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Henry Barclay Swete.

BY PROFESSOR THE REV. GEORGE MILLIGAN, D.D., UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

IT is impossible not to recognize that his friends have taken the true course in their memorial of Professor Swete. Anything in the nature of a formal biography would have been distasteful to his shy and sensitive nature, nor does his quiet student's life present any striking outward incidents to arrest the attention of the ordinary reader. But in their *Remembrance*,¹ three of those who knew him best have given us just these particulars which are necessary if we are to form any adequate conception of the man himself, and of the extraordinary influence which he exerted upon the scientific study of Theology in this country during the twenty-five years of his Cambridge professoriate.

Over the facts of Dr. Swete's early life it is unnecessary to linger. He was born at Bristol on March 14, 1835, the twelfth child of the Rev. John Swete, D.D., but the only one of his second marriage. His childhood was not a very happy one, nor did he show any special prominence as a youth. But it is worth recalling as prophetic of the future textual critic, that during his early days at Bristol the boy, with the memory of Chatterton, the forger of 'antique' verses, in his mind, used to stain paper with coffee and write on it in uncials, playing that he had discovered a Greek MS.²

It was to his father, who also counted among his pupils R. W. Church, the future Dean of St. Paul's, that Henry owed his early education. Then, after two years' study at King's College, London, he was enrolled as an undergraduate at Caius College, Cambridge, the family tradition in favour of Oxford being set aside owing to his father's dread of the Tractarian Movement. Swete's university career was not specially brilliant, while his natural reserve prevented him from mixing freely in the general life of the place.³ But, by

dint of hard work, he graduated seventh in the Classical Tripos in 1858, and in the same year was ordained to the curacy of Blagdon in Somersetshire. Here he found full scope for those pastoral instincts which had already been asserting themselves even during his undergraduate days, and on the exercise of which he used in later years to insist so strongly.

In 1865 Swete returned to Cambridge to act as Dean, and later as Tutor and Lecturer of his College; but he found the undergraduates very 'un-get-at-able,' and in 1877 gladly accepted the College living of Ashdon in Essex, where he not only proved himself the faithful parish priest, but made a beginning with those literary enterprises which were afterwards to extend his name and influence so widely. For it is to the thirteen years of the Ashdon incumbency that we owe, along with many minor publications, the edition of Theodore of Mopsuestia's *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles* (1880-82), and the first, and the greater part of the second, volume of the invaluable edition of the *Septuagint* (1887-91).

The decisive moment in Dr. Swete's career came, however, in 1890, with his appointment as Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, in succession to Dr. Westcott. The appointment had not been generally looked for, least of all by Dr. Swete himself. The difficulties in the new Professor's path were many and serious, but he faced them with the singleness of aim and serenity of mind which were always amongst his most marked characteristics. And the result was, in the words of one of those best qualified to judge, that the Council's choice was shown to be 'abundantly, even triumphantly, right,' and that Dr. Swete's professoriate 'stands out as a great professoriate, justly memorable and fruitful of the highest good.'⁴

when the secret was still jealously guarded, Swete's critical insight put him on the right track. 'It is Seeley all over,' he remarked to a friend. As showing the variety of views that then prevailed, the book was attributed amongst others to a Roman Catholic divine, an Archbishop of York, a female novelist, a Scottish Duke, a Dean of Westminster, a Poet Laureate, an unknown sea captain, and the Emperor of the French!

⁴ 'Henry Barclay Swete,' by the Right Rev. F. H. Chase, D.D., Bishop of Ely, in the *Church Quarterly Review*, Oct. 1917, p. 110.

¹ *Henry Barclay Swete, D.D., F.B.A., sometime Regius Professor of Divinity, Cambridge: A Remembrance.* London: Macmillan & Co., 1918.

² One is reminded of John Henry Newman's awestruck surprise on discovering, during his Littlemore days, on the first page of an old school Latin verse-book the figure of an upright cross, and next to it 'what I cannot make out to be anything else than a set of beads suspended, with a little cross attached' (*Apologia pro vita sua* [Longmans, 1886], p. 3).

³ Amongst his few intimate friends was J. R. Seeley, soon to become famous as the author of *Ecce Homo*. At a time

For a full statement of the grounds on which this claim rests, I must refer all who are interested to the *Remembrance* itself; but they consist partly in the high, and almost austere, ideals which Dr. Swete had formed of his responsibilities, and of the unremitting toil and care with which he sought to give effect to these. Courses on an almost bewildering variety of subjects were prepared and delivered year after year, which, while they reflected the teacher's own exact and profound scholarship, never lost sight of the practical needs of those to whom they were addressed. Professor Swete's outstanding aim was to equip as fully as possible his students for the ministerial calling to which most of them were devoting themselves. And if, as his friends point out, he would probably have taken St. Paul's familiar words, 'He gave some . . . pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,' as his ideal of his life-work, so he took our Lord's words, 'Every scribe who hath been made a disciple to the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old,' as embodying the spirit in which he should perform it.¹

Apart from his immediate professorial duties, Dr. Swete's literary 'output' during these years was enormous, especially when we remember the finished care with which all was produced. In the sphere of Old Testament study he completed his edition of the *Septuagint*, and accompanied it by an *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (1900), of which a new and revised edition under the editorship of Mr. R. R. Ottley appeared in 1914. And his interest in the history of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which had shown itself in two essays in 1873 and 1876, and later in articles in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography* and in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, was maintained by two books on *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (1909), and on *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* (1912).

Dr. Swete also found time to act as editor of two volumes of *Essays* on some Theological and Biblical Questions of the Day (1905 and 1909) by members of the University of Cambridge, to which he contributed Prefaces, which are amongst the most illuminating guides to his own theological and

¹ P. 66. The two texts form also the two mottoes prefixed to the book.

critical positions. How clearly, for example, does his constant endeavour to hold the balance level between the 'old' and the 'new' come out in such words as these from the earlier volume: 'Reconstruction, however, is a serious matter, when vital truths are concerned; and in Theology it calls for the utmost care. There is grave risk lest some pearl of great price should be lost or marred in the resetting of the chain. Although new combinations are permissible, the original deposit must remain without diminution, without addition: *nove, non nova* must be the motto of the worker in this field' (p. ix).

Apart from the Prefaces, Dr. Swete's only direct contribution to the volumes was an Essay on 'The Religious Value of the Bible,' in which he is careful to point out that that value 'is found in no wise to depend upon the estimates which critics may form of its historical accuracy. . . . To what lengths criticism may go or how many of its results may endure the test of time, we do not know, but we may be confident that the critic has not been born, nor will be, who can take from the Bible its power of ministering to the religious needs of all sorts and conditions of men' (*Biblical Essays*, p. 544 f.).

This is very far, however, from implying that Professor Swete was not fully alive to the advantages to be gained from the closest and most scientific study of the sacred records, and the diligent use of every means within our reach for so penetrating into the exact sense of the letter of Scripture that we are thereby led to understand better the underlying spirit. Strong undoubtedly as was the hold which 'Tradition' had over him, he kept an ever open mind to the new methods and the new discoveries, claiming that 'it needs no prophet to foresee that the time will come when ideas which to-day are strange and unwelcome will be seen to possess a beauty of their own, to be necessary to the completeness of truth, and to belong, no less than many which are long familiar, to the common treasury of the Kingdom of Heaven' (*Theological Essays*, p. x).

What has been said will have prepared us for the interest that Dr. Swete took in the writings of the ancient Catholic Church, and his desire to stimulate and guide personal study of them. Hence his useful little book on *Patristic Study* (1902), and hence too the series of 'Cambridge Patristic Texts' and 'The Cambridge Handbooks of Liturgical

Study,' both of which owe their existence to his initiative. His own knowledge of liturgical subjects had already been shown in the volume *Church Services and Service Books before the Reformation*, published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in 1896.

Of a more directly Biblical character are the *Studies in the Teaching of our Lord* (1903), which originally appeared as a series of papers in *The Expositor*, and the valuable series of Studies, first delivered as Lectures, which deal more particularly with the closing events of our Lord's life, and with some of the great articles of the Christian Creed which had already engaged his attention from an historical standpoint in 1894.¹

These later Studies are of a directly expository and practical character, and, like so many of Dr. Swete's writings, are designed to meet the needs not only of the clergy, but of the educated laity, and are marked by his customary clearness and beauty of style. Of anything in the nature of 'a tawdry finery of language' Dr. Swete always stood in the utmost abhorrence. Not only was it in his eyes out of keeping with the gravity of the subjects dealt with, but it tended to become 'more or less insincere,' and, where it did not 'excite disgust,' certainly did not win esteem.² On the same ground he shrank from anything like a display of mere ingenuity or speculation on the part of the Christian teacher, nor, with one or two slight exceptions, were his writings ever of a directly controversial or polemical character. It was the positive presentation of truth which mainly concerned him, confident as he was that the nearer we get to the original meaning of the sacred writers, the more assuredly we shall find that they have

¹ In *The Apostles' Creed: Its relation to Primitive Christianity*. It may be convenient to enumerate the titles of the subsequent Studies—*The Appearances of Our Lord after the Passion* (1907), *The Ascended Christ* (1910), *The Last Discourse and Prayer of Our Lord* (1913), *The Holy Catholic Church* (1915), *The Forgiveness of Sins* (1916). Six addresses delivered during the last year of his life at Hitchin were published after his death under the title, *The Life of the World to Come* (1917).

² Cf. *Remembrance*, p. 74f. The immediate reference is to sermons in which highly-coloured language takes the place of real teaching; and that Dr. Swete could be severe when occasion demanded it is shown by the words which follow: 'Too many sermons remind one of a certain queen who when the enemy was at the gate tired her head and painted her face. We remember her end; within half an hour nothing was left of her worthy a decent burial.'

still a direct message for the needs and questions of to-day.

This comes out very clearly in the two great *Commentaries* on St. Mark (1898) and the Apocalypse (1906), which will remain perhaps Dr. Swete's most precious legacy to the Church. With the literary or source problems which these writings raise he is never much concerned, but everything that bears upon the determination of the true text or the interpretation of some difficult word or phrase, is stated with a fullness, and at the same time a succinctness, which may well prove the model, and excite the envy, of subsequent workers in the same field. Either of these works alone would have placed their writer in the very front rank of New Testament exegetes, and by them Dr. Swete worthily continued the succession of his great Cambridge predecessors—Lightfoot, Westcott, and Hort.

But Dr. Swete's contribution to the scientific study of theology must by no means be measured by his own published writings. Equally striking was the manner in which he 'mobilized' the services of others, both by suggesting subjects for inquiry, and by showing the lines on which the inquiry could be best carried out; he had such generous confidence in the ambitions and powers of all with whom he was brought into contact. And none who have had the privilege of consulting him in the book-lined study in Bateman Street, can fail to look back without the warmest gratitude to the friendly interest and encouragement he always showed himself so ready to bestow.

And in this connexion mention must be made of two most valuable aids to theological study for which Dr. Swete was mainly, if not wholly, responsible.

One was the starting of the *Journal of Theological Studies* in 1899, which was intended to provide a medium for publishing texts and scholarly articles outside the range of ordinary theological magazines, and which, under the able editorship of Professor Bethune-Baker and the Rev. F. E. Brightman, still continues its honoured and useful career.

The other was the institution of the 'Central Society of Sacred Studies,' having for its main object the bringing of the parochial clergy into touch with those who are engaged in the study and teaching of Theology at the Universities and elsewhere, and of assisting them by the stimulus that comes from united action, and by guidance

with regard to courses of study and the choice of books.

'No class of men,' it is pointed out in a small pamphlet, which, if not written by Dr. Swete himself, certainly reproduces his thoughts, 'has so unceasingly to be producing (or rather, reproducing) material for the instruction of others as the clergyman; and therefore it is specially incumbent upon him to be keeping up his own mental supply. . . . Nor does the fact that the laity are now, as a rule, well educated, in any way free the clergy from responsibility in this matter. Rather the contrary. The more the people know, the better must be the instruction which is provided for them. . . . While it is true that "the Faith once for all delivered to the Saints can never be maintained by compromise," it is also true that the *presentation* of the Faith constantly requires readjustment, according to the amount of enlightenment possessed by those to whom it is presented. Unless that readjustment be wisely made, the Faith that saves souls may be rejected, not because the laity know too much, but because the clergy know too little.'

An enumeration of the principal subjects of Sacred Study follows, special stress being laid on the study of Holy Scripture, as 'at once the most important, the most attractive, and the most far-reaching' branch of knowledge. And the significant warning is added, that as 'the Bible was given to save souls; not to save trouble,' 'we have no right to expect to find in it infallible guidance respecting those things, such as science and history, which we can discover by our own industry and acumen.' Finally, certain practical rules of study are laid down, of which the last is: 'Read devoutly as well as critically; in order to become less unprofitable as a servant, not in order to have more knowledge to exhibit. It is superficial knowledge that puffs up; the real knowledge that builds up, humbles; for it reveals to us our boundless ignorance.'

I have quoted at length from this paper, both because it is not generally accessible,¹ and because it points to a very helpful way in which a growing need may be met. The Church is on her trial, and if she is to respond to the many and varied demands that are being made upon her, she must take steps not only for securing an adequate supply of candidates for the Christian ministry, but also for assisting in their continued theological training

¹ I owe my acquaintance with it to the courtesy of Professor Bethune-Baker.

and development, after the practical duties of their sacred office have been entered upon. The desire for assistance in these directions is, I believe, widespread. And it may well be asked whether the time has not come for extending to Scotland some of the advantages which the 'Central Society of Sacred Studies' has already secured for the clergy of the Church of England.²

There are many other aspects of Dr. Swete's life and work on which one would gladly have touched, if space had permitted. But enough, I trust, has been said to show how fruitful of the highest good to the whole Church of Christ his many and varied activities have proved themselves. They did not cease even with the resignation of his professorial chair at the ripe age of eighty. And amongst the most suggestive pictures in the *Remembrance* is the description of the veteran scholar in his retirement at Hitchin, editing a new volume of *Essays*,³ planning fresh literary activities, preaching from time to time in the Parish Church, conducting a large Bible class for men, and visiting with unflinching regularity the aged and the poor. So, 'serene, patient, and conscious to the very end,' he entered into rest on 10th May 1917. It is a singularly beautiful ending to a singularly beautiful life. And I cannot more fittingly close this imperfect tribute than in the feeling words of Dr. Swete's close associate and friend, Professor Bethune-Baker: 'Whatever future may lie before the study of Theology in Church or University, the tradition of scholarship and charity, of faith and of hope, which Dr. Swete bequeaths to us, is one to inspire and to guide students of any subject in any age. He has reared his own monument of profound learning and sensitive workmanship. It could only have been built up so firmly, in its large and delicate proportions, by one who set the things of the spirit above all else; and wherever those things are prized, he will be honoured and his memory cherished' (*Remembrance*, p. 62).

² Reference may also be made here to the many important suggestions made by the Archbishops' Committee in their report on *The Teaching Office of the Church* (S.P.C.K., 1918).

³ Published under the title *Essays on the Early History of the Church and the Ministry* (1918). The work of finally preparing the volume for the press was undertaken, by Dr. Swete's own wish, by Mr. C. H. Turner, to whom we are also indebted for the greater part of the valuable bibliography of Dr. Swete's published writings attached to the *Remembrance*.