

THE MONTHLY RECORD,

OF THE

Church of Scotland

IN

NOVA SCOTIA, NEW BRUNSWICK AND ADJOINING PROVINCES.

VOLUME XXIII.

SEPTEMBER, 1877.

NUMBER IX

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning."—Psalm 137, 4-6.

ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL.

If this Gospel has given rise to a greater amount of criticism than any of the others, it has certainly received a larger amount of commendation than any of its companions. These commendations, so well deserved, reach over the whole range of literature. Origen calls it "the choice one of the gospels." Chrysostom describes it as "more elevating in its influence than all the harmonies of music." Jerome asserts that "John excels in the depths of divine mysteries." Luther places it in the foremost rank. Calvin declares that "while the others seek to describe Christ's body, John's gospel reveals his soul." Ernesti describes it as "the heart of Christ;" Heider, as "written by the hand of an angel;" Lange, as "the diamond among the gospels." Dr. Caesar, of Trarane, has made this Gospel a special study, and has just published a lucid and popular account of it, and an elaborate and carefully-prepared refutation of most of the hostile criticisms with which its authorship has been assailed. He concludes his useful volume by thus speaking of the Gospel, and quoting opinions in regard to it:—

"It is the plainest in speech and the profoundest in meaning. It is the Gospel of love, life, and light; the Gospel of the heart taken from the very heart of Christ, on which the beloved disciple leaned at the Last Supper. It is the type of the purest forms of mysticism. It has an irresistible charm for speculative and contemplative minds, and furnishes inexhaustible food for meditation and devotion. It is the Gospel of peace and Christian union, and a prophecy of that blessed future when all the discords of the Church militant on earth shall be solved in the harmony of the Church triumphant in heaven." The estimate of John's Gospel thus quoted is confirmed by the judgment of critics in all ages. It seems to us advisable to give one or two quotations in this

place in illustration of our statement; and from these it will abundantly appear how highly our Gospel has been esteemed. Augustine, whose words are not more appreciatory than beautiful, says: 'In the four Gospels, or rather, in the four books of the one Gospel, the Apostle St John, not undeservedly with reference to his spiritual understanding compared to an eagle, has lifted higher and far more sublimely than the other three his proclamation, and in lifting it up he has wished our hearts also to be lifted. For the other three evangelists walked, so to speak, on earth with our Lord as man—of His divinity they said but few things; but John, as if it oppressed him to walk on earth, has opened his words as it were with a burst of thunder, has lifted himself not only above earth and every sphere of sky and heaven, but even above every host of angels, and every order of invisible powers, and reaches to Him by whom all things were made, as he says, "In the beginning was the Word," &c. He proclaims other things in keeping with this great sublimity with which he begins, and speaks of the divinity of our Lord as no other person has spoken. He pours forth that into which he had drunk. For not without a reason it is mentioned in his own Gospel, that at the feast he reclined upon the bosom of his Lord. From that bosom he had in secrecy drunk in the stream, but what he drank in secret he poured forth openly.' Origen writes in equally laudatory language, and says: 'We may presume, then, to say that the Gospels are the first-fruits of all the Scriptures, and the first-fruits of the Gospels is that of John, into whose meaning no man can enter, unless he has reclined upon the bosom of Jesus.' Claudius, in striking and sublime phraseology, thus expresses himself: 'I love best of all to read in St John. There is in him something so perfectly wonderful—dusk and night, and the quick lightning throbbing through them! The sort clouds of evening, and behind the mass the big full moon bodily!