

Apocalyptic Regeneration :

A series of Lectures on the Book of Revelation, with a Dissertation on the Origin and Nature of Symbolic Language, and on the Use of Hieroglyphs by the Prophets. By the Rev. ROBERT POLLOK. Vol. I.—Glasgow : Thomas Murray & Son.

As a general rule, we do not profess to review religious books. Even if a political and literary journal were a suitable medium for such criticisms, the leisure and quietude of mind necessary to do justice to the exalted themes involved, would often, we fear, be wanting. The work before us, however,—particularly in so far as it treats of the origin and nature of symbolic language,—is sufficiently within the scope of our ordinary duties, to entitle it to some consideration at our hands.

All great works, even of human origin, have depths of meaning which challenge the ingenuity of generations to fathom. The "Iliad," the "Divine Comedy," "Hamlet," and "Paradise Lost," have had endless commentators. How infinitely more provocative of investigation and controversy must be the mystical books of the inspired writers, filled with the wondrous oracles of Heaven, uttered in the blazing language of the East, and with images blinding to mortal eyes from their very excess of light! The Revelation of St. John the Divine, with its curious symbols and tremendous visions, has tasked the profoundest intellects of the Church from the times of the early Fathers downwards. Many have abandoned it in despair as apocryphal. Amongst these was Martin Luther. Calvin has likewise been praised for wisdom in not writing about it. That the style of the Apocalypse differs considerably from the gospel and the epistles of St. John is undeniable; but the reason of its authenticity having been questioned, even by sects and synods, has undoubtedly been owing to its alleged unintelligibility. Some have even pronounced this mystic book to be a fabrication by the heretic Cerinthus who is said to have lived at the time, and to have been a personal opponent of the Seer of Patmos. The balance of ecclesiastical authority having long since established the Revelation of St. John among the genuine canonical books, it continues to this day, and will probably continue to the end of time to fascinate the imaginations of mankind by its symbolic grandeur, and puzzle their understandings with its prophetic visions.

The controversies which have grown out of the Book of Revelation in later times have related not to its inspiration or authenticity, but simply to the interpretation of its oracles. Dr. Cumming of London has recently blown the coal of disputation to a somewhat alarming fierceness, by representing the cholera, the potato-blight, Papal aggression, the Russian war, and other late or present visitations, as the emptying of the vials of God's wrath, fulfilment of St. John's awful prophecy, and the harbinger of the speedy ending of the world! Various redoubtable champions holding opposite opinions have rushed into the arena, including, strange to tell a comedian of this city, in the person of Mr. Harcourt Bland, who, we may add, has proved himself in theological warfare, a gentleman of considerable cunning of fence. The work whose title we have given appears opportunely as a most elaborate and scholarly attempt to inculcate rational views, and quiet unnecessary alarms. Mr. Pollok breaks at once the meshes of an immense amount of logical entanglement by asserting the identity of meaning of all the symbolical terms and sacred hieroglyphics used throughout the Scrip-

tures, and subordinating every prediction of the Apostle to the history of the Church of Christ, and not to the secular history of nations. The very learned and well-reasoned Dissertation prefixed to the Lectures supplies a simple, and so far as we can judge, solid basis for the interpretations which follow. Mr. Pollok has no sympathy with those who put a literal meaning upon language which is clearly symbolical, or who affix to it fanciful or ingenious significations not sanctioned by the uniform purport of the figurative language of Scripture. He opposes Cumming, Elliott, and others, in the constant reference to Rome as the thing symbolised in the Apocalypse, and aims at expounding prophecy instead of courting disinction as a prophet. For example, having found from Zechariah and other parts of Scripture that a horse is a Scripture hieroglyph for a divine or providential dispensation, he applies it in this uniform sense to all the four seals and accordingly escapes the diversified interpretations which have led certain other expositors into confusion. "It is evident," he says, "that if there be such a thing as prophetic language, every hieroglyph must in every instance retain its identity so as uniformly to unfold its appropriate generic sense." This is the master-key whereby he proposes to unlock all the mysteries of prophecy; and certainly his interpretation of the seals according to the principle thus set forth, and in a purely spiritual sense, has the merit of harmony and simplicity, and gives, in fact, the *coup de grace* to those secular interpretations which have led men, from time to time, to mix up the history of the church with the history of temporal dynasties, and betrayed them into wild and perilous paths of prophecy, causing them of course to look exceedingly foolish when their confident ratiocinations were unfulfilled.

So far as he has proceeded in the present volume—which is one, he first of a series—Mr. Pollok does not attempt to lift the veil from the future. "Very diversified and interesting subjects," he says, "await us in the Lectures on the trumpets and vials, in which the same mode of interpretation must be carefully maintained, by a strict continuation of the uniform sense of symbolic language, and by showing that prophecy fulfilled becomes the history of the Church of Christ, and not the profane history of the kingdoms of this world." All, we are sure, who peruse this volume, which displays ample learning, a vein of vigorous good sense, and a homely but forcible style, will look forward with interest to the succeeding volumes.—*Glasgow Citizen.*

"The Apocalypse has a potent spell of attraction about it, and almost all have felt more or less the influence of the charm that draws them to read it. The deeply mysterious and enigmatical character of the book, exhibiting a panoramic view of singular and striking scenes—the curious combination of hieroglyphic images it contains, and the highly figurative style of Oriental poetry that characterises its descriptions—the portentous secrets that are believed to lie hidden beneath its seals, and to describe the destinies of the church or the world to the end of time, have in all ages of the Christian Church attracted the attention of speculative as well as stimulated the ardour of pious and devout inquirers. The interest excited by passing events has in the present day given a fresh stimulus to the study, and there is scarce any one department in the field of literary exercise on which so many labourers have employed their energies, as in the inter-

pretation of unfulfilled prophecy. Peers and commoners—foreign and fireside travellers—lecturers on the platform as well as in the pulpit, have occupied themselves with "Apocalyptic Sketches;" and if proof were wanting of the lively and extensive interest that is felt in the subject, we need go no farther than our own city, in which, within the present year, as large a representation of all classes of the community assembled to listen to expositions of the signs of the times, as were found congregated either at the meetings of the Brunst Association or at the Crimean Banquet.

"There are not a few, however, who soot all attempts at exploring the sea of unfulfilled prophecy, and it must be acknowledged that no small reason for the scepticism of such persons has been afforded by the failure of many bold adventurers who have set out on a voyage of discovery on these unknown waters. The scepticism of the one class, however, appears just as worthy of censure as the rash and presumptuous arrogance of the other. In every department of knowledge, sound and accurate views have been arrived at only by slow and laborious advances, and when we remember that notwithstanding all the absurdities of judicial astrology, observations on the heavens were patiently continued till sounder principles led to the sublime discoveries of modern astronomy; when we bear in mind that amid the dreams and fancies of the alchemists, an experimental knowledge of the nature and affinities of material bodies gradually increased, till it opened up the large and beautiful domain of modern chemistry—why should we doubt that equally bright and happy results may be anticipated in the dark paths of Apocalyptic research. If many who rushed with confidence into this field of inquiry have been covered with the shame of confusion and ridicule, from their wild fancies and conjectures being found so wide of the mark, success has rewarded the labours of others; and to mention no more, the instance of Fleming alone, who, at the beginning of last century, with extraordinary sagacity anticipated the outbreak of the great French Revolution in 1792, as well as the European convulsions in 1848, may serve to show that there are data to go by—there is firm ground on which knowledge can be built, in this and other departments of inquiry. Nay, far more; for since the spirit of God inspired the Seer of Patmos to record his Apocalyptic visions, and the concurring testimony of every age, of the Christian Church has recognized the Revelations as a portion of the Sacred Canon, the book must have been designed for important uses; and, therefore, in endeavouring to understand its mystic pages, instead of incurring the charge of seeking to be wise above what is written, we are adopting the course which faith in the authority of revealed truth manifestly prompts us to pursue.

"The Rev. Mr. Pollok of this city, who has made "the Revelation of St. John" for many years a special subject of study, has published the first volume of a series of expository lectures on this inspired book; and we confidently pronounce it a valuable contribution to the class of religious literature to which it belongs. He proceeds in a very scientific manner, and the work is introduced by a very learned and interesting dissertation on the nature and use of symbolic language; and it is not till he has prepared the way by attaching to the symbols of the Apocalypse a fixed and uniform sense, as determined by the writings of the Old Testament prophets, that he begins to apply the ascertained meaning to the interpretation of St. John's. He differs from a numerous and pre-