

**THE MEANING AND MESSAGE OF THE CROSS.** A Contribution to Missionary Apologetics.

By Henry C. Mable, D.D. Fleming H. Revell Company, New York, Chicago and Toronto. 1906.

One of the greatest doctrinal needs of our day is that the great fundamentals of Christian teaching should be restated from the standpoint of the deepest spirituality. It is unfortunate that a great many of the formulated creeds took their rise in times when the philosophic and intellectual aspects of truth were predominant. The result is that the creeds that have been promulgated since the Reformation are ceasing to be considered adequate statements of doctrinal truth in all respects. The great leading doctrinal statements are essentially true and sound, but the intellectual element predominates too greatly for them to answer as final statements. In this volume on *The Meaning and Message of the Cross*, Dr. Mable has made a valuable contribution to doctrinal statement. In particular we would emphasize the spiritual insight and interpretation of the atonement from within, so to speak, rather than from without. The book is an attempt to appreciate the Cross and the redemptive message, rather than an attempt to formulate an intellectual statement which shall be comprehensive. At every point the author makes the impression that he is dealing with infinite depths and infinite heights, and leads the reader to grasp and appreciate the atonement more profoundly by reason of the fact that it enters so deeply into the divine nature in its essential meaning.

In Chapter I, Dr. Mable distinguishes clearly between the cross of the reconciliation and the tragedy of the crucifixion. Roman Catholics have substituted the crucifix for the cross, and, as Dr. Mable says, sometimes Protestants, by their literalism, have done practically the same thing. The dying penitent who called upon Christ in the act of death had a spiritual discernment of the redemptive meaning of the Cross which others may well imitate. In the second chapter Dr. Mable points out

some of the sources of confusion respecting the cross, and dwells on the ambiguity in the terms "death of Christ" and "blood of Christ". These need interpretation. In the third chapter he gives an account of the New Testament use of the crucifixion terms. In Chapter IV the nature of Christ's reconciling death is pointed out, and in Chapter V Dr. Mabie explains the cross as a redeeming achievement. The latter half of the book, including Chapters six, seven, eight, nine, and ten, deals with the message of the cross. So much for a general summary.

Now, a few details. Dr. Mabie holds that Christ's death was not merely a murder on the part of the Jews, and not a suicide on the part of Christ himself. It was the experience of spiritual death (p. 33). Christ participated in the doom of the spiritual death of the race. He experienced the spiritual woe of lost men. "The death for which Christ came into the world, that in its elements he might taste it, and then by resurrection be saved out of it, was chiefly a profound, non-physical, psychical experience inseparably connected with the sin principle; a death of which the crucifiers of Jesus had no conception whatever" (p. 74). Christ's death was voluntary. His spiritual death was the cause of the physical, and not *vice versa*. The self-sacrifice of Christ was the principal event in the history of God's revelation to mankind. Properly understood, the Cross is the "symbol and substance of the revelation to us of deity, not in any mere mood or paroxysm, but of its characteristic being." God entered into all the vicarious relationship which was needed to recover man from sin. He condemned himself, so to speak, century in and century out to watch the evil in the world, to plead with men because of it, and the death of Christ was endured as the only kind of suffering which could deliver from it. "This is the deepest law of the life of our God" (p. 82).

Christ's death was in a real sense an objective achievement—one in behalf of others. Dr. Mabie makes use of the suggestive phrase "judgment-death" to describe the

work of Christ on the cross. That death had relation to penalty, to righteousness and justice. The Biblical conception of judgment is not vindictive, but vindicatory, and includes the idea of mercy. The Cross looked in two directions—the divine holiness and the sinner's recovery (p. 91). "It is because of this principle of judgment in the very nature of this universe as moral that no statement of the reconciliation can ever long be satisfying which does not embody in itself the expiatory principle." Dr. Mabie, by expiation, does not mean this in any pagan sense. He means rather the vindication of the divine righteousness. He says that three elements at least are embraced in expiation. The first is that holiness must suffer in view of human sin, and expiation is a necessity of the holiness of God, which suffers vicariously. Secondly, a public and adequate acknowledgement must be made of sin's ill desert. And third, expiation is necessary in order to institute a process within the soul itself which will destroy the power of evil in due time and establish righteousness instead" (pp. 92, 93).

The real difficulty involved here is not the willingness or unwillingness of God, but a question of moral consistency. God loved the world not because Christ died for it, but before Christ died for it. It was the divine provision for a need felt in the divine nature. The atonement of Christ enables God to act as he feels. Now, from the above point of view, Dr. Mabie maintains that the atonement of Christ is "indigenous to the soil of reality itself"; that is to say, it is no artificial arrangement or provision. It is no scheme devised from the outside to meet an emergency merely. It is the expression of an essential principle in the divine nature itself—the principle of sacrifice which comes out in the winning of the lost. God could not pardon men in any such way as would legitimize sin, and yet his nature impels him irresistibly toward redemption. Atonement, therefore, enables God to execute the purpose of love. The atonement is not an afterthought obtruded into the order of the

world. It is rather the expression of an eternal relation of God toward his creation.

The above is a very brief and inadequate outline of Dr. Mabie's leading argument. The reader must follow him through his chapters carefully, however, to appreciate fully the insight and power with which the subject is unfolded. In the second half of the book Dr. Mabie discusses the soul's saving relation to the death of Christ, and in general the spiritual laws which are organic in the Christian life as the result of the atoning work of Christ in relation to the redeemed. This part of the discussion is exceedingly valuable. Indeed, no discussion which we have read will be more helpful to many troubled minds than this second division of the book, for in it Dr. Mabie interprets the atonement of Christ largely from the point of view of Christian experience and the practical needs of the missionary enterprise. There is no space here to outline his general position, save to say that in the believer a process takes place analogous to that which Christ experienced, and in the missionary enterprise the atonement of Christ, as expounded in the first half of the book, imparts the law and the motive.

It is often said that missionary secretaries are constantly exposed to the danger of neglecting the intellectual and scholarly side of their lives. Dr. Mabie has given us a demonstration, in this admirable work, of the possibility of maintaining a deeply spiritual and highly intellectual Christian life in connection with the arduous duties of a great secretaryship. Dr. Mabie is essentially a prophet. He is a man with a message. His interests are primarily spiritual and practical. He is intensely loyal to his Lord, and has entered deeply into the mystical experiences of grace, and, as is always the case where sanity of judgment is combined with mystical experience, has given us a book of rare value on one of the most engaging and profound themes in all the range of theology.

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