

THE
CHURCHMAN

NOVEMBER, 1893.

ART. I.—“FAITH AND CRITICISM.”¹

IT is always interesting when an important body of Christians put forward what may be taken to be, formally or informally, their own distinctive view of Christian doctrine or duty. The volume before us, however, is not “Congregationalist” in any special or controversial sense; very little of it is polemical; much of it might have been written by Christians of any Church or “denomination”; and to the last essay is appended an intimation that “the author is not a Congregationalist.” For a formal, if not an authoritative, exposition of Congregationalist dogmatics, we may have to turn to such a work as the little manual of Mr. E. J. Dukes, “Principles and Polity of Congregational Churches, being notes for teachers of Church-preparation classes.” This work is mainly taken up with attacking the Church of England, the Church of Rome, Episcopacy, Confirmation (“a ceremony generally misleading and often profane”), etc. We are informed that the “five great families of Churches, in the order of their rise,” are Independents, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Society of Friends, Methodists; that “baptism is *not* a Church ordinance”; that we should avoid speaking of “administering” the Communion, for each is to wait on his brother, etc.

Happily there is very little of this spirit in “Faith and Criticism.” Happily, also, the title is a misnomer. It would be sad indeed if we could not think of faith apart from criticism; if we could not think of the “faith once delivered to the saints” without perpetually barking back to the nibbling of modern writers at the documents in which that

¹ “Faith and Criticism,” by Congregationalists, 1893.

faith has been so delivered. But most of the essays in this collection are quite apart from criticism, and for that reason some of them at least may have a permanent value, and may stand on our shelves side by side with those volumes to which we turn, not to seek weapons for controversy, but for calm and comfort, for spiritual edification and instruction. The two first essays, indeed, entitled respectively "Old Testament" and "New Testament," refer inevitably to criticism, and set before us what, from other sources, we should expect to be the general drift of the Congregationalist mind on critical questions. Mr. W. H. Bennett, Professor of Biblical Literature at Hackney College, the author of the first essay, represents the school which accepts all the extreme results of the modern rationalistic system, and endeavours to accommodate them to Christian belief. Thus, after going over the familiar ground of different documents, editions, "redactors," etc., Professor Bennett proceeds as follows: "This method of composite authorship preserves to us historical sources centuries older than the time of the actual composition of the books. The analysis of Samuel or Kings into a variety of documents provides us with a larger number of early witnesses to the history. Indeed, these books are seen to have greater authority when their composite authorship and repeated editings are recognised. The teaching of each book is sanctioned by every writer who put his hand to it. The Pentateuch is rightly clothed with the authority of Moses, for it is a result of the impulse he gave to the national and religious life of Israel; but it has also the authority of the group of prophets and priests who published Deuteronomy, of the writers who composed the Priestly Code, and of the editor who combined the various documents into our present Pentateuch." This is a plausible and ingenious way of putting the "critical" position with regard to the Old Testament; but it falls between two stools. The statement will not satisfy the critics, because it maintains that important parts of the sources or documents are of early date. It will not satisfy the maintainers of the integrity of the Holy Scripture, because it still leaves us to suppose that the "group of prophets and priests," whose existence is only inferred from the books themselves, *invented* the acts and words which they ascribe to Moses, while they give no hint that the book itself is not a homogeneous whole, which had come down to them from times very little, if at all, later than those of the great Lawgiver himself. Dean Milman, in his edition of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," adds the notes of Wenck and Guizot, as well as his own, to those of the original work; but each source is distinguished by its own letter. What would be thought of a future editor who should

obliterate the distinctions, and incorporate "G," "W," and "M" into a book still professedly that of Gibbon?

The question of our Lord's relation to the Old Testament Scriptures is passed over by Mr. Bennett, as by other writers of the same school, in much too easy and off-hand a manner to satisfy any serious reader or thinker. In the New Testament, he says, references are made to passages ascribed to Isaiah or Moses, "as a modern writer quotes Chaucer or Shakespeare, on the authority of current editions, without intending to express an independent opinion as to the authenticity of their contents." This comparison fails in two important respects. Chaucer and Shakespeare are not made up piecemeal out of fragments, thrown together nobody knows when by nobody knows whom, as the critics allege to have been the case with the Old Testament Scriptures; the pieces falsely ascribed to these writers are pretty well known, and can be detached from their genuine works as easily as the subscriptions to St. Paul's Epistles can be detached from the Epistles themselves. And, further, no danger to religion or morals would ensue if it could be proved that half the works ascribed to Chaucer or to Shakespeare were never really written by them. No Christian believes, or none till lately believed, that Chaucer or Shakespeare were "inspired" in the special sense in which we ascribe inspiration to Isaiah or St. Paul. But the faith of millions is imperilled, and their sense of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood, is hopelessly confused and impaired, if they are taught that what they once regarded as the Word of God is in truth the invention of man, an unjustifiable and immoral "pious fraud"; and that Christ was either deceiver or deceived when He spoke of Moses as having "written of Him," or of a legendary and non-existent Abraham as having "rejoiced to see His day."

On the whole we prefer to Professor Bennett's optimistic and plausible presentation of the destructive results of rationalistic criticism the outspoken plainness of such a writer as Mr. W. E. Addis (of Melbourne, Australia), on the earlier books of the Bible. "If we put aside," he says, "a few fragments of ancient song, the earliest document cannot be much earlier than the ninth century before Christ, and is, therefore, posterior by many centuries to the time of Moses. True, we have at least four witnesses instead of one. But the earliest of these witnesses is anonymous and late; the witnesses, on the one hand, copy each other, on the other hand contradict each other; the oldest among them proceeds on unhistorical assumptions; each in his order displays an increasing taste for the marvellous, and wanders further from the fact. We cannot

out of such materials construct the history of Israel."¹ As, unfortunately, no other materials exist, it follows that the history of Israel can never be constructed.

In the second essay, on the New Testament, by Mr. W. F. Adeney, Professor at New College, London, we find ourselves on very different ground. It is a clear and, on the whole, decidedly orthodox and conservative statement of the view which is taken by the vast majority of professing Christians as to the supreme authority and unimpeachable veracity of the New Testament Scriptures. Professor Adeney will have none of the attempts that have been made to find contradictory "drifts" or "tendencies" in the different writers. "The objection that in John we have another Christ, different from the Christ of the synoptics, has received a crushing blow in the demonstration that the teaching of Jesus in the fourth gospel is in full harmony with His teaching in the earlier gospels." He speaks, again, of the "dull devices by which it was attempted to explain away the Gospel and the Apostolic narratives. The most remarkable example of the failures of negative criticism may be seen in the successive futile attempts to follow it up by some constructive theory, which shall account for the existence of the Gospel history, while denying the facts narrated therein." The contrast between the two Professors is here very instructive. Substitute the words "Old Testament" for the word "Gospel" in the sentence just quoted, and many will feel that the expressions used describe with complete accuracy the present condition of rationalistic criticism, English or continental. The inference seems irresistible—that just as the Second Essay might have been conceived and written in a very different spirit, had it been penned in the days when the theories of Baur and others had not yet received their final *quietus*, so the first essay might be no less different had its composition been postponed till the day when "this tyranny shall be overpast," when students of the Old Testament shall begin to breathe more freely in an atmosphere cleared of the clouds and the cobwebs with which German and Dutch critics have darkened and mystified us, and when the Euroclydons of strange doctrine shall at last have left us standing on the *terra firma* of the "impregnable rock of Holy Scripture."

The third essay, by Mr. R. T. Forsyth, of Leicester, on "Revelation and the Person of Christ," contains many beautiful thoughts, forcibly expressed, on the all-important subject of which it treats—perhaps the gravest and the most far-reaching of all touched upon in the volume before us. But this essay is

¹ "The Documents of the Hexateuch translated and arranged," by W. E. Addis, p. xciv.

far too purely subjective, and contains too much dangerous depreciation of all “dogma,” to find acceptance among members of the English Church. Thus Mr. Forsyth writes: “The constitution of the Godhead before the birth of Christ is no direct portion of His revelation, however necessary as its corollary.” And again: “Revelation is obscure even about the origin of the Redeemer.” With the Nicene Creed as our authoritative standard, it is impossible for us to accept such statements as these. The essay, indeed, bristles with anti-dogmatic and anti-ecclesiastical utterances. “Revelation is not a thing of truths at all. It is not scientific. It is a matter of will, not of thought.” “Christianity is not a book religion. It has a book, but the book is not the Revelation. It does not even contain the Revelation any more than the reflecting telescope contains the heavens.” “The priesthood is but the religious form of the tyrannical specialist.”

Having quoted from Melancthon, “Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia ejus cognoscere, non ejus naturas, modos incarnationis cognoscere,” Mr. Forsyth says: “Only the beneficiaries of the Cross can effectually discuss the Cross, and through it the Incarnation, of which the Cross, and not the miraculous birth, is the key — the Cross, and not the miraculous birth, because the one can be verified in our Christian experience, while the other is a question of the record alone, and cannot. It is the one and not the other that is *used* in Scripture. It is in the one and not the other that our certainty lies, and so our Revelation; for nothing is revelation, in the close use of words, which is not verifiable in our Christian experience.” The absence of any *objective* body of *credenda*, which does not fluctuate with the faith or want of faith of the individual, is here very conspicuous; and it is well known to be the weak point of much Nonconformist theology.

On this point, it is instructive to contrast the very different position taken up by the writer of the fourth essay, “Christ and the Christian,” Mr. E. A. Lawrence, of Halifax. Speaking of the sense of the *authority* of Christ as the first step in the “course of conscious life in Christ,” he instances the conversion of St. Paul, and says, “Paul’s wonder at the love of Christ, and his sense of the infinite meaning of Christ’s death, depended on his sense of *who Christ was*. More and more, as his Christian life advanced, did he feel the power of that love and of that death; but it was not with the perception of it that his life in Christ began. . . . It was when he became assured that Jesus Christ was still alive, when he became convinced that the story of His resurrection from the dead was no mere tale, that his whole attitude towards Jesus underwent a complete

change." Could St. Paul have found "infinite meaning" in Christ's death, if Christ to him had been only "Jesus the carpenter, the son of Joseph," and the story of the Nativity a "mere tale"? On Mr. Forsyth's principles, there is no reason why the Resurrection should be accepted as an external, objective fact, on which our faith must rest as its foundation, any more than the Incarnation: neither can be "verified in our Christian experience."

The essay of Mr. Lawrence is a valuable one; more especially for bringing out forcibly the truth, so often forgotten, that in many cases of the relation of "Christ to the Christian," as notably in the case of St. Paul, the sense of the *authority of Christ* must precede the sense of *sin*.

The powerful essay of Mr. R. F. Horton, of Hampstead, on "The Atonement," will be welcome to many thoughtful minds, because, while emphasizing the fact that the New Testament has no definite theory about the Atonement, he shows, nevertheless, that the Atonement is the centre of all New Testament theology: that "the preaching of Christ and Him crucified has been the occasion and means of all decisive extension and rapid establishment of the kingdom"; that "in all countries and among all races of men the penetrating point by which Christian truth and civilization have pierced the prejudice and callousness of heathenism, has been the story of the Cross, the sufferings of the sinless Saviour proclaimed to men, as the means of their pardon and acceptance with God." While showing the essential immorality of that theory of the Atonement which represents our Lord as having "endured the wrath" of God, Mr. Horton, on the other side, points out the failure of the mere *moral* explanation of the mystery of Calvary, as only "the greatest moral act ever done in the world," and the impossibility of reconciling this with the thought of St. Paul and other New Testament writers. Perhaps he assumes too much when he says that "the unfortunate speculations of Protestant pietism, and the idea of penal suffering in an innocent Son satisfying the vindictive justice of the Father, so that wrath, having flared out against Christ on the cross, no longer burns against sinful men, *would evoke a unanimous cry of indignation from the New Testament writers.*" Those who hold the views which Mr. Horton denounces, appeal, like him, to the New Testament itself, and he himself admits that there are passages which, taken alone, countenance such views. It is by the combination of many passages, and by balancing against each other statements respecting the Divine purpose which seem at first sight conflicting, that we arrive at such a rational, sober, and reverent attitude with regard to this vital point of Christian belief, as

Mr. Horton himself has expressed in the following striking passage:

"It may be broadly stated that the subject of the Atonement appears in the New Testament as a vast and transcendental mystery, a truth revealed but not explained. It rises like a range of mountains against the sky, recognised as a constant feature of the landscape, tenderly loved in its shifting beauties of sunshine and shadow, rain and storm and snow, but never delved or quarried; with roots which strike into the inscrutable bowels of the earth, and summits which rise insurmountable into the azure heights of heaven. Men do not argue that the mountains are there; they lift up their eyes to the hills from which cometh their salvation, without any desire curiously to inquire into the formation and stratification of those mighty bastions. That is the general attitude of the New Testament writers. No theory will cover their thought on the Atonement. At most they permit us to contemplate certain great landmarks of truth on the subject which are reared, like lofty peaks, above the swimming vapour and the untraversed gorges."

A noticeable omission in this essay is the absence of any reference to the heavy and obscure, but thoughtful and suggestive, work of the late J. McLeod Campbell, on "The Nature of the Atonement, and its relation to remission of sins and eternal life."

It would be difficult to speak in terms of too warm commendation of the beautiful essay on "Prayer, in theory and in practice," by Mr. H. A. Thomas, of Highbury, Bristol. Its reverent and chastened language, its spiritual tone, its practical Christian wisdom, may well evoke the wish "*Quum talis sis, utinam noster esses*"; though that wish may be modified by the reflection that, so long as such a body of Christians as the Congregationalists shows no disposition to amalgamate with ourselves, it is well that it should contain men whose influence may leaven it with such a thoroughly Christian spirit as breathes in this essay. The true nature of prayer, its difficulties, its rewards, its privileges, are here dwelt on in a thoughtful and reverential spirit, which, while it is not afraid to grapple with the intellectual problems and the "searchings of heart" which modern thought has brought to the front, yet rises above these to that calm devotional serenity which we have, too much, perhaps, been inclined to consider specially Anglican—the spirit which breathes, for example, through the "Christian Year," and finds expression in the prefatory words of its author on the "*soothing* tendency of the Prayer-book," and the "sober standard of feeling in matters of practical religion."

Speaking of those who strive to pray faithfully, but apparently strive in vain, Mr. Thomas writes: "In their experience

the promise of Christ appears to fail of fulfilment. They ask, but do not receive. They seek, but do not find. They knock, but the door is not opened to them. Such words as they utter are spoken, as it were, into the air and lost. They speak, but there is a chilling silence. No whisper comes to them from other worlds. No invisible hand is laid upon their troubled spirits. No glory dawns upon their wistful eyes. All is darkness; all is stillness. They are alone, for no Father is with them. They are orphans in an empty universe. It is not so, but so it seems; and they rise from their knees with a bitter sense of disappointment and failure. They have tried to pray, and they have not prayed. They have done nothing but repeat empty words, to which there has been no response. If prayer is a privilege, they have not known how to use the privilege. If it brings joy and peace, the joy and peace have not been theirs."

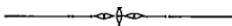
Mr. Thomas points out "two tendencies of the present age which have served to aggravate the difficulty" of prayer: one the "tendency towards free and widespread speculation in the region of religious truth"; the other the tendency towards practical philanthropy, which calls us not to be praying, but doing, and leaves, in fact, no time or thought for prayer; and he exposes the fallacy which underlies the popular use of the adage, "Laborare est orare." "The signs that are amongst us that what is described as devoutness is held to be of little moment so long as men are living good and useful lives, suggest the timeliness of the question whether a life wanting in the element of prayer can be a good and useful life in any deep sense of the words." With much force, too, he shows how in the "doctrine of the Holy Spirit," no less than in faith in Christ, is to be found the power which overcomes the "want of accessibility in God." "As it is the doctrine of the Incarnation which teaches us how we may acquire a definite conception of God, and may understand what He is, so it is the doctrine of the Spirit which teaches us how we may know Him, whose character is thus revealed to us, to be a God at hand, and not a God far off."

There is not in this essay any reference to what Dr. Goulburn has somewhere called the "magnificence" of prayer; nor does the writer touch directly on the special difficulties which surround that kind of prayer with which our Liturgy makes us familiar—prayers the answer to which involves results which are purely *physical*, and are, it is alleged, governed by invariable law or sequence—prayers, *e.g.*, for the cessation of pestilence, or for rain or "fair weather." But the following passage, part of the answer to the question, "Is it fitting for us to ask for temporal benefits?" will be read with interest: "We dare

not plead that miracles may be wrought on our behalf. While recognising this, however, we shall not forget how extremely difficult it often is to determine what does or does not involve a violation of the natural order. We shall remember how little we know of those relations which exist between the spiritual and the natural world, and how constantly and in what a variety of ways material things, as we call them, are being affected by what is happening in the spiritual domain. We shall remember how, within the sphere of our own experience, thought and will are incessantly producing changes, though none can guess by what process, in things belonging to the regions which natural science claims as its own. And, bearing these things in mind, we shall seldom be hindered, for fear that we may be demanding a miracle, from asking any good thing of Him whose relation to the visible world we may presume to be analogous to our own, and whose power to modify or control, without doing violence to, the laws which are the expression of His own mind and will, can scarcely be inferior to that which He has entrusted to His creatures.”

A. COLCHESTER.

(To be concluded.)



ART. II.—THE LEGEND OF THE VERONICA HANDKERCHIEF.

THE legends which have sprung up, as a kind of parasitical growth, around the simple narratives of the earthly life of our Lord, are interesting from many points of view, and not least from the contrast they present to the clearness of aim and simplicity of form in which the real facts of the Divine life are presented to us in the sacred record. Their relationship to one another is as curious a subject of investigation as the manner in which they were developed from age to age.

The germ of them is often to be found in some careless expression of an early writer, whether genuine or apocryphal,¹ or in the traditions imported from the East in the earlier days of the crusades, which were eagerly accepted and treasured by the monks and ascetics of the western world. These were soon enriched by visions and revelations of a later origin, and by the translations into Latin of the apocryphal gospels and acts, upon whose fables the Koran has drawn so largely. Not

¹ *E.g.* : The professed ignorance of Epiphanius of the death of the Virgin Mary, which led to the legend of the Assumption, and the reticence of St. Augustine on her liability to sin, which forms the germ of the doctrine of the “Immaculate Conception.”