

Essays.

Professor Blackie has collected in a volume five essays (1) which have but a slender connection. They are all readable, and to some extent forcible, but there is nothing very remarkable about them. The first is on the social aspects of Christianity, a subject now much debated, but the Professor does not greatly advance the discussion. He considers that there ought not to be any poor-laws—that “no man has a right to be saved from starvation; starvation may, in certain cases, be the best thing for him, as it certainly is the best thing for society to be saved from the necessity of prolonging the existence of an altogether worthless character.” This sounds harsh; but then, if Christianity had its due effect, it would not have to be carried out. The essay on Scottish Nationality is an eloquent panegyric on the Professor’s countrymen, in which it is stated that the Scotch are the hardest workers, the most enterprising and successful colonists; conscientious, well-principled, and reliable as workmen; and that these and many other virtues are the fruit of a religion which is “personal, not ceremonial, and means character.” On the other hand, the Professor is afraid that the Scotch are historically not only a tasteless, but a dirty people; and as there has been a defective development in the emotional religion of the soul, Scotland has no place in the grand array of great musical composers. Professor Blackie says that to whatever sum of virtues the Scotchman is justly entitled to claim, we may add this additional one, that he has “a guid conceit o’ himsel;” but though he regrets the process of “Anglification,” which is going on nowadays at a great rate, the Professor does not desire Home Rule for Scotland. He speaks with the authority of a master on the Philosophy of Education, and the Essay on this subject is the weightiest in the volume. Its strength and value lie in enforcing truths which deserve to be often repeated—truths which are incontrovertible, and yet too frequently forgotten, to the detriment of all concerned.

The Gospel and Modern Substitutes (2) is a volume of eleven essays written with the object of bringing out the “inexhaustible fulness of the Gospel of Christ in relation to Modern Creeds that contest its supremacy and claim to supersede it.” The author thinks that the more excellent way to deal with modern problems is the way of comprehension. He is not satisfied with the organized Christianity of to-day, with its rule-of-thumb, its conventional deadness, and its worship of success; and he is of opinion that the “best method of treating modern systems is not to take up strong negative ground on the one hand, or strong aggressive ground on the other, but to show how Christianity contains the best of all systems.” He claims