

Literary Notices.

CALIBAN: The Missing Link. By Daniel Wilson, LL.D., Prof. of History and English Literature, University College, Toronto. London: Macmillan & Co.

To the general reader the most interesting part of this scholarly work will not be the working out of the idea that Shakespeare's Caliban supplies the "Missing Link" between man and ape. It is true that this forms the basis of the work, but several of the most interesting chapters are, in fact, essays upon quite distinct though kindred topics. The Caliban of Shakespeare, developed afterwards by Browning into a rather different being, leads the author into discussions about "The Tempest," and Shakespeare's writings in general, the Commentators and the Folios, Religion among Savages, Ghosts, Witches, and Fairy Folk Lore, with other similar subjects, all of which are treated suggestively rather than exhaustively. At the close of the volume are given notes on "The Tempest," and on "A Midsummer Night's Dream," which offer to the reader's judgment a number of improved readings. We cannot attempt to give the argument of the work, which will be valued by all Shakespeare scholars, but we will give an extract from the chapter "which discusses the universality of the belief in the supernatural":—

The search for defined or consistent creeds on such matters of enquiry and belief, among nations in widely differing stages of progress, is apt to prove illusory, and among savage races is vain and deceptive. We transmute their ideas in the alembic of our own creeds and opinions, and obtain results unconsciously adulterated by prejudice and misconception. We are trying in prosaic literalness to do what the poet Browning has done with the Caliban of Shakespeare: to enter as it were into his brain, and think his own thoughts, wholly unaffected by those of the actual thinker.

It seems to me sufficient for all that is attempted to be deduced from such beliefs—that the rudest savage does realize the idea of man's spirit as something at least ethereal, capable of leaving the body, of existing apart from it, of haunting the deserted dwelling, or hovering round the grave. With a very vague conception of what is implied in the idea of immateriality, his belief in the invisible ghost or spirit does realize the essential ideas of an immaterial existence, a spiritual life with the personality perpetuated apart from the body, and surviving death. Whether that survival shall be regarded as temporary or eternal is much more a matter of definition of the instinctive belief, than essential to its universality or significance as one of the most characteristic attributes of human reason.

So soon as we reach the stage of minutely defined beliefs and formulated creeds, they prove to be full of inconsistencies; and before the printing-press superseded tradition and came provided with ready-made opinions for all, the interblendings of ecclesiastical dogma and popular folklore resulted in conceptions singularly quaint and even grotesque. The instinctive belief is one thing; the defined ideas, whether formulated into vulgar beliefs, or into written creeds, are of a wholly different nature. The mediæval doctrine of purgatory, so curiously interwoven into Shakespeare's 'Hamlet,' is an illustration of the intermingling of those diverse elements; and hence the strange extravagances which it involves. It had been adopted into the teachings of the early Church, had modified the whole prevailing ideas of a future life, and when developed by the opinions of successive generations, had been reduced to a dogmatic form by the teachings of centuries. This intermediate state of the soul accordingly affected the superstitions of thousands, long after it had ceased to be a part of their accepted creed.

It is curious, for example, to turn to the current popular ballads of Presbyterian Scotland, and to note how ineradicable have been the impressions produced on the popular mind by the ancient faith, in spite of the vigorous crusade of ecclesiastical discipline and public opinion conjoined, for upwards of three centuries. Pasch, Yule, Halloween, Fasternseen, Rudeday, Whitsunday, Candelmas, and other rustic anniversaries, all survive as relics of the ancient