

# THE HOMILETIC REVIEW.

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## REVIEW SECTION.

### I.—CÆDMON'S SCRIPTURAL PARAPHRASE.

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IN no department of historical English, linguistic or literary, is there more decided interest manifested, at present, than in what is generally known as the Saxon period. Students are busily engaged, in Europe and America, in ascertaining all that can be ascertained relative to the home and life, the character and authorship of this Old English folk. To us, as biblical, homiletic and Christian students, it is especially interesting to mark the earliest presence and the progressive expression of ethical life and teaching in our social and national history, and to emphasize the fact that from the days of Cædmon, in the seventh century, on to the Norman Conquest, in the eleventh, and still on to the time of Chaucer and Caxton, most of the best prose and poetry was ethical, if not, indeed, distinctly religious in character. To this conspicuous fact we have already referred in the columns of this REVIEW.\* In the brief paper now before us it is our purpose to exemplify the presence of this religious feature in our oldest poetry and poets, beginning with the Paraphrase of Cædmon.

Mr. Thorpe, in the preface to his edition of Cædmon, writes: "Having been led to the study of our old vernacular tongue, I naturally felt some desire to become acquainted with the works of one whom, justly or unjustly, I considered as the father of English song." This appellation has been accepted by later editors and critics as applicable to Cædmon, even though he appears and disappears with but few authoritative facts to mark his place and poetic work. From "Bede's Ecclesiastical History," as translated from Latin into Saxon by King Alfred, we glean some incidents and data which together form a kind of biographical narrative; this story, in the pages of Bede, substantially reappearing in the "Heliand," a biblical paraphrase of the ninth century, written in continental as distinct from insular Saxon. From Bede we learn that Cædmon was a Northumbrian, living, in the seventh century, near Whitby; that he was a convert from paganism and a member of the abbey of Hilda; that he was English in heart and spiritual in life, singing in his native speech and for holy

\*See Bible and Homily in Old English, Feb. number, 1889.