

THE
PRINCETON REVIEW.

JANUARY 1849.

No. I.

- ART. I.—1. *American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Special Report of the Prudential Committee, on the control to be exercised over Missionaries and Mission Churches.* Printed for the use of the Board at the Annual Meeting.* Revised edition. Press of T. R. Marvin.
2. *Correspondence between the Cherokee and Choctaw Missions, the Rev. S. B. Treat, and the Prudential Committee.* Missionary Herald, October, 1848.

IT is a matter of notoriety that the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, have for several years been sorely harassed on account of their supposed patronage or tolerance of slavery. Those known to the country as abolitionists, have felt it to be a duty to expostulate with the Board from time to time, for receiving money from the owners of slaves, for employing slaveholding missionaries, and for sustaining mission churches in which slaveholders were received as members.

* Also published in the Missionary Herald for October, 1848.

in a word, that the obvious and natural meaning of the passages which speak of elders, is the true one, and that no other need be sought by forced constructions or gratuitous assumptions. By the application of this safe and simple method of interpretation, we have reached the conclusion that presbyters, as presbyters, possessed and exercised the highest ministerial powers, including those of discipline and ordination, in the days of the apostles; that the same rights and powers belong to them at present; and that no ministrations can be charged with invalidity, because they are performed under authority derived from presbyters.

ART. VII.—*An Introduction to the New Testament, containing an examination of the most important questions relating to the authority, interpretation, and integrity of the canonical books, with reference to the latest inquiries.* By Samuel Davidson, LL.D. Volume I. The Four Gospels. London: Samuel Bagster & Sons. 1848. Svo. pp. 430.

IN our last number we gave a very imperfect outline of the history of opinion with respect to the Four Gospels. Had we been acquainted then with the elegant volume now before us, our labour might have been greatly abridged by reference and extracts, and we should certainly have withheld or qualified our closing statement, as to the total want of books in the English language, presenting a correct view of the German speculations without any undue deference to their authority or gratuitous adoption of their principles. The general fact as to this deficiency in English literature is stated by Dr. Davidson himself in still stronger terms than we employed, and with an expression of contempt for the "stereotype-minded," and for those who creep along in "the ruts of hereditary or prevailing opinion," which we think less suited to correct the evil than to raise an unjust prejudice against his own work, as neologizing in its tendency; whereas its chief characteristic is the rare combination of a thorough knowledge of the German writers, with a total freedom from that slavish submission to their dicta,

which so frequently accompanies this kind of learning, both in England and America. As the criticism of the gospels is awakening more and more attention, such a work as that before us will, in all probability, excite the curiosity of many readers, and we therefore think it best, without renewing the discussion of the subject, to describe, as briefly and as clearly as we can, what the author has attempted, and how far he has accomplished it.

The grand merit of the book is that which we have hinted at already, that it shows a thorough and familiar acquaintance with the latest literature of the subject, which, as we have said before, is almost exclusively German. The intrinsic value of a large part of this matter, and the impossibility of utterly excluding it from the English-reading public, makes it highly desirable that those who feel an interest in such inquiries should have access to them, not in a garbled or one-sided shape, but in a fair and ample statement. At the same time, it is equally important that this statement should be made by one who is not infected with the virus of neology, or ashamed or afraid to dissent from the conclusions of the most authoritative German writers. Even a bias towards the opposite extreme of sturdy common-sense and prepossession against specious novelties, may, for obvious reasons, be regarded as a salutary check, in the exposition of these new and strange views to the English reader.

Both these conditions seem to us to be answered in the work before us. The author's knowledge of the recent foreign writers is surprisingly extensive and exact, coming down, so far as we can judge, to the very latest dates, and reaching to the most minute particulars. Nor is it mere bibliographical learning. With a rare patience of attention and facility of acquisition, he has really mastered the contents of this voluminous and complicated literature, stating opinions and authorities, wherever we can follow him, with exemplary fairness and precision. We have no hesitation in affirming that a careful study of this volume is, beyond comparison, the best means known to us, by which an English reader can inform himself, with least expenditure of time and labour, as to the latest forms of speculation with respect to the Four Gospels.

On the other hand, the conservative prejudice or prepossession

sion, which we have represented as desirable in such a case, has influenced the author's mind throughout in a very high degree, it may be, higher than he is himself aware. We have repeatedly been pleased to note the old-fashioned good sense and simplicity with which he sweeps away a fine-spun web of ingenious fallacy, by answers which, however, satisfactory to us and to himself, would be regarded by the subjects of his criticism as nothing more nor less than proofs of his ungerman intellect. Even admitting that he sometimes actually goes too far in this direction, and relies too much upon the straight-forward plain sense of his readers—a quality which there is cause to fear is rapidly decreasing in these fanciful and transcendental times—the general tendency, of which these are occasional excesses, is not only a correct one in itself, and especially entitled to respect when found to co-exist with such familiar knowledge of the writings which have done more than all other causes to discredit and destroy it, but peculiarly safe and re-assuring in the case of one who undertakes the delicate and doubtful task of engrafting German discoveries on the good old stock of English sobriety and solid sense.

What we have now said of our author's anti-neological propensities must not be understood as wholly acquitting him of all undue concession to the new opinions. In some of his departures from the old views, he appears to us to be not only wrong, but inconsistent. Yet even in these cases there is no appearance of a puerile submission to authority, or a morbid love of innovation, but a simple error of judgment, such as might have been committed in any other case of choice between numerous and conflicting views. These exceptions are, moreover, for the most part, such as affect only questions of detail. They do not touch the author's general principles of criticism or his views of inspiration. With respect to these, he is, in spite of his expressed contempt for such, as "stereotype-minded" as we could desire.

There is, however, one intellectual deficiency in the performance which detracts not a little from the safeness and the wholesomeness of its influence, though not in the least from the author's *bona fides* or his personal soundness in the faith. Like almost every other writer who attempts to refute a great variety of errors in a limited space, he sometimes states objections and

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difficulties, which he either fails or neglects to answer. It would indeed be almost miraculous if one man, even of the highest powers and the most extensive learning, should be able single-handed, to resist and vanquish the selected subtilties of many cultivated minds. The attempt to do so would be highly presumptuous, if deliberately made. It is not, however, in this light that it is usually viewed by those who undertake so hazardous a task. The concentrated venom of a hundred teeming and erratic minds excites no more apprehension than the sophistries of one, and the defender of the truth is scarcely conscious of fighting against odds. He is also apt to be misled, by having passed through the ordeal himself without a change of his belief, into the error of supposing that the fallacies which failed to hoodwink him will be equally unsuccessful in the case of his own readers. Hence he frequently contents himself with simply stating an objection or a cavil, either wholly without comment, or with a bare description of it as absurd, when perhaps to many readers these very slighted and derided sophisms are as so many drops of deadly venom or the barbs of poisoned arrows, which the wounded mind has neither strength nor skill enough to render harmless.

With this defect, to some extent, it may be, unavoidable in executing such a plan, the work before us is unquestionably chargeable. The author does sometimes leave unanswered what he ought to have refuted or suppressed. Nor can it here be urged in justification, that the false opinion would be known at any rate, because if he repeats it without any antidote, he merely helps to give it currency and multiply the chances of its doing mischief. It is not, however, in this particular form that the mistake in question shows itself most frequently in the work before us. It does not belong to the character or habits of our author's mind to leave the refutation of an error unattempted. But a good will is not all that is required, and the effort is not always as successful as its honesty deserves. In other words, the author's reasoning against the skeptical opinions which he states, is sometimes very unequal to the ingenuity and force with which they are propounded even by himself, but nearly in the words of their original authors.

This defect may arise in part from something in the author's turn of mind and intellectual habits; but we think it is suffi-

ciently accounted for by the peculiar nature of the work itself. It is clearly impossible for any man to muster and marshal such a host of contradictory and complicated theories as a compiler and reporter, and at the same time to exercise his own powers of reasoning and judgment on this mass of heterogeneous materials with complete success. Considering the difficulties of the case, we are far more disposed to wonder that he has been so successful than to complain that he has not been more so.

In reference to what has now been said, the question may arise; how far this imperfection makes the work unfit for circulation, or unsafe to use. To this we answer, that a work of so much erudition is not likely to be carefully perused by any except those who are especially addicted to such studies, and who have already some acquaintance with the subject. To such the volume furnishes a valuable storehouse of materials, which might else be inaccessible, presented almost always in the light most favourable to old and strict opinions, by an author whose own principles are sound, and whose occasional failures to refute what he rejects may only serve to call forth a completer refutation on the part of those who come to the perusal of his work with right dispositions and the necessary literary preparation. As the ablest teacher commonly learns something even from his less distinguished pupils, so the industry and learning of an author may assist readers, far inferior to himself, in the solution of some difficulties which he has, either inadvertently or unavoidably, left without an antidote.

Dr. Davidson's style is among the least of his merits, being often at the same time awkward and ambitious. This is especially apparent when he chooses to expatiate on a topic. The diffuseness, which we have observed in his lectures on Biblical Criticism, and which was no doubt owing, in some measure, to their primary design, has been here corrected by the superabundance of matter to be crowded in a narrow compass. The worst fault chargeable upon the English of this book is a kind of euphemistic circumlocution, to avoid the repetition of the same word, which becomes worse than ludicrous when it leads the author to speak of our Saviour as "that person" or as "that distinguished Being."

The mechanical execution of the work is in the finest English

style. A writer on biblical subjects could not well fall into better hands than those of Samuel Bagster. The typography is certainly most beautiful, and seems to us immaculate. We trust that these external advantages will multiply intelligent readers, not of this volume only, but of those which are to follow it, and of the new edition of the *Biblical Criticism* which we are encouraged to expect, to say nothing of the other works which Dr. Davidson seems called in Providence to write and publish, in the exercise of his vocation as the safest and most skilful introducer of exotic learning, disinfected of exotic infidelity, to English readers.

QUARTERLY LIST OF NEW PUBLICATIONS.

Important Doctrines of the true Christian Religion explained, demonstrated, and vindicated from popular Errors. Including among others, The Lord's Second Advent; The Divine Character, Unity, Trinity and Person; The Assumption of Humanity and Putting forth, thereby, the power of Redemption; The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and Salvation by his blood; His Mediation and Atonement; The Justification of a Sinner; Harmony with the Doctrine of a Plurality of Worlds. Being a Series of Lectures delivered at the New Jerusalem church, in Cross Street, Hattou Garden, London. By the Rev. S. Noble. With an Introduction by George Bush. New York: John Allen. Svo. pp. 485.

The above long title gives a clear idea of the nature of this work. It contains twenty-seven popular Lectures on important subjects. It is perhaps the best, and certainly the most accessible, authentic exposition of Swedenborgianism. That system must have a certain power about it as it has lived under a weight of confusion and absurdity which would have long since crushed any ordinary theory to death. It is however only for a very limited class of men that the system has any attraction, or who have any affinity for the system; amiable men, who can believe and disbelieve at will; whose convictions are subject to their wishes, and their wishes determined by their imagination. Men, to whom the conceivable is, for that reason alone, the real. Some gentleman of this class, enamoured with this theory, has been at the expense either of the republication of these Lec-