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## 'Christ Crucified' for the Thought and Life of To-day.

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### II.

FROM these works we may gather material of value for our own consideration of the subject; the argument as it is presented by Dr. Denney may be followed, with such references to the other books as may be helpful. (i.) The two characteristics of the Modern Spirit mentioned by Dr. Smith—the historical criticism of the Holy Scriptures, and the principle of the Solidarity of the Race with its corollary, the law of Heredity—are undoubtedly important. Of the first Dr. Smith himself does not make an altogether consistent use; if he had he would not have included the so-called *Protevangeli-um* of Gn 3<sup>16</sup> and the passage about the prophet in Dt 18<sup>15</sup> as two instances of Messianic prophecy; nor would he have given the kinds of Hebrew sacrifice in the order in which he has done. It is the merit of Mr. Mozley's book that he discusses all the Biblical questions, taking full account of all that modern scholarship has to say about them. Dr. Denney does not expressly discuss these questions, but his treatment rests on the historical criticism of the Holy Scriptures. I am not at all inclined to attach as much significance to the bearing of the modern theory of heredity on the Pauline doctrine of imputation as does Dr. Smith, and we need hardly now, except as a matter of historical interest, trouble ourselves much about the distinction between 'immediate' and 'mediate' imputation, or the federal theology. It is doubtful whether heredity in the strict sense as physical has the moral significance which is often attached to it. It is much more probable that what has been called *social heredity*—the inheritance of customs, standards, institutions—is a very much more potent factor in human development for good or evil. Ritschl's theory of a kingdom of sin opposed to the kingdom of God is a very much more useful conception. Dr. Smith's use of the law of heredity assumes a fall of the race; and he attempts to harmonize Scripture and science by showing that a fall of man, not from perfection, but from innocence, is not inconsistent with the doctrine of evolution. Dr. Denney is

content to start from the present fact of man's sense of sinfulness. 'It is not necessary,' he says, 'in this connection to speculate either on the origin of evil or on a primitive state of man' (p. 189). If we must speculate as to man's moral history, it would seem to me more in accord with the facts to assume a condition morally neutral, with possibilities both of good and of evil, in which the wrong and not the right direction in development was taken, but not to the suppression of the possibilities of good in opposition to and conflict with the possibilities of evil. Dr. Denney in his discussion of the need as well as the value of reconciliation is entirely in accord with the modern spirit, as his method is psychological and ethical, in one word experimental. 'It is a commonplace of modern theology that no doctrine has any value except as it is based on experience, and before proceeding to the Christian doctrine of reconciliation, it is indispensable to look at the experience or experiences which are covered by the term' (pp. 7-8). In his first chapter he seeks also to relate the distinctive Christian experience to experience generally. 'Reconciliation is a term of wide scope and various application, and it is hardly possible to conceive a life or a religion which should dispense with it' (p. 1). But experience is not self-sufficient, it must be expressive of something. 'The *differentia* of Christian reconciliation is that it is inseparable from Christ; it is dependent on Him and mediated through Him' (p. 8). He does not, however, distinguish, as some writers do, between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. 'The historical Christ does not belong to the past. The living Spirit of God makes Him present and eternal' (p. 9). That this method has close affinities with the Ritschlian hardly needs pointing out, and thoroughly experimental and historical is his analysis of the reconciling action of Christ on men. While insisting on the central significance of the death, he keeps it in organic relation to the whole life.

(ii.) While for his own purpose Dr. Denney was

justified in omitting any special discussion of the Old Testament doctrine, and there is force in the reason that he gives for that omission, which has already been quoted, yet it would be a loss if his action were treated as a general precedent. The Old Testament has value in this as in other doctrines as preparatory for the New Testament. The doctrine of sacrifice, especially in the light of the comparative study of religions, while it does not explain the sacrifice, yet relates the sacrifice to a world-wide movement of the spirit of man, in which we may surely discern the guidance of the Spirit of God. It is a real *preparatio evangelica*. Dr. Smith and Mr. Mozley both devote some attention to the subject; but the treatment of the latter is more adequate. In reference to the atonement it does not seem necessary to refer to the Messianic hope as a whole, as Jesus certainly did not fulfil the prophetic predictions regarding the King of the house of David, unless in so far as the conflict between the ideals of Jesus and the popular expectations of the Messiah was the historical condition of His rejection. So unique, however, is the significance of the ideal of the Servant of Yahveh, that it should not be presented as it is by Dr. Smith as only one form of the Messianic hope. Mr. Mozley's treatment may be especially commended, as he shows how in this ideal the priestly and the prophetic types of teaching converge. There can be no doubt, as Dr. Denney recognizes, that it was this ideal which Jesus set before Himself even from His baptism. He did not simply fall back upon it when His attempt to realize another ideal of the Messiahship failed. We need not in this connexion assume any supernatural foresight, but only the moral and religious insight of the Son, leading Him to choose the one rather than the other of the two ideals presented to His consciousness, when His call came.

(iii.) Dr. Smith is not altogether just to the Patristic period when he selects as its sole solution of the problem of the Atonement *the ransom theory*. It is not as adequately representative of that period as are the *satisfaction theory* and the *forensic theory* of the Mediæval and Post-Reformation periods respectively. The characteristic doctrine of the Greek fathers is represented by Athanasius, of whose book on the Incarnation Dr. Denney gives a full account. 'The incarnation means for him that the eternal Word assumed flesh in the womb

of the Virgin; in doing so, He united the human nature to the divine, and in principle the atonement, or the reconciliation of humanity to God, was accomplished.' His attitude to this theory is not sympathetic. 'Now, be the speculative fascination as great as it may, this is not a position in which a Christian mind can rest content' (p. 37). While the inadequacy of the doctrine may be fully admitted, and even the injury it did to subsequent Christian thought by diverting attention to the metaphysical from the ethical and the spiritual, yet Dr. Denney seems to me to fail to do justice to the truth which it enshrines. Man is not merely sinner, and God's relation to man is not limited to His dealing with human sin; and without regarding the Incarnation as itself the Atonement, we must not assume that it has no significance apart from the Atonement, as showing the close affinity and community between God and man. Consistently with his general position, Dr. Denney rejects the view that Atonement must not be regarded as the sole reason for the Incarnation, that even to a sinless race, the Son of God might have come. 'Attractive as it may appear to speculative minds, the idea that Christ would have come apart from this redemptive purpose—to complete creation or give humanity a Head—departs from the line of religious and especially of Christian interest. It finds the motive of the incarnation in some speculative or metaphysical fitness, and not where Scripture and experience put it, in love' (p. 59). While we may agree with him that we have to interpret the world as it is, and not imagine what it might be; yet, on the other hand, he is not just to this idea, for in it too the motive for incarnation might be love. God might love a sinless soul and seek closer fellowship with it in Himself becoming man. This is an instance of a defect which meets us again and again in this great book. The author is not always wide enough in his sympathy to appreciate modes of thought and types of experience which are not his own. The tone of the volume is very much more gracious than that in former books, and yet again and again is the author not entirely just to views he does not share, and seemingly cannot even understand as representing any moral and spiritual reality for others. It is, however, a perilous enterprise for any man, however great his personality—and Dr. Denney's was great—to make himself the measure of all truth.

(iv.) As might be anticipated, Dr. Denney does full justice to Augustine. He recognizes that Augustine's chief concern was not that of evangelical Protestant theology, as for instance Luther's. 'It was not responsibility, or the bad conscience attending on sin, which mainly troubled him; it was the bondage of the will, intensified, as he came to believe, into a corruption of the whole nature' (p. 52). Anselm also is very sympathetically handled, as he is by Dr. Smith; but both fully point out the defects of his theory. We may ask whether Dr. Denney recognizes adequately the reflex action of terminology on thought, of the intellectual environment on even a great mind in such a sentence in defence of Anselm as this: 'It is absurd to say that Anselm, or those to whom his thoughts appealed, conceived of God as a feudal baron and not as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (p. 67). The significance of the application of the term *satisfactio* to the work of Christ with its close association with the penitential system of the Church is fully recognized. Of special value in Principal Franks' work is the full treatment he gives to this association in dealing with the mediæval theology. The change brought about at the Reformation is stated by Dr. Denney in one sentence. 'The satisfaction of which the theologians think is not the Anselmic one, which has no relation to punishment, nor that of the penitential system, which is only quasi-penal, but that of Roman law, which is identical with punishment' (p. 94). What measure of truth there was in the Socinian criticism of the Reformation doctrine is fully acknowledged. What now may seem only a theological subtlety—the distinction between the active and the passive obedience of Christ—is shown to be an endeavour to correct the one-sidedness of this penal theory, that 'it left no significance for salvation to anything in Jesus except His death' (p. 94). Another defect of the doctrine of reconciliation, that it had become 'too objective,' and needed to be brought into closer relation to human experience, is indicated. In Grotius' theory it is held 'there is something arbitrary in the death of Christ, something which takes us out of the region of rational and moral necessities where alone the mind can breathe' (p. 113). As regards the last century and a quarter, Dr. Denney says that 'it does no injustice to other theologians if we say that the original contributions which have been made to the subject are

represented in Schleiermacher's *Der Christliche Glaube* (1821), McLeod Campbell's *The Nature of the Atonement* (1856), and Ritschl's *Die christliche Lehre von der Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* (1870-74)' (p. 115). The common merit he finds in these books is that as regards both Christ Himself and the believer 'personality gets the place, or something like the place, which is its due' (p. 119).

(v.) It is from this standpoint that the New Testament Doctrine is treated. While Dr. Denney's theory of the atonement rests on Paul's teaching, yet Paul is interpreted experimentally not dogmatically; and what is a special merit, and redeems the whole discussion from the one-sidedness which sometimes results from too narrow a Pauline basis, the testimony of the Gospels has full justice done to it. We approach the Cross as it ought to be approached, by the way of the earthly life, and especially Jesus' dealing with sinners. There are many beautiful and gracious passages it would be a delight to quote, did limits of space allow. But we must press on to deal with the constructive discussion. With all that Dr. Denney says about the need of reconciliation I find myself in substantial agreement. His searching analysis of sin and its consequences, of the divine reaction against sin in the moral order of the world, of the wrath of God and death as it is for moral beings as divine judgment on sin, carries conviction to my conscience no less than my reason. No theory of the atonement can be adequate which does not recognize the stern and sad realities here described with sanity of thought and sobriety of language. What alone can meet this great need is reconciliation; and 'in the last resort, nothing reconciles but love; and what the soul needs, which has been alienated from God by sin, and is suffering under the divine reaction against it, is the manifestation of a love which can assure it that neither the sin itself nor the soul's condemnation of it, nor even the divine reaction against it culminating in death, is the last reality in the universe; the last reality is rather love itself, making our sin its own in all its reality, submitting as one with us to all the divine reactions against it, and loving us to the end through it, and in spite of it. Reconciliation is achieved where such a love is manifested, and when in spite of guilt, distrust, and fear it wins the confidence of the sinful' (p. 218). There is no antithesis here between the love and the righteousness of God,

which, however effective rhetorically, is only disastrous theologically.

(vi.) While Dr. Smith insists that in view of New Testament usage we must not think of the reconciliation as mutual, since God as Father needs not to be reconciled to men, but only men to God, Dr. Denney adequately explains the New Testament usage as emphasizing God's initiative in reconciliation, and to my mind convincingly shows how the New Testament teaching on the wrath of God and the reaction of God in the moral order of the world against sin justifies us in maintaining that reconciliation is mutual. 'When we say that because God is love . . . therefore He does not need to be and cannot be reconciled, we are imparting immutability to God in a sense which practically denies that He is the living God. . . . He has experiences in His love. To have His love wounded by sin is one, and to forgive sin is another. If to be forgiven is a real experience, so is to forgive; it makes a difference to God as well as to us' (p. 237). Dr. Smith rejects the interpretation of the term *propitiation* in what he calls the *forensic* sense. He regards it as in the Septuagint equivalent entirely to the Hebrew *Kipper*, 'wipe out' or 'purge away,' which it is used to translate, and maintains that in the apostolic writings 'the pagan idea of "propitiation" in the sense of appeasing an angry God is excluded,' and that 'the "propitiation" is never wrought by the penitent upon God; it is wrought by God upon the penitent's sin. It signifies not the sinner's placation of God, the appeasement of His anger, the satisfaction of His justice, but God's forgiveness and purgation of the sinner's guilt' (p. 163). He recognizes vicarious sacrifice as a necessity of God's Fatherhood, but insists that the satisfaction is not of justice, but of love. Nevertheless he holds that the necessity of an atoning sacrifice rests on the satisfaction of man's moral instincts. 'His sin had to be adequately dealt with. It demanded expia-

tion; and expiation means open confession and full reparation.' 'It is primarily a human necessity. It is indeed a divine necessity also; not because God's justice demands satisfaction or because His wrath must be appeased, but because Love is vicarious and the sin of His children lays a burden of sorrow on the Father's heart' (p. 178). When a theologian uses such a phrase as 'moral instincts,' I become at once suspicious that he has not thought out his problem, and does not know how to make his view intelligible. There may be moral intentions, but these are not moral instincts: the term is quite inappropriate. Again, we are back to all the vain antitheses between justice and wrath on the one hand, and love on the other, for love can and must be just, and love can and must be angry with what threatens to sever the bonds of fellowship. But if God and man have moral affinity and community, man's moral intuitions will not be other than what the moral character of God Himself is. I entirely agree with Dr. Denney's statement: 'What pursues man in his sin and appeals to him is not love which is thinking of nothing but man, and is ready to ignore and to defy everything for his sake; it is a love which in Christ before everything does homage to that in God which sin has defied. No other love, and no love acting otherwise, can reconcile the sinner to a God whose inexorable repulsion of sin is witnessed to in conscience and in the whole reaction of the world's order against evil. We cannot dispense with the ideas of propitiation, *ἔλασμός, ἱλαστήριον*; we cannot dispense with a work of reconciliation which is as objective as Christ Himself, and has its independent objective value to God, let our estimate of it be what it will' (p. 236). It is possible to think of the holy love of God as propitiated, morally satisfied by the sacrifice of Christ without introducing any false pagan notions of an angry God appeased.