

## SOME RECENT BOSSUET LITERATURE.

ENGLISH people do not like Bossuet. He has not Fénelon's charm, nor was he an aristocrat. Yet Bossuet is the greatest figure in French literature, and Sainte-Beuve could say that the glory of Bossuet had become one of the religions of France. Now that the German fog is lifting, French culture will mean more to us. How is it that there are so few good books about Bossuet? Sainte-Beuve wrote some excellent essays. So did the late Ferdinand Brunetière. These were collected in a volume in 1913. M. Rebelliau's smaller book is excellent. Valuable monographs have been published on this or that aspect of Bossuet, as for instance M. Rebelliau's monumental study of the value as history of the *Variations du Protestantisme*; M. Longuemare's interesting collection of the *aperçus* of social life afforded by Bossuet's sermons; and M. Ingold's work on Bossuet's relations to *le Jansénisme*. But there is no great book on Bossuet, as a whole. In English we have nothing but one or two inadequate essays by Dean Church and a work by Mrs Sidney Lear, which might almost be called Bossuet for mothers' meetings.

Here we have another. M. Dimier's work is a reprint of a series of lectures delivered in 1916. It reads like that. It has two main faults. First, it is too polemical. Much of the earlier part is occupied in shewing up the deficiencies of nineteenth-century Bossuetists. Brunetière in particular is never mentioned except to attack. Now the romantic element in Bossuet is not the whole. Some of the writers here attacked may have emphasized too much what they call the 'lyrisme' of Bossuet. Still, it is there. This had been overlooked in the eighteenth century.

The other fault M. Dimier shares with Brunetière himself and many others, who wrote on Bossuet. Unless like M. Brémond they are writing avowedly in the support of Fénelon, they fall into panegyric. One of the greatest living Bossuet scholars has remarked this in two cases. But it is found in more. Bossuet was a great man, a great bishop, and a very great writer. But he was far from perfect. Many readers approach Bossuet with a prejudice against him, derived from the Fénelon controversy. This prejudice will not be removed by the tone of unreasoning admiration adopted by nearly all his biographers ever since the Cardinal de Bausset, indeed we might almost say since the panegyric written by Bossuet's secretary Le Dieu.

M. Dimier's little volume is no exception. The pages on Bossuet's relations with Richard Simon are superficial and unfair. Bossuet's treatment of Simon is the least pleasant episode in his life. In the

matter of Fénelon, Bossuet has been harshly judged. His fame has never recovered from his victory. Yet in the main he was right, and even in method he was less wrong than is commonly supposed. But in regard to Simon, Bossuet was unfair in object, tyrannical in method, and wrong in nearly every point of detail. The consequences to religion were disastrous. M. Dimier mentions this incident or rather series of incidents, but he does so without giving the reader a chance to see that Simon even had a case. If Bossuet, as Simon believed, allowed himself to be moved by the Jansenist leaders, who always hated Simon, that only derogates from his greatness. But I think he was sincere, like the Protestant assailants of Simon's critical method. This is proved by the attitude he took up in regard to Dupin. Anyhow he did an ill service to religion in suppressing this early effort at true critical enquiry, and, as Renan said, by throwing men back on the old indefensible methods of Biblical exegesis he prepared the ground for Voltaire.

Equally unsatisfactory is the last chapter, which is concerned with Bossuet's defence of Gallicanism. Largely occupied with the problems of modern ultramontanes, the writer does not take the trouble to go into the difficult problem of Bossuet's precise part in the assembly of 1682, and the framing of the four propositions. Nor does he give even a tolerable outline of the argument of the great *Defensio*.

On the other hand, the chapter on Bossuet as director of souls is admirable. It were to be wished that more people were acquainted with a side of his work which shews him in so sympathetic an attitude, and is different from that of the melodramatic gesticulator which so many people attribute to him. The Quietist controversy also is treated with common sense, and the writer escapes that glamour which has misled so many into a false notion both of Fénelon and what he stood for.

Greater gratitude is due for other efforts of Bossuet students. The monumental edition of the letters by MM. Urbain and L'Evesque is worthy of French scholarship at its best. The old divisions into *lettres diverses*, *lettres de pitié et de dévotion*, and *lettres relatives à l'affaire de Quietisme* had something in their favour. But the principle was not exactly carried out; many of the so-called letters of devotion were merely instructions to the superiors of convents. The editors have now adopted a purely chronological classification, and have nearly reached the close of the Quietist controversy in the tenth volume. Many letters not previously published are here given; and others gathered from out-of-the-way sources. Besides this, valuable pieces are printed in appendices to various volumes, and the notes on all important points are a storehouse of information without being overloaded. The same two scholars are giving us a definitive edition of the oratorical

works in six volumes. That is to say they are revising and completing the work of Lebarq. The condition of the text of the earlier editions of the sermons leaves much to be desired. Dean Church once wrote an essay on it, mainly derived from Gandar's book *Bossuet Orateur*. It is essential for the student to have the true text and the right date and attribution; also to be able to read Bossuet's various courses through, and not scattered as they all now are. Not the least of the injuries the Germans have done to culture is their stoppage of this publication. We have at present only two volumes, taking us down to 1659, i.e. the eve of Bossuet's great preaching period. Four other volumes we hope to see, if the war ever ends.

The *Revue Bossuet* was evidence of the interest and enthusiasm of French students. A glance at the foot-notes to any modern book on Bossuet will shew how important are the articles. It is sad that the British Museum, the Cambridge University Library, and the Bodleian have all alike passed it over in their catalogues. This, too, may come to us in peace-time.

Dimier, Louis, *Bossuet*. Paris, Librairie Nationale. 1917.

Brunetière, Ferdinand, *Bossuet*. 1913.

Rebelliau, Alfred, *Bossuet*. 1900.

" " *Bossuet, Historien du Protestantisme*. 1891.

Ingolde, *Bossuet et le Jansénisme*. Paris. 1897.

Longuemare, *Bossuet et la société française*. Paris. 1910.

On the Simon controversy cf. A. M. P. H. Margival, *Richard Simon*.

Bossuet, *Correspondance*, nouvelle édition augmentée par Ch. Urbain et E. Levesque, 1909-16.

*Œuvres oratoires de Bossuet*, édition critique de l'Abbé Lebarq, revue et augmentée par Ch. Urbain et E. Levesque. 1913, 1914. (Four more volumes to come.)

J. NEVILLE FIGGIS.

## A PARALLEL TO A COPTIC SERMON ON THE NATIVITY.

No. 6 in the *Theological texts from Coptic papyri*, edited by W. E. Crum in *Anecdota Oxoniensia, Semitic Series*, vol. xii (1913), pp. 20-23, gives: *a.* the final doxology of a discourse or some such text; *b.* the beginning, in a very defective condition, of an ἐξήγησις or Sermon by a bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia on the Birth of our Lord; *c.* a fragment on the appearance and the discourse of our Lord to the Apostles in Acts i 3-7. *b* follows *a* on the same leaf. *c* is in a conjugate leaf, more or less distant from the first, and it is not clear whether it preceded or followed the other; in the editor's judgement, 'it is