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THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY AND ITS WORK.

In the last number of this REVIEW* some account was given of the calling of the Westminster Assembly and of its historical meaning. It was pointed out that its really significant work was the preparation of formularies designed to serve the churches of the three kingdoms as a basis for uniform establishments. Some account of its work on these so-called "four parts of uniformity" is now to be given.

Of these "four parts of uniformity", the one which was at once the most pressing and the most difficult for the Assembly, was the preparation of a platform of government for the churches. Both Parliament and Assembly were, indeed, fairly committed to the Presbyterian system under solemn sanction; and the majority of the members of both bodies were sincerely Presbyterian in conviction.⁶⁶ But sincerity and consistency are very different matters; and so soon as the details of church organization were brought under discussion, a bewildering variety of judgments was revealed. The Scots, though prepared to yield in the interest of harmony all that it was possible to yield,

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⁶⁶ Baillie, writing in 1645, says (ii., p. 320): "The bodie of the Parliament, City, and Countrey are for the Presbyterie." Cf. i., p. 287, from Dec., 1640: "The farr greatest part are for our discipline."

REVIEWS OF RECENT LITERATURE

APOLOGETICAL THEOLOGY.

WHAT IS RELIGION. By WILHELM BOUSSET, Professor in the University of Göttingen, Author of *Life of Jesus*. Translated by F. B. Low. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1907. (London: Williams & Norgate). Crown 8vo.; pp. xvi. 304.

Professor Bousset tells us that "the object of this little book is" to help us "to understand the meaning of the phenomenon which we call religion" (p. 6). It is the phenomenon which he undertakes to expound; that is to say he deals directly with the phenomenology rather than with the philosophy or the psychology of religion. In other words, his method is historical. He traces what he conceives to be the history of the development of religions from their beginning in the first vague manifestations of the religious aspirations of man to their culmination, we do not say in Christianity, but in the liberal Christianity of the twentieth century; and through this medium of history he seeks to convey to the reader a conception of what religion is.

Professor Bousset's book is, therefore, historical in form. But it is not primarily historical in purpose. As there are some novels which are written "for the novel's sake", and some which are written "for a purpose"; so there are some histories which are written for the history's sake and some histories which are written "for a purpose". And Professor Bousset's history of religions is of the latter class. He does not trace the varied forms of religion which have been prevalent among men merely that he may make these forms known to us; nor even that through them and their sequence he may make the development of religion known to us; nor even that through this development he may make what religion as religion is known to us. His real purpose, dominating his whole undertaking, is that he may make Christianity—naturally, as he conceives Christianity,—known to us. The book, therefore, very properly culminates in two long chapters on the Nature and the Future of Christianity, for which in point of fact the whole of the preceding chapters have been written and to which they lead up. In a word, Professor Bousset's little book is a study of the nature and prospects of Christianity from the point of view not so much of "comparative religion" or of the "history of the religions", as of the so-called "comparative-religion" or "history-of-religion" (*religionsgeschichtliche*) school. It is in other words an attempt

to explain Christianity, in its entirety, as a religion among religions, the product like other religions of the religious nature of man.

Professor Bousset is quite frank and quite emphatic in the expression of his point of view upon the main matter at issue—whether, to wit, Christianity is just a religion among religions, the product, like all other religions, of the religious nature of man. Nor does he wait for his exposition of the course of religious development to suggest this, or to establish it. He announces it already in his Introduction, practically as a postulate; and sets out on his exposition of the course of religious development, therefore, with his goal well in view. The distinction so often drawn between “revealed and natural religion”—as if, forsooth, “the religion of the Old and New Testaments is revealed religion”, and “all others are natural religions, the product of man’s thought or imagination”—is in his opinion thoroughly untenable,—“impossible” is his word (p. 8),—and, indeed, “irreligious and Godless” (p. 7). For not only is it not accordant with the principle of historical evolution, but it implies a “narrow-minded and melancholy view of the history of humanity”. This mode of speech is determined by the shock which it gives Prof. Bousset that anyone should suppose God to have allowed “the nations” “to go their own way” without guidance from Him, the implication being that all religion is the product in a sense of “revelation”. Elsewhere his thought swings around the opposite focus of the ellipse. The thinking of men imbued with modern culture, he tells us, “rests upon the determination to try to explain everything that takes place in the world by natural causes; or—to express it in another form—it rests upon the determined assertion of universal laws to which all phenomena, natural and spiritual, are subject” (p. 283). “Historical science”, accordingly, “puts before itself the object of explaining all intellectual events by reference to a universal law” (p. 288). There is, no doubt, always “the riddle of personality and individuality” which enters everywhere into the fabric of history; but this is not the same thing as—or in any way analogous to—the intrusion of a supernatural factor. The “halo of the supernatural” which has in the past clung around ‘sacred history’ “has been disrupted”. We can now believe only in an evolution of religion shaping itself in accordance with “the universal evolution of civilization”, and it is in consequence no longer possible to “believe in a Divine revelation in the old acceptance of the term, which restricted revelation to one special province” (p. 289). Thus we see the curve of the ellipse turn back on itself. When we speak of “the natural course of events” and of “the direction of divine revelation”, we are speaking of one and the same thing, and the upshot of it is that Christianity is no more “revealed” than any other religion and is just as much a product of human thought and imagination as any other religion. It takes its place among other religions as just one of them,—the purest form, the highest and most perfect, religion has yet reached: but certainly not the only true religion, “but simply the most complete species of the genus” (p. 9).

It is to exhibit this of Christianity that Professor Bousset has written

his book. As was natural, he takes his start from the beginning. Religion being natural to man, there never was a time when men did not have religion; or if we, from the evolutionary standpoint, must say that "there must be some point of time when religion had its beginning", that point of time must be placed so early that "wherever human life advanced a stage religion was evolved" (p. 2). Its first beginnings were no doubt of a low character,—corresponding to the low intellectual and social development of its creators. Professor Bousset puts "animism" at the basis of all religious development; and then traces the gradual evolution of religious conceptions and practices from it, in stages running *pari passu* with the development of social organization, up through tribal and natural to universal religions. Prof. Bousset is a scholar of wide reading and an expositor of decided gifts; and much that he tells us of these several phases of religious construction is well conceived and well told. But by means of it all he is working his way steadily onward to an explanation of the religion of the Bible,—or, from his point of view, we should say, of the religions of the Old and New Testament writings in their several stages—as of purely natural origin. He is careful, therefore, to insert accounts of the successive stages of religion which he thinks he finds set forth progressively in the several strata of the Biblical books in their proper places in the advancing evolution. And so he comes at last to the origin of Christianity.

Christianity, like certain other high religions of "reform" character in this, owes its origin, of course, to the impulse received from a great personality, the greatest religious personality the world has (as yet) seen. An element of inexplicability is thus introduced into it; for who can read the riddle of powerful personalities? But this does not prevent our perceiving that it grew naturally out of the soil of its own time. What Jesus did may indeed be summed up almost entirely in one word: He simplified the developed Judaism of His day. The Jewish Rabbis are quite right in saying that everything that Jesus taught may be found taught beforehand in Judaism. The proper retort is to acknowledge that the Rabbis had said all that Jesus said,—and to add that "unfortunately they said so much else too!" (p. 217). What Jesus did was not to add to their teaching but to subtract from it. The note of His teaching was simplification. He freed religion from rationalism, ceremonialism, legalism and scribism. And doing so, He gave us Christianity. For the Christianity of Jesus is just the Judaism of His day freed from these elements and thus reduced to the simple doctrine of God as Father, who forgives the sins of men, because He is good.

The Christianity of Jesus we say: but not the Christianity we know, or indeed the Christianity a modern man can accept. For the development of religion did not stop with Jesus. After Jesus came, for example, Paul. And Paul's Christianity is not the Christianity of Jesus. For one thing, the Christianity of Paul worships Jesus, and Jesus worships God alone. For another thing, the Christianity of Paul talks

of an atoning sacrifice, of which Jesus knew nothing. For yet another thing, the Christianity of Paul has incorporated into it sacramental acts, to all which that of Jesus is a stranger. Nor did the development stop with Paul. After Paul came Old Catholicism; and after Old Catholicism, Mediævalism; and after Mediævalism the Reformation; and after the Reformation has come—or at least is coming—Modernism. And it is not the Christianity of Jesus or the Christianity of Paul,—or even the Christianity of the Reformation, great as is the advance of the Christianity of the Reformation on all preceding Christianities,—which can lay claim to being the highest of religions, but the Christianity of Modernism now at last assuming firm outlines and a stable form. The old order has changed and given place to a new: “the whole structure of human life has entirely altered since the Reformation, and history and experience tell us that when this happens religion assumes other forms” (p. 271). A new Christianity conformable to the data supplied by modern culture is, therefore, now called for.

“The narrow Pauline idea of redemption, which was developed by St. Augustine and strengthened anew by Luther” (p. 275), must go. We must “no longer speak of the ‘divinity’ of Christ” (p. 279). And with the ‘divinity’ of Christ must go all its corollaries,—primarily the self-contradictory doctrine of the Trinity. The idea of an atonement and of a vicarious sacrifice, of course, goes too (p. 282). And indeed the whole conception of the supernatural which has hitherto ruled—which contradicts not only “our whole mode of thought” but also “our changed belief in God” (p. 285): and with this idea of supernaturalism must go also not only the whole notion of an inspired book, but also of a special revelation (p. 289). This is not to return to the Christianity of Jesus. The Christianity of Jesus lies at the root of Christianity; it does not appear at its apex. Jesus believed in the supernatural: we cannot (p. 286). We cannot accept His demonology or His eschatology (p. 292). Even much of Jesus’ moral teaching is too onesided or ascetic to be possible to a modern man (p. 295). It is ours not slavishly to copy but to grow. “We take our stand by Jesus” only in the Parable of the Lost Son and “on the ground of the absolutely simple conviction that God is to be found in the good and that faith in the Heavenly Father includes moral deeds and moral work in the human community”. Here is the creed of the Christianity into which all the religious development of all the ages meets and coalesces: “God the Father; life in accordance with His will, spent in joyful work for the service of the world; forgiveness of sins and eternal hope” (p. 298).

We must bear in mind that it is this Christianity which Prof. Bousset has in view when he tells us that Christianity is the last and best of religions and that the future of religion is bound up in it. What place does Christ take in this Christianity? None whatever. He is merely the impressive religious personality back to whose impulse is traced the development which has issued, after two thousand years, in it. If we can say of the Jewish Rabbis that they taught all that Christ taught, but the mischief of it is that they taught so very much more: so we

must say of Christ that if He taught all of this "abiding" Christianity, the mischief again is that He taught so very much more. Why call this new Christianity by His name any more than call this Christianity Judaism? He did not more "simplify" Judaism than our moderns are "simplifying" Christianity. And let us particularly note what this new "simplification" reduces us to. It is just God, Morality, Immortality. "God the Father"; "life in accordance with His will, spent in joyful work for the service of the world"; "forgiveness of sins and eternal hope". Is there any religion which does not embrace these three elements of "natural religion"? No doubt the conception of God, the conception of morality, the conception of immortality which are commended to us bear the traces of Christian teaching. It is God "the Father". It is life "in the service of the world". It is "forgiveness of sins". We are thankful that it is proposed to retain this much of the contribution of Jesus and of His accredited Apostles to the religion of the world. But it is worth while to observe that when Christianity is reduced to a "natural religion" in its origin, it is reduced also to a "natural religion" in its contents: it shrinks at once to the meagre contents of the familiar trilogy, of God, morality and immortality.

The main question of course recurs, Has Prof. Bousset succeeded in reducing Christianity to a "natural religion" in its origin? He has certainly put together an account of the origin and development of religion, into which he has interspersed an account of the origin and development of the religions of the Scriptural narrative, including Christianity, in all its developments, on the assumption that it is equally with all the rest a "natural religion". But this is merely Prof. Bousset's historical argument for the naturalistic origin of Christianity. He says, in effect, "See, if this be conceived to be the way religion has come into existence and developed itself in the course of the ages, then Christianity may be conceived to be a growth of nature". The "if" here is, however, a mighty one and covers an immense assumption, or rather a whole series of immense assumptions. Behind it lies the assumption of the validity of all the results of the Graf-Wellhausen critical reconstruction of the history of the development of the Old Testament religion; and of all the results of "the history-of-religion" critical reconstruction of the history of the New Testament development. Behind it lies the assumption of the invalidity of all the evidence of the divine origin of the religion of the Bible, of the divine mission of Christ, of the revelation of truth through His Spirit to the Apostles: in a word, of the whole body of the claims of the founders of Christianity, substantiated as those claims are by a mass of the most varied evidence. In one word, behind it lies the simple assumption of the naturalistic origin of Christianity. Prof. Bousset's essay amounts, therefore, merely to this declaration: "See, if Christianity is merely a natural religion, this is the way it must be conceived to have come into existence." The argumentative value of his presentation will reduce, therefore, simply to this: that a self-consistent scheme of the origin of Christianity as a natural religion can be constructed. For the

testing of the value of this presentation as an argument, we should have, therefore, to examine into the self-consistency of the presentation primarily; then into the legitimacy of the combinations that are made, the exactness of the facts which are marshalled, and the inclusiveness of the explanations which are offered.

This is not the place to enter into such a detailed examination. But it is not out of place to remark simply that in none of these items is Professor Bousset's presentation in our opinion impeccable. In addition to the primal assumptions to which we have adverted, his presentation is burdened with a mass of minor assumptions. The facts are adjusted to fit the thesis, instead of the thesis inferred from the facts. And the whole presentation takes, therefore, merely the form of a plausible effort to justify a foregone conclusion. If this is in its details at least the course of the development of religion we must assume in case Christianity be deemed a natural religion, we can only say that Christianity cannot be deemed a natural religion. It does not naturally emerge out of its environment as here presented.

Princeton.

B. B. WARFIELD.

THE SCIENTIFIC BASIS OF IMMORTALITY. By JAMES J. BILLINGSLEY.
New York: Eaton & Mains. 12mo., pp. 47.

It is no reproach to Mr Billingsley's brochure that it is cast in a highly rhetorical form. The rhetoric is somewhat exuberant, especially towards the end; but he, doubtless, knows how to carry home his argument to the especial audience he has in mind. This argument is principally to the effect that science knows too many immortalities for the immortality of the soul to be held doubtful. There is the doctrine of the indestructibility of matter: and there is the doctrine of the conservation of energy: and now, since Weismann has taught it to us, there is the doctrine of the continuity of the germ plasm and of the deathlessness of the cell. Certainly "our bodies contain immortal elements", as Professor Metchnikoff says. If this is true of our bodies, what of our souls? Of course, we can say with Professor Metchnikoff that we haven't any: for consciousness is a function of the body, and, in the body of the most highly organized structures, and hence can persist only so long as they abide. Even so, it is hard to believe that the great quality of immortality belongs exclusively to the lowest things. And if we perchance have souls, can they be less immortal than their material envelopes? And just see what this self-conscious life means to nature. It is the culminating attainment of all its progress. "Having struggled through a thousand millions of years to produce a man, will Nature turn traitor in the hour of her greatest triumph and slay the superb product of all her labor and sacrifice?" "If science reveals the fact that nature preserves the material, the immaterial, the vital, with the psychical, and as man, the climax of all that has gone before, combines these four immense results within himself, then science bids us hope." "From the indestructibility of matter, and the persist-