

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION.*

WE have read this book with very mixed feelings. For whilst we cannot help being struck by the varied knowledge and wide reading that the lecturer brings to his subject, by the bold and vigorous language, with which at times he clothes his ideas—yet at the same time we are disappointed—so much seems to have been taken away from us, and so little given to us in return.

In a work of such a character, perfect satisfaction throughout is not to be expected: the field is much too vast for all the parts to be adequately treated. But we do not think that as much has been done as even within the limits of eight lectures might have been. Throughout the book, often filling consecutive pages, is a vast mass of very interesting matter that, however, does not appear to be altogether necessary, and that might well have been sacrificed in the interests of the subject more immediately under discussion. Some of the movements and the persons who shared in them are treated at great length, whilst others do not receive the attention that they deserve. We instance the cases of Grotius and Hengstenberg. At times too the grouping of names—in the last chapter Gesenius, Hitzig, Delitzsch, Huther—may possibly create very erroneous impressions.

The Bible must be considered as the record of a progressive Revelation. *Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως*, fragmentarily and multifariously, in many portions and in many ways, Revelation was given. This is strongly insisted upon. The law is laid down that the Bible shall be approached upon the same principle of reason and learning as any other book. Men, the Archdeacon says, must emancipate themselves from "that pretence of reverence for the errors of men who were not more illuminated than are men of to-day, who in knowledge were hundreds of years behind them." For the dogma of "Verbal Inspiration" he has no sympathy, he combats it continually. It is "at variance with the whole form and fashion of the Bible, and is destructive of all that is holiest in man, and highest in religion." "The *πρῶτον ψευδος* of the whole unprofitable development was Biblical Supernaturalism, an irreverent identification of 'inspiration' with 'verbal dictation.' Whoever was the first to make the terms, 'the Bible' and the 'Word of God' synonymous rendered to the cause of truth and religion an immense disservice."

Human knowledge and experience are to be brought to the study of the Bible. Revelation is to be viewed in the light of the knowledge of the present. The past has not been altogether unproductive. From each age "some element of elucidation, some fragment of knowledge, some flash of light" has been inherited. But so much evil also has arisen from false exegesis, that "he who would study Scripture in its integrity and purity must approach the sacred page with a mind washed clean from human opinions." Thus the lecturer puts the matter. Speaking of the tendency to read into Scripture our own notions, to interpret passages without paying the slightest heed to the times and the circumstances to which they rightfully belong, he says, and we shall quote his words in *extenso*: "Till we cease to palter and juggle with the words of Scripture in a double sense—till we cease to assume that the Trinity is revealed in the beginning of Genesis, and that Canticles furnish a proof of the duty of Mariolatry; till we abandon our 'atomistic' method of dealing with Scripture and the treatment of its sentences as though they were magic formulæ; till we repent of the fetish-worship which made some of the Jewish theologians say that all the law was of equal importance, from 'God is one God' to 'Timna was the concubine of Eliphaz'; till we give up the late and humanly-invented theories which, with a blasphemy only pardonable because it is unconscious, treated the voices of human anger and human imperfection as the articulate Voice of God; till we admit that the Bible cannot and may not be dealt with by methods of which it gives no indication, and of which we see the absurdity when they are applied to every other form of literature, whether sacred or profane,—we may produce improved forms of Rabbinism, or Scholasticism, at our pleasure and at our peril; but we shall never clearly understand what is, and what is not, the purport of the Revelation contained in Scripture."

The eight lectures deal with the various stages through which exegesis or Scriptural interpretation has passed. Mankind stands in need of a revelation. God reveals Himself, successively displaying different aspects of His character. The Law is given to the Israelites, it is transmitted orally. Its freshness wears off, circumstances change, explanations become necessary, the literal sense seems no longer to be applicable, hence the need of exegesis. The Rabbis undertake this work of explanation. The gradually increasing intercourse of the Jews with other nations gives an impulse to the work, but along two widely divergent lines. The orthodox party—from whom eventually proceed the Targums, the Talmud,—believing

that the one thing needful is to preserve the law from any impurities through the infiltration of Gentile knowledge, hedge it around with innumerable glosses, adding point to point till the original meaning is well-nigh lost. The heterodox school, of whom Philo may be taken as a representative, develops the older system along the lines of Greek thought. Side by side these two schools exist.

Christianity introduces a new factor. The claims of both Old and New Testaments have to be considered; their mutual relationships, their differences, their contrasts. Various schools of Christian exegetes arise: the traditional, the historical, the allegorical; but they effect little, working upon a wrong principle. The Dark Ages succeed, when even the originality that marked earlier times is lacking. Vague and superstitious notions regarding inspiration become general; but men tire of this, and the reaction culminates in the Reformation. The Church is to be judged by the gospel, not the gospel explained by glosses of the Church. Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, are foremost amongst the working spirits of the time. But a spirit is raised which cannot easily be laid. Discordant elements appear on every side, disputes are innumerable, all seem drifting into an age of dogma-framing, belief-inventing; exegesis suffers. A belief in verbal inspiration is forced upon all from necessity, for Scripture must be brought forward to prove this, that, and the other conflicting view.

Dogmatism and Scholasticism seemed again about to usurp sway, fettering thought. But Spenser, Descartes, Koch, and others, appear as apostles of the different movements that tended gradually to mould thought, and, by encouraging wider learning, gave a fresh impulse to Biblical studies.

The eighth lecture is devoted to modern exegesis, but the subject is much too vast to be at all adequately treated: we cannot here attempt to unravel the maze. H.

CONCERNING KISSING.

No one will require to be told what a kiss is, and yet everyone will admit that there is some truth in the remark of the American humourist that the only way to define a kiss is to take one. We have many different kinds of kisses in this country, but we are not so far advanced in the osculatory practices as our friends in Europe. It is not a breach of Continental etiquette for two members of the male sex to embrace and demonstrate their affection for each other by a hearty kiss. A Frenchman likes to maintain his reputation of *bon enfant*, and to him is granted a privilege, which, fortunately, here, gentlemen do not enjoy, for on New Year's morning he kisses every young lady of his acquaintance whom he may meet or call upon. Although possibly we might envy French ladies in this particular, we must admit that we get a fair share of labial compliments during our lifetime. We are well nigh overwhelmed with affectionate motherly kisses long before we can appreciate or return the compliment; and then we have, amongst many others, the kiss of friendly greeting, the kiss under the mistletoe, the kiss in the ring, the automatic kiss of the actor, the kiss blown from the tips of the fingers, and the formal kiss of fashion, which is subservient to the laws of etiquette. These salutations, when between royal personages, vary in number, according to the age and rank of the person kissed, and it is a serious matter if one kiss too few or one too many be given. The stolen kiss which the inamorata,

With an easy cruelty denies,
Yet wishes you would snatch not ask the bliss,

is supposed to possess certain qualities peculiarly its own. How divinely sweet and rapturous is that other kiss, the

Evanescent touch that thrills
The ardent lover's trembling frame;
A dew which on the heart distills,
And kindles into flame,

in reference to which Dr. Walcott writes—

When we dwell on the lips of those we adore,
Not a pleasure in nature is missing;
May his soul be in heaven—he deserves it, I'm sure,
Who was the inventor of kissing.

The lover's kiss is often a lingering one. Byron speaks of the

Long, long kiss—the kiss of youth and love,

and Tennyson says:

With one long kiss, my whole soul thro'
My lips, as sunlight drinketh dew.

In "Locksley Hall" appears the line—

Our spirits rushed together at the touching of the lips,
a sentiment which had previously been expressed by Shelley, who speaks of—