

NOTES ON COMMENTARIES.

6.—THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

It is singular that, while as yet we hardly possess as many commentaries of real value on the Gospels as there are Gospels to be commented on, we have the most copious and efficacious aids to the study of the only other historical book in the New Testament.

Of direct expositions, critical and exegetical, of the Acts of the Apostles, I may name two, Dr. Hackett's<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Gloag's,<sup>2</sup> as probably the best in our language. Each of them is marked by sound scholarship, good common sense (an invaluable quality in an expositor), a candid and devout spirit. Each of them perhaps is a little wanting in those finer qualities of spiritual insight and historical imagination which lift a commentary into the very first rank, but the English student will find in them both much that is really valuable and helpful to him; and, if he must make a choice, he will do wisely, I think, to give Dr. Gloag's work the preference.

Even Biscoe on the Acts,<sup>3</sup> though somewhat antiquated, contains much that is both valuable and suggestive. Not a commentary, but a series of Apologetical Lectures, it deals mainly with such confirmations of the accuracy of the sacred historian as are to be derived from Hebrew, Greek, and Roman annals, literatures, and customs. Like good old Dr. Bennet's "Lectures on the Acts"—from which also a shrewd hint may be gathered now and then—a second-hand copy of it may often be picked up for a mere trifle, and those to whom the chance comes would do well to avail themselves of it. If any modern scholar would write a book on Biscoe's lines, bringing it down to date, and illustrating it from the vast store of discoveries which have rewarded recent critical study and research,

<sup>1</sup> Published by Hamilton, Adams, & Co. One Vol.

<sup>2</sup> Published by Clarks of Edinburgh. Two Vols.

<sup>3</sup> Published at the Clarendon Press (A.D. 1839). One Vol.

he would render no small service to the student and lovers of the New Testament.

Baumgarten's "Apostolic History" has long been accessible to the English reader in a translation published by Clarks of Edinburgh. Its special worth—for there are far abler commentaries on the Acts by German scholars—lies in its fundamental conception; viz., that the acts of the Apostles are really the acts of the risen and exalted Lord of the Church; that as the Gospels record what He "*began* to do" while He was on earth, so the Acts are a record of what He *continued* to do after He had passed into heaven. Those to whom this conception is new will find St. Luke's annals read very freshly in the light of it; and, in any case, Baumgarten's is a good book to have.

Of Conybeare and Howson's—especially Conybeare's—great work on "the Life and Epistles of St. Paul," there is no need to speak. Every one knows its worth. As a popular commentary on the major part of the Acts of the Apostles—for it does little for the Epistles beyond placing them in their true historic setting, and drawing from them details which illustrate the life of St. Paul, but this it does most admirably—it would be hard to praise it up to the mark of its deserts.

Less generally known, but not less deserving to be known—as I will try to shew in the next number of the Magazine—is Lewin's sumptuous work with the same title. It has one very special charm for ministerial students of the Word, that it is written by a layman, and from a layman's point of view.

The same charm—and a layman's work is specially valuable to ministers, just as a minister's work is, or should be, specially valuable to laymen—is possessed by a volume entitled "Paul of Tarsus." Though not a commentary, it will be found a grave assistance by those who have to expound the Scriptures of and concerning the Apostle of

<sup>1</sup> "Paul of Tarsus." An Inquiry into the Times and the Gospel of the Apostle of the Gentiles. London. Macmillans.

the Gentiles. It is a very able and sincere attempt to appraise the character of St. Paul, the kind of work he did, and the way in which that work has told upon the Church and the world. I do not know that I can give a better taste of the author's quality than in a few words on a question much disputed and often raised.

“It cannot be denied that the teaching of Christianity ignores patriotism. It ignores it, however, only because patriotism is transient, is inferior to the large purposes which can be obtained by evangelizing a federal humanity. The State is superior to the family, and asserts its claim to break up all domestic ties in view of the public good, for it sacrifices the father in the citizen. But it does not, except under this constraint, disparage the family: on the contrary, it cherishes and encourages the love of home. And, similarly, the claims of a federal humanity are stronger than those of patriotism, and as civilization advances the latter will be sacrificed if it clashes with the former. Patriotism is encouraged only as the school of a higher life. And it should be remembered that if patriotism has given magnificent examples of self-sacrifice, of heroic devotion, of ardent courage, of noble enterprise, these very qualities have been called out because a spurious loyalty has armed the oppressor with the power which a true patriotism has successfully defied. But where, alas, could the preacher of the apostolic age find the material for patriotic impulse in the hopeless slavery of the Roman Empire? He is turned, perforce, to the *civitas Dei*. He does not, indeed, forget to prescribe the conduct of a pure and happy home. Between that and the spiritual kingdom there was a desert. If the Lord had not shortened those days, no flesh should be saved.”

EDITOR.

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