Joubert "State truths of sentiment and do not try to prove them. There is danger in such proof; for an inquiry it is necessary to treat that which is in question as something problematic: now that which we accustomed ourselves to treat as problematic, ends by appearing to us really doubtful." The tremendous mystery of the incarnation is encountered; but an attempt to find, obviously for a practical purpose, a middle passage between conflicting theories ends as might have been expected, in a purely arbitrary solution.

Renan, Pressensé, the author of *Eccle Homo*, and Mr. Ward Beecher, all men of more or less ability, and all working upon the same materials, with which all of them are thoroughly familiar, bring out four widely different Christs, each deeply coloured, as we before said, with the individuality of the writer. Other writers again, especially those of the Ascetic School, bring out from the same Gospels a Christ totally different from the four. The natural inference seems to be that the attempt is chimerical. You may have Diatessarons and Harmonies of the Gospels, you may have commentaries and sermons on Christ's acts and discourses, you may have topographical and antiquarian illustrations of the Gospel History. But as to Lives of Christ—there is a life of Christ in the Gospels and there will never be another.

LITERARY NOTES.

CONTEMPORARY poets, are not, it appears, to have it all their own way. We have already noticed a criticism in the *Contemporary Review* on "The Fleshly School of Poetry." The paper was originally published under a pseudonym, but ultimately acknowledged by Mr. Robert Buchanan. On that occasion Mr. D. G. Rossetti was the chief object of attack; but in an article in the last number of the *Quarterly*, Messrs. Swinburne, Rossetti and Morris are pilloried together as the chief exemplars of "The Latest Development of Literary Poetry." In the previous number, the same critic, if we mistake not, treated his readers to a comparison between Byron and Tennyson, in which the laboured eulogy pronounced upon the one was as palpably factitious

as the studied depreciation of the other. The mantle of a satirist is, at best, a dangerous legacy; that of Gifford has made uneasy the shoulders of his successor. He cannot exactly imitate the savagery of the elder prophet, but the mission of both is substantially the same—to assail every assertion of nascent talent in the current age. Critics of this stamp are always born too late. If Gifford had lived in the Elizabethan period and the living critic had adorned the reign of Queen Anne, all would have been as it should be. Falling, however, upon evil times their mission was, and is, to take up their parable against the feeble degeneracy around them. Into the controversy between the *Quarterly* and the so-called "Literary" school, we have neither space nor inclination to enter,