

THE  
UNION SEMINARY MAGAZINE

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NO. 3.—JAN.—FEB., 1898.

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I.—LITERARY.

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Robert Lewis Dabney was born in Louisa county in Virginia, on the 5th of March, 1820, of good old Hanover lineage. In June, 1836, he entered the Sophomore class, half advanced, of Hampden-Sidney College. He completed the remaining part of the Sophomore, and the Junior course, and left the college in 1837. He then taught a country school for two years. In December, 1839, he entered the University of Virginia, from which he retired in July of 1842 with the degree of Master of Arts. He again taught a select private school for more than two years. In October, 1844, he entered Union Seminary in Virginia, took the full three years course in two years and was licensed to preach in May, 1846. He spent one year as a missionary in his native county, at the end of which time he was called to be the pastor of Tinkling Spring church in Augusta county. Here he performed for a considerable time the functions of the pastorate to a large church and those of the head teacher of a classical school. After a pastorate of over six years he was elected to the chair of Ecclesiastical History and Polity in his *alma mater*, Union Theological Seminary, which he filled until 1870. Meanwhile, in 1869, he had been appointed Adjunct Professor of Theology, and he was made full Professor in this department in 1870. He continued to dignify this important chair until 1883, when owing to bronchial troubles he was warned by his physicians to seek a milder climate. Accordingly he accepted an invitation to the chair of Mental and Moral Philosophy in the University of Texas, at Austin,

## THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE CONVERSION OF THE APOSTLE PAUL.

In the field of historical criticism the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, next to the resurrection of our Lord, possesses most evidential value in support of evangelical christianity. These two historical facts, like Zachim and Boaz of Solomon's temple, are the pillars upon which the superstructure largely rests. They are fundamental to a correct conception of the gospel. Their apologetic value has always been recognized, and had already, in the first half of the eighteenth century, led to the production of two remarkable books, "Observations on the Resurrection of Christ," by Gilbert West, Esq., and "Observations on the Conversion of St. Paul," by Lord Lyttleton. There is a pleasant story to the effect that these two gentlemen, who were fast friends and entertained like skeptical views, jointly agreed to an attack upon the truth of the christian religion in which they would expose the falsity of the two alleged historical facts, namely, the resurrection of Christ, and the conversion of the apostle Paul, and thus strike a deadly blow at a long tolerated imposture. Their investigations, however, resulted not as they had anticipated or intended, but in the conversion of both men to Christ and in the preparation of the two valuable works above mentioned.

Lord Lyttleton's "Observations on the Conversion of St. Paul" is an elaborate and able discussion of the subject from the layman's standpoint and in the light of the theological learning of the eighteenth century. His argument is to show that the Paul of sacred history—the man of sound mind, stout heart, solid character, and herculean deeds—could not have been "an *impostor*, who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive;" nor an *enthusiast*, who, by the force of an over-heated imagination, imposed on himself;" nor "*was he deceived by the fraud of others*, so that all that he said must be imputed to the power of that deceit;" but that "what he declared to have been the cause of his conversion, and to have happened in consequence of it, did all *really happen*;" and, therefore, the christian religion is a divine revelation."\* This

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\*Lyttleton's *Conversion of Paul*, p. 8.

discussion, it may be said, settled the question of imposture for all reasonable, fair-minded people. No rational, honest mind, intelligent in the facts of the great apostle's history, could long entertain the view that he was a self-conscious deceiver. In this quarter the enemy has been completely routed. The question, however, is still open upon the other two points, namely, that Paul may have been an enthusiast, who was self-deceived, or he may have so fallen under the influence of others that his views and his manner of life were radically changed; but the discussion in recent times has taken a different direction. Lyttleton clearly proves that Paul could not have been merely an enthusiast in the sense that Francis of Assisi and Ignatius Loyola were self-deceived by an imaginative and melancholy temper, ignorance, credulity, and vanity, or self-conceit. The character of the man forbids such a conception of him. Lyttleton also shows that the apostle could not have been imposed upon by the fraud of others. But modern criticism has invented a far more ingenious explanation of the apostle's conversion than any suggested in Lyttleton's discussion.

The critical theory in attempting to account for the transformation of Paul, which is an admitted historical fact, proceeds on naturalistic grounds. This theory appears in a variety of forms, all of which, however, eliminate the miraculous element, and insist that the transformation was the result of a natural and gradual process. The critics assume a psychological preparation in the experience of the apostle in the liberal training of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34-39; 22:3), in the scriptural arguments of the christians, their purity of character and the joyous fortitude with which they endured suffering and death, notably Stephen;\* with perhaps the added natural phenomenon of a thunder storm, suddenly falling upon him while on the way from Jerusalem to Damascus, to precipitate the mental crisis.† Ewald conjectures that, while Paul's bosom was strongly agitated with conflicting emotions, a hot and deadly wind threw him and his travelling companions to the ground, and that in this condition he thought he saw the form and heard the voice of Jesus. Of course the phenomenon of a thunder storm or a hot wind is interjected into the narrative

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\*"Si Stephanus non orasset,  
Ecclesia Paulum non haberet."

†Lange's Acts, pp. 171, 172; Weiss Introduction to N. T., vol. I, p. 152.

by the critical imagination under the consciousness that something of the kind is necessary to meet the demands of the situation. But this is a baseless assumption that does not call for serious consideration. It is ludicrous to suppose that Paul might have mistaken a flash of lightning for "a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun" and a clap of thunder for the voice of the glorified Jesus. Luke knows nothing either of a thunder storm or a simoom in connection with this event which he narrates three times (Acts 9:3-9; 22:6-11; 26:12-15). It must be observed also that the narrative as given by Luke in describing the occurrence in the first instance (Acts 9:3-9) and in reporting the speeches of Paul on the stairs of the castle in Jerusalem (Acts 22:6-11) and before Agrippa and Festus in Caesarea (Acts 26:12-15) does not recognize any gradual psychological preparation in the mind of the apostle for the change, or that any influence whatever was exerted upon him by the arguments, the character, or the sufferings of the christians whom he was madly persecuting. Indeed it is manifestly the purpose of the writer to show how little the apostle was anticipating such a denouement to his grand enterprise and how suddenly and unexpectedly the Lord appeared to him. The previous history reveals the fact that his mind up to the very moment of the miracle was bent upon the extermination of that pestiferous sect and that he was not accessible to exterior influences from such a source. The death of Stephen instead of alleviating his anger apparently stirred him up to the adoption of more desperate and far-reaching measures. In his epistles Paul himself in alluding to his conversion confirms this view. He steadfastly resisted the suggestion that the gospel had come to him through human influence or human teaching (Gal. 1:1, 12). It was to him a direct and special revelation (Gal. 1:13-16). "When," he says, "it pleased God . . . to call me by his grace, and to reveal his son in me . . . immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" (vs. 15, 16). His conversion was not brought about by psychological processes within himself, nor by the influence of others, but it was according to the pleasure of God, it was an act of divine grace, it was a revelation of the Son of God in him. He had not himself apprehended Christ through naturalistic influences either subjectively or objectively exerted, but he had been "apprehended of Christ Jesus" through direct miraculous interposition (Phil. 3:12, 13). The fact of supreme

moment in the apostle's mind was that the risen and living Jesus had personally appeared to him, and he ranked that appearance with his appearances to the other apostles and brethren immediately after the resurrection. Not only was he seen of the twelve and others, but "last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time" (1 Cor. 15:5-8). This personal conference with Jesus, on the highway without the gates of Damascus, undesired and unanticipated on his own part, but miraculously forced upon him, was the secret of the marvellous transformation in his character and career, of his unswerving devotion to the Master, and of his peculiar conception of the doctrines of the gospel. Any theory of Paul's conversion which fails to note at its true value this fact as it had imbedded itself in the deepest convictions of his soul is necessarily false. "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Cor. 9:1). "Has he not revealed himself unto me? (Gal. 1:12) has he not talked with me? has he not commissioned me to preach the gospel unto the Gentiles?" (Acts 26:14-18). That personal appearance of Jesus to him was the starting point in his new life without which the radical change in him is unaccountable.

The critical theory has been most brilliantly elaborated by the Tübingen school.\* According to this view, the conversion of Paul is susceptible of "a purely subjective and visionary explanation." The chief obstacle between him as a Pharisee and the gospel was "the offence of the cross." The Jews were slow to comprehend the death of Jesus on the cross, and they urged this against his Messiahship as indicating that God had abandoned him. The Christians, on the contrary, insisted upon the Messianic signification of the cross as furnishing a necessary propitiation for the sins of the people, and maintained that the resurrection of Jesus, which was confirmed by a multitude of reliable witnesses who were ready to support their evidence by death, proved that God had not abandoned him. These two essential points in the gospel were brought before the mind of Paul by his contact with the Christians, and, it is claimed, must have had great weight with him. He believed in the resurrection of the dead and must have seen the necessity of a Messianic atonement. As he reflected upon these things he became involved in intellectual difficulty, and

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\*Weiss: Introduction to N. T., vol. I, p. 153. Beyschlag: New Testament Theology, vol. II, p. 10.

being of a visionary turn of mind, he formed a mental picture of Jesus as the Risen One, which finally ripened into such a reality as to bring about the crisis in his religious experience at Damascus. Thus a psychological vision was gradually developed which compelled him to acknowledge the Messiahship of Jesus. To this theory Pfeiderer adds, as a supplementary thought, that Paul's gospel of justification by faith originated in his conversion. The crucified man was under the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13) and therefore could not complete the righteousness of the law, but must bring in an entirely new righteousness which was received by faith. By such reasoning Paul was led to his great doctrine of justifying faith.

This naturalistic scheme is remarkable mainly for its brilliant ingenuity and disregard of Pauline history. It is constructed principally of sophisms with scarcely any basis of facts. It assumes that "the offence of the cross" was the only obstacle to Paul's acceptance of Jesus, without furnishing any proof on a subject upon which Luke is silent. It assumes that he was in the habit of discussing the question of the atonement and the significance of the death of Jesus with the christians, proof of which is totally wanting. It assumes that he was more accessible to the testimony of the disciples concerning the resurrection of Jesus than the apostles were to the testimony of Mary Magdalene and the other women at the beginning (Luke 24:10, 11), and quite ignores the fact that the doctrine of a general resurrection as held by the Pharisees did not lead them to accept the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus as taught by the christians (Act 23:9). It assumes that the transformation in Paul's character and life was due to intellectual reflection upon questions of doctrine rather than to the regenerating power of God's spirit, and that the doctrine of justification by faith became a dogma with him prior to its becoming a life which is a reversal of the logical and Scriptural order (Rom. 1:17, Gal. 2:20). This theory also proceeds upon the assumption that the supernatural is impossible, and hence it robs the incident of every vestige of a miraculous element. It quietly sets aside as unworthy of credence the testimony of Paul himself and that of his travelling companions. It denies that the Lord Jesus appeared to him, and asks the world to believe that the character and life work of this remarkable man rested on a mental delusion, which is wholly inconsistent with the history and with the psychological constitution of the

man. It fails utterly in the effort to construct an adequate basis upon which the temple of his after life can securely repose. Is it conceivable that Paul could have been entirely mistaken as to the reality of the occurrence on the road to Damascus? Some unusual event must have taken place at that time to mark the transitional epoch in his career. Everything in his subsequent history dated back to it. He told the story of meeting Jesus to howling mobs, and to governors and kings upon their thrones. He repeated it in cities and villages wherever he went as he wandered up and down in the earth for more than a quarter of a century. He suffered the loss of all things for the knowledge of Jesus Christ revealed to him on that occasion. He believed that the appearance of Jesus to him was not a mere mental vision, but an actual objective event, and upon his faith in the reality of it his life turned. He was separated from relatives and friends; he forfeited his place in Hebrew society; he lost his official position in the Sanhedrim; and he patiently endured the pangs of poverty, the stings of obloquy, ridicule and shame, and many other sufferings of various kinds, bitter and cruel persecutions among the rest, through a long series of years, "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," never languishing, never tiring, never complaining, never looking back, never longing for the old life, never despairing even in the face of tremendous odds of the triumph of the kingdom, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor, yet making many rich," bright, cheerful, brave and faithful—all because he firmly believed that the Lord Jesus had miraculously appeared to him, had saved him by divine grace, and had commissioned him to preach the gospel. Is this the work of a visionary?

Nor is it true that the apostle Paul was of such a visionary turn of mind that he was unable to distinguish in his own experience a mere mental picture, however vivid it might be, from an objective reality. His mind was singularly sound, well balanced, penetrating and logical. He had received the best of training in the schools of the day, and had undergone severe mental discipline. He was a skilled reasoner, capable of weighing evidence and of exposing logical fallacies. He had accustomed himself to the habit of introspection and to the making of observations on his own intellectual exercises; and he was one of the last of men to have been deceived by a mental fancy or an illusion of the senses. Is it credible that

such a man could have been permanently deceived? Would not time and reflection have inevitably dissipated the illusion if he had seen only a mental picture and not the Lord Jesus himself? And yet he must have been permanently deceived, or a large portion of his life must have been based upon a self-conscious imposture. But what could have sustained him, while with ever growing zeal and devotion, he persisted in the perpetuation of such a sham to the bitter end? Nothing was to be gained by it in the way of emolument, worldly applause, or honorable position among men. His teaching and his life were as much out of harmony with the spirit of the world in Nero's day as it is possible to conceive. He was not founding a religion to be called after his own name, like Mohammed, or Buddha, or Confucius, and which would perpetuate his fame through all future history. He built only upon the foundation of the crucified and risen Jesus, and indignantly spurned the thought of heading a sect. "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:13). To a man thus mentally deluded but finally awaking to a realization of the situation, the future promised nothing which could have stimulated his efforts and have held him steadily to a course of suffering which terminated in a violent death.

The "purely subjective and visionary explanation" of Paul's conversion involves us in insuperable difficulties. Instead of explaining it mystifies. It intrudes largely upon the imagination for its facts, and then it employs those alleged facts in a way that sound reasoning does not justify. It is a far greater strain upon our credulity to believe that Paul could have arrived at his comprehensiveness knowledge of the gospel through psychological processes than it is to believe the simple Biblical story of his miraculous conversion. His doctrinal system was founded upon his conversion, and nothing short of the miraculous character of it could have shattered the old Pharisaic system of belief to which he was in bondage and have made room for the new truth which thenceforward possessed him. Under the searching power of that divine light which shined into his heart from the face of Jesus Christ, the risen and glorified Saviour, he beheld the former temple of faith in which he had long lived and worshipped laid in ruins at his feet. It was hopelessly destroyed. But in its place God erected another temple far more glorious, Jesus Christ



himself being the chief corner stone, and into that temple Paul was invited to enter and dwell there. The meeting with Jesus was a supernatural and objective occurrence; the change in Paul was miraculous and radical. Old things for him passed away, all things became new. His old system was abandoned because exploded; and his new system began to develop under the fostering care of the Holy Spirit of God.

It is not clear that Paul had any positive preparation for his miraculous conversion. It is maintained by some that the terms of the narrative indicate some kind of a mental preparation,\* but others, whose views are equally valuable, do not accept such an interpretation.† To the question of the Saviour, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Paul answered, "Who art thou, Lord?" Upon this Bengel remarks that his own conscience would have readily replied that it was Jesus.‡ It is also claimed by Dr. Stalker that the words, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" can only mean that he was already fighting a battle with doubt and that his conscience was at work. But the question, "Who art thou, Lord?" means nothing more than that Paul did not know who had addressed him, but supposed that it might be an angel, or perhaps God himself; and the words of the proverb, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks," do not necessarily imply that Paul was suffering from an inward conflict. The meaning was that his resistance to the will and power of the living and glorified Jesus was vain and useless, and would result only in injury and ruin to himself. When the plowing ox kicks against the goad his resistance is useless and his wound is made worse. Paul, while furiously persecuting the christians, was not retarding the progress of the kingdom, but he was injuring himself. He was getting deeper and deeper into sin, the consciousness of which in his later experience filled his soul with penitent anguish.

The fact seems to be that the persecuting spirit was raging in him until the very moment that he was stricken down by the bright light from heaven. The narrative in its original form, and as repeated by the apostle himself at different times, sets out in bold relief the miraculous appearance of Jesus as an objective reality with its crushing effect upon the persecu-

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\*Dr. Stalker: *Life of St. Paul*, p. 40, par. 40.

†Lechler in *Lange's Acts*, p. 172.

‡"Conscientia ipsa facile diceret, Jesum esse."—Bengel.

tor, and the masterly efforts of critics to soften the picture have proved unavailing. After everything has been said, that can be said, the bald miracle remains. It is as clearly outlined upon the horizon of church history as a silhouette, and the honest seeker after the sources of evangelical christianity cannot fail to observe its impressive proportions. Next to the resurrection of our blessed Lord, what fact in history can equal in its revolutionary influence upon the world the miraculous conversion of the apostle Paul?

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