

REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

A MUCH DISCUSSED BOOK.

THE LORD'S COMING AND THE WORLD'S END. By the Rev. W. J. L. Sheppard, M.A. London: S.P.C.K. 2s. 6d. net.

This is a remarkable book. Its author sets out to demolish the views of prophecy commonly held among Evangelicals who are usually regarded as very deep Bible students, and undoubtedly few of his arguments can be dismissed with a wave of the hand. He frankly "spiritualizes" nearly everything. And his treatment demands respect because he is not one of those who discredit inspiration or disbelieve in a personal Advent. If an event is unquestionably foretold in Scripture—e.g. 1 Thessalonians iv.—he unquestioningly accepts it. And he bases all he says on the words of Scripture.

Most of us who are not definitely committed to any school of prophetic interpretation will probably feel, after reading this book, that it is well not to be too sure how the details of prophecy will be worked out. We shall feel this, not only because of Mr. Sheppard's arguments, but because, as we venture to think, he is sometimes too sure himself. It is impossible to give many instances either way; but we should like to select one or two examples of his strength, and also of what we think may be his weak points.

On the subject of the pre-tribulation Rapture, and especially the *secret* Rapture, he has hit on a point which must have struck many of us. Where is the Scripture proof? Writers and speakers follow each other with dogmatic assertions, but they either take the fact for granted or quote passages capable of different interpretations. If anybody has an answer to Mr. Sheppard here, we should like to see it. We have looked for it in many quarters, and are anxious to find it. At the same time, has he dealt with every passage which may be taken to bear upon it? We have found no direct reference to Luke xxi. 36.

Another point which seems quite unanswerable is that if Matthew xxv. deals with a judgment of living nations at the Coming of Christ, and if all Christians, living and dead, are then already with Him, the earth would be uninhabited during the Millennium, if a Millennium be accepted (note ver. 46 here).

But in one pivotal passage Mr. Sheppard is not so happy. First of all, we are not quite sure of his point on 1 Thessalonians iv. It is quite true that nothing can be built on the word "first," which cannot be assumed to refer to anything but the succeeding "then." But is there no hint of a separate resurrection in the emphasis on the words "in Christ"? He gives a perfectly clear reason for his belief that there is not: but it does not quite convince us. We are still more doubtful about Revelation xx., which is really pivotal to his whole position. If he fails here, the spiritualizing theory is done for. The comparison with John v^o 25, 28 is very striking, but the parallel is not exact. In that passage, the distinction between spiritual and literal is made clear by designed variation of phraseology. In Revelation xx. there is no such variation. *ἐξήσαν* is used in both cases, and moreover in consecutive lines. To seek a different meaning in such circumstances is very forced. Nor is this all. *πεπελεκισμένων* is another stumbling-block. Mr. Sheppard knows the value of correct translation of tenses. He insists on the right rendering of *ἐρχόμενοι* in Revelation vii.

14. (But, by the way, is he necessarily right there? If that vision was future, the present tense would be proleptic, and would refer to what was happening, not in St. John's day, but at the time represented in the vision.) It is surely clear that *πεπελεκισμένων* refers to those who, at the time referred to, had been already beheaded. It passes our comprehension how such a tense can refer to a *present* experience of potential martyrdom, even if this latter interpretation could be accepted without grave doubt. They had been beheaded, and lived. We are not, indeed, sure that the omission of the word "again" in ver. 5. makes so much difference as is represented. But even if it does, what is the precise value Mr. Sheppard assigns to the words "the rest of the dead"? Why "the rest," if those already mentioned in ver. 4 had not been literally dead and literally raised? We think we know what he would reply, but the only reply again seems terribly forced.

Is it correct, too, to say that the New Testament is "absolutely silent" on such a reign of blessedness, except for this disputed passage? How can we be quite sure there is no reference in Matthew xix. 28, Acts iii. 21, Revelation xi. 15, Matthew v. 5, Acts i. 6, 7, or perhaps other passages? In the last case, for instance, it seems very significant that our Lord did not deny the main assumption. His silence, when denial would have been so easy, and especially when a direct allusion to times and seasons might be understood as an admission of the ultimate fact, may well be argued as assent.

We do not quite like the way in which Bishop Moule is quoted. Many of us know how scrupulously balanced are the assertions of that careful theologian; but the quotations might convey an impression that he gave an adherence to the spiritualizing view to which he certainly did not commit himself. In one place, moreover, there is apparently a grave misquotation, unless Mr. Sheppard's edition of *Outlines of Christian Doctrine* is different. Correctly, the passage runs (p. 109): "And if so, the question arises whether the same principle does not rule other Old Testament predictions of the future of Israel." Mr. Sheppard writes "the other." There is a difference, and it may mean much.

We are not impressed by the chapter on the Creed of the Church. Let it be granted that the Reformers and others held certain views: nevertheless they used Scripture language, and therefore the interpretation of it must be Scriptural, whatever that is. With the doubtful exception of the Athanasian Creed, none of the passages quoted demands adherence to the view advocated as a matter of loyalty to the Church.

The book is remarkable, as we have said, for its arguments. But it is also remarkable for its omissions. It would be unreasonable to expect everything in a small volume; but it is extraordinary to find no reference to the remarkable chronological correspondences worked out by the leading students of the Historical School (we except less responsible people who have brought discredit on the study of the subject by rash conjectures). We do not recall more than the most casual reference to Daniel in the whole book! On the very day these words are written, there appears in *The Life of Faith* (February 5) an address by Bishop Moule, in which he remarks on Dr. Guinness's forecast for the year 1917 forty years ago. That year witnessed the fall of Jerusalem and Bagdad—portentous events for Turkey: and moreover, this is only the latest of a whole series of correspondences which simply cannot be fortuitous.

Mr. Sheppard would probably point us to his remarks on the principles of the Apocalypse as his answer to the Historicists. But it is simply begging the question to say that "any line of interpretation which violates" the

principles he lays down " may be dismissed as erroneous." He is up against the facts of history there; and the Historicists have evidence to produce which he has not. In the address just named, Bishop Moule regards the Apocalypse as strictly predictive (the same conclusion may be drawn from the section of his " Outlines " quoted in this book). Referring to the parallel of Daniel's chronological prediction already fulfilled at the First Advent, the Bishop, with gentlest irony, suggests that some liberalising Hebrews " may have smiled at Simeon's and Anna's hope, and advised them to read Daniel's visions in a more philosophic spirit; to forbear to load them with chronological responsibilities; to regard them rather as pictorial embodiments of principles." " But," he adds, " such sages would have been wrong. The seventy weeks meant history and an event, the supreme event for Israel and the world." Mr. Sheppard does not really " liberalise," in the usual sense of that word at any rate; but he does some at least of these things with reference to the Apocalypse. Among these predictions, by the way, the Bishop shows he includes Revelation xx., probably reckoned by " year-days."

Perhaps the weakest part of the volume is the Foreword. 2 John 9 is not clear enough for the writer's purpose, at any rate unless more closely limited, and moreover lays him open to a retort from Revelation xxii. which we notice has already been made. And it is inconsistent to allow that such points are non-essential on p. 8 after this apparently inclusive fulmination on p. 5. Mr. Sheppard cannot have it both ways. If 2 John 9 is applicable he must have no dealings with the Bishop of Durham, Mr. Hubert Brooke, and quite a host of other people whom we are quite certain (as indeed he himself clearly shows) he is by no means anxious to excommunicate!

But there is nothing unseemly about the tone adopted in the book towards opponents. Most of the way we have been rather critical; but that is because we do want the author and others to weigh well these points, and such-like with them. The book is really impressive, and deserves the attention which it is receiving—it is already in a second edition. It *compels* thought, and we hope it will lead to wider and deeper study and discussion, without recrimination, of its great and immediately vital topic.

CANON LILLINGSTON'S "EVANGELISM."

THOUGHTS ON EVANGELISM. By Canon A. B. G. Lillingston, with a foreword by the Bishop of Durham. London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1s. 6d. net.

This little book of eighty-four pages, which has already gone into a second edition, comes as a suitable sequel to the Report of the Archbishops' Committee on the Evangelistic Part of the Church—and enforces the findings of that Committee. From a rich and varied experience the writer lays emphasis upon Evangelization as the primary (and too often the neglected) duty of the Church and its members. He modestly disclaims novelty or profundity in treatment; but no one can read this volume and fail to be impressed with its deep, searching tenderness and high pastoral value. There are four chapters—The Need, The Clergy to Lead, Helps, " Jesus spake the Word unto them." The book is simply written, in a style that arrests, with many an incident related to bring out the point. The tone is spiritually high; the manner gentle; the aim to lead the readers to an appreciation of the real purpose of the Church and the first work of its true members. For all the failure—the remedy is obvious. " The Church, the whole Church, Clergy and Laity alike and together, must walk nearer to God, must walk continually in the Light, for in the Light we see Light—and can then go forward in the steps,

and after the example of, the Master Himself, and manifest God more fully and better to a world that is sitting and labouring in darkness or in gloom." This is a little book which every "parson" would be the better for reading: the younger men would find that it would shape their course, and the older men would be gently rebuked and led back again to the first paths.

OTHER VOLUMES.

THE PATHWAY TO FULNESS OF BLESSING, by the Rev. E. L. Langston, M.A. (*London Jews' Society*, 16 Lincoln's Inn Fields.) 2s. 6d. net. The writer declares that the greatest need of the servants of God to-day is to be filled with the Holy Spirit: and declares that in the prophecies of Balaam and in the history of Israel there are wonderful object-lessons of the way to live such a life of overflowing blessing. How to enter this life, the difficulties we must encounter, and the obstacles to be overcome, are all given in Balaam's remarkable prophecies. Those three prophecies are dealt with as setting forth the calls to Separation, Sanctification and Satisfaction.

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INTERCESSION AND THE SHARING OF THE CROSS, by Charles Gardner, Muriel G. E. Harris, Eleanor McDougall, Michael Wood, Annie K. Small. (*Macmillan & Co.* 2s. net.) This is a small volume of five essays on Intercession, in which with others the following subjects are dealt with:—"The Background of Intercession," "Contemplative Intercession," "Vicarious Offering." The reader will put down this little volume with sense of the greatness of the power of intercession: a mighty power of which he has learnt but first principles.

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THE SPIRIT OF JESUS. A Study of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: Its Missionary and Social Gospel for To-day. (*S.P.C.K.* 2s. net.) By the Rev. Canon A. E. Humphreys, M.A. This book of studies is prepared as the basis of "ten minutes daily with the Bible," and has a modern English version of the Epistle, showing the connected argument. The studies cover a period of six weeks.

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THE MEANING AND REALITY OF PRAYER, by the Rev. A. R. Whately, D.D. (*S.P.C.K.* 4d. net.) This is a scholarly, and yet a simple, treatise on a great subject by a writer of distinguished ability. It is among the freshest and most helpful little booklets on this important topic.

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DREAMS: WHAT THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY MEAN, by J. W. Wickwar. (*Jarrollds*, 2s. 6d. net.) Most of us dream, and some of us have theories of the meaning of dreams. Mr. Wickwar, who has given the subject much study, claims to have treated the old topic in a new way, in the light of "common-sense reasoning." His conclusions may not be ours, but he has certainly produced a very interesting little book, which has reached a third edition.

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A LITTLE BOOK FOR MOTHERS AND SONS, by Nora Brodie Thornhill (*Longmans, Green & Co.*, 2s. 6d. net), is a series of readings by mothers to their boys during the seven weeks of the holidays. The writer disclaims any literary merit, but one cannot but admire the ingenuity shown in the capture at the outset of the youth's attention by an interesting story or topical allusion, an indispensable preliminary to the enforcement of the subsequent religious lesson.