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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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Then it is to be seriously doubted whether the author proves his thesis that only two *methods* of evolution have ever been suggested. On page 44 he does admit that Kellogg refers to the theory of Mutations as an alternative theory as to method, but immediately adds that "to say 'Species have originated through Mutations' is merely to say 'We do not know *how* Species originated.'" This hardly seems to do justice to the theory of Mutations. This theory claims that, contrary to Mendel's Law, species at various times produce individuals having a mutation not present in the parent species, and that this mutation is caused either by an "intrinsic tendency toward progress," or as Christian evolutionists would say, by the purposeful activity of the power of God. Now it seems almost a quibble to deny that this is a theory of the method of evolution. There is valid ground for rejecting this theory as an adequate explanation of evolution, but we can hardly deny that there is at least one other theory of method in addition to the two he mentions.

There is perhaps a slight tendency to overstatement in certain portions of the book, as for example, when the author says (p. 36) that it is quite unthinkable that the Greek philosophers and people were in ignorance of Biblical teachings at about 400 B.C. Doubtless also it is true that Darwinism has had an effect on the epistemology of Pragmatism and contributed greatly to the popularity of this sceptical philosophy, but Pragmatism too plainly harks back to the agnosticism of Hume, to say, as the author does, that it "is too manifestly Darwinian in its cast of thought to admit of any great doubt as to its affiliation" (p. 67). "Evolution as a substantial theory, with content and definite specific *meaning*, is shut up to Darwinism" (p. 103) seems rather an overstatement, which the modern evolutionist would hardly admit. Exception might also be taken to a statement found on page 175: "Place a Greek of the Golden Age . . . with his brilliant secular intellect side by side with a Hebrew of the Golden Age of the Prophets, with his penetrating insight and thrilling statement of the Mind and Will of Jehovah! What vast contrasts! And these have come to pass by the process called Evolution within the limits of the type called Man." This seems to indicate that the Hebrews evolved their knowledge of God, through probably it was not consciously intended in that way by the author.

But these are after all only minor blemishes in a splendid book which should be read by all interested in evolution. Certainly the author accomplishes his aim as set forth in the Foreword to: "make it easier for the men and women of this generation to accept the Bible unhesitatingly as the Word of God."

Princeton.

FLOYD E. HAMILTON.

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## EXEGETICAL THEOLOGY

*Jesus and the Greeks.* Or Early Christianity in the Tidewater of Hellenism. By WILLIAM FAIRWEATHER, M.A., D.D. (Edin.), Kirkcaldy. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 38 George Street, 1924. Pp. xvi. 407. Price (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York), \$3.50.

Dr. Fairweather first treats, by way of review and estimate, the life of the Hellenistic age; and then discusses the question of Hellenistic influences upon primitive Christianity. The subject is just now in the forefront of interest, and the present book treats it in a way which at many points is stimulating and informing. The author has not immersed himself in the mass of discussion which has been proceeding in Germany, in England, and elsewhere, but is inclined for the most part to make his own observations and go his own way.

Such a method, however, is beset by certain dangers, and our author is not immune from them; indeed he exhibits in rather marked degree the defects of his qualities. It is well not to be too dependent upon the judgment of others; but a book on the relations of primitive Christianity to its pagan environment which ignores altogether the questions that are put, even if they are not answered, with such incomparable incisiveness by Wrede and Bousset, can hardly be regarded as anything like a complete introduction to the subject. Indeed, this neglect of most of the basic discussions of the origin of Christianity that have appeared in recent years rather puts the author at the mercy of those writers to whom—it might seem almost at random—he does refer. One cannot help having the feeling that Dr. Fairweather does not himself detect the far-reaching implications of some of the quotations that he makes in the course of his book.

In general, the book cannot be acquitted, we think, of a certain lack of coherence, a certain failure of the author to draw out the logical consequences of assertions which are rather lightly made. On the one hand, Dr. Fairweather does seem to hold to a supernaturalistic view of the person of Christ; he does seem to believe in the resurrection of our Lord and in the miracle at Pentecost; he does seem to defend the miracles as being connected with one who was Himself a miraculous Being (p. 245); he does clearly accept, and almost as a matter of course, the sinlessness of our Lord (p. 241). And yet in another place he appears to rationalize away the miracles of healing, or of expulsion of demons. "In those types of mental disease," he says (pp. 236f.), "which contemporary opinion attributed to 'possession' by an evil spirit Jesus saw the malign influence of evil, and by the potent power of His personality over confiding souls He cured the malady."

Equally or even more obscure is our author's attitude toward critical questions regarding the Gospels. He does apparently use the Gospel narratives, even those contained in the Fourth Gospel, as historical; yet at the same time he makes assertions which are difficult to harmonize with such a view. The most radical of such assertions, perhaps, is that which appears in connection with the application of the term "Lord" to Jesus. "It is, however," says our author after quoting Pfeleiderer, "probably more correct to say that He [Jesus] was first designated 'the Lord' by St Paul" (p. 277, note). It is really difficult for the reader, when he comes across such an assertion, to believe his own eyes, and indeed it is not quite clear what Dr. Fairweather means. But if he means that Paul was the first to call Jesus Lord he has here expressed his adherence to an extreme radical-

ism in negative criticism which goes beyond what even Bousset and Heitmüller have ventured to maintain: and yet he is apparently quite unaware that he said anything startling or subversive at all. It is difficult to avoid the impression that Dr. Fairweather has never considered the extreme importance of the question as to the origin of the Kyrios-title and the bearing of that question upon the central question of the origin of the Christian religion.

A similar judgment may fairly be passed, we think, upon our author's treatment of the work, as distinguished from the Person, of our Lord. At times he does apparently regard Jesus as a true Redeemer from sin; and yet at other times it seems doubtful whether he regards Him as anything more than a Revealer of the Fatherhood of God. In general, the book suffers from the adherence of its author to the false separation between the "religious content" and the "dogmatic framework" of the Christian religion. As a matter of fact, the religious content of our religion is based upon its dogmatic framework, rather than *vice versa*. And the dogmatic framework is simply the "gospel" that the New Testament sets forth.

Fortunately Dr. Fairweather does not himself draw all the skeptical inferences which logically proceed from the false principle to which we have just referred. Indeed, in one place he takes occasion to commend in a very refreshing way the intellectual power of the Apostle Paul. "The fresh and acute reasoning of the Hebrew scholar," he says, (p. 275) ". . . is more than a match for the superficial flippancies of some twentieth-century scientists." These are salutary words. Yet the false separation between "religious content" and "dogmatic framework," though it is by no means allowed to perform with any completeness its baleful work, yet does affect the book very unfavorably. The author is discussing the influence of the Hellenistic environment upon primitive Christianity; and he says many good things upon that subject, in contradiction of extreme views which have derived Christianity in its essence from the mystery religions. But the solution proposed in the preface will not do. "Certain alleged doctrinal resemblances," the author says, "between the Hellenistic and Christian religions are found, when closely examined, to amount to nothing more than similarity in point of intellectual structure. In this respect Christianity was indeed strongly influenced by Hellenism; but although, particularly in the speculative construction of St. Paul, Christianity made use of Hellenistic categories of thought, it owed nothing of its essential content to the religion of the Greeks." This solution needs to be defined much more carefully before it can cease to be misleading; and in general, before one determines whence Christianity was derived, it is important to determine a good deal more clearly than our author does in this book what Christianity itself is.

We have read the book not without pleasure; many good observations are contained in it; it is written by a man of broad culture, who is also not wanting in certain Christian convictions. But it lacks that precision in dealing with great questions of principle which would be required to

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

Princeton.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN.

*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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