

REVIEWS AND NOTICES OF BOOKS.

CHRISTIANITY IN THE THREE FIRST CENTURIES: Historical Lectures delivered at Geneva in February, March and April, 1857, by DR. MERLE D'ACBIGNY, DR. BUNGENER, COUNT DE GASPARIN, and M. VIGUET. Translated from the French. London: James Nisbet & Co. pp. 251.

These Lectures were delivered under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Union of Geneva. They were listened to with the deepest interest by an audience of six hundred men of all creeds and political parties in the State. A more admirable selection of lecturers could not have been made. They are men who know the history of Geneva, and entertain for their country and this ancient stronghold of evangelical Protestantism a profound reverence and affection. They have the advantage, besides, of understanding the mental and spiritual characteristics of the people whom they address; and hence they speak evidently to their apprehensions, habits and affections. Gentlemen more accomplished in ecclesiastical and theological science could not anywhere be found. They unite the scholarship and philosophy of the German with the vivacity of the Frenchman and the humble piety of the true Christian. As might be expected, their treatment of the subjects committed to them is both masterly and interesting. In all the lectures philosophy and fact are finely blended; salient points in history are seized with much skill; and, as by an illuminated path, the reader is led through the varied and complicated phases of the Christian life during the three first centuries.

The first lecture is by M. Viguet; the subject is, "The State of the World at the coming of Jesus Christ." He recognises in the social and political state of those times a manifest preparation for the advent of our Lord;—not only the removal of merely external and superficial encumbrances to the progress of the Gospel, but especially a preparation of a deeper and more spiritual kind, which had slowly and painfully worn its way into the inner region of the conscience. He guards himself, however, from being understood as asserting that Christianity was the natural and logical result of the religious and philosophical development of the time at which it appeared. Far from being the result of inward and spontaneous development in mankind, he explicitly states that Christianity came from without; that it came from above. Coming from heaven it fell like seed on a field previously ploughed and prepared. The two points in this preparation which the lecturer notices are (1st) that at that time the spiritual importance of man was first discovered in matters pertaining to religion; and (2d) that an ardent desire had been excited in the human heart towards something better than man possessed—towards a revelation which should grant him truth. These two main topics are discussed with much learning and philosophical penetration. The worthlessness of heathenism is skilfully portrayed, and the equally unsatisfactory character of the ancient philosophies is pointed out. In the midst of these corruptions and of the perversion of sentiment and principles, which at that time had brought society so low, he recognises more than one trace of a serious and felt want among thinking men.

These views we find universally held by historical writers on this period of Church history. From Eusebius downward it seems to be an accepted fact, that there was a great and striking preparation for the promulgation of the Gospel. On this point men so diverse in their mental constitutions as Neander and Milman, are found to agree. It would seem, therefore, an act of unpardonable temerity to question what rests upon authority so universal and unquestionable. Yet, it has long been our conviction that this is an entirely mistaken view of the state of heathenism at the coming of Christ. If we contrast heathenism with Christianity, there will certainly appear in the former nothing to satisfy the soul, and