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

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## III.

PASSING over what Dr. Denney has to say as to the reconciling work of Christ in the treatment of sinners, not because it is not of extreme value, but because it will command universal assent, we must consider how he interprets the Cross of Christ. (i.) He asserts as true the substance of the theory of M'Leod Campbell. 'Christ saw what sin was to God as we because of our sin itself could not see it; He felt what it was to God as we for the same reason could not feel it; He owned the justice of God in condemning it and repelling it inexorably, even while He yearned over His sinful children, and longed for their reconciliation.' He adds, however, that 'it was unhappy, to say the least of it, to call this repentance, or vicarious repentance' (p. 259). He rightly recognizes that it is no less morally confusing to speak of the repentance than of the punishment of the sinless. He does not maintain that Christ was punished for us (p. 262); but, insisting that there is a real relation between death and sin, as the consummation of the divine reaction against sin in the moral order of the world, and that the Scriptures insist on something dreadful and mysterious in the death of Christ, he puts his conclusion in the form of a question. 'Can we say anything else than this: That while the agony and the Passion were not penal in the sense of coming upon Jesus through a bad conscience, or making Him the personal object of divine wrath, they were penal in the sense that in that dark hour He had to realize to the full the divine reaction against sin in the race in which He was incorporated, and that without doing so to the uttermost He could not have been the Redeemer of that race from sin, or the Reconciler of sinful men to God?' (p. 273). The *crux* of the problem lies just here; is this inexorable reaction of God against sin in death a necessity of the very perfection of God; is it so inexorable that in bringing to men the forgiveness of God, the Son of God could not, and would not even if He could, escape that reaction; was it a necessity for love itself to share with as well as for man that

reaction to its very consummation in death, and death apprehended as divine judgment? It is impossible here to offer any logical demonstration; all one can do is to confess an ultimate moral intuition which it would be as perilous to challenge as the authority of conscience itself. For my part, I must confess my entire consent to the statement just quoted. It can easily be caricatured into a false antagonism of love and righteousness in God: it can only be understood as it is seen in the light of the searching scrutiny of the experience of man and the history of Christ which justifies it.

(ii.) The new theological standpoint is shown by the fact that Dr. Denney bestows almost as much space on showing *reconciliation as realized in human life* as on proving *reconciliation as achieved by Christ*. 'It is through faith,' that 'the reconciliation achieved by Christ avails and becomes effective for sinful men' (p. 287). I am in entire accord with all Dr. Denney affirms about the efficacy and sufficiency of faith as not only 'the right reaction to the new reality' in Christ, but as the only adequate one morally and religiously. 'Nothing can by any possibility go beyond faith, and the whole promise and potency of Christianity are present in it. The sinner who through faith is right with God is certainly not made perfect in holiness, but the power which alone can make him perfect is already really and vitally operative in him. And it is operative in him only in and through his faith' (p. 292). While agreeing entirely with Dr. Denney in his estimate of the efficacy and sufficiency of faith, I cannot but regret that he is not more sympathetic to those who cannot understand faith just as he does. He recognizes that Paul's doctrine of justification by faith was misunderstood even in the apostle's lifetime; and how often has it been misunderstood since, if not openly 'as if it meant a privilege to continue in sin' (p. 292), yet, in fact, as a wakening of the urgency of moral endeavour. If Paul himself felt it necessary to add Romans 6, 7, and 8 to Romans 3, 4, and 5 to forestall such misunder-

standing, interpreters who lay stress on these chapters, and insist that the latter need to be supplemented and explained by the former, are not to be misrepresented as they undoubtedly are in the following sentence. 'The "forensic" gospel of justification is for them replaced or eked out by the "ethical" gospel of mystical union with Christ in His death and resurrection; but it is a real case of replacement or eking out; there is no vital or necessary connexion between the two things' (pp. 292-293). I offer no defence of these to whom this description may justly apply. All I insist on is that we must give to faith the moral and religious content Paul gives to it in these later chapters if we are to assert its efficacy and sufficiency. Dr. Denney is entirely right in insisting that the assurance of the Christian life depends on contemplation of Christ, the object of faith, and not on self-scrutiny, and yet surely the Christ as presented in Romans 6-8 is a more adequate and satisfying object of faith than the Christ of Romans 3-5. When we realize what Christ is doing in us, it will not lessen or lower our sense of what Christ has done for us. It is certainly true that 'there is no religious assurance contemplated by the apostle which is not *ipso facto* a new moral power' (p. 297), but the apostle's statement about justification has so often been perverted that we are entitled to lay stress on what he has to add about sanctification. In one thing I am entirely agreed, that the confidence we have should be measured not by what even in Christ we have as yet become, but by what Christ Himself is as the promise and potency of all that He will yet make us.

(iii.) I must apply a similar criticism to the discussion that follows of 'the Christian experiences' to which Dr. Denney holds that faith 'is often set in some kind of contrast,' while they 'are really dependent upon it' (p. 302). Wherever and whenever such a contrast is made, all Dr. Denney's criticism is entirely valid. But need such a contrast always be intended? May it not rather be that an inadequate conception of faith, for which Protestant evangelicalism must regretfully accept some responsibility, has led believers for whom religion was something wider and deeper than belief in a plan of salvation or a theory of the atonement to look elsewhere than to such inadequate representations even of the object of faith for adequacy and satisfaction in their inner life? Union with Christ, either as our union with Him

or His with us, Life in the Spirit, the fellowship of the Church, and the blessings of its sacraments are not apart from the life of faith in Christ; but we should recognize that for many minds these representations do give fuller content to the life of faith than an abstract statement that faith itself is adequate and sufficient would. There are different types of experience, and we must not insist on one as though it alone were legitimate. Evangelical Protestants need to make an effort to appreciate more fully what may be called the Catholic type. The Church and the sacraments cannot take the place of faith, but may be means of grace for fuller faith than for some souls would otherwise be possible. Union with Christ gives a personal content to faith which in some representations of the atonement of Christ—though assuredly not in Dr. Denney's—had been lacking. To me, however, the treatment given to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is most surprising and disappointing, and seems to fall far short of what the teaching of the New Testament requires. The doctrine of the Trinity virtually disappears from Dr. Denney's theology; and the Spirit is nothing more and else than the presence and operation of Christ spiritually. But it does seem to me important to recognize the difference between the objective revelation of God in Christ and the subjective realization of God in His Spirit, while recognizing what Dr. Denney insists on, the constant and complete dependence of the one on the other. God immanent in history and in experience may be distinguished. If we are to maintain the difference, while recognizing the dependence of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God, may we not also still distinguish the fellowship of the Spirit and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? The subject cannot, however, be pursued any further here. I cannot but feel that the last chapter of this work is not as satisfying for my mind at least as the other chapters, and that what still needs to be done is to relate more satisfactorily than has been done the central truth of evangelical Protestantism to other tendencies of thought and types of life in the Christian Church; but in closing this inadequate appreciation of this great book it is only the highest admiration and the deepest gratitude which I desire to place on record.

4. A few sentences may be added to indicate in what ways the present situation seems not so much to challenge as to confirm the Christian

doctrine of the Atonement. (i.) The horrors and calamities of the time have surely once for all discredited the shallow theology which made light of the reality of sin and the consequences it brings and must bring in man. If it does not justify a theological reaction to the old doctrine of original sin and total depravity, it yet does demand a recognition of an abyss of iniquity, which may open up in human souls and human society such as an optimistic idealism did not take account of as even possible.

(ii.) Unless we are to abandon faith in God's goodness altogether, we must accept as morally justified God's reaction against sin in its consequences, which is involved in the moral and natural order of the world, which is to be regarded as a unity. Does the sin committed by men deserve all the misery and suffering that it is now bringing upon them? Is it right that sin should be punished, and punished so severely? If not, then the moral indignation that is being felt against the crimes and outrages committed in the war is not morally justified, and must be condemned as only personal vindictiveness. If we do well to be angry, and if we feel that we should be untrue to conscience were we not angry, do we not begin to understand that there is not only moral justification for, but moral necessity of, the wrath of God and the Lamb? That God hates and judges sin is not a theological fiction but a historical reality which our conscience must approve.

(iii.) If this reaction of God in the moral and natural order against sin is morally justified and

even necessary, can we conceive it as morally legitimate and even possible that in the revelation of the grace of God in forgiveness of sin and reconciliation to God in Christ Jesus that reaction should be simply set aside, and no confirmation of its conformity with the character of God should be given? Is it not only fitting but even necessary that the higher order of grace should not merely supersede, but should fulfil the lower order of law, making even more evident the reaction of holy love against sin than had been done hitherto? That in love to God and to man alike, the Son of God, the personal revelation of God in human history, should submit, and in submitting approve in all its severity, that reaction of God is surely the only adequate fulfilment of the lower in the higher order.

(iv.) This tragedy of sin is the background on which shines the glory of sacrifice, the free self-giving even unto wounds and death of the manhood of the nations, not merely in the defence of country, but in the vindication of righteousness in the affairs of men. We cannot pretend that all who fight have this lofty motive; but that it is a moral reality, who can doubt? Has not this sacrifice entered into the world's history as a cleansing and ennobling power in human development? That God Himself makes the sacrifice by which the reaction of His holy love against sin is sustained and confirmed also casts a glory, and a glory transcendent, on the Cross of Christ. What we are now passing through is mystery intolerable, unless we find, as we do find, its interpretation in that Cross.

## Contributions and Comments.

### Dr. Field's Old Testament Revision Notes.

TRANSCRIBED FROM THE AUTHOR'S MS. BY THE  
REV. JOHN HENRY BURN, B.D.

#### II.

GENESIS 6<sup>16</sup>. [Dr. Field proposed leaving 'window' in the text, and giving 'coved roof' in the margin. The Revisers, however, preferred 'light' for the text, and simply 'roof' for the margin.] לחר being ἄνεπαξ λεγόμενον, the sense of *tectum* proposed by

Schultens (from Arabic = *dorsum*) and adopted by Dathe, Rosenmüller, and others might perhaps be admitted as an alternative rendering. I have added the epithet 'coved,' both as being suggested by the Arabic word, and also as furnishing a clue to the meaning of the next clause, 'and in a cubit shalt thou finish it (the ark) above.' It has not been observed that the LXX translation, ἐπισυνάγων ποιήσεις τὴν κιβωτὸν, also suggests the idea of *gradual contraction* of the width of the ark. So Diod. Sic. xvii. 82 : Αὐταὶ δὲ (αἱ κῶμαι) καὶ τῶν οἰκῶν στῆγας ἔχουσι, ἐκ πλίνθων εἰς ὀξὺ συνηγμένων. ἔχουσας