

Notices of Books.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW: THE GREEK TEXT, WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND INDICES. By Alan Hugh M'Neile, D.D. London: *Macmillan and Co.* Price 15s.

The appearance of a new Commentary of the first rank on one of the Gospels—and especially perhaps on St. Matthew—may well excite special curiosity just now. What will be said about the great verities challenged by modernism—such as the Virgin Birth and the infallibility of the Saviour? What is the author's position on eschatology? Will there be any sign yet of revolt against the yoke of German tyranny so long meekly borne? Dr. M'Neile, in his Preface, acknowledges his "indebtedness to German scholars." He is "often unable to accept their solutions; but their microscopic detection of problems to be solved supplies a large part of the material for study." Much of the book must have been ready before the war; but we should like to see a bolder rebellion. While the present volume avoids some extremes, one wishes that more regard had been shown for the text as it stands, and less for the microscopic problems discovered by German scepticism. Dr. M'Neile finds a safeguard in doctrine from some of the developments of literary criticism. Dealing with the Virgin Birth, he concludes, after well showing the weakness of certain theories, that it is its "congruity with the whole body of Christian belief, with the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Sacraments, which turns the scale for those who will not assert that miracles do not happen, much less that a miracle, avowedly unique, did not happen, but whom the literary evidence leaves in suspense." He does not, of course, say that he is one of these; but in any case, if the historical evidence of the inspired records be abandoned, the safeguard of the Creeds (which in fact rest upon them) will not long weather the storm.

Before glancing at some other topics, it will be well to give an idea of the scope of the volume. The author explains why his Introduction is so brief. But considerable space is given to Additional Notes, as special points arise. A leading feature is the minute and careful examination and illustration of words and phrases, a most copious store of learning—Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Greek, Scriptural and Patristic—being drawn upon for the purpose. Upon the other hand, textual criticism receives little attention, and we are told the design is to deal mainly with the historical problems and with necessary exegesis. The scholar and the student may perhaps derive more help from such a commentary than the preacher, though he, too, will find illustrative and suggestive points. Here are a few brief specimens of the best: "Flexibility of treatment is psychologically safer than rigidity in dealing with language so ζῶν καὶ ἐνεργῆς as that of the Lord's parables." "'Free' thought, that recognizes no authoritative control, is as useless as spilt wine." (Is this applicable in a way not contemplated?) "He 'fulfils' the ἀκριβεια of the Law by the ἐπιεικεια of the Gospel." (We venture to alter the accents, and wonder why they are paroxytone in so carefully printed a book.)

On miracles some good things are said. Here is the main position adopted: "Modern thought is learning not to reject records of miracles simply because they are miracles; their possibility must, in each several case, be judged in relation to the paradox of a transcendent God working immanently, and to the mystery of the Incarnation." But in this process too many sacrifices are made on the altar of modern thought—*e.g.*, the admission of the possibility of legend, and a dangerous statement that, "as Man," our Lord "shared the contemporary beliefs as to demoniacal possession."

Readers of the CHURCHMAN will be interested in the ecclesiastical position of an Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Oxford. It is interesting to find that the "rock" in xvi. 18 is taken as probably "the truth which the Apostle had proclaimed." With regard to the Lord's Supper, a sacrificial character seems to be attributed to the *meal* where we should lay stress upon the sacrificial aspect of the great Offering which the meal commemorates. But it is candidly stated that *τούτο ποιείτε* (in 1 Cor.) cannot mean "offer this." Upon "This is My Body" a truly astonishing comment appears. No explanation of this, we are told, can be offered in a Commentary; "its meaning varies for Christians with their varieties of spiritual experience." This is certainly one way of getting out of the difficulty! But are Rome and Geneva equally right? Can words bear two exactly opposite meanings? And must not a commentator expound meanings?

We much regret the treatment of some great missionary passages. Had xxiv. 14, it is said, "been a genuine utterance of Jesus Himself, it is difficult to think that St. Peter and the other Apostles could have acted as they did." We suspect Dr. M'Neile's knowledge of human nature is what is at fault here. And the Great Commission at the close is regarded as probably "the expression by the evangelist of truths which the Church learnt as a result of the Resurrection." This attitude, by the way, equally touches the Baptismal Commission; and here we are apparently reduced to the supposition that the command of Baptism by our Lord is "in any case extremely probable," for reasons connected with the early Church.

The eschatological position of the writer is in some respects frankly deplorable. A hint has already been given of distinctions as to our Lord's teaching "as Man." The worst development is in connection with eschatology. "It is impossible," he says, "to escape the conclusion that Jesus, as Man, expected the End within the lifetime of His contemporaries." Was it not Bishop Moule who called attention so clearly to the remarkably guarded nature of the one reference to what the Saviour did not know in this connection, somehow thus—*He knew that He did not know?* Dr. M'Neile practically asks us to believe He did not know that He did not know—yes, and something worse still, that He definitely gave mistaken teaching. In the one carefully limited case He would not say, *because* He knew He did not know. Here it is supposed that He pronounced definitely, and wrongly, *though* He did not know—and this with the added solemnity of the *ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν*.

This habit of distinguishing what our Lord held "as Man" colours other passages. *E.g.*, in the Temptation, the dominion of Satan (iv. 9) is spoken of as "a thought which the Lord shared with His contemporaries"—as if, of course, we knew much better. The treatment of the passage leaves doubt whether the personality of the devil is recognized at all, and this causes uncertainty in a serious direction. Each time it is said that the Lord addressed the quotation ("It is written") "to His own heart"—or "to Himself." What does this mean?

A few passages illustrate the relation between Old Testament and New Testament criticism. The two Feedings and their contexts are taken as "duplicates." We read—that if such similarities occurred in the Old Testament, "few students would hesitate" about it. This illustrates the inevitable extension of critical methods from the Old Testament to the New. But may not the argument be reversed? If the passages show differences that have to be explained away, it is a warning not to be too sure in Old Testament cases of a similar kind. Old Testament criticism comes in again, of course, on Ps. cx., with regard to which all the critics unite to assure us that what to an unsophisticated mind seems the very foundation of the question (xxii. 43) has in reality nothing to do with the matter!

Something must be said of the author's conceptions of genuineness. Though he shows up several extreme follies of other critics, his own doubts are very numerous. Varying phrases reveal, for example, at least thirty instances in the last eight chapters alone. And he is sure of some "additions" which are "certainly apocryphal," and that the evangelist used "very little critical sifting." Equally sure is he that many passages are out of their proper context. Sometimes one fancies that a little imagination and sense of psychological fitness might alone set our hypercritical author right, and that in these respects at any rate the evangelist excels his commentator. But of course there is something much more serious. Dr. M'Neile is most painstaking in comparing the four Gospels (this is another feature of his book), but he shows scanty respect for their authority—quite apart from considerations of inspiration. Any passage may be overthrown, without the least manuscript evidence, if his judgment decides so. Of course, it is the old story: no two critics are sure to agree on that elusive thing, "the unmistakable stamp of genuineness"; and the rest of us will be left in chaos if we wait for their agreed minimum. Let us make no mistake: God has not left us with a set of records so untrustworthy. Dr. M'Neile apparently finds a safeguard from some perils in devotion to the Creeds. But this is illogical, as the Creeds rest on revelation. And anyhow most critics will care less for Creeds than for Scripture. One is driven to conclude that, in spite of its learning and thorough research, this volume cannot be recommended as a satisfying treatment of a Divine writing.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE BIBLE. Two volumes: Jeremiah to Malachi; Revelation. Edinburgh: *T. and T. Clark*. 10s. per vol.; subscription price, 6s.

This great series of Bible-sermons is now complete. The two volumes under review are the last of twenty, and the whole series has been five years in the publishing. It has been prepared, planned, and published, with all that care, thought, and accuracy, which we have long since accustomed ourselves to expect from Dr. Hastings, and by which he is laying this and future generations of Christian men under so real a debt. The twenty volumes give exhaustive treatment to a total of "great" texts which must exceed 500 in number, and which are spread over every Bible book from Genesis to Revelation. The main features of the series, the plan and method of treatment, are already widely known, and need not be further referred to.

The present volumes are on the same lines as their predecessors, and are fully worthy of their fellowship. The Old Testament volume is chiefly one on the minor prophets, and provides an interesting example of the difference in treatment between this series and that of the "Greater Men and Women," of which a volume on the prophets makes its appearance almost simultaneously. They serve different purposes and appeal to different minds and ways of working. Those who want careful exegesis and more direct sermon models get them here, and get them of the best. Modern scholarship and modern illustrations are taken toll of, to the reader's immediate advantage. There are ten sermons on texts from Jeremiah, four from Ezekiel and Zechariah, and one or two from most of the others. We noticed a helpful treatment of the "marred vessel" text from Jeremiah.

Many will be glad to have the volume of twenty-five sermons on texts from Revelation. They have been carefully and wisely selected, though there are obvious and important omissions. There are treatments of texts from the messages to five out of the seven Churches. The chapters which some might regard as especially distinguishing the Book of Revelation are, for the most part, avoided, and there is little or nothing in the volume of signs, seals, trumpets,

vials, horns, beasts, or numbers. There are fine sermons on "The Waiting Guest" and "The Perfect Life," and, indeed, on many beautiful passages.

W. HEATON RENSHAW.

THE GREATER MEN AND WOMEN OF THE BIBLE. Vol. IV.: Hezekiah to Malachi. Edinburgh: *T. and T. Clark*. 10s. per vol.; subscription price, 6s.

The high level of usefulness is well maintained in vol. iv. of this really splendid series, of which the Old Testament is now complete. Religion has to do with individuals and with personal relationships to God and man. No happier "commentary" on the big features of the Old Testament could well be imagined than one which deals in turn with its greater men and women, and these four volumes which have now been reviewed will, if we mistake not, be increasingly used by preachers everywhere. It is the type of "mind-food" which many will regard as the most attractive of all.

The present volume includes all the prophets, major and minor, and is practically a commentary upon them, considered from a broad human standpoint, with the addition of studies on Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, and Job. Very properly a large share of space and attention is given to Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Book of Job, and these take up nearly half the volume. Very careful and excellent treatment is given to the subject-matter of Job, which is dealt with with thoroughness and insight. There are sections on (1) the problem of Job, (2) the Book of Job, and (3) the characters in Job. It is an excellent piece of work. But each of the minor prophets receives consideration, both the prophet and his prophecy being spoken of in helpful words. The four volumes make an excellent and inexpensive commentary on the Old Testament.

W. H. R.

