

Professor Gwatkin's "Early Church History."¹

BY THE EDITOR.

AT last we have what has been so long expected—the ripe fruit of Professor Gwatkin's labours in the study and teaching of Early Church History. In these two fine volumes he has given a record of the Church up to the Edict of Milan, A.D. 313, a record which it is bare truth to say takes its place at once in the front ranks of our authorities. We have been taught what to expect by the Professor's masterly "Studies in Arianism," while his great work, "The Knowledge of God," revealed to the world a thinker and a philosopher as well as an able annalist. The growth of Christianity is here traced "in its connection with the general history of the time, indicating the lines of thought, and noting the forces that made for change, but without any attempt to give an exhaustive account" (Preface). But though not exhaustive, the book is remarkably full of detail, and it is difficult to believe that any ordinary student of Church History can need much more than is here given. To review such a work is obviously out of the question, whether we have regard to the reviewer's knowledge or the space at his disposal. Professor Gwatkin is a master, and it is our wisdom to follow his guidance and to learn from him the deep lessons of Christian history. The three opening chapters are on "Church History in General," "The Decay of Ancient Religion," and "The Roman Empire," and at once reveal the writer in the character of a philosophical historian. In the course of these pages the reader is guided safely along many avenues that would otherwise be dark and intricate. Thus, how informing is the statement descriptive of the three great periods of Church History, "The Early, the Mediæval, and the Modern" (p. 3 f.). Then the chapter on "The Decay of Ancient Religion" is another illustration of the writer's insight into the fundamental principles of life in that day. The ancient world is shown to be a failure, and yet a preparation for Christ and Christianity. Greek philosophy, Roman jurisprudence, political and economic changes were all part of the great *præparatio evangelica*.

The treatment is roughly chronological, and so we have in the first volume the various stages from the Apostolic age through the Neronian Persecution to the time of Commodus. The last three chapters discuss "The Apologists," "Christian Life," and "The Churches and the Church." Proofs of Professor Gwatkin's knowledge and insight abound on almost every page. The *Didaché* is "Petrine Christianity diluted." The contrast between the books of the New Testament and those of the subsequent age is described as one between "creative energy" and "imitative poverty" (vol. i., p. 98). Dealing with the Apologists we have the acute remark that "Christian life has never reached a high level without a widespread knowledge of the Bible." Senten-

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tious sayings abound which take us right into the heart of great questions. Thus, on the opposition of Celsus to Christianity, we are taught that—

"The ultimate offence of the Gospel has always been its lofty tone of authority. Such a claim cannot be ignored, but must either strongly attract or strongly repel" (vol. i., p. 186).

On the question of the Resurrection it is truly said that—

"Granted the fact of our Lord's Resurrection, it cannot be an idle story. If in very truth He broke the never-broken spell of death, few will venture now to dispute His claim to reveal the secrets of another world" (vol. i., p. 192).

And as to the Old Testament, we are told that—

"The early Christians had a very real sense of the historical continuity of revelation, and a fixed persuasion that even the Old Testament must somehow speak of Christ throughout. And were they not right?" (vol. i., p. 195).

The chapter on "The Christian Life" is full of good things, of which we have only space for one:

"Just because the Gospel was personal, it never stopped at the individual. It was a social power from the very first, for the power which claimed the whole man had to cleanse all the relations of life" (vol. i., p. 226).

The keen penetration into fundamental principles is particularly evident in the treatment of Baptism, than which nothing could be clearer or, as a whole, more convincing.

Professor Gwatkin quite frankly says that "no attempt has been made to conceal personal opinions," and we are particularly glad that it is so, for it adds to the interest and value of a book like this to see the bearings of the facts of early Christian life on subsequent problems. It is well known that the author's view of Church history is frankly Protestant, and those who have read his "Knowledge of God" are well aware that he has a good account to give of himself in this connection. So, also, in this work it is a scholar and a thinker who writes, and his arguments will only be set aside by a superior scholarship and a deeper thought. The last chapter in Volume I. on "The Churches and the Church," is of the very first importance, and must be studied by all who would know the facts of the case. We have therein Professor Gwatkin's treatment of that disputed question—the origin of episcopacy. His general view is that "the theory of an apostolic command is needless as well as unhistorical" (vol. i., p. 294). Also that the theory of a development downward from the Apostles is "quite untenable" (vol. i., p. 295), for the very obvious reason that the Apostle's work differed entirely from that of a Bishop, and because there is no evidence that he ever gave up his calling to become a Bishop. In view of some recent writing, it is truly valuable to have the careful, weighty, and confirmed convictions of so profound a student and so great a historian. It need hardly be said that Professor Gwatkin is, in all essential respects, at one with Bishop Lightfoot's epoch-making Essay on the Ministry.

The chapter on Gnosticism is particularly valuable for its perception of principles, and for the clearness of its treatment of the main facts of this intricate story. No one need lose his way in the maze of Gnosticism if he follows Professor Gwatkin's guidance. The chapter on Montanism is

equally illuminating and discriminating. Of its importance and significance we can gain a good idea by the concluding comment :

"The entire medieval system, from the Papacy downwards, is no more than a natural development of the unbelief which knows no working of the Spirit, but one transmitted by outward ordinances from a distant past ; and to this development the failure of Montanism gave a greater impulse than the defeat of the Gnostics or the conversion of Constantine " (vol. ii., p. 95).

Chapters of equal interest and value are those on Irenæus, The School of Alexandria, and Origen, from which we are tempted to quote, but must not. At every step we feel that we are being led by the hand of a master, and his guidance is almost self-evident in its clearness and cogency. What could be finer and more suggestive than the remarks which open by saying that—

"Four times in four distant ages the truth of Christ has had to be defended from a great and deadly enemy inside His Church " (vol. ii., p. 156).

We must leave our readers to discover for themselves what these ages are. Clement of Alexandria and Origen are evidently favourites of Professor Gwatkin, and his treatment is full and sympathetic, albeit discriminating. Not the least valuable is the clear knowledge and firm grasp of essential Christian doctrine here displayed for the student's help and guidance. Thus :

"The Gospel is neither a religion nor a philosophy, but a revelation ; and the revelation is Christ—in His Person, not simply through His teaching " (vol. ii., p. 180).

Again :

"The dilemma of the Person of Christ was growing sharper in the third century. If He is God, we have two Gods ; and if He is not God, we worship a creature " (vol. ii., p. 314).

The life and teaching of Cyprian afford another characteristic illustration of the writer's powers. This is how the great Bishop is introduced :

"We are on the eve of changes. The first great contribution of Latin thought to Christian history was a new theory of the ministry and of the Church in general, which forms the greatest break between the Apostolic age and the Reformation " (vol. ii., p. 274).

Professor Gwatkin shows, as Lightfoot did years ago, that it is to Cyprian we owe the introduction of the conception of a sacerdotal ministry :

"Cyprian claims for the Bishop a sacrificing (no longer a purely eucharistic) priesthood, and a *jus divinum* essentially different from the Divine sanction given to the 'powers that be' of every orderly government. Both claims were new. The New Testament gives no hint of any such priesthood to be held by Christian men, though there was no other worship in the world without it. . . . As regards the *jus divinum*, it will be enough to repeat that even Ignatius never claims it for him " (vol. ii., pp. 275, 276).

So also with the Lord's Supper. As Westcott points out in his "Commentary on Hebrews," Cyprian is the first to supply the term "altar " to the Communion-table. So Professor Gwatkin says :

"If it was not easy to turn the Bishop into a sacrificing priest, it was even harder to provide him with the something material which a priest must have to offer. Scripture admits no sacrifice that Christian men can bring but that of thanksgiving ; and this is the deliberate language of all Christian writers before the Nicene age—Cyprian excepted—whenever they speak of sacrifice " (vol. ii., p. 276).

There is, however, one very important point which certainly deserves to be better known than it is: the fact that sacerdotal language is used by Cyprian of the Bishop only, not of the Presbyter.

"He is careful to use sacerdotal words only of the Bishop, Levitical of the Presbyter. Cyprian would have been as shocked as any Quaker at the idea of turning the Presbyter into a priest" (vol. ii., p. 278, note 3).

But we must close, though we had marked several other passages of great importance to show the profound interest and permanent value of this book. It must suffice to say that it will be absolutely indispensable to all serious students of Church history. In spite of the welcome additions during recent months from Bigg, Duchesne, and Westcott, Professor Gwatkin's book stands at the head of all for its fulness of learning, deep insight, firm grasp on essential principles, and the truly marvellous epigrammatic way in which he can express some of the profoundest principles of the Gospel of Christ. We called attention last month to the *Times*' review of this work, in which the reviewer spoke regretfully of "the pained surprise" with which the High Church school has greeted it. And yet perhaps this is not to be wondered at, for High Churchmen of the extreme school could hardly be expected to accept without question the remarkable array of facts, with all that they imply, which may be found herein. It is worth while calling renewed attention to the words of the *Times*' reviewer when he says that—

"It might seem well to acknowledge frankly that the results of the historical knowledge stated by its most eminent exponents within and without the English Church to be taken by themselves are not favourable to the High Church theory."

And the reviewer very aptly and forcibly goes on to remark that "it can hardly inspire confidence in anyone's ability to read the first century aright if he takes an obstinately conventional view of the twentieth."

It is the barest duty to express our most cordial and grateful thanks to Professor Gwatkin for one of the most refreshing and convincing treatments of ante-Nicene Church history which it has ever been our privilege to read. Armed with weapons such as are here provided in the historical facts of these early centuries, the true Anglican Churchman in sympathy with the Reformation has no need to fear in regard to his position.



The Missionary World.

BY THE REV. A. J. SANTER,

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FROM all parts of the Mission-field come reports of the intense struggle which has to be maintained against the forces of evil. The conflict is against the same foe under many different forms. From Hoima, the capital of Bunyoro, Central Africa, the Rev. A. B. Lloyd writes, as quoted in the *C.M. Gleaner* for February: "The fight here is a fierce one; we have got to the parting of the ways, and the little band of Christians stands for a moment