ENGLISH CHURCH HISTORY.

The Church of England in the Eighteenth Century. By ALFRED PLUMMER, D.D. (Methuen & Co., 36 Essex Street, W.C.)

THIS work, which is the last of a series of six volumes, by different authors, on the history of the English Church from the earliest times, certainly conforms to the main object of the series. It is conceived in no narrow spirit, and does full justice to the claims of parties both religious and political, and it would be difficult from a mere perusal of its pages to discover to what side the author leans. In a small treatment of a subject this is undoubtedly a great merit; but, of course, the almost total suppression of the author's personality leads, in the necessarily abbreviated balancing of various considerations on either side, to a certain loss of tone in the colouring of the events that are described. This is inevitable; but though Dr Plummer is everywhere learned and interesting, there are one or two small matters that cannot fail to detract from the amenities of this book, especially as they might so easily have been avoided. Anything resembling a bibliography is at all times annoying, and in the frequent lists of names flung at the reader, not covertly from notes at the bottom of a page, but openly from the main body of the text, Dr Plummer in several places seems desirous of gratuitously testing how far he can defy the feelings of the reader. Mere lists of names are simply unedifying and do not in the least reinforce an argument. If space forbids comment, the lists are better left out altogether, and it is to be regretted that Dr Plummer has not recognized this.

Lack of space has of necessity made it difficult for the author to deal with many aspects of the history of the Church; but undue emphasis has surely been laid upon the political and literary side of it. It is not possible to concur in the view apparently taken by the author that a discussion of the literary merits of Addison, for example, is more important than many social events which occurred in the eighteenth century. The industrial revolution which began in 1750 is ignored entirely; so is the Poor Law; nor is the decreasing importance of the political aspect of the Church's history in the course of the century even alluded to.

On the other hand due praise must be given to the often complete, and always just, estimate of the characters of the leading men of the age, especially in their political and literary relations. As individual studies they display to full advantage the sympathy and industry of the author; but the successive elucidation of the views of individuals somehow fails to produce a clear total effect. For instance, the cynical indifference of Walpole, the result of political calculation, cannot

explain the lack of vitality in the Church in the eighteenth century. Hence it is that, profound as the remarks of Dr Plummer may be upon this or that personality, and fully as he seems to have caught the literary and political mind of the age, he does not seem to have explained adequately the decline of the spiritual influence of the Church, particularly in comparison with the rapid spread of Methodist enthusiasms ; for it was not in individual but in corporate excellence that this decline in the Church was most evident.

No one, however, who seeks to understand the relations of the Church to the politics and literature of the age will be disappointed with the researches of Dr Plummer

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