

THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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I. CHRIST AND HIS MIRACLES.

“His glory consists, not in being banished from history; we render him a truer worship by showing that all history is incomprehensible without him.”—
RENAN.

It may be said, without disparagement of the labors of able men, that our learned treatises on the person of Christ and on his miracles fail to exhibit in a satisfactory manner a certain necessary relation between them, apart from which neither can be clearly apprehended. The confusion that attends, even to the present day, the discussion of these subjects is evidence of something wrong in our conception and method of dealing with them.

There is a troublesome feeling in many minds that the best and final word respecting the divinity of Jesus and the place and value of miracles remains to be spoken, and that, when it is spoken, it will discover a new line of thought touching the relation of the two things. It would be sheer egotism for a paper like this to propose more than a suggestion, when one takes into consideration the magnitude of the two-fold subject, and of the literature already extant; but it ought to be possible to set forth in brief, yet clear and satisfactory form the main features of a doctrine which, to our thinking, promises so much to faith in its conflict with science and philosophy.

It may be assumed that the deity of Christ is one of the best established doctrines of Christianity, in so far as the consensus of faith is able to secure a dogma. While it involves the profoundest mystery of religion, and rises beyond intellectual apprehension, it is yet in its relations seen to be indispensable. The religious

have been unquestioned in New Testament times by the heresies of the day; we, therefore, find but two references to it, one by Christ—"The laborer is worthy of his hire"—and one by Paul, Heb. ix. 13, 14; and both references are drawn from Old Testament usage and authority. Numerous and urgent arguments and exhortations are, however, given to secure generous gifts to the poor, and they were no doubt timely. These exhortations contain principles of wider application to Old Testament tithes, and free-will offerings as well.

8. Many who may not concede the permanent binding authority of the tithe as a minimum for all ages and dispensations will perhaps concede the following proposition: If the tithe was the minimum proportion in a confessedly inferior dispensation, the larger graces, wider field and abounding prosperity of a better dispensation do not suggest a smaller proportion when we essay to "honor the Lord with our substance."

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THE DODS-BRUCE DECISIONS.

THE General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, which met last spring in Edinburgh, was the largest that has been held in twenty years, the number of commissioners in attendance being seven hundred and sixty. On the 27th of May the great Assembly Hall on High street, which holds about two thousand people, was packed as never before perhaps in its history. As early as eight o'clock in the morning people began to gather, and by ten, when the Assembly was called to order, not a vacant seat could be seen, though only holders of tickets were admitted. Even after benches had been placed in the aisles a great block of people was left standing at each door. This extraordinary manifestation of interest on the part of both ministers and people was due to the expectation of a debate and a decision concerning the alleged heresies of Prof. Marcus Dods, of Edinburgh, and Prof. Alexander Balmain Bruce, of Glasgow. The former had exposed several joints in his harness by certain expressions he had used in regard to the divinity of Christ, the atonement and the resurrection, as well as by sundry unguarded statements concerning the "errors" and "immoralities" in the Old Testament. The latter had rendered himself obnoxious to the heresy hunters by loose statements also on the subject of inspiration, particularly in regard to the free reports of the words of our Lord in the synoptical Gospels.

The matter came up in the form of a report by the College Committee on the case of Dr. Dods, stating that his writings did not furnish grounds for instituting a process against him as teaching what is at variance with the standards of the church. On this five motions were introduced, three by the Professor's opponents, one by his friends, and one by those who put personal and party considerations aside and decided the question more purely on its merits. Happily the last prevailed. Of the three adverse motions, one proposed that the Professor should be "libelled," another that his case should be sent to a committee, while the third condemned his views, but declared that a formal prosecution was not "advisable." These were all voted down by large majorities. The motion introduced by his supporters adopted the conclusion of the College Committee, that there were no grounds for a libel process, reaffirmed the Assembly's belief in the great verities of the faith, and suggested to Dr. Dods to—

"Bear in mind in his statements, not only what he thought requisite in the interest of truth, but what his brethren deemed due to it, and exhorted their faithful ministers and office-bearers to observe all due care in speech and action, lest utterances from her accredited teachers be misapprehended in the church."

The final vote was taken between this and the following resolution, introduced by Dr. Adam and supported by Principal Rainy and others:

"The Assembly approve of the report of the College Committee in respect of the conclusions arrived at, that the writings of Dr. Dods do not afford ground for instituting a process against him as teaching what is at variance with the standards of the church.

"But having regard to questions which have been raised in connection with certain passages in Dr. Dods' writings, the Assembly find it necessary to declare as follows:

"(1). This church holds immovably the cardinal doctrine of our Lord's divinity, and highly disapproves of all representations, by whatever motive dictated, which tend to lower the sense of its vital importance in the minds of many hearers of the gospel.

"(2). This church steadfastly adheres to the fundamental doctrine of the atonement as laid down in her standards, and cannot consent to sanction its being set forth as a mere theory, or as only one among many phases or aspects of the Saviour's death.

"(3). This church firmly believes that the resurrection of our Lord is not only an incontestably proved fact, but one which lies at the very foundation of the Christian system, and it looks with high disapproval on any apparent countenance being given to speculations fitted to bring the reality of it into question.

"(4). With regard to the Holy Scriptures, this church continues to hold, as she has ever done, that they are 'all given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life,' and that of their infallible and divine authority we are assured by the inward work of the Holy Spirit. She views the use of the term 'mistakes and

immoralities' to describe recognized difficulties in the Scriptures as utterly unwarranted, and fitted to give grave offence.

"Finally, the Assembly, while thankfully acknowledging Dr. Dods' strong declaration of adherence to the doctrine of the church as laid down in her standards, and desiring to do justice to his high character and services, find it necessary in present circumstances to remind him, and the church's professors generally, that the primary duty which devolves on them in the responsible offices they have been called to occupy, is to teach and defend the church's faith as embodied in her Confession, and it earnestly exhorts them, even when engaged in laudable efforts to convince gainsayers and to help the doubting, to be on their guard against all lines of argument and forms of expression which may have a tendency to endanger the faith of others, and to wound the hearts of those who tremble at the divine word."

This was carried by a majority of eighty-five.

Two days later the case of Dr. Bruce came up in the same way. Both he and the Edinburgh professor were greeted with enthusiastic applause when they entered the house. Only two motions were submitted. The one from the opposition ran as follows:

"The Assembly receive the special report of the College Committee and of its sub-committee in the case of Dr. Bruce, and thank them for their diligence. The Assembly find, as regards the case, that in the volume of Dr. Bruce, entitled "*The Kingdom of God*," and other of his writings, there are many statements which are seriously objectionable, and appear to be irreconcilable with the standards of the church and the position and responsibilities of a professor of theology. The Assembly remit this decision, along with the special report of the College Committee and its sub-committee, to the Presbytery of Glasgow, to deal therewith as seems to them fit."

The motion which became the finding of the house was introduced by the Rev. R. G. Balfour, and reads thus:

"The General Assembly approve of the report of the committee as regards its conclusion, finding no ground for a process against Dr. Bruce as teaching doctrine opposed to the standards of the church. But the Assembly also declare as follows:

"(1.) With regard to the inspiration of the gospels and the reliable character of their reports as to the life and ministry of our blessed Lord, the Assembly find that, by want of due care in his modes of statement, and by his manner of handling debated questions as to the motives and methods of the evangelists, Dr. Bruce has given some ground for the misunderstandings and for the painful impressions which have existed.

"(2.) With respect to Dr. Bruce's doctrinal positions and his statements about the system of the Christian faith, the Assembly find ground for reminding Dr. Bruce that, in endeavoring to state afresh the bearing of our Lord's teaching, and in setting forth aspirations after fresh light upon the matter of the teaching received among us, he was bound to express himself, not only with essential loyalty to the church's faith, professed by him along with all his brethren, but also so as to make that continued loyalty evident to the world. With reference to both de-

partments of this finding, the Assembly call Dr. Bruce's special attention to the responsibilities attaching to his position.

"Finally, the Assembly cordially recognize the good gifts which Dr. Bruce has brought to the service of the church in the line of theological literature and otherwise, as well as those which distinguished Dr. Dods, whose case was before the Assembly at a former diet. They assure those brethren of the Assembly's earnest desire for their acceptance and success in the important work which the church has entrusted to them."

The majority for this was one hundred and fifty-five, and the decision was received with loud cheers, as in the former case.

It is easy to sneer at this action as a compromise. It will not satisfy those hyper-orthodox people whom Dr. Stuart Robinson used to speak of as men of "high pints." Nor will it satisfy those who are in full sympathy with the accused professors. But a careful study of the whole case convinces us that the action was wise. It was not a compromise, but a decision based upon the evidence. There may be facts which would justify judicial process against Messrs. Dods and Bruce, but they were not adduced in this discussion. Even Principal Rainy declared that the first clause of the motion, which stated that there was no ground for censure, was most important and fundamental, and that he would vote for no motion from which that was absent. The most obnoxious statements of Dr. Dods seem to have been made, not as expressing his own views, but as premises in an *ad hominem* argument, for purposes of apologetics. That he has made other unsound statements which cannot be explained in this way, we have no doubt, but they were not in evidence. The truth is, his opponents had not studied his writings, and relying apparently upon passion and prejudice rather than facts, they made but a feeble attack when they might have made a strong one. The prosecution was conducted by weak and imprudent men. Their lack of force was accentuated by contrast with the strength of the two professors, whose abilities are beyond question, whatever may be said of their orthodoxy. The speeches of the opposition were intemperate and abusive. The three leaders of this minority were Mr. Howie, who "came to grief in an attempt to introduce the name of Dr. Dods' father in connection with an argument against the professor"; Mr. Macaskill, who threatened his brethren from the Highlands with excommunication if they should venture to vote contrary to his views; and a Major McLeod, the most picturesque of them all, who "sporting a very pronounced true-blue necktie" and "delivered a very perfervid speech (of ten minutes), in the course of which he was twice called to order."

These men were all more orthodox than the Confession of Faith, and, of course, the decision of the Assembly counts for nothing with them, notwithstanding the tremendous majority against them. These are the men who compose "the purest church on earth," who denounce those that do not agree with them and distrust those that do, like the extremely orthodox Scotchman who had carried secession so far that when asked about the membership of his church said, "There's only Sandy and me, and I hae my doots o' Sandy." "While dispensing the sacrament in Fearn, on a recent Sunday, the Rev. D. Matheson, during the fencing of the table, debarred all who believed in the opinions of Professors Dods and Bruce from taking their places at the table of the Lord." These Mucklewraths and Macbriars will probably cause a defection which will sadly cripple the real friends of the truth in coming contests. Shortly after the adjournment of the Assembly, a secret conclave of the malcontents was held in Glasgow. Though declining to make their proceedings public, there is little doubt that they took steps looking to the further agitation of the matter in the church courts. Accordingly we read of another and later meeting, at which an elaborate manifesto was adopted, setting forth reasons for dissatisfaction with the decisions of the Assembly. This they have a right to do, of course, and there is little doubt that the matter will soon come before the Assembly again in some shape. But we hope that, when it does, the cause of orthodoxy may fall into the hands of abler and wiser men.

In pleasing contrast with the hysterical and bitter speeches of the minority were the dignified and conciliatory expressions of the two professors. If they *have* taught some of the doctrines attributed to them, we have as little sympathy with them as with the extremists just described, but we are bound to admit that they showed throughout an admirable Christian spirit. While the decision was an exceedingly unpalatable one to Dr. Dods, he has bowed to it loyally, and in token of his readiness to submit to his church's ruling he immediately changed the subject on which he was expected to speak at Oxford. As for Dr. Bruce, he achieved an extraordinary triumph. The statement that his much-abused book was included by the Princeton professors in their list of the best hundred books for a minister's library, was received with cheers. His speech of half an hour was listened to with the closest attention, the unusual stillness which reigned throughout the hall being broken only by an occasional storm of applause. The tone of it took all the heart out of the attack upon him. He ac-

knowledge his imperfections, reiterated his hearty acceptance of the great doctrines of our faith, defended his book in a modest and manly way, and yet accepted the admonitions of the Assembly in a spirit of humility. He has, moreover, recently issued a new edition of his book, in which certain passages to which objection was taken have been modified.

We have not seen the end of this matter. Neither the unwise enemies nor the unwise friends of the two professors are satisfied with the Assembly's decision. But we shall look forward to the further agitation of it without apprehension. The Free Church is sound. The papers above cited ring true on every one of the great doctrines involved. And the overwhelming majorities by which they were adopted relieve all fears as to the issue of future controversies. W. W. MOORE.

Hampden-Sidney, Va.

THE SARATOGA ASSEMBLY AND THE PUBLICATION BOARD.

SUMMIT, N. J., *August 21, 1890.*

EDITORS PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY: My special attention has been called to an article in your July number, in which Rev. Thomas A. Hoyt, D. D., has attacked severely the report of a special committee of the General Assembly of the Northern Church, of which I have the honor to be chairman.

Assuming that your spirit of fairness will allow your readers to hear both sides, I ask your indulgence while I give you some of the facts in the case, so that they may be able to judge of the matter in question.

Let me say that Dr. Hoyt himself is a member of the Board of Publication that is under investigation, and that he seems to have availed himself of the advice of a distinguished lawyer to a young student, "When you have a bad case abuse the witnesses on the other side."

The special committee, who are spoken of as "supposed to be experts," as "obscure and incompetent persons," etc., were appointed by the moderator on account of their acquaintance with the matters under investigation. Of the number two are book publishers, one the publisher and owner of a paper with an issue of 350,000 copies monthly, another is a general printer, another was for fifteen years the Business Agent of the American Tract Society, in charge of manufac-