

Notices of Books.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS. By G. H. Box, M.A., Lecturer in Rabbinical Hebrew, King's College, London; Hon. Canon of St. Albans. With a foreword by the Lord Bishop of London. London: *Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons*. Price 5s. net.

The startling plea put forward by Dr. Sanday and others in behalf of a "symbolical" interpretation of the Creeds will cause many to welcome heartily a full and concise treatment of the great subject of the Virgin Birth by one eminently qualified for the task. Canon Box's sub-title conveniently summarizes the contents of his book. It is "a critical examination of the Gospel narratives of the Nativity, and other New Testament and early Christian evidence, and the alleged influence of heathen ideas." The Bishop of London rightly describes it as "a very clear and scholarly book," which will, he thinks, "carry conviction to the unprejudiced mind." Again and again the author demonstrates how prejudiced and uncritical the critics of the Gospel narratives, and those who have suggested grotesque sources for those narratives, prove themselves to be in the light of critical examination of their own theories. For he approaches the subject from the critic's point of view. In fact, he goes further in this respect than many of us will be prepared to follow him. For example, it is much against the grain to read that the angelic appearances may lawfully be regarded as subjective. Though the reality of the inward communications thus represented is insisted upon, our own view is that the suggestion is in the nature of a surrender to the enemy—and a painfully unnecessary surrender too. Why should not the greatest events in the world's history—nay, in the history of the universe—be accompanied by unwonted manifestations? We feel that remarks about disentangling facts and beliefs from their decorative embroidery are not only mischievous but needless; and we fear they are tainted by the all too common nervousness with regard to the miraculous. However, Canon Box's attitude in this respect will at any rate deprive his opponents of any ground for accusing him of the blindness and prejudice which they are wont to lay at the door of orthodoxy. It is his own "firm conviction" that the essential truthfulness of the narratives "only shines forth with added lustre as they emerge from their fiery ordeal to which they have been subjected."

The examination of the opening chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke is very thorough and convincing. In this section we may perhaps single out for special mention the valuable refutation of attacks on the genuineness of Luke i. 34, 35, the interesting comments on *Ναζωπαίος* and *ἀνατολή* and the examination of alleged historical difficulties in Luke ii. 1, sqq. The silence of St. Mark, St. John and St. Paul is effectively dealt with. And the Jewish Christian origin of the history is clearly proved, the alleged pagan parallels being quite ruled out of court. There are two Appendices dealing with Jewish matters, and also a series of Appended Notes, among which are interesting textual discussions on Matthew i. 16 and on John i. 13. In connexion with these notes the author thanks Professor H. J. White.

The most striking chapter is perhaps the concluding one. Canon Box enforces in the strongest possible terms the vital connexion between the fact of the Virgin Birth and the Catholic doctrine of the Incarnation. Dr. Sanday's position is shown to amount to a surrender of the Gospel account as history. While individual believers, safeguarded by long experience of the atmosphere of the full Catholic teaching, might (the author thinks) be able to rest in their position, it would be "disastrous" for the Church to adopt

such an attitude. "Sooner or later, the results would inevitably work themselves out in a 'reduced' Christology, and a 'reduced' Christianity." And the truth of this final conclusion is enforced by a foot-note embodying a quotation from another writer, showing that historically the "half-way position" has never been able to maintain itself. The disciples of those schools which have adopted it abroad have mostly ended either in an acknowledgment of the Virgin Birth on in "pure humanitarianism."

UNLIKELY MINISTRIES OF GOD. By J. Stuart Holden, D.D. London: *Morgan and Scott, Ltd.* Price 1s.

Four addresses delivered at Keswick last summer by Dr. Stuart Holden which are intended to bring comfort and light to any who are in distress or darkness during this time of war. Those who are tempted to doubt the love of God, those who have lost their dear ones or their possessions, those who cannot understand or whose future life seems aimless and impoverished, are all alike bidden to meditate upon the unexpected and unlikely ministries of God which Dr. Holden calls the ministries of (1) Darkness, (2) Withdrawal, (3) Delay, and (4) Contradiction. The message of the little book is simple, and is simply told. It is true to the Bible and true to the deeper experience of those who have learnt somewhat in the school of discipline. It is full of comfort to anxious, weary and nigh-unto-despairing souls in days when the light of life seems to go out and the Lord's hand to be shortened. There are helpful little poems scattered throughout the book, which is quite a suitable one to give to any friends who "want to trust in God what time they are afraid."

GLEIG'S WONDERFUL BOOK CONCERNING THE MOST WONDERFUL BOOK IN THE WORLD. Introduction by Sylvanus Stall, D.D. London: *Vir Publishing Company.*

It was a little surprise to discover that this book, issued by an American firm, is a reprint of a work published many years ago and written by the Rev. George R. Gleig, formerly Chaplain-General, a post which he held from 1844 to 1875. Before taking Holy Orders he was in the Army. It is indeed well that the book should be brought out of an undeserved oblivion. Its 710 closely packed pages takes us right through the Bible, with helpful explanations and illuminating "side-lights." It is a pity the chapters are not broken up into paragraphs—the general appearance of the volume is a little bewildering. The price too—7s. net—hardly gives it a chance of competing with such handbooks as Dr. Green's revision of Angus. Still we welcome a book devout and scholarly in tone and written in an easy, pleasant style, calculated to appeal to the general reader.

THE DIVINE PROGRAMME: SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS STUDY. By the Rev. Canon R. B. Girdlestone, M.A. London: *Chas J. Thynne.* Price 1s. net.

This little volume forms number three of the "Aids to Prophetic Study" put forth by the Prophecy Investigation Society. Thus besides being the work of Canon Girdlestone—no slight recommendation—it is also issued under the auspices and sponsorship of a Society of which he is a prominent and well-known member. His plan, the author tells us in his preface, "is to survey the Biblical predictions as a whole so as to detect their method, leaving each student to work out his own conclusions." This plan is adhered to in the treatise and many valuable suggestions for study are thrown out. The Divine Programme, centring, as is so well pointed out, in the person of the Saviour, is traced alike in the Old and the New Testament. The Chronological

Notes on Daniel alone present an analysis of that important book which occupies more than twenty-seven pages. Twenty pages are devoted to the Apocalypse, in explaining which the writer follows the historical method of interpretation.

"The day will come," we read, "when the Gospel promised to Abraham shall have reached the end of the earth. Then Jerusalem will become once more the head-quarters of Truth, and the Leader's feet will once more stand on the Mount of Olives." "We see not yet all things put under Him," but we see the first-fruits of victory, and we have the promise."

Those who wish to have a bird's-eye view of the whole range of Scripture condensed into a small compass will do well to procure and to read carefully this inexpensive and pre-eminently readable little volume.

FOR LITTLE PILGRIMS ON LIFE'S WAY. By Belle House. *Sherrat and Hughes*. Price 3s. 6d. net.

Forty-four chapters or papers, dealing with thirty-three subjects, written, as we should think, by a mother or at least by a lady who is fond of children. They abound in parables, telling stories, and illustrations, and besides the children for whom the book is primarily intended we would suggest that it might be a valuable help to those who have to give addresses to children and young people generally. We would not commit ourselves to every position taken up by the writer, but Sunday School Teachers and others who instruct our young people must be very dense if unable to find in these pages material to help them. The papers are brief and to the point. In particular we would commend the chapter entitled, "Soldiers of Jesus" page 23, as being not merely very apt and suggestive, but specially appropriate to the present time when soldiers are so much in evidence and bulk so largely in every one's thoughts.

The Churches and the Armies.

The new number of *The Times* "History of the War" (Part 100, issued July 18) should make a special appeal to religious people, inasmuch as it gives an account of the work of the Chaplains in the Armies. Like everything that comes from *The Times* office it is remarkably comprehensive in its survey. We are shown in turn the work of the Chaplains of the Church of England, the Presbyterian Churches, the Wesleyan Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the United Board (representing the Baptist, Congregationalist, Primitive Methodist and United Methodist Churches) and the Jews, and when these are considered together we see how splendidly the various religious bodies of the country have worked to promote the highest interests of the soldiers at home and at the various fronts abroad. But this is not all. As befits a "History," reference is made to the various discussions which have taken place during the last two years concerning the position of clergy and ministers in relation to combatant service and other kindred topics. The narrative is lightened up by many a telling story and the illustrations are excellent. Attention is called to the spirit of unity which has everywhere prevailed. We are told that the war has had a wonderfully unifying influence upon the various religious bodies of the country. Distinctive principles were not interfered with, but common work for a common purpose produced a common unity which before that memorable fourth day of August, 1914, would have been deemed unthinkable. Is that "common unity" to vanish into thin air after the war is over? We hope not. This is a question outside the purview of *The Times* writer, but it is one to which the Churches themselves cannot remain indifferent.