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EDITORIAL

"How The Continuing Committee Got Its Name" — The Message
Versus The Messenger — Serious — "Loyalty"

THE PLACE OF HIDDEN STRENGTH

By Rev. Cary N. Weisiger, Jr.

HAGGAI AND MALACHI

By Rev. Edward J. Young, Ph.D.

REASONS WHY IT IS UNWISE TO UNITE WITH THE NORTHERN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

By Rev. R. Wilbur Cousar, D.D.

OWNERSHIP OF OUR CHURCH PROPERTY

By Rev. D. J. Woods, D.D.

SABBATH SCHOOL LESSONS

(February 1-8)

Edited By Rev. J. Kenton Parker

YOUNG PEOPLE'S DEPARTMENT

(February 1-8)

Edited By Rev. W. G. Foster

WOMAN'S WORK

Edited By Mrs. R. T. Faucette

BOOK REVIEWS

Library, Reading Room
University of N. C.
Chapel Hill, N. C.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF ADOPTION

By R. A. Webb. With Introduction by Rev. John R. Richardson, D.D. Published by Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947, Pages 188. Price \$2.50.

Dr. Robert A. Webb was a gift of Old Columbia to Southwestern and to Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In both places he formulated the Reformed Faith in convincing logic and presented it with warm conviction. The memory of Webb's presentation of the glory and the work of Christ from the Epistle to the Hebrews makes it still difficult for the reviewer to be satisfied with any other sermon on this grand theme.

Some question the title to this work on the ground that not many of the Reformed theologians have developed the doctrine of adoption. We agree with the statement but reject the conclusion. A series of lectures presented in 1861 by Dr. Candlish, of the New College, Edinburgh, Scotland, and answered by his opposite number, Dr. Crawford, of the University of Edinburgh, focused the theme. The discussion, taken up in Scotland by Hugh Martin and William White, was carried on in Columbia Theological Seminary by Thornwell, Girardeau, and Whaling, in Louisville, Ky., by Webb, and in Austin, Tex., by Dr. George Summey.

Thus we have a distinct doctrine wrought out on the ground of the Reformed Faith as that was gloriously present in the Free Church of Scotland and in the Southern Presbyterian Church. In editing and introducing this work, Dr. John R. Richardson has shown himself a true disciple of Webb, and has earned the gratitude of the Columbia alumni just as he undertakes the responsibility of being one of the Directors of Columbia Theological Seminary.

While Candlish and Thornwell held that Adam was a servant and only a potential son, Crawford and Girardeau held that Adam was created both a servant and a son—a subject at one and the same time both of moral government and of moral discipline. As Alexander Whyte, the great Scottish evangelical preacher, follows the Candlish line, so Robert A. Webb follows but modifies Girardeau. Indeed Webb defines, states, elaborates and develops the doctrine further than any writer we have seen.

For Webb the original sonship of Adam and of the race "was not natural but artificial." Adam was adopted by a decree of the Divine will, and when he failed to fulfill the filial test the adopting act was annulled and Adam was remanded to his former position as a mere creature and servant. Indeed from the first chapter through the last Dr. Webb holds his lance against the New Theology with its conception of God as the natural Father of all men and all men as the children of God. Such natural paternalism does away with the true doctrine of creation, of moral government, of sin, of human suffering, of the atonement, of regeneration, and of eternal punishment. According to Dr. Webb, the sonship of man was "cancelled," "annulled," "forfeited," by the Fall, so that man was "disowned," "disinherited," "repudiated" and "outlawed" by God.

How then can the filial status be restored? Webb carefully considers the various theories and shows

that this cannot be done by those who teach a pantheistic and mystical view of the incarnation, nor through a moral and sentimental sonship by a mere act of love, nor through the atonement as a mere didactic display issuing in a natural and normal sonship by a mere repentance. It is attained through the atonement as a propitiatory sacrifice as that is applied to sinners by the grace of the Holy Spirit. This evangelical and redemptive sonship is one "in which God is constituted a Father by the Atonement, and the sinner is constituted son by Grace; one in which the death of Christ makes God a Father of the elect, and the Spirit conveys filial privileges and imparts a filial nature to cast-off and disowned sinners. The fall, on the one hand annulled the fatherhood of God, and on the other hand, it annulled the sonhood of man; the evangelical sonship is that sonship in which the Son of God changes God's relation to that of a loving and beneficent Father, and the Holy Spirit changes man's relation and heart into those of a dutiful and delightful child." "Evangelical sonship, therefore, is based upon the vicarious and sacrificial death of the Son of God. There is no entry into the sheepfold—no entry into the kingdom—no entry into the house of God which avoids the Cross on Calvary." "By the fall we became the children of disobedience, by the atonement we became the children of obedience. By the fall we became the children of wrath, by the atonement, we became the children of love. By the fall we became the children of the Devil, by the atonement we become the children of God."

Since Webb taught and wrote the theological climate has changed from an emphasis upon logical formulation to one upon the living Lord, from preoccupation with a system to concern with a Person—the Saviour Christ. Therefore, it may take a little longer for our day to appreciate the careful reasoning of this solid work, and some may even be stopped by the fact that the argument for the Edenic sonship of Adam moves from reason to revelation. We invite such readers to continue the perusal of the work of a ripe theologian, a true believer, and a great preacher of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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Professor of Historical Theology,
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The Southern Presbyterian Journal Co.
Weaverville . . . North Carolina

CALVIN'S COMMENTARY ON ROMANS

By John Calvin. Published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 255 Jefferson Avenue, S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich. Price \$4.50.

Bible-believing Christians are hailing with great delight the republication of this monumental work by the prince of exegetes. It is also good news to learn that other volumes by Calvin are now in the process of publication. For a number of years this commentary has been hard to obtain. Although we have had one for a long time it is now dilapidated through constant use and old age. We are elated that this new volume is now off the press. Furthermore the type has been improved.

Professor Louis Berkhof has an illuminating introduction to this edition. We concur in his state-