

THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED REVIEW

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I.

THE MEANING AND VALUE OF THE DOCTRINE OF DECREES.

THE proposal to revise the Westminster Standards has brought the doctrine of the Divine decrees into the foreground. The controversy turns upon this pivot. Other features come in incidentally, but this is capital and controlling. This is the stone of stumbling and rock of offense. If election and reprobation were not in the Confession and Catechism, probably the fifteen Presbyteries would not have overtured the Assembly. It is for this reason that we purpose to discuss the *Meaning and Value of the Doctrine of Decrees*, so plainly inculcated in the Scriptures, and from them introduced into the Westminster symbol. We are certain that the Biblical truth of the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners, and of His just liberty to determine how many He will save from their sin, and how many He will leave to their self-will in sin, is greatly misunderstood by many who profess the Presbyterian faith, and who sometimes describe it in much the same terms with the anti-Calvinist, and inveigh against it with something of the same bitterness. The conservative and the radical reviser meet together at this point, and while the former asserts that he has no intention to make any changes respecting the doctrine of decrees that in his opinion will essentially impair the integrity of the Calvinistic system, he nevertheless practically coöperates with the radical in bringing about a revolution in the sentiment and creed of the Presbyterian Church concerning one of the most distinctive articles of its belief. Because revision, be it conservative or radical, contends that there is more or less that is *un-Scriptural* in the tenets of election and reprobation as they are formulated in the Standards, and that

Such psychological defects have evidently impaired the author's representation of the *ordo salutis* on its subjective side. Regeneration through faith is taught and the latter taken as the logical *prius* of the former. Conversion precedes both. It is not easy to see how conversion, or even that part of it which is called contrition, though it be rather a noetic than a voluntary act, can be possible without an undercurrent of harmony with the Divine law, *i. e.*, without a change of will. We may find the source of these statements in the proposition, that the renewing influence of the Holy Spirit proceeds from the understanding. If this be meant in the unqualified sense that no immediate influence is brought to bear upon the will, it certainly is an incorrect and dangerous position to hold. The ground why the author makes faith precede regeneration appears to be that, until we are actually united with Christ by faith, the saving power of His spirit cannot be subjectively applied to us—no new life can be infused. This again amounts to an implicit denial of the principle of pure imputation, which the author recognizes elsewhere. Of what value does the latter remain if God cannot give us life, unless an actual union has taken place? Moreover, this statement, when carried out to its legitimate consequences, would render every beginning of the subjective process of salvation impossible, for we might ask with equal right, how God could bestow upon a sinner the gift of conversion and faith, as long as he is outside of the mystical body of Christ. Against this confusion of the juridical and the mystical unions with Christ, we may refer to the statement of Weiss, "New Testament Theology," i, 460, 461, note 10.

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THE FAITH OF THE GOSPEL. A Manual of Christian Doctrine. By ARTHUR JAMES MASON, B.D., formerly Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. London: Rivingtons, 1888. Second edition, 1889. Pp. xxii, 483, small 8vo.

Mr. Mason's able exposition of doctrine is one of the very welcome signs of the revival of the study of dogmatic theology in the Church of England. Like Mr. Moule's equally able and much more satisfactory compend, it professes not to be "a book written for the learned," though even a "cultivated" audience may well find portions of it somewhat strong meat for unlearned stomachs. We cannot speak too highly of its earnest and reverent tone, of its lucid style, or of its truly profound analysis of doctrine. It shows the effect of careful and critical study of the New Testament; and bears traces of somewhat wide reading in the fathers and some modern dogmatic authors. Its type of doctrine is strongly Churchly, tinged with a speculative infusion, apparently derived chiefly from Martensen. To speak the truth frankly, Mr. Mason's Churchliness is so high as very unduly to affect his attitude towards truth. Thus, though his conception of Dogmatics is a high one—defining it as a Christian philosophy, not in the gnostic sense of "a human fabric borrowing elements from the Gospels," but in the sense that it is made up wholly by putting together the fragments of revealed truth given in exegesis—he adds, that this construction is to be made, not, as we might expect, with regard to the real relations of the separate dogmatic facts, but "in no arbitrary fashion, but in the way in which the Church has always grouped them." Accordingly, the preface ends with the declaration that he submits himself unreservedly to the correction of the Church for any errors he may have committed. All this sounds scarcely Protestant. And we cannot, therefore, be surprised to discern, as we read into the heart of the volume, that Mr. Mason's Protestantism is at times strongly conditioned by Romish leanings. This, of course, comes out especially in the doctrine of the sacraments.

The Romish view of the difference between the Old and New Testament sacraments, which makes the former only symbolize, while the latter alone convey, grace, is asserted (p. 259). Although Baptism and the Lord's Supper are separated from the others as the preëminent sacraments, yet the sacramental character of the others is insisted upon (p. 265, etc.). Baptismal regeneration, and that in the sense of Rome, is asserted (p. 267). The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is, of course, asserted (p. 311). And the *opus operatum* theory of the sacramental efficacy is explicitly taught: not only is it argued that they convey somewhat not to be had by faith apart from them (p. 287), but we meet with such extreme statements as this: "The grown-up man, indeed, may ask to be baptized and the new life be granted him; but, on the other hand, it is difficult to see how he could refuse it, if it were thrust upon him. If he chooses, he may speedily destroy it out of his soul, but he has had it, though but for a moment" (p. 276). One direction which the Romanizing tendency takes is worthy the remark of Protestants. The *Guardian* tells us (in the words of an old Anglican): "Of one thing I will assure them, till they are good *Marians* they shall never be good *Christians*; while they derogate from the dignity of the Mother, they cannot truly honour the Sonne." As a member of that brilliant circle of young High Churchmen whom the *Guardian* probably represents more closely now than any other coterie of the Church of England, Mr. Mason takes care not to "derogate from the dignity of the Mother." He thinks we have "no need to assume the immaculate conception of Mary herself," but he asserts her complete freedom from actual sin: "That maiden life which gave our Lord birth was entirely holy" (p. 114).

Nevertheless, Mr. Mason sets his feet at the outset firmly on the Reformed ground that natural reason is inadequate to the right apprehension of God, but faith is requisite to know Him aright; and teaches the primary Protestant principle of a forensic justification (in the Arminian form). And everywhere whatever in Romanism he deems "uncatholic" meets his unqualified disapproval. He is even, as already hinted, not wholly unaffected by the more recent currents of German speculative theology. Thus, for example, he adopts the Hegelian proof, so popular nowadays, that the conception of the Trinity is the condition of a thinkable God. Probably, indeed, the argument was never more simply and attractively put than on pp. 41-46 of this volume, though, perhaps also, its unavoidably faulty conceiving of the Godhead as a "becoming" was never more naively betrayed. Certainly an identity can scarcely be instituted between the two propositions "that a solitary unit could have no perceptions at all," and that an isolated human spirit could not "attain to consciousness of his own being, or, indeed, have any thoughts at all." It is quite one thing to say that the doctrine of the Trinity illimitably broadens and brightens our conception of God—and this is a valid argument of its truth; and another thing to say that a unipersonal God is wholly unthinkable. It is probably a patristic current of thought which leads to the exposition of Christ's relation to the Father (p. 62), under what seems essentially the Platonic conceptions of the *λόγος ἐνδιὰθετος* and *λόγος προφορικός*. And from the same impulse has probably arisen the unflinching and very attractively put advocacy of the Nicene doctrine of subordination (pp. 51-58).

The attributes of God are excellently expounded, though not without some unacceptable expressions. A trichotomistic anthropology is adopted. The doctrine of imputation is rejected and the solidarity of the race made to carry the burden of original sin. There is a most suggestive and admirable exposition of the preparation for the incarnation (107 sq.). A Kenotic doctrine of Christ's person, of the type of Thomasius, is taught (p. 139), while that of the type of Gess is spoken of as the "most elementary" of all the

false methods of constituting Christ's person. God's foreknowledge of free acts is expounded as contingent; and the fall was not included in God's plan (154). The atonement is not substitutionary or expiatory; but an identification theory is taught (170-193). The whole doctrine of the Church is high; and all bodies apart from "the historic succession" are unchurched. The mechanical view of inspiration is denied, and a statement made which in essence would not be unacceptable, although it is pressed too far in its application. Election is to Church privileges only (to grace only, not to glory), and predestination is contingent and may fail (p. 330). The Eschatology is sober and in general acceptable.

With all his brilliancy and general clearness of thought, Mr. Mason develops a remarkable faculty for framing extreme and offensive statements. "God alone is because He chooses to be" (p. 18). "The act by which the Father begets the Son is the act by which He gains the true grasp of His thought; and, conversely, the process by which He realizes the total fertility of His resources, gives birth to Him who is 'God Only-born'" (p. 62). "His everlasting birth is the first step towards creation" (p. 63). The Holy Ghost "is the eternal product of the mutual love of the Father and the Son" (p. 203). "We may consider them [the angels] as a kind of spiritual substratum, in which the material things are planted" (p. 67). "The impersonal universality of our Lord's human nature" (p. 114). Spiritual bodies are "bodies, that is, with characteristics of the Spirit imparted to them" (p. 130). The Church is "necessary to the fulfillment of Christ's incarnate life" (p. 214). "Each baptized person is, accordingly, like a kind of fresh incarnation of Christ. The difference between Him and us is this: that He is a Divine Person who has assumed form as a human nature, while we are human persons who through His humanity have received the Divine" (p. 275). "Though, unquestionably, regeneration, which makes us children of God, is a higher benefit than conversion, which makes us begin to be good men, yet, unless it be preceded, or accompanied, or followed, by conversion, it will avail a man nothing, or rather increase his damnation" (p. 343). It is a good book that, in spite of a succession of such sentences, must be pronounced helpful and valuable.

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CHRISTIAN THEISM: ITS CLAIMS AND SANCTIONS. By D. B. PURINGTON, LL.D., Vice-President and Professor of Metaphysics in West Virginia University. New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons. The Knickerbocker Press, 1889. Pp. vii, 303.

West Virginia University is honored by the son who in the teaching service (p. iv) of his *Alma Mater*, as we understand, has produced this volume. There is power here, judicious compilation and digestion, helpful analysis, cogent argument, apt criticism and reply, often great felicity in terse, lucid statement; there is originality and suggestiveness enough withal to keep the thoughtful reader on the alert and to assure him that even yet the possibilities of fruitful development in theistic study are by no means exhausted.

The author claims a "plan of treatment here first presented in which each attribute of the Deity is to be established by a separate and independent argument" (p. iv). The reader must judge whether the promise of the preface is kept. The Claims and Sanctions of Christian Theism are presented in the Introduction, where occasion is found to declare that Christian Theism "has just two themes: first, *Theism*, or evidences concerning the being and nature of God; second, *Revelation*, or evidences concerning the inspiration of the Bible" (p. 19). We learn that this volume is to contain a purely natural