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*AN IMPORTANT BOOK.

For a long time those who are interested in such matters have been waiting for this volume. At the first glance at the subject one might be tempted to think that the proper thing to do in issuing a commentary on the Bible would be to begin with the first book and go straight through, and that was certainly the case in the days when the whole thing was written by one man. But the time has gone by for any one man to publish a commentary on the whole Bible, at any rate a critical commentary. The general editor of the series selects men who are supposed to have some special knowledge of the book they undertake to do with. At one time it was expected the Dr. Cheyne would write the commentary on Genesis in this series, but when he became a special pleader for Jeremiah that was no longer advisable. Six years ago Dr. Skinner, who is now Principal of the Presbyterian College, Cambridge, was entrusted with this difficult and delicate task, and he has accomplished it in a highly satisfactory manner. We can now say that we have a critical commentary in English on Genesis which is worthy to rank with the best productions of German scholars on the same subject, which is saying a great deal. Recent commentaries on Genesis by Dr. Driver and others rest upon a basis of sound modern scholarship and deal to some extent with critical problems, but it is to the International Commentary that the English student must look for the latest results and a more thorough treatment of all such questions. Some of the volumes are disappointing and are in danger by Rev. Principal Skinner, D.D., in the International Critical of becoming mere storehouses of grammatical and lexicographical material which bewilder and baffle the average preacher, but Dr. Skinner has reached a high standard and his work is equal to the best in this series.

It is in connection with the questions that gather round the Book of Genesis where the traditional and critical views of the Bible stand furthest apart; here the fiercest battles have been fought and the sharpest discussions carried on. Now it looks as if the main results of modern criticism had gained acceptance among the leading Christian scholars. Such a book as this could not have been sent forth by the Principal of a Presbyterian college thirty years ago. The conclusions accepted in it are much more radical than those taught by Dr. Rob-

ertson Smith, though they are views which that distinguished professor would have looked upon as the logical outcome of the theories that he introduced. When anyone wishes to see what the present situation of the "Documentary Theory of the Pentateuch" is he may with full confidence consult Dr. Skinner's book. We cannot now enter into specific statements or detailed criticism of his treatment of the subject; sufficient for the present to say that we have here carefully sifted and clearly stated the results of the best scholarship regarding this remarkable book of scripture. It is of course entirely different from the "traditional view," but it is not now thrust upon us for the first time; it is the slow result of investigations and discussions extending over two hundred years, and as the vulgar phrase goes, it has come to stay. Every minister who claims to be an expositor of the Word should wrestle with such a book and try to get the real good out of it. Although it is a very learned book and much of it can only be fully used by those who know Greek, Latin, Hebrew, etc., yet there is very much in it that the intelligent layman can understand and appreciate. For the good of the Christian church it is to be hoped that our educated laymen will take more interest in these great questions so that there may not be a great gap between the special student and the average reader. In our handling of the Bible we must now have knowledge and intelligence as well as reverence and love.

SOME BEAUTIES OF RELIGION.

Nearly all of us can see the value and necessity of religion, but how few of us can appreciate its beauty. To multitudes it appears to be the opposite of beautiful. It is disagreeable, irksome, repulsive. Many of those who do not reject it altogether receive no comfort from it. So men regarded Jesus. He was the fairest among ten thousand, the one altogether lovely; yet when He came men saw no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. They derided Him, despised and rejected Him. They now treat His religion in a similar way.

The beauty of the religion of Christ is manifest in the character of the man who chooses it for his portion. It is an inner beauty. Beautiful thoughts, beautiful aspirations, beautiful hopes, beautiful virtues are here. It is the beauty of love. Human love is beautiful, more beautiful than the morning. Religion is love, sweeter than a mother's love. It is the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. It is the beauty of truth, the beauty of righteousness, the beauty of joy and peace. It is the beauty of symmetry. The Christian character is not one-sided. It is well-rounded, complete. Every virtue that can enter into the moral and spiritual constitution of a complete man is there. It is the beauty of poetry. It is not easy to tell exactly how it is that poetry is beautiful. Perhaps no one can explain the philosophy of the beauty of poetry, but the man who cannot feel the beauty of a fine poem is to be pitied. The Christian is one of God's poems. He has written His poetry in the skies and in the earth and sea. He is still writ-

ing poetry. There is no such poetry as that of a genuine Christian character. It is the beauty of life. Life is sweet; life is beautiful. In the spring of the year, when life is bursting forth from every tree, every shrub, and every plant, all nature is clothed with beauty. The Christian religion is not merely a creed, or a bundle of ceremonies, or a profession but a life. Let no one be content with a mere form of religion, for then he will never see its real beauty. As one can feel physical life throbbing through his nerves, so the Christian can feel spiritual life palpitating within. The most beautiful life of all is the life of God in the soul of man.

The beauty of religion is manifest in the good works of those who make it their choice. Inward beauty will come to the surface. Let no one imagine that he possesses the beauty of holiness in his heart when his outer life is marred by worldliness, selfishness, and wickedness. So soon as the seed of religion is planted in the heart it will begin to grow and blossom in works of mercy and charity and goodness.

Religion beautifies everything it touches. Like salt it imparts its savor to everything with which it comes in contact. Like leaven it leavens the whole lump. It makes youth beautiful. Some think youth is beautiful in itself, and that its charms cannot be enhanced by religion. This is an error. We have seen many youths who were repulsive, because they had forgotten God. The glory of youth is its simple faith in the living God. Religion makes old age beautiful. It has been said that old age, the opposite of youth, is hopelessly ugly, and that there is no remedy for the wrinkles and decay of age. This also is an error. Old age without God and hope is, indeed, pitiable, but the hoary head is a crown of glory if it be found in the way of righteousness. Religion beautifies business. There is much in business life and business customs, as we see them, which is unlovely, all because God has been excluded. One may as well try to exclude God from his religion as from his business. Religion beautifies politics. Is it possible to make politics beautiful? Have we not been told that one must keep out of politics if he would escape contamination? But there are good men in politics, and they are doing a good work for the country and the cities. When politicians acknowledge the authority of God and serve Him in public life, politics will be as beautiful as religion.

Religion makes affliction beautiful. Our God giveth songs in the night. Some of the sweetest songs of the Church were written by men and women who were wading through deep sorrow, and the music is all the sweeter for the tremolo of a broken heart. Religion makes death beautiful. Death is loathsome, terrible. We shrink from it and would abolish it if we could. Well, "Jesus Christ hath abolished death." We have heard singing in the room where the monster death had entered, and with joy fingers were feeling for the heartstrings of his victim. We have heard singing by the open grave. We have known dying men to look through the vale and catch a glimpse of the Holy City on the other shore. Then death lost all its terrors,