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The Journal of Theological Studies

JULY, 1917

HENRY BARCLAY SWETE.

UPON the cross which marks the grave of Munro at Rome are inscribed the words—words of Plato, if I remember right, adapted by Thompson—

Ἄνδρὸς ὃν οὐδ' αἰνεῖν τοῖς ἀμαθέσσι θέμις.

Only a direct request, which seemed to have the force of authority, justifies me in putting together for the *Journal of Theological Studies* a few sentences in memory of the man who, more than any other man of our time, embodied in himself all that the JOURNAL stands for.

Under German influence the word *Theologian* has come to mean for us a person who interests himself in studies that bear upon religion in some direction, without necessary reference to the religious convictions or the contents of the belief of the student. Not in that sense was Dr Swete a theologian. He was a theologian in the older sense of one who has heard the charge:

‘Hold thou the truth; define it well.’

To be true to the Catholic faith, as he understood it, and to elucidate its meaning for others, was the object of all his labours. His earliest published work, now out of print, and known to me only in its Italian translation, *Paragone dottrinale tra la Chiesa Anglicana e la Chiesa Romana*, contains little of his own besides its accuracy and the lucidity of its arrangement, but it aims at guiding to right conclusions through a dispassionate comparison of authoritative documents. His last public, or semi-public, act was to take part in the session of an important Committee dealing with the *Quicumque vult*, and great was his joy at carrying his point, against some opposition, to recommend that

that document, in a revised and *re-revised* version, should be printed in the Prayer-book in its integrity, and that specified sections of it should be used on particular occasions. Perhaps into none of his books has his soul passed with more concentrated force than into his admirable little work on *The Apostles' Creed* (1894), written 'to enable educated members of the English Church who do not possess the leisure or the opportunities necessary for a fuller study of the subject to form some judgement upon a recent controversy which intimately concerns all who have been baptized into the faith of the Apostles' Creed'. The same interest led him to make his own the subject of the Procession of the Holy Ghost. As early as 1873 he published his first book on this question, to be followed by another three years later, and, between the two, he edited the treatise of Theodore Lascaris II upon it. The well-worn topic might seem to be so abstruse and remote from life as to become purely academic; but nothing that Dr Swete wrote was devoid of charm, and here he was animated by the consciousness that he was contributing towards the mutual reconciliation of the ancient Churches of Christendom, as well as touching the very heart of Christian doctrine. To him it was no arid speculation; it was vital to an intelligent faith. It was not for nothing that he prefixed to the *History of the Doctrine . . . to the death of Charlemagne* the famous words:

Per te sciamus da PATREM
noscamus atque FILIUM:
te UTRISQUE SPIRITUM
credamus omni tempore.

Upon the foundation thus carefully laid he added at intervals throughout his life volume after volume of a more popular kind, expounding the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, though in the preface to the latest of them (1912) he records that 'with the view of preparing for' it he had 'read again all the more important Greek and Latin patristic authorities of the first five centuries, and a few which belong to the sixth, seventh, and eighth', and had 'sought to form his impressions afresh'. He was never content to serve up again what had become to him stale and lifeless.

It might have seemed as if this devotion to Dogmatic Theology, with all the reading which it involved, would have been enough to occupy all the spare energies of a man who was constantly lecturing to large classes of students and administering the business of a great Divinity Faculty. But Dr Swete was at the same time laying himself out to do for the Old Testament in Greek something like what his predecessor and Dr Hort had done for the New. Of course nothing like the labours of Westcott and Hort were required for editing a text on the principle adopted by Dr Swete in his LXX, but no one who has used it can fail to admire the skill and judgement with which he accomplished the task of preparing what was avowedly but a precursor of the greater edition upon which Dr Brooke and Mr M^cLean have long been engaged. The Introduction, which followed the three volumes of the text, shews the hand of a master, who knows all that has yet been brought to light on matters relating to the LXX, and who handles every detail with assured ease and certainty. It is a pleasure, even to one who is not specially interested in textual criticism, to read the finished and scholarly accounts of the MSS; while the chapters of part iii, on the use of the LXX by Christian and non-Christian writers, and on the aid which it gives to Biblical students, become quite fascinating in their interest. Few disappointments were more keenly felt by Dr Swete than the failure, after years of thought and negotiation, to bring into existence a new Lexicon of LXX Greek, which Dr Nestle was to edit.

Probably the books which lay the greatest number of readers under obligation to Dr Swete are the two commentaries, on St Mark (1898), and on the Apocalypse (1906). These two books alone would have sufficed to place their author in the foremost rank of English divines. A wealth of erudition, ancient and modern, illustrates the text without overwhelming or distracting the reader. The scholarship is not merely accurate, but delicate and sensitive to every *nuance*. Nowhere is there a trace of the pedantry which indulges itself in pouring out information that no one wants. The notes, while ample, are restrained, and are always expressed in language which is lucid, well-chosen, and beautiful with a real artistic beauty. All the commentator's trained power of observation is employed to

bring out character, motive, thoughts, and ideas, with a subtilty and a sanity which make every sentence that he writes a delight to read. Above all things, every sentence might be called a lesson in reverence for the subject and for the words 'written for our learning'.

The bibliography which will be published later will shew that dogmatic theology, patristic research (of which his *Theodore of Mopsuestia* is the principal monument),¹ the Greek version of the Old Testament, the exegesis of the New, did not exhaust Dr Swete's stores of learning. He had a good working knowledge of Hebrew and of Syriac. He had a deep interest in the somewhat neglected field of liturgical studies. He found time to vindicate the Orders of the Church of England against assailants, and the rapier with which he did it was keen and polished. Perhaps the only departments of theological study into which he made no excursions were those of the philosophy of religion and of comparison between religions.

Dr Swete's achievements are not to be measured only by what he wrote, nor by what, in addition, he taught orally in lectures and sermons—lectures and sermons which were always marked by the same felicity of expression and fineness of finish as his books. He was almost as remarkable in setting others to work as in what he did himself. This JOURNAL itself is his offspring, and he wrote the words which introduced the first number of it. The conception of it was his, and the plan on which it was to be conducted was his. He felt the need of an organ for publishing shorter pieces than those of *Texts and Studies*, but of real scientific value, and proceeding from the hands of students of every school. It was he who secured the co-operation of Dr Ince, and Dr Sandy, and other Oxford and Durham theologians. Almost at the same time he founded the Central Society of Sacred Study, which has had so large a developement throughout the English-speaking world. He brought to birth, what he called a 'conception of the great 'seventies', the Patristic Texts Series. He induced Dr Srawley to set on foot his excellent series of Liturgical Handbooks. Dr M^eNeile tells us that it

¹ His capital little book on *Patristic Study* is the only one, so far as I know, which for some reason he failed to correct with his usual care. It contains a good many misprints.

was Dr Swete who induced him to undertake his edition of St Matthew. Scholars without number have gone to him for advice and found encouragement from him. Two volumes of Cambridge Essays have had him as their editor. A third volume, only partly from Cambridge, is expected to be published in a few months' time. With endless pains he organized the work which it is hoped will at last produce the Lexicon of Ecclesiastical Greek.

The admixture of the Irish blood with the English has often been productive of genius—in theology no less than in other pursuits. Dr Swete was an instance. With Celtic brilliancy and imagination he united the methodical ways and the disciplined perseverance of the Englishman. Bodily frailness—for several years he was unable to walk, or even to stand at the altar to celebrate, and delivered his lectures and sermons sitting—prevented him from seeking exercise, and favoured his intellectual industry. He was a wonderfully rapid worker, and could throw off in a few hours what would have cost other men—if they were capable of such work at all—days or weeks of labour. But this facility did not make him less painstaking. He would write a lecture or paper over and over again two or three times before he was satisfied with its shape. He had a great distrust of anything that looked too clever. It was difficult to get him to do justice to French writers: he thought them too ingenious and too epigrammatic. He preferred the plodding, verbose, uncouth German as a helper in his work—though his anger with the German divines since the war broke out was almost amusing in its naïveté. In himself he joined the German thoroughness with the French feeling for form.

He had of course his limitations, like other men. He had little sympathy with people who did not care for knowledge. No one could be more tenderly helpful to a learner, however ignorant and backward; but he did not understand the healthy young man who only wants to pass his examinations as easily as he can. It was a cruelty to make him a college officer, as he was once. He would say, after a delightful half-hour with a child, 'What a pity it is that a dear little boy like that should have to grow up into an uninteresting undergraduate!' Nevertheless this was but a humorous turn of phrase. He took the utmost

pains to make his lectures intelligible to men of little capacity, and delighted to describe himself as 'the Pollman's Professor'.

The most marked feature in his character was his profound humility. It was a pain to him to be in any way put forward—to put himself forward was unthinkable. He shrank from notice. He paid the utmost deference to authority. Men whose knowledge was incomparably less than his own found themselves treated as if they were more than his equals. But this does not mean that his opinions and judgements were easily changed and weakly held. Dr Swete knew his own mind, and could defend it with tenacious gentleness.

Of things still deeper this is hardly the place to speak. But no one could be with Dr Swete without becoming sensible that he lived and breathed in another world than this. The things of the Spirit were realities to him. The quietness and restraint which marked his manner were imposed upon him by the sense of the Presence in which he moved. It is a happiness to know how greatly he impressed the people of Hitchin, among whom his last days were passed. Not only the men of the Bible class which from time to time he conducted, not only the few invalids whom he used to visit, but many others besides, learned to reverence and love him. They felt his death as a loss to the whole community. They knew that they had had among them not only a great and famous scholar, but a holy man of God.

A. J. MASON.