

GS469

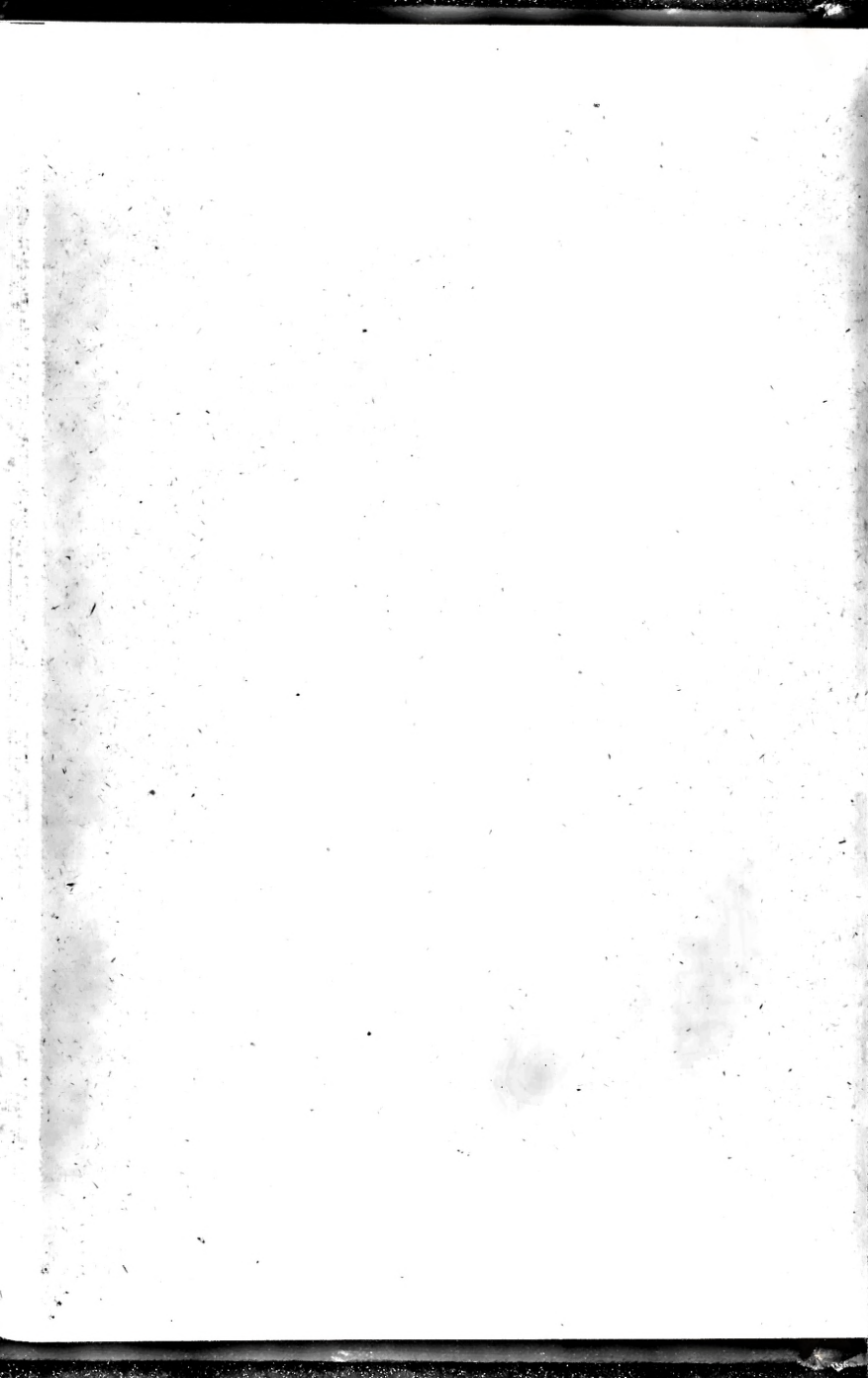
THE
NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY
AND THE
TEN COMMANDMENTS.

BY
EDWARD VANSITTART NEALE.



PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,
No. 11 THE TERRACE, FARQUHAR ROAD, UPPER NORWOOD,
LONDON, S.E.

Price Threepence.



THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY.

MY DEAR MR SCOTT,

In compliance with your request, I state the impression produced on me by an examination of the 'New Bible Commentary,' so far as it has at present proceeded. I regret to say that it is by no means a favourable one. If the work is to be continued in the spirit indicated by this beginning, assuredly it will completely fail in its primary object, of "giving to every educated man an explanation of any difficulties which his own mind may suggest, as well as of any new objections urged against any particular book or passage of the Bible;" whether or not it may fulfil its second object, of "supplying satisfactory answers to objections resting upon *misrepresentations* of the sacred text (Advertisement, page 1)." For, as you are well aware, it is not upon *misrepresentations* of the text, but upon the faithful *presentation* of its simple, natural sense, that the force of the objections adduced to its statements depends. The *misrepresentations* are to be found in the *rationalising* expositions of its, so-called, orthodox defenders; who twist the natural meaning of its words—for instance, the six days of Genesis with their "evenings and

mornings"—into non-natural significations, suggested, *not* by a careful study of the sacred text, but by the desire to bring the statements which they profess to regard as divine into accordance with the knowledge which they know to be purely human.

If any one, at the present day, wishes to learn the simple, natural sense of the words of the Bible, undisturbed by any theory, but ascertained by careful inquiry, by the patient application of all the resources at the command of the modern science of language, much more if he would learn all that can be known with reasonable probability about the dates, authors, and general character of the books comprised in it, it is to the critical, not to the so-called orthodox, schools of commentators that he must address himself. For these orthodox commentators, so far as I know their works, are one and all tainted with the "original sin" of Apology. They are, I say it with regret, essentially *untruthful*. Not that I mean to charge them with consciously asserting what they believe not to be true. What I complain of is, that they put themselves into a mental attitude in which the light of truth is shut out, as effectually as the natural light is by shutting our eyes. They apply to the Bible a principle which, if it is applied by the Mahometan to his Koran, or the Brahmin to his Vedas, they would be foremost in denouncing as a false principle—namely, the assumption that its statements must be *taken* to be absolutely correct wherever they cannot be *demonstrated* to be false, by evidence admitting of no doubt; and that the duty of its expositors is to rack their ingenuity to discover hypotheses in justification of these statements, without troubling

themselves to inquire whether there is a particle of evidence adducible in support of them beyond the fact that they are "wanted" to meet objections to the statements to be defended.

That the New Commentary, from which so much might reasonably have been expected, considering the flourish of trumpets by which it was ushered into the world, should be deeply infected with this grievous taint, is to me a subject of sincere regret. It is so, because this leprosy of pious falsehood is, in my judgment, the fatal disease by whose ravages the great ideas of the Catholic Faith, which, as you know, I differ from you in holding to be essentially true, while you regard them as delusions, are deprived of their inherent power over men's minds. For, that these ideas are intimately connected with the history of the Jewish nation preserved to us in the Bible is unquestionable. Obviously, therefore, it must be of the first importance to the spread of the ideas, that their effects should not be impaired by their association with any matters of a doubtful nature associated with that history. The spiritual element must be presented, unmixed with the slightest particle of detectable falsehood, or undoubtedly it will be rejected, and rejected, I think, with entire justice, by the earnest, laborious, truth-seeking generation of thinkers nurtured, at the present day, in the schools of natural and historical science.

But is the New Commentary really open to such an accusation as I make against it? I am afraid the answer admits of no doubt. I could easily fill a volume, were I to attempt to point out in detail the many sins of omission and commission by which

it is already marked. I can only refer those, and I hope they may form a large body, who desire to satisfy themselves upon this matter, to the searching examination into its statements by the Bishop of Natal, of which the two first parts are already published. But, *ex pede Herculem*: I will take one instance only, a very important one, both from the matters treated of and the mode of treatment, the story of the "Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant." I will show the difficulties with which the account is encumbered, and how they are met, first by the Bishop of Natal, and then by the Rev. Canon Cook and Mr S. Clark who have divided this subject between them, as the representatives of the critical and the apologetic schools. A comparison of the two methods by their results will, I think, show clearly and conclusively which method best serves the interests of Truth and Religion.

If we read carefully the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus, we shall find a succession of "goings up" and "comings down" of Moses, between "the people" and "Jehovah," which are so unintelligible, that, divested of the imposing accompaniment of lightnings and thunders, and thick darkness, and terrible voices, they become absurd. 1st. In ver. 3 Jehovah calls up Moses into the Mount, and gives him a message relating to the blessings to be obtained by the Israelites through the observance of a covenant, of which no mention has previously been made. 2nd. Moses brings this message to the people, who reply (*v.* 7) that they will do all that Jehovah had spoken, though there is no record of his having ordered them to *do* anything. 3rd. Moses returns with this answer of

the people to Jehovah (*v.* 8), and receives the reply that He will come to speak with him in a dark cloud, so that all the people might hear, and believe in him for ever; and the command to return to the people and prepare them for this appearance on the third day.* 4th. This order Moses fulfils, and brings out the people on the third day to meet Jehovah (*v.* 17), to whom Moses speaks, and God answers by a voice. 5th. But all that He says is to call Moses up a third time into the Mount; and as soon as he gets there, to command him to go down again, to warn the people against doing what the execution of the orders previously given had made it impossible for them to do, as Moses takes the liberty of reminding Jehovah (*v.* 21-23); and to direct the "priests," of whose appointment not a word has been said, to sanctify themselves, "lest Jehovah break forth upon them;" and afterwards to come up into the Mount with Aaron. No compliance with this last command is recorded; but, without waiting for the return of Moses, Jehovah, as soon as Moses has spoken to the people, utters the Ten Commandments (*Ex.* xx. 1-17.)

8th. Then the account mysteriously carries us back to the descent of Jehovah in chapter xix. The people, who were so little impressed by the "smoke which went up as the smoke of a furnace, and the trembling of the whole Mount, and the sound of the trumpet louder and louder," and the voice of Elohim (*xix.* 19), that it needed a summons

* I omit, as apparently an accidental mistake, the statement (*v.* 9) that Moses reported the words of the people to Jehovah, which would imply another going down and coming up on his part not detailed.

from Jehovah to Moses, in order specially to charge them "not to break through to Jehovah to gaze," and who had then heard the awful sounds change to the distinct voice in which the Ten Commandments must be supposed to have been spoken, now, all at once, are so frightened by the thunderings and the flames, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, that they shrink back, and stand afar off, and say to Moses, "Speak thou with us and we will hear, but let not Elohim speak with us lest we die" (xx. 18, 19).

9th. Moses, accordingly, after saying a few words to quiet their apprehensions, but without the slightest reference to what they had just heard, "draws near to the thick darkness where Jehovah was" (v. 20); when he receives, 1st, a mass of laws, treating of nearly all the subjects comprised in the Ten Commandments, but in a totally different order, and mixed up with various regulations concerning different social or religious matters, which extend from chapters xx. 22 to xxiii. 18, and are terminated by promises and threats relating to the future residence of the people in Canaan; 2nd, a command to bring up Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel to Jehovah (xxiv. 1).

10th. This command Moses fulfils (xxiv. 9-11); when the elders are said to have seen Elohim, and eaten and drank in his presence (xxiv. 11), though not till after Moses had "written down all the words of Jehovah in a Book," and made a solemn covenant between the people and Jehovah in its words (xxiv. 3-8).

If we now turn to the account of the giving of the law in the Book of Deuteronomy, this Book of the Covenant, which plays so important a part in

Exodus, disappears. In its place we have, as the terms of the "covenant made by Jehovah with Israel," *another version of the Ten Commandments*, differing in several important particulars, especially the reason given for observing the sabbath, from that contained in Exodus, but which, nevertheless, is declared to have been the very words uttered by Jehovah, neither more nor less, and to have been written by him on two tables of stone, and given to Moses (Deut. v. 1-23, ix. 10). Many interesting observations are made by the Bishop of Natal on these tables, and those mentioned in the Book of Exodus, which I have not space to discuss here. I apply myself to the questions, can any reasonable explanation be given of the incongruities in the story in Exodus taken by itself, and of the remarkable differences between it and the story in Deuteronomy? The answer given by the Bishop of Natal to both questions is complete. By an exhaustive examination of the verbal and grammatical peculiarities distinguishing different parts of the Pentateuch, he has shown that the narrative in Exodus consists of an original story, to which additions have been made, first by the author of Deuteronomy, and afterwards by the authors of the laws which form the Levitical legislation.

The original story narrates one ascent of Moses only on his arrival at Mount Sinai, when he receives from Jehovah instructions as to what he is to do (xix. 3^a, 9-13); followed by the descent of Jehovah on the third day (xix. 16-19), the terror of the people (xx. 18), the approach of Moses to the "thick darkness where Elohim is" (xx. 21), the laws contained in the Book of the Covenant, and the acts by which the covenant is made, on

the basis of these laws. Into this story the Deuteronomist introduced: 1st. The account of what now appears as the first going up of Moses (xix. 3-9) with the answer of the people (v. 8), very inappropriate where it stands, but quite intelligible from the pen of one who had lying before him the laws supposed to be spoken by Jehovah; "all that Jehovah has spoken we will do;" 2nd. The *Ten Commandments*, on which alone he dwells in his own fuller and later composition, the Book of Deuteronomy; and 3rd. The warnings and promises which close chapter xxiii. 24-33, with matter unfit to be introduced into a *covenant* as part of *its terms*, though very suitable in the mouth of a prophet, as a statement of *its consequences*.

Into it also the later Levitical legislator, in his desire to magnify Aaron and the priestly order, introduced the strange passage which now closes chapter xix., and inadvertently brings the priests on the scene before any were in existence.

The disjointed, self-conflicting character of the present narrative is thus fully accounted for, in a manner which accounts also for the omission of any notice of the Book of the Covenant in the story of the Deuteronomist, with whose ideas of Divine Order, as set forth in Deuteronomy, the laws contained in it jarred in many particulars. And the explanation removes at the same time all conflict between this story and our present conceptions of the action of God in the world. For the reasoning by which the different parts of the Pentateuch are distinguished, leads also to the conclusion that this story was written long after the death of Moses, probably not before the days of David. Thus the manifestation of the Divine Being recorded in the

Book of Exodus, is transferred from that outer world of natural forces, with which, according to the knowledge now attained by us, it fits so badly, to that inner world of imaginative power, where the sort of action described is quite in place. From an incoherent account of a series of partial Divine acts, the story changes into an important link in a universal process; it takes a high place among the efforts of the Divine in man, to present to itself an adequate picture of that all-upholding Deity whose presence we dimly feel. When restored to its original form, the *poem* of The giving of the Law is not only freed from the liability to call forth unseemly scoffs, but becomes for us a magnificent outburst of religious genius; a vestibule worthy of that Temple of which the semi-dramatic utterances of the Prophets, and the logical effusions of the Psalmists form the abiding materials. The ill-arranged collection of half-barbarous laws, to which it is an introduction, casts an instructive light upon the state of the Jewish tribes at the time when they were consolidated into a nation under their first kings. While the interpolations, now marring its original unity, acquire an interest distinct from their intrinsic merits, by the insight afforded through them into the progress of religious thought, between the age of David and that of Josiah, and the light cast by them, both upon the action of that great prophet to whom we owe the grand Book of Deuteronomy, and on that later Legislation, which transformed the Prophet into the Rabbi.

But what becomes of all this food for intellect and emotion, when dished up by our orthodox commentators? Of reasonable explanations, of course there is not a trace. On the strange "goings up" and

"comings down" of Moses in chap. xix., Canon Cook has nothing to say; he simply ignores the perplexity attending them. On the equally startling conversation between Moses and Jehovah at the close of that chapter he has nothing better to suggest than "the very probable account of the Rabbinical writers," that Jehovah committed a slight blunder, in saying "priests who draw near to Jehovah," when he meant "the firstborn or heads" of families, whom the Aaronic priesthood afterwards superseded. Of the laws forming 'The Book of the Covenant,' which, according to the tale accepted by Mr Clark as historical, *were spoken by Jehovah* to Moses, as part of a *Divine* Legislation, and if so, surely, as the Bishop of Natal observes, "might be expected to be divinely perfect, infallibly just and right,"* Mr Clark says, "that they cannot be regarded as a strictly systematic whole," that "some are probably traditional rules, handed down from the Patriarchs; and others, especially those relating to slavery, seem to have been modifications of *ancient maxims*, usages which may have been *associated with notes* of such decisions in cases of difference, as had been up to that time pronounced by Moses, and the judges whom he had appointed by the advice of Jethro." Truly a most condescending Deity is the Jehovah of Mr Clark, though a little too much given to theatrical effects; who descends in the awful dignity of thunderings and lightnings, and trumpet-voices on trembling Sinai, nearly frightening the Israelites into fits, that he might pour into the ear of Moses a body of *traditional* rules and *ancient maxims*, with a *réchauffée* of decisions by Moses himself; laws,

* 'New Bible Commentary Critically Examined.' Part II. Page 72.

too "in more than one instance," as the Bishop of Natal observes, "iniquitous and inhuman" (Ex. xxi. 4, 7, 21); and forming a confused jumble, the more strange because it follows the orderly classification of the Ten Commandments into the duty of man to God, and his duty to other men.

But there is stranger matter behind. "What," says Mr Clark, "were the words of Jehovah that were engraven on the tables of stone? We have two distinct statements of them—one in Ex. xx. 1-17, and one in Deut. v. 1-21, apparently of equal authority, but differing from each other in several weighty particulars, each said, with reiterated emphasis, [and that, according to Mr Clark, by Moses himself], to contain the words that were actually spoken by the Lord." Mr Clark justly rejects, "as not fairly reconcilable with the statements in Exodus and Deuteronomy," both the supposition "that the original document is in Exodus, and that the author of Deuteronomy wrote from *memory!* with variations suggested at the time," and "that Deuteronomy must furnish the most correct form, since the tables must have been in existence when the book was written." In their place he adopts a suggestion, made by Ewald, and, from the point of view taken by him, quite appropriate, "that the original commandments were all in the same terse and simple form of expression as appears (both in Exodus and Deuteronomy) in the 1st, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th, such as would be most suitable for recollection; and that the *passages in each copy in which the important variations are found were comments added when the books were written;*" "slighter variations, such as *keep* (or *remember*) may perhaps be ascribed to copyists." That is to say, in the Bishop of Natal's

words—"The New Bible Commentary deliberately admits that *neither* version of the commandments, as they appear in the Bible, gives the genuine Ten Words uttered by the Almighty on Sinai. Although in Ex. xx. 1, we read, "God spake *all* these words," and in Deut. v. 22, *These* words Jehovah spake. . . and He added no more; and He wrote them on two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me." And it further supposes that, in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 10th commandments, large interpolations must subsequently have been made, apparently by Moses when the books were written, which were thus added to the words really spoken by Jehovah, "unto all the assembly, in the Mount, out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the darkness, with a great voice."* Well may he add, "This recognition of the indisputable result of the critical examination of the Pentateuch strikes at the root of the whole Pentateuchal story as an historical narrative. If the Ten Commandments in the Pentateuch are not genuine and historical, what is?"

Mr Clark, indeed, observes, with touching *naïveté*, "that it is not *necessary* to unite this theory with any question as to the authorship, or with any doubt as to the Commandments being the words of God given by Moses, as much as the Commandments, strictly so-called, that were written on the tables." He should have said, not *expedient*: for, if the facts are as Mr Clark supposes, and *Moses* wrote the statements which we find in Exodus and Deuteronomy, as we read them, there can be *no question at all* but that he wrote, in the name of Jehovah, *deliberate lies*.

* 'New Bible Commentary Critically Examined.' Part II. Page 68.

Miserable result ! and yet just punishment of the untruthful spirit of apologetic comment, to end by making that contemptible which it begins by worshipping. Contrast this issue with the view sketched above of the place in the history of religion belonging to the Pentateuch, if regarded simply as the expression of the growth of religious feeling and thought in the Jewish mind.

Look here upon this picture and on this :

Have you eyes ?

Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten on this moor ?

Surely we may legitimately conclude, with the Bishop of Natal, "that it is far more dangerous, far more fatal to the cultivation of an intelligent and reverent faith in the Bible, to assert that Moses wrote the Decalogue, but wrote twice over, each time in different words, what he knew to be untrue, than to say that the Decalogue, as critical examination plainly shows, is, in each of its forms, the work of the Deuteronomist in a far later age."

Believe me,

Yours very truly,

EDW. VANSITTART NEALE.

Hampstead, October, 1872.

The following Pamphlets and Papers may be had on addressing a letter enclosing the price in postage stamps to Mr THOMAS SCOTT, 11 The Terrace, Farquhar Road, Upper Norwood, London, S.E.

- ETERNAL PUNISHMENT. An Examination of the Doctrines held by the Clergy of the Church of England. By "PRESBYTER ANGLICANUS." Price 6d.
- LETTER AND SPIRIT. By a CLERGYMAN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND. Price 6d.
- SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY. By RICHARD DAVIES HANSON, Esq., Chief Justice of South Australia. Price 4d.
- QUESTIONS TO WHICH THE ORTHODOX are Earnestly Requested to Give Answers. THOUGHTS ON RELIGION AND THE BIBLE. By a LAYMAN and M.A. of Trin. Coll., Dublin. 6d.
- THE OPINIONS OF PROFESSOR DAVID F. STRAUSS. Price 6d.
- A FEW SELF-CONTRADICTIONS OF THE BIBLE. Price 1s., free by post.
- AGAINST HERO-MAKING IN RELIGION. By Prof. F. W. NEWMAN. Price 6d.
- RITUALISM IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND. By "PRESBYTER ANGLICANUS." Price 6d.
- THE RELIGIOUS WEAKNESS OF PROTESTANTISM. By Prof. F. W. NEWMAN. 7d., post free.
- THE DIFFICULTIES AND DISCOURAGEMENTS which Attend the Study of the Scriptures. By the Right Rev. FRANCIS HARE, D.D., formerly Lord Bishop of Chichester. 6d.
- THE CHRONOLOGICAL WEAKNESS OF PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION. By a BENEFICED CLERGYMAN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND. Price 1s. 1d., post free.
- THE "CHURCH AND ITS REFORM." A Reprint. Price 1s.
- THE "CHURCH OF ENGLAND CATECHISM EXAMINED." By JEREMY BENTHAM, Esq. A Reprint. Price 1s.
- ORIGINAL SIN. By THOMAS SCOTT. Price 6d.
- REDEMPTION, IMPUTATION, SUBSTITUTION, FORGIVENESS OF SINS, AND GRACE. By THOMAS SCOTT. Price 6d.
- BASIS OF A NEW REFORMATION. By THOMAS SCOTT. Price 9d.
- MIRACLES AND PROPHECIES. Price 6d.
- THE CHURCH: the Pillar and Ground of the Truth. Price 6d.
- MODERN ORTHODOXY AND MODERN LIBERALISM. Price 6d.
- THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM. By a BENEFICED CLERGYMAN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND. 6d.
- "JAMES AND PAUL." A Tract by Emer. Prof. F. W. NEWMAN. Price 6d.
- LAW AND THE CREEDS. Price 6d.
- GENESIS CRITICALLY ANALYSED, and continuously arranged; with Introductory Remarks. By ED. VANSITTART NEALE, M.A. and M.R.I. Price 1s.
- A CONFUTATION OF THE DIABOLARCHY. By Rev. JOHN OXLEE. Price 6d.
- THE BIGOT AND THE SCEPTIC. By Emer. Professor F. W. NEWMAN. Price 6d.
- CHURCH CURSING AND ATHEISM. By the Rev. THOMAS P. KIRKMAN, M.A., F.R.S., &c., Rector of Croft, Warrington. Price 1s.
- PRACTICAL REMARKS ON "THE LORD'S PRAYER." By THOMAS SCOTT. With Annotations by the late BISHOP HINDS. Price 6d.
- THE ANALOGY OF NATURE AND RELIGION—GOOD AND EVIL. By a CLERGYMAN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND. Price 6d.
- COMMENTATORS AND HIEROPHANTS; or, The Honesty of Christian Commentators. In Two Parts. Price 6d. each Part.
- FREE DISCUSSION OF RELIGIOUS TOPICS. By SAMUEL HINDS, D.D., late Lord Bishop of Norwich. Part I., price 1s. Part II., price 1s. 6d.
- THE EVANGELIST AND THE DIVINE. By a BENEFICED CLERGYMAN OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND. Price 1s.
- THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES AND THE CREEDS,—Their Sense and their Non-Sense. By a COUNTRY PARSON. Parts I., II., III. Price 6d. each Part.