

BREVIA.

Dr. Dods on St. John's Gospel.¹—There are some, though it may be quite a minority, among the many admirers of Dr. Dods who will receive his latest work with rather mingled feelings. If they do so, it will be chiefly because his other writings, and in particular his contributions to *THE EXPOSITOR*—so genial, so intelligent, so well informed—have accustomed them to set for him a high standard, which the present volume reaches indeed, but perhaps does not in all respects equally sustain.

On the face of it, this volume, like the rest, bears certain great and conspicuous merits. It is written with complete lucidity and ease. It meets the average reader entirely on his own level. It takes him by the hand, and leads him through the Gospel by smooth and pleasant paths. It puts no strain upon his powers of attention. The style is at once flowing and pointed; and the subject is treated with warmth of feeling, with sincerity, and with reality.

Let me add, that here too the exposition of the Gospel is always intelligent, and sometimes felicitous in its wording and illustrations. Just two of the latter I am tempted to quote. The first is a rabbinical parallel to St. John v. 17, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

"'Why does not God keep the Sabbath?' a caviller asked of a Jew. 'Is it not lawful,' was the answer, 'for a man to move about his own house on the Sabbath? The house of God is the whole realm above and the whole realm below'" (p. 194).

The other is from a work with which I am not acquainted, but which must evidently contain thoughts of value, Treffry, *On the Eternal Sonship* :

"Had the Jews regarded the Messiah as a Divine Person, the claims of Jesus to that character had been in all cases equivalent to the assertion of His Deity. But there is not upon record one example in which any considerable emotion was manifested against these claims; while, on the other hand, a palpable allusion to His higher nature never failed to be instantly and most indignantly resisted. The conclusion is obvious" (p. 346n).

¹ *The Gospel of St. John*, vol. i. ("The Expositor's Bible"). By Marcus Dods, D.D. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891.)

These of course are not the only good things of the kind; but they are so good as to excite in us the wish for more. Dr. Dods will forgive me if I say that I have read his book with something of professional jealousy for the reputation of the guild to which we both belong. And it is on this professional side that it seems to me, I confess, in some degree wanting. It has a scientific value, and it has also a popular and homiletic value; and the second seems to me, more than I like to allow, in advance of the first. One is reminded of the admirably thorough and exhaustive—so far as such a word can be used—treatment of the Fourth Gospel by Dr. H. R. Reynolds in the “Pulpit Commentary.” Of the “Expositor’s Bible” Dr. Dods has a more familiar knowledge than I have; but two other volumes of it lie before me (*The Pastoral Epistles* and *The Epistles of St. James and St. Jude*), and I cannot but think that the proportions there observed are both better in themselves and more in keeping with what I take to be the object of the series. The impression made upon me is that Dr. Dods elaborates the homiletic parts too much, and leaves his text too soon. I should have preferred to see the text more closely grappled with, and the homiletics confined to hints and suggestions. Perhaps it is right that questions of scholarship, various readings, and the like, should only be touched in the slightest and most general manner; but even so there are inaccuracies. As for instance, where it is said to be probable that St. John “adopted the Roman reckoning” of the hours of the day, “and counted noon the sixth hour” (p. 132). This method of counting was not at all peculiarly “Roman,” but was, in fact, almost universal. It was rather the other method of counting—the evidence perhaps does not permit us to say the *hours*, but the *day*—from midnight which more properly deserves to be called “Roman”: at least Aulus Gellius and Macrobius tell us (after Varro) that the Romans so reckoned their “civil day” (“*diem quem Romani civilem appellaverunt a sexta noctis hora oriri*”: *Noct. Att.* iii. 2; Macrobi., *Saturn.* i. 3).¹

This is only a detail; but I cannot help taking stronger exception to the absence of any adequate introduction. (The intro-

¹ The question as to St. John’s mode of reckoning time is a complicated one. It has recently been re-opened by the Rev. J. A. Cross in an article in the *Classical Review* for June, 1891. Of previous discussions one of the best is that by Mr. McClellan (*Gospels*, pp. 737-743).

duction to Dr. Reynolds' "Pulpit Commentary" fills 161 closely printed, large octavo pages, not one of which we could afford to lose.) We are plunged into the prologue at once, with only a note on the structure of the Gospel by way of preface. Now I can well understand the cutting short of the wearisome discussions as to the genuineness of the Gospel. Writing for the public he has in view, Dr. Dods might very naturally start from the assumption that he is really dealing with the work of the Apostle St. John. But surely a word was needed to explain when, where, and under what circumstances the Gospel was written, and what was the attitude of the author towards the facts he is relating and towards the narratives which preceded his own. These are matters which are as far from being self-evident as they are from being without significance for the understanding of the Gospel. If critical study means anything, it means that the reader of to-day is to be placed side by side with the writer, and learn to see what he saw as he saw it. In omitting to approach his subject from this side, Dr. Dods seems to have abandoned much of the vantage-ground which the researches of modern times would have given him.

This is, I think, the chief defect in Dr. Dods' book, taken by itself and as one of a series; but there is another which it shares, by no means in large measure, but still in some measure, with a number of others, and which for that reason I feel obliged not to pass over in silence.

The strong point in most modern reproductions of the Gospel narrative, and the strong point more particularly in Dr. Dods' books, is the persistent effort to *realize* what is being described, to translate it into present-day language, to bring out the deep and permanent human interest in it. In this, as I have said, Dr. Dods seems to me to have conspicuously succeeded. But a danger lies by the path of those who make this effort, which I cannot but think is too often imperfectly seen and guarded against. Dr. Dods has a natural finish of style and lightness of hand which save him from it to a greater extent than many of his companions, but even he is not entirely exempt. For instance, paragraphs and sentences like these I cannot help strongly deprecating.

"The disciples, when they went forward to buy provisions in Sychar, left Jesus sitting on the well wearied and faint. On their return they find Him, to their surprise, elate and full of renewed energy. Such transformations one

has often had the pleasure of seeing. Success is a better stimulant than wine. Our Lord had found one who believed Him and valued His message; and this brought fresh life to His frame" (p. 161). "Jesus cannot stand it" (p. 89). "His brothers, who might have been expected to understand His character best, were very slow to believe on Him. They only felt He was different from themselves, and they were nettled by His peculiarity" (p. 243).

Idiomatic writing is good in its place, but its place is not here. And though we believe that our Lord took upon Him "our infirmities," our infirmities does not mean "our littlenesses."

I hope it will not be thought too presumptuous if I address a word of warning to others which I would be fain to remember myself. He who would lift up his eyes to the central figure of the Gospels must be content to stand "afar off," with hands crossed over his breast, and with the words for ever at his heart, if not upon his lips, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

When a critic ventures to exercise his function towards those whom he unfeignedly respects, he will often find it hard to escape the miserable consciousness that in pointing out what seem to him blemishes he may be taken to imply, and even to wish to imply, that he could do better himself. Nothing could be further from the thought of the writer of these lines. He sees in the book of which he has been speaking much to which he would gladly attain if he could, but he knows that he cannot. That knowledge however does not, he thinks, acquit him from the duty of holding up to his fellows the best ideal which it is given to him—not so much to practise as to conceive.

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