

THE MEMORABILIA OF JESUS.

The Memorabilia of Jesus, commonly called The Gospel of St. John, by William Wynne Peyton, Minister of Free St. Luke's, Broughty Ferry, N.B. (A. & C. Black.)

Mr. Peyton has given us a volume of genuine originality and of great value. To translate the Fourth Gospel in terms of modern science might seem an impossible, and if possible, an undesirable undertaking. But Mr. Peyton has shown us that it is both possible and full of results. He writes as if dogmatic theology had never existed, and is instructed solely by natural science and the experience of the Christian life. To turn to the world a new side of Christianity is no small achievement; it may almost be said to require a Hercules to put his shoulder to the wheel of the bogged wagon of Christian theology and lift it out of the ruts into a position in which it can start on a fresh career. To Mr. Peyton is due the credit of setting Christianity in new relations to nature and of thereby eliciting from each a significance previously hidden. He has given us an interpretation of Christianity which will appeal to many who have no patience with theology. He has accomplished a task, than which there was perhaps none more urgently required, he has brought religion into line with nature, and shown us that one God is in both, and that both are working out the same principles. "The theological conception takes on another complexion when the biological conception is placed alongside of it" (p. 338).

But the charm of the book arises not more from its main teaching than from the skill and beauty with which the teaching is given. For Mr. Peyton is not only thoroughly equipped in science, he is a poet as well, and conveys his meaning not in verse but in that most flexible and least monotonous of instruments, a prose which has all the swing and terseness and flush of poetry. This blend of science and poetry gives its peculiar flavour to the book. There are descriptions of nature equal to anything in Kingsley or in Tyndall, while there are expositions of the Spiritual life as searching and appeals as tender and inevitable as the finest passages in Maurice. The volume throughout has that peculiar charm and glamour which only genius imparts.

From first to last one scarcely meets a commonplace thought or a thought expressed in a commonplace way, and on almost every page are sentences which will often be quoted as the first and final expression of important truth. Above all, the entire volume is pervaded by faith, courage, hopefulness, charity, the spirit of power and love and a sound mind.

At the same time there is much in this book that will mar its influence. Four misprints on two pages; "Assissi," "Euripedes," and so forth, are bad enough; but these are the gnats. The camels are blemishes of style and errors in taste which some readers will not forgive. If the host sits down in shooting-coat and slippers, there are guests who will not own that the dinner is excellent. Snobs they may be, but there they are. Mr. Peyton's fondness for plural abstracts will be set down as an affected echo of Carlyle. The woman of Samaria was "quivering with magnetisms." "Life performs its physiologies in the virtues of water." "The pious actions and inspirations, the higher ethics of philosophy, have been awakened by the feeding on Christ, which lay long in the sleep of latences." Even these might be allowed to pass as one feature of an original and valuable personality, but the writer's idiosyncrasy unfortunately penetrates to the very substance of his thought and prompts utterances so singular that they will find an echo in scarcely another mind. The virgin-birth of our Lord is not made more credible by the fact that sexless generation exists among bees. "Parthenism, or a virgin-birth, is no difficulty to a naturalist," is on a par with the statement that "miracles offend a mind untrained to Nature's wonders." Nature undoubtedly shows us wonders as marvellous as any miracle, but it also shows us that those wonders occur by a natural evolution, each step in which can be exhibited. His theory of miracle is right but he does not make it so easy as he fancies for the naturalist to accept miracle.

It is also a misfortune that the opening chapters of the volume are below the level of the rest. The introduction itself is an ill-judged assault upon criticism. He pronounces all questions of genuineness and authenticity obsolete. "We deposit the literature of canonicities into a clean cabinet of antique bones." "Critics and apologists have failed to ask in these pathless arguments about authorship and authenticity the question of relevancy, What is the argument of the Johannine authenticity good for?"

What do you want to get at? Literature does not create life; life creates literature." According to Mr. Peyton it matters nothing whether the gospel belongs to the year 90 A.D. or 140 A.D. "Chronology is nowhere. The worship of Jesus was established 140 A.D. The authority of the Johannine Memorabilia established nothing about the Divine Personality of Jesus; it reflects what had been established." The gospel, if written in the second century, reflects the life of that century, and exhibits its sources. The Christian life authenticates itself and proves the Divinity of its source. This is quite true. It is a line of argument that is valid, but if Mr. Peyton supposes that he thus disposes of difficulties and cuts a short and easy path to an unassailable position, he deceives himself. This line of argument will be found to raise as many questions as any other. Does the Christian life authenticate itself? Whence the excrescences, the malformations, the disease that *uniformly* attach to it? Or, admitting its excellence, have not illusions, misconceptions of fact, unmerited love often produced, as in Buddhism and Mohammedanism, a type of life of much value? Besides, the affirmation that literature does not create life can only be admitted in a qualified sense. What produced the Christian life? Not the books of the New Testament certainly, but the oral deliverance of that same information regarding Christ, or the oral presentation of that same Christ afterwards embodied in the written gospels. Between this oral teaching and the written gospels there is no essential distinction. And of both we are driven to ask, Is this a true testimony? Have these witnesses had opportunity of knowing the truth? The other argument, from the nature of the life which their testimony produces, is valid, but does not supersede the ordinary critical argument.

But after all deductions Mr. Peyton's volume is one which for originality of thought and felicity of expression, for the delight it will bring to its readers, and the stimulus it will give to faith, may be put on a level with the best work of this generation. The type of Christianity it presents affords a happy corrective to all overstrained, morbid, unnatural, pharisaism which so commonly passes for the religion of Christ in our day.

MARCUS DODS.