

Beet's "Through Christ to God."

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Through Christ to God: A Study in Scientific Theology.

By JOSEPH AGAR BEET, D.D. London: Hodder & Stoughton. 1892.

IN this volume Dr. Beet undertakes the exposition and the proof of the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and he announces that it is to be followed by other three, which will treat of the New Life in Christ, the Church of Christ, and the Last Things. I shall briefly indicate the line of thought in the volume under review. Conscience testifies that the grand law of the moral order is the law of retribution, and this testimony of conscience is confirmed by our observance of the facts of life. But this confirmation is only partial; the law of retribution is subject to exceptions in the world: good men sometimes suffer, evil men sometimes prosper. Is the law, then, defeated? No, its perfect operation is only delayed, the future world will redress the present. To that future world we are approaching; how will it fare with us there? Conscience testifies that we have sinned; is there, then, only a fearful looking for of judgment? We may repent, and strive to do right; but will our present right-doing atone for our past wrongdoing? We may strive; but, weakened as we are by sin, can we succeed? As we look for help, there is One, who, from the signal influence which He has exercised in human history, and the supreme authority which He wields in the human conscience, claims our attention. As we listen to Christ, we hear Him indeed reaffirm in higher form and with stronger sanction the moral law which condemns us; but we hear Him also proclaim that all who believe the Good News which He announces are received by God into His favour. But is not this to violate the majesty of the law? No, for by this sacrificial death Christ fulfils the law and satisfies its demands, and so harmonises the justice and the mercy of God. But who is He, whose death is accepted as the moral equivalent of the death of the whole human race? He is the eternal Son of God, who became Man for us men and for our salvation. What is the proof of this amazing affirmation? The crowning proof of it is that He rose from the dead.

This is, of course, only a very bald outline of a

book of nearly four hundred pages, containing not only a statement, but a defence of such great doctrines as Justification by Faith, the Atonement, the Person of Christ, the Trinity. In establishing these results, Dr. Beet does not assume, though, as is well known, he heartily believes in the inspiration of Scripture. He regards the New Testament writers as witnesses, and compares their reports, and in the testimony which is common to them all, he finds the actual teaching of their Master. He begins with Paul, because he is the most influential of the early preachers of Christianity, and because his writings—or, at least, writings of his—are undisputed. Of Paul's teaching, he gives us, as might be expected from one who has devoted so many years to its study, a careful and thorough exposition; but his treatment of the other New Testament writers is much slighter and less satisfactory. He is apt to assume too easily their agreement with Paul. For example, after showing by several quotations and references that Paul teaches the universality of sin, he continues: It is frequently implied in the recorded teaching of Christ,—which is no doubt true, but surely not in the saying—and it is the sole one—which he quotes, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John viii. 34). Again, while he gives fully sixty pages to Paul's teaching on justification by faith, he somewhat summarily disposes of the teaching of all the other New Testament writers in ten. He shows that Paul uses justification and its equivalent terms in a strictly forensic sense, meaning by them not an inward and moral, but an outward and legal charge. He allows indeed that a mere imputed righteousness, if it stood alone, would be worthless; but it does not stand alone. Paul teaches that "to the justified God gives His Holy Spirit to be in them the animating principle of a new life." But this, he tells us, is to be the subject of his next volume; in the present, he treats of justification only in its forensic sense. He then passes to compare the teaching of Paul with that of the other writers, and after a brief reference to the passages in the Fourth Gospel, in which Christ declares that he who believes in Him has even now eternal life, he proceeds to say: "The doctrine of eternal life as

a privilege and present possession of all who believe in Christ is as conspicuous in the writings of John as is justification through faith in the writings of Paul. These phrases, each characteristic of a school of New Testament thought, are, from the point of view of spiritual life, absolutely equivalent." Is this true? Does John vi. 47 ("He that believeth on me hath everlasting life") mean no more than an outward and legal change? Among the passages which he cites in proof of the agreement of the New Testament writers with Paul on the doctrine of justification is Jude 3 ("the faith once delivered to the saints"), which is surely quite irrelevant; and he even ventures to point to the discussion in James ii. 14-26, remarking with some ingenuity that it reveals the unique importance of faith in early Christian teaching! But what of the agreement of the teachers? To argue emphatically against a doctrine is doubtless to acknowledge its importance, but it is an odd way of expressing assent to it. Luther, because he thought that James contradicted Paul's doctrine of justification, rejected his epistle from his canon as an epistle of straw, but with this straw Dr. Beet makes a brick for his temple of harmony.

One of the features of Dr. Beet's method is the close interweaving of the exposition and the proof of doctrines; and the apologetic parts of the book are, in the main, of great excellence. But his chapter on the *Rationale* of the Atonement, interesting as it is, can scarcely be pronounced satis-

factory. To ask, Why could not God forgive sin apart from the death of Christ, as a father forgives a penitent child? and to reply, Practically a king cannot forgive a guilty subject, is to put a question and *not* to answer it. And even if it be granted that a father should punish a penitent child for his disobedience, yet does he not forgive him for his repentance? The mystery of the Atonement is not explained. What purpose is served by illustrations which do not illustrate? Again, in his exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity, he suggests the following analogy: "In a firm of manufacturers are three partners. The head of the firm is never seen on business outside the office; but, whenever the partners meet in council, he presides. . . . The second partner transacts business with the outside world. They who wish to negotiate with the firm must do so through him. . . . The third partner is manager within the factory. No workman can go above him to the second partner, or to the head of the firm. All immediate contact with the workman is reserved for the third partner." We remember Matthew Arnold's *Three Lord Shaftesburys*, and though Dr. Beet's illustration is conceived in a very different spirit, yet I must frankly say that I do not like it any better. It is not only inadequate, it approaches, I think it crosses, the verge of the ludicrous. The chapters on the Resurrection of Christ, on the other hand, are admirable, and contain a singularly able and effective apology.

Kings and their Counsellors.

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FRESH interest has been of late years aroused in the life and writings of the prophets of Israel. Professors Robertson Smith and George Adam Smith, Archdeacon Farrar, Mr. Buchanan Blake, and more recently Professor Kirkpatrick in his admirable Warburtonian Lectures, not to mention the able writers in the *Cambridge Bible for Schools*, have alike brought the historical and critical method to bear upon portions of Scripture that were to the majority of English Bible students almost sealed books.

The work of the prophets of Israel is being vividly realised. We are learning more and more clearly to apply their teaching to the problems of

our own time. And yet we are even thus in danger of losing sight of the work of many whose words have come down to us only in scattered fragments incorporated in historical books. When we speak of "the prophets," we think of those whose writings we possess in the Canon of the Old Testament. The following list has been prepared,—as the outcome of a study of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the writings of the prophets,—in order to exhibit at a glance the important part played by the prophets of Israel from the foundation of the monarchy to the close of Old Testament history. It will be seen that few of the kings of Israel or