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## THE PERFECTION OF SCRIPTURE\*

In the nineteenth Psalm and the seventh verse, David says, *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul*. These words do not only assert a fact, but record a personal experience. That is to say David found in the law of God a quality which he termed perfection, and he also found that this law of God in virtue of this quality converted, restored, refreshed the soul. In all ages of the church the called of God have had a similar experience; in particular our noble forefathers, the Reformers, had it; and let it be our prayer that now and all through this seminary year the perfect Word of God may convert our souls.

As you well know our predecessors developed the doctrine of Holy Scripture, theirs and ours, out of the controversy with Rome. Each side agreed that Scripture was divinely inspired and therefore authoritative. But there was disagreement as to the relation of Holy Scripture to the Church. Rome exalted the Church above the Bible; the Reformers exalted the Bible above the Church. Like all theological differences the controversy was soon found to reach farther and deeper than most had imagined it would do. Each side was compelled to define carefully its terms and to state clearly its reasons. Rome formulated its doctrine of the attributes of the Church; the Reformers formulated their doctrine of the properties of Scripture. These latter were earnestly discussed and variously enumerated, but after a while opinion was unanimous that the sacred writings possessed at least these four properties: Authority, Necessity, Perspicuity, and Perfection. Perfection is the topic of our discourse.

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make it a thoroughly adequate treatment of the important question with which it deals.

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*Light from Ancient Letters.* Private Correspondence in the Non-Literary Papyri of Oxyrhynchus of the First Four Centuries and Its Bearing on New Testament Language and Thought. By HENRY G. MEECHAM, B.A. (Lond.), M.A., B.D. (Manch.), former Wellington Scholar in the University of Manchester. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., Ruskin House, 40 Museum Street, W.C. 1; New York: The Macmillan Company. First published in 1923. Pp. 189.

In this treatment of a limited number of the non-literary papyri, as throwing light upon the New Testament, Mr. Meecham avoids certain extremes that have marred the work of some recent advocates of the new materials. He says some salutary words, for example, "against inferring from the colloquial character of N.T. Greek that it is destitute of literary quality" (pp. 163f); though it surely seems somewhat like damning with faint praise when he says in this connection that the language of the New Testament is "not without traces of true literary excellence" (p. 165), or that "now and again real literary grace shines through" in the Epistles of Paul (p. 166). As a matter of fact it is a radical error, we for our part think, to suppose that because the New Testament was written in the living language of the period, rather than in an artificial language of books, it is therefore characterized by anything like cheapness or vulgarity. The New Testament writers used, indeed, the common speech of their time, but they used it in a very uncommon way. That is the reason why the King James Version, despite faults in detail, is really a much more faithful translation than those recent versions that put the New Testament into the language of the modern street.

Commendable also is the author's caution in applying to the New Testament Epistles Deissmann's distinction between "epistles" and "letters." The Epistles of Paul, as Mr. Meecham well observes, are more than ordinary private letters, like those which have been found on Egyptian rubbish-heaps; for they were intended for the churches. "Even in that charming letter which on the face of it is a mere personal or private note, Philemon, the prospect of a wider circle is not absent from view. It is addressed to 'Philemon . . . and to the church in thy house'" (p. 100). Mr. Meecham also notices, quite correctly, the "exalted message and edificatory aim" of the Pauline Epistles (p. 101). Only, we should prefer to speak, in this connection, not merely of the "spiritual authority" of the Epistles, but definitely of their apostolic authority. Paul was conscious throughout of speaking with an apostolic commission to the Church of God.

The lexical and grammatical details in this book make the same impression upon our mind as that which is made by all similar books—the impression, namely, that the papyri do not often settle in any very definite way the mooted exegetical questions in the New Testament. The new materials are interesting but not at all revolutionary.

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