

THE OUTLOOK IN NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM.

It is serviceable, from time to time, to get a competent survey of what has been done and of what remains to be done in any department of research. Especially when the principles and methods change, as they must do, to some extent, in any living branch of study, the entire aspect of things may become so altered in the course of a few years that it is essential for the student to take his bearings with the help of those who are actively and prominently engaged in the same enterprise. The changed outlook in recent New Testament criticism is more easily felt than defined, and it is therefore useful to get such estimates as have recently been published by Professor J. Weiss (*Die Aufgaben der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft in der Gegenwart*; Göttingen, 1908) and Paul Fiebig (*Die Aufgaben der neutestamentlichen Forschung in der Gegenwart*; Leipzig, 1909). Fiebig's essay is partly a reply to some points in the lecture of his predecessor, but each has independent value. As any one familiar with the previous work of both scholars might expect, Weiss emphasises the rhetorical and structural element in Paul's epistles (pp. 11 f.),¹ while Fiebig's main plea is for a better knowledge of the Jewish and rabbinic background to the New Testament. These idiosyncrasies do not, however, affect the general interest of the essays. That of Weiss, in particular, has a wide scope and leaves no problem of the subject untouched. He begins by emphasising the importance of textual criticism, especially for the study of the Gospels. This must be clear to any one who has been following the recent movements of research

¹ One of his parallels from the *diatribè* literature is particularly apt. With 1 Cor. vii. 17 (*δέδεσται γυναῖκί· μὴ ζῆτει λύσιν· λελύσται ἀπὸ γυναικὸς· μὴ ζῆτει γυναῖκα*) he compares the saying of Teles, the Stoic philosopher of the third century B.C., *γέρον γέγονας μὴ ζῆτει τὰ τοῦ νεοῦ· ἀσθένης πάλω· μὴ ζῆτει τὰ τοῦ ἰσχυροῦ . . . ἀπορος πάλω γέγονας· μὴ ζῆτει τὴν τοῦ εὐπόρου διαίταν.*

into the Old Latin and the Old Syriac versions, which indicate the possibility of reaching a Greek text over a century older than the earliest Greek uncials. A few pages (pp. 8 f.) on the language of the New Testament qualify some of Deissmann's principles and results.¹ Then come ten or eleven pages on exegesis. Weiss bewails the present lack of interest in exegesis among theologians as well as among preachers. "The modern theologian as a rule has no time, or at any rate he believes he has no time, to trouble himself with various interpretations or a number of possible renderings; what he wants is to be furnished at once with one translation of a passage, one interpretation, one view. In many theological circles the interest in exegesis has fallen to zero." This is in part due to honest reasons, e.g. a reaction against the older method which deployed one theory against another in successive sentences, headed by the forbidding *Gegen*. Partly also we may account for it by the contemporary popularisation of historical criticism and theology, which demands results rather than processes. But, Weiss frankly confesses, if the publication of a popular commentary like his own *Schriften des N.T.* is to delude students and ministers into the idea that they can afford to dispense with scientific editions of the New Testament, he would almost wish it had never been written. The object of his commentary, he protests, is to prepare the way for the use of such larger editions, not in any sense to supersede them. Nothing can be more deceptive than to go off with the idea that only one interpretation is possible in every case and that no further problems of the text await inquiry.

The problems of introduction get only eleven pages

¹ E.g. "Der griechische Papyrusbrief, der an Feinheit, Wärme, und Gedrungenheit des geistvollen Ausdrucks sich auch nur mit dem Philemonbrief messen könnte, soll noch gefunden worden" (p. 10).

(32-43), and most of these are concerned with the Gospels. Weiss does little more than recapitulate the conclusions of his earlier volumes. John the Presbyter, Paul's successor in Asia Minor, is given the authorship not only of the seven letters in the Apocalypse but of the three Johannine epistles and of the "Grundschrift" of the Fourth Gospel; the latter was subsequently edited by the author of chapter xxi. As for the Synoptic Gospels, Weiss still adheres to the view expressed in his *Älteste Evangelium* pp. 72-74, that Mark's Gospel must have been written between Peter's death and 70 A.D. The data of chapter xiii. are held to preclude any date subsequent to the fall of Jerusalem. But, while the Gospel is earlier than Matthew and Luke, the author is "not a primitive collector of materials from early, luxuriant tradition; he employs, arranges, and edits, with conscious purpose, an older tradition which has already a history behind it. Mark's Gospel is not a spring, but a reservoir" (p. 41). The problem thus opened up is that which Wendling and Wellhausen have done so much recently to explore; Nicolardot, in his *Les Procédés de Rédaction des trois premiers Évangélistes* (Paris, 1908), has also extended the inquiry to Matthew and Luke. Weiss does not enter into the details, but he makes the further suggestion that the influence of the Johannine text upon the Synoptists can be traced not only in passages like Matthew xxvii. 49, and Luke xxiv. 12, but in passages where Mark stands alone. This hypothesis is legitimate, but it is precarious. No evidence of such conformation occurs in the history of the text; it must have been extremely early, and, for the most part, the hypothesis is not absolutely necessary to explain the phenomena in question.

The bearing of these critical results upon the problem of the life of Jesus (pp. 43-48) is defined as a corroboration of the view that the nucleus of the genuine evangelic tradition

goes back to a Palestinian basis, and reveals a real religious personality. Weiss makes short work of Kalthoff and Jensen. "You cannot refute a man who denies the existence of the sun!"¹

A few pages (48-55) on the relation of the New Testament to contemporary religion, Oriental and Greek, conclude the essay. They do not contain anything of special moment. Weiss contents himself by defining his general position in these words: "The elements of Christology were all taken over from pre-Christian religions, but it was owing to the influence of the personality of Jesus that a doctrine of Christ ever arose; the Christology of the church after all voiced the faith of the church, that is, its gratitude and love to Him who had sacrificed Himself for it and furnished it with the assurance of the love of God."

One of the remarkable features of recent New Testament research has been the rôle played by scholars from outlying provinces, like Blass, Wendland, Soltau, Reitzenstein and Klein. This feature is emphasised and welcomed by Fiebig. He begins by pointing out that New Testament criticism is simply historical criticism directed towards the New Testament, and then proceeds to magnify his calling, or rather the calling of the New Testament student, in a way that will reduce most people to despair. Dr. Johnson's programme of what an editor of Shakespeare ought to read before essaying his task helps to explain why he never fulfilled his own promise, and Fiebig's prospectus is of an equally deterring character. The New Testament is written in Greek. Therefore the student must acquaint himself not only with the papyri but with the Greek and Latin literature of the age, under the guidance of men like Dieterich

¹ This was written, of course, before A. Drews published his sensational attempt to prove, on Jensen's lines, that Jesus is a creation of mythological romance.

Deissmann, Wendland, Heinrici and Reitzenstein. The New Testament is a Christian book. Therefore he must also specialise in the Christian literature down to c. 300 A.D., instead of accepting the results of Zahn and Harnack. The New Testament is written for the most part by men who were born Jews ; therefore the vast Jewish literature must be mastered, canonical, apocalyptic, Hellenistic and Talmudic. Fourthly, the New Testament is an Oriental book, and the New Testament scholar must learn Syriac, Aramaic, the Egyptian dialects, Arabic, and even Armenian ! *πρὸς ταῦτα τίς ἰκανός* ; it is impossible, Fiebig admits, for one man to be an expert in all these fields ; so much he concedes to human weakness. Such an attempt would land in hopeless dilettanteism. But one line at least must be mastered in so thorough a fashion as to qualify the student to estimate the work done elsewhere. Fiebig closes by appealing for the addition of at least two New Testament chairs to the ordinary curriculum, one for Talmudic, the other for Oriental, studies.

Of the two pamphlets, Fiebig's is obviously more concerned with questions of method. It is a plea for academic reorganisation rather than a survey of actual procedure. J. Weiss writes with a closer eye to the real problems of the science. What is common to both is the increasing prominence given to problems of historical and textual criticism, and the retrogression of interest in the questions of literary criticism which up till ten years ago would have bulked largely in essays of this kind. This is a feature of the modern outlook in New Testament criticism which is quite remarkable. It is a passing phase, due largely to the influence of the *religionsgeschichtliche* method. But when it passes, these literary questions will be resumed on broader lines than have hitherto been followed as a rule in monographs upon the subject. JAMES MOFFATT.