

[The prompt mention in our list of "Books of the Week" will be considered by us an equivalent to their publishers for all volumes received. The interests of our readers will guide us in the selection of works for further notice.]

DR. HUMPHREY'S SACRED HISTORY.*

The reputation of Dr. Edward Porter Humphrey rests mainly upon his excellence as a pulpit orator. In a State where eloquence is much affected, his style of preaching was considered one of remarkable beauty and power. He displayed his qualities of popular address first as pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Ky., and last as pastor of the College Street Church in the same city. But between these two pastorates, during some years he held the position of professor of Church History in the Theological Seminary at Danville. Here, as one of his successors testifies, "his fine scholarship, his pulpit power, his graceful diction, his manifest piety, his winning manners and unrivaled skill in imparting knowledge, made him the ideal instructor, to whose influence the minds and hearts of the students turned as the clay to the seal."

The volume published since his death at the solicitation of many friends and pupils is said to contain some of the best fruits of Dr. Humphrey's thinking. Doubtless it covers a portion of the ground of his lectures in the Seminary; but certainly not all, for the range of its subjects extends only from Eden to Sinai, and it is, therefore, merely a fragment of Sacred History. But in treating of the topics which fall within this range, his sons, in the preface to the volume, express the conviction that their father's method will bring welcome assistance to all ministers who are seeking to broaden and deepen their comprehension of divine truth, a surprising number of fresh suggestions of kindling and enriching thought to all careful students of the Bible, and clear away the mists from the vision of many serious and candid doubters, etc.

To what extent these anticipations will be fulfilled we do not undertake to judge, but we fear to no great length outside that particular school of thought and theology to which its author belonged. Instead of "Sacred History" its title should be rather a Treatise on the Early Covenants—for almost everything that happened in those primal times is referred to a covenant of some sort, either the Covenant of Works with Adam in Eden, or after the Fall the Covenant of Grace with Jesus Christ, or the Covenant of Forbearance with Noah, or the Covenant of Circumcision with Abraham, including their several stages, articles, revelations, theophanies, promises, seals, heirs and perpetuity. In fact, a simple-minded reader could never imagine from the Word of God itself that these covenants were so far-reaching and vicarious. The impression one naturally gets from the Bible in respect to the term "covenant" is that of an assurance or pledge, especially in the case of Noah after the Flood and in the heavenly bow; but, according to this exposition and others of the same tenor, it seems that in the first, second and fourth cases, the actor of the second part formally and actively entered into a compact, involving every human being down to the end of time, for, in regard to the first covenant, Dr. Humphrey teaches that the whole race was in the loins of Adam, who therefore was competent as their sole representative to enter into that agreement with God for himself and for them; in regard to the second covenant he intimates that Adam was the head and factor of his descendants; and, in regard to the fourth covenant, he considers Abraham to be the father of believers in all ages sharing in its terms. Apparently, Dr. Humphrey has gone through the first two or three books of the Bible interpreting them in the light of the Westminster Confession.

Agreeably to Dr. Humphrey's style of

* SACRED HISTORY FROM THE CREATION TO THE GIVING OF THE LAW. BY EDWARD P. HUMPHREY, D.D., LL.D. Sometime Professor in the Danville Theological Seminary. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son. 1888. 1 vol., 8vo.

delivery, the character of these lectures is rhetorical rather than scholarly. An illustration may be taken at random.

"When John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, saw the Lord Jesus, he exclaimed, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!' The frankincense-tree, solicited by sunshine and shower, distilled the savory gum from root and bough and leaf and flower, and at last brought its whole life, in its aromatic gift, to the altar. In like manner, salvation by the cross of Christ had been slowly educed from the first Gospel by the unfolding purpose of God running through all the ages" (page 178).

Indeed, it is only too evident throughout the book that its author deals with nothing as an original investigator, but takes his critical results as well as his historical and archeological facts at third or even fourth hand. This is seen, also, in his leaning upon Geikie's "Hours with the Bible," Coleman's "Historical Atlas," Blackie's "Biblical History," Farrar's "Families of Speech," Clarke's "Ten Religions," Rawlinson's "Origin of Nations," Hengstenberg's "Kingdom of God," Kurtz's "Old Covenant," such commentaries as Kalisch, Candlish, and Lange on "Genesis," and such encyclopedias as McClintock and Strong's, with occasionally a reference to the "Britannica"—and on other systematic works, as his authorities. It is easy to see that very little, either independent or new, or of much value, can spring from a reworking of such soil. It is also just as easy to see that Dr. Humphrey must inevitably revive some things that are obsolete and in other directions be led astray; and we are not surprised to find him defining the name Benjamin as "son of happiness," equivalent to *felix*, when the loss of Rachel certainly could not have made Jacob happy so as to prompt him to give his last son an appellation the very reverse of its mother's, Ben-oni—"son of my sorrow"; or explaining Joseph's Egyptian title Zaphnath-paaneah to mean "support of life," without regard to Brugsch's later rendering "Governor of the nome of the Place of Life"; or telling us that Pharaoh signifies "the sun," when its sign is now universally understood as reading "the Great House," analogous to the Turkish "Sublime Porte."

At the same time perhaps we should expect him to take the position he does in regard to the text of the Holy Scriptures as it has come down to us:

"The record exists in its integrity. No canonical book has been lost out of the volume, nor is any one of them mutilated or interpolated or otherwise corrupted. We have them as they came from the pen of their writers; we have them all. By the care and providence of God they have been kept pure in all ages, and are, therefore, authentic; and, further still, the record is sufficient and complete unto all the purposes of a veritable history of redemption. . . . No error, no discrepancy, mars the record" (p. 3).

It is a mystery how any friend of the truth can take such a stand as this. The Bible suffers more thereby than from an honest admission as to mistakes in transcription, later glosses, and some discrepancies in numbers, particularly in those pertaining to the reigns of kings in Judah and in Israel after the death of Solomon. Most of the faults found by Bishop Colenso were, and much of modern adverse criticism is still, based on these inaccuracies or additions to our present text; and the true answer to all such cavilings is that they formed no part of the original and inspired text. Dr. Humphrey's way of avoiding difficulties is of no credit to him or to any other writer on sacred history, and, withal, it will serve in no degree to clear away the mists from the vision of doubters, but the rather to thicken them. In the preface Dr. Humphrey is commended as a pupil of Moses Stuart, whose impress is said to be legible in all his work. Quite the contrary; for on this point Professor Stuart taught as follows:

"There is surely nothing short of a perpetual miracle which could have prevented some mistakes. But is there any evidence of such a miracle? I know of no satisfactory evidence. . . .

"The ground taken by most of the older

Protestant writers in regard to the invariability of the sacred text has been shown to be altogether untenable. Facts contradict their theory, and there is no arguing against facts. . . .

"We freely yield our assent to the allegation that in our present copies of the Scriptures there are some discrepancies between different portions of them which no learning or ingenuity can reconcile."—"Old Testament Canon," pp. 178, 179.

It would not be strange if such a disposition to avoid trouble by gainsaying it should lead Dr. Humphrey into many other errors of statement. We are sure any one at all acquainted with the Bible and ancient history will perceive at sight something wrong in the following proposition:

"Sabism was introduced very early into Chaldaea. There is reason to believe that before Abraham left his native country Sargon had established a complete system of idolatry, with its hierarchy of priests." However, the well-known Assyrian king, Sargon, reigned from B.C. 722 to 705, and was thus contemporary with King Hezekiah of Judah and King Hoshea of Israel. An early Babylonian king, Sargina, sometimes styled Sargon I, flourished not far from B.C. 1550, but still not less than four centuries short of Abram's home-life at Ur of the Chaldees. Again, a singular misapprehension underlies Dr. Humphrey's words:

"About thirty-eight years later the Israelites were encamped on the plain of Moab, almost within sight of the land of Canaan. They were visited by the heathen Balaam" (page 268).

Evidently the writer of these words understood by the "plain" the elevated plateau of Moab; but the lower eastern Jordan plain is meant, itself a portion of the land of Canaan, and in full sight of the western side of the river. Moreover, Balaam did not visit Israel, but looked down upon its camp, from the heights of Moab and at a considerable distance. Also he says, the government of Egypt in the time of Joseph undertook one of the greatest public works on earth—the artificial sea of Moëris—as an effectual means of preventing the recurrence of famine (p. 384). But, as every student of Egyptian history is informed, the artificial lake of Moëris was the achievement of King Amenemhat III, of the twelfth dynasty, who lived not less than five hundred years prior to the Pharaoh of Joseph.

As may be guessed from what has thus been pointed out, Dr. Humphrey deals less easily with events than comments, and his work is properly a theological analysis and interpretation of the earlier books in the Pentateuch. In most of his explanatory amplification, illustration, comparison and construction, he is discreet and instructive. We regard his views upon the Church and the Children, Baptism as a Substitute for Circumcision, the Jehovah-Angel, his defense of Joseph in Egypt, and his chapter on the Sins of the Patriarchs, as exceptionally excellent and worthy of wide as well as thoughtful consideration. Indeed, the whole of the review will aid to a fuller insight of divine truth any one who desires the help of an expansion of the subject rather than argument or contention. Beyond a question, the sons of Dr. Humphrey, who issue the volume, are right in believing that

"It will refresh and confirm and gladden the choicest hopes, personal and evangelical, of all those devout readers who regard themselves and all believing souls, the world over, as inheritors of the covenants and the promises, and who, in these days, are waiting for the manifestation of the Sons of God."