

INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE: A SHORT HISTORY

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Interpretation of the Bible: A Short History by George Holley Gilbert

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GEORGE HOLLEY GILBERT

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A SHORT HISTORY

BY

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"THE STUDENT'S LIFE OF JESUS," "THE REVELATION OF
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PREFACE

THIS book surveys a great but neglected field. The greatness of the field is not easily overestimated, whether we regard its extent and complexity, or its importance. It stretches back through twenty centuries; it touches both the intellectual and the religious life of Jew and Christian on many sides; and it brings us into immediate contact with those processes which underlie all historic creeds and all our religious institutions. Coleridge has somewhere remarked that the history of a word is often more interesting and significant than the history of a campaign. That is most true, also, of the history of the *interpretation* of a word, and especially a word of the Scriptures. Out of their sound interpretation have come beneficial enfranchising influences, which have been promotive of the best civilization, while out of their misinterpretation has flowed the inspiration for the cruelest wrongs in Christian history.

But this wide field of the history of interpretation has been neglected. The English language has but one original work on the subject, and even that, with all its excellences, practically omits one of the most fundamental sections in the history of interpretation, viz., the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New.¹ The

¹ F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 1886.

poverty of other languages in the literature of our subject is quite as great as that of our own. The French writer Simon in his *Histoire Critique* (1693) treats the history of interpretation incidentally, the German work of Meyer¹ more comprehensively indeed, yet by no means as one would treat it to-day, and both these works have long since been forgotten except by the special student.

Whatever reason there may have been in the past for the neglect of this field, — lack of materials, lack of the historical spirit, lack of religious freedom, or other causes, — there appears to be no excuse for it at the present time; and, moreover, the unparalleled progress of the last half century in biblical research lends new emphasis to the need of fresh investigations in this neglected field.

What the history of interpretation is capable of contributing to a more intelligent use of the Bible will, it is hoped, be *suggested* at least by the present volume, though it is not here adequately shown. The praise of such a finished achievement must be reserved for some yet unwritten work.

¹ *Geschichte der Schrifterklärung*, 1802-1809. — A number of works on Hermeneutics, particularly German, devote some space to the history of interpretation.

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