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Reviews.

La Foi en la Divinité de Jésus-Christ. By Père DIDON. Paris : Librairie Plon.

IN the Lent of 1892, the eloquent Dominican preached a series of sermons at the church of the Madeleine, in Paris, on the divinity of our Lord. They created immense interest. Large numbers flocked to hear them ; and verbatim reports were hawked in the streets. After a lapse of two years these sermons appear in the volume before us, during which time no doubt they have been undergoing a certain amount of revision. Père Didon is now universally admitted to be one of the very foremost of living French preachers ; and these sermons are undoubtedly his most successful series. It is interesting, therefore, to take them as a type of what is best in modern French preaching, and to compare them with productions of the English pulpit.

The sermons are of the evidential type. The preacher assumes that his congregation is not actively religious, which indeed, to judge from appearances, was the case. Therefore he endeavours to inquire, in a studiously simple and, as it were, impartial manner, into the present state of (French) disbelief in Christ's divinity, the causes for it, how they may be refuted, and, finally, the practical means of believing. With regard to the style, it should be remembered that they were delivered without manuscript, of course, coming as they did from a Frenchman and a Dominican. Thus they bear in them both the excellences and the defects of "extempore" sermons. For though no doubt they have undergone revision to a certain extent, they still bear manifest traces of the method of their delivery. We note the long passages, built up of coordinate sentences ; the repetition of the same idea in slightly varying words ; the manner in which a thought is worked out through a sequence of involved phrases. On the other hand, there is the rush and vigour of impassioned argument and hortatory appeal, varied every now and then by peculiarly brilliant phrases and sentences, couched in that epigrammatic form which seems the inherited right of all educated French writers—epigrams which are as apt and as pregnant with recollection as a line from Pope. These sermons, in common with those of many modern French preachers, such as Lacordaire and Gratry, have a peculiar charm. They miss the ordered diction and the educated melody of our greatest English sermons ; they have not in the same degree the spirit of reverence and piety ; nor, it seems to us, do they reach the same standard of either scriptural or scholarly excellence. But there is a fire, a glow of thought, a sparkle of phrase, a clear, glittering logic, which renders them fascinating and, due regard being had to their Romanist character, useful reading for an English clergyman.

As a fair specimen of the matter of our author's sermons, it may be of interest to give the last in his book, which is entitled "Practical Means of Believing in the Divinity of Jesus." We give a full summary :

To be a Christian is to believe in Christ. That is the foundation-stone on which is to be raised all the structure of doctrine, dogma, and good works, and which is at last to raise us to the threshold of eternity. Therefore it is of the most primary importance to know within ourselves what answer we would give to the question, "What think ye of Christ—whose Son is He?" We are conscious that the answer *should* be: "God's." So our question is, in other words: "What are the practical means of believing in the divinity of Jesus? Do such means

exist? What are they? Do they depend on our will and our own energy?"

There *are* practical means, which are in our hands, and which it depends on us to employ. Just as science and philosophy, education and art, have their methods of proceeding, so faith has hers. Nay, more, there is this great difference. The methods of science and philosophy, art and education, are not within the reach of everybody; everybody cannot aspire to be a great man of science, or a clever doctor, or a renowned artist. But the means of believing belong to all; everyone can and ought to aspire to be a Christian. Human things are the affairs of a few; the things of the Gospel are the privilege of all.

Before we examine the practical means of believing in the divinity of our Lord, let us not exclude that influence, divine, invisible, and sacred, which surrounds man, and which is called in theological language "grace." We cannot analyze its action, or trace its method. "The Spirit bloweth where it listeth." But we must, to speak reverently, co-operate; and how?

I. Whoever aspires to believe in Jesus Christ with an intelligent and well-founded faith, must at the outset put himself into personal connection with Jesus Christ as a real and historical personage. Jesus Christ, Son of Man, has affirmed, declared, and taught His Divine Sonship; we must put ourselves into direct relationship with Him who has proclaimed these marvellous things. In the first place, we must know not even the Jesus of dogma, whom the Creeds contain in their sublime formulas, but the Jesus of history, living, acting, preaching, teaching, founding His work and His doctrine on His death and sacrifice—the Jesus of the Gospels. How can we be acquainted with a man belonging to history if we have not read his memoirs?

But we must be careful how we read them. There are three ways of reading a book—with a critical mind, with the imagination, and with the conscience. When we read with our intellect, it is to criticise, such as an essay; when we read with our imagination, it is to amuse ourselves, such as a novel; when we read with our conscience, it is to make us better men. That is how we must first read the Gospels, with our simple understanding and our conscience. Then, at least, you will be able, if nothing else, to say with Rousseau: "If the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of a God." When we have read, re-read, and read again the Gospels under these conditions, we shall be in relation with Jesus Christ. Of course, one does not know what will follow; but we shall be in touch with the human being who solemnly declared His divinity. Does He deserve belief in that statement—yes or no?

That brings us to the second condition.

II. The knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ, by reading the Gospel carefully and with the conscience, is the first step, but it is not enough. For notice: Many of the contemporaries of Jesus were put into contact with Him, heard Him preach to the crowd, saw Him heal the sick, and yet what a difference! Some believed in Him and became His disciples, others remained indifferent, or even became His adversaries.

What does this variety of attitude arise from? Why are some enlightened and some blind? We do not know what passes in the soul, but we do know, for Christ has told us, what is the method of believing in Him. "If anyone wishes to come after Me," He often said to His disciples and the crowd, "let him take up his cross and follow Me." To follow Jesus is to believe in Him. There is no doubt about this. Whoever wants to follow Jesus must believe what His Master says about Himself, and consequently in His Divine Sonship. But Jesus teaches as a necessary condition of arriving at that faith the renunciation of your

personality, sacrifice symbolized in carrying the cross. Do you think that that narrows the way? If you suppose that it is easy to be a true Christian, undeceive yourself. Jesus does not want common-place people in His train. The selfish, the satisfied, the stubborn, have no place in the following of Him who said in terms which disguise nothing: "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must give up *himself*." Do you wish that?

You must notice that the more powerful and active one's personality is, the more difficult it is to surrender it. There is a historical proof of that. In the time of Jesus there were men of power, there were wealthy people, scientific men, yes, and "holy people," who said to each other, "we are perfect"—the undying race of Pharisees. Jesus appeared. Power rejected Him, opulent families disdained Him, the doctors despised Him, the perfect people were the most pitiless of all. Who did believe in Him, then? Why, the poor Galileans—the people who didn't know very much about the law, and observed still less; men without letters, without power, without sanctity, the Galileans, Peter, John, James, Bartholomew, Matthew—a publican!—all these are the humble folk who recognised Jesus. And why? Because they were practised in self-effacement; they had so poor a personality that it was little trouble to surrender it.

Ab, brethren, it is the hardest lesson we have to learn, to give up self, to deny our own desires and passions; but it has to be done. The gate is narrow, and, as Jesus said, it wants violence to open it even. The kingdom of heaven is not a kingdom of invalids, but of brave men. Only the valiant can gain it—we might say the violent.

Is there any plan by which this denial of self can be facilitated? Yes, there is. There would not be, if it were left to man. If man were left to his own energy, given up to his own aspirations, he would never arrive at faith. The secret, irresistible action of the Holy Spirit is needed. Let us again turn to the teaching of our Lord Himself. In one of His mysterious and profound sayings He said, "No man can come unto Me, unless the Father draw him." Who is the Father of Jesus? God, most certainly. And in every man there is an influence, however much he may struggle against it, which does its best to induce him to good, to high and pure things. What is this? It is the movement of the Father, who is drawing every creature to Himself; and if to Himself, then also to Jesus, who is the realization, under human form, of the ideal of God. Yes, if man, in spite of all his imperfections, is drawn towards the noble, pure, and perfect, whither will his steps lead him? To Jesus, Son of God.

Yet there remains the sacrifice of that same tyrannical personality of ours. What will give us the strength for that sacrifice? Once again Jesus had spoken the secret of believing, "*Repent and believe the Gospel.*" He speaks to the conscience, for it is the conscience which plays the chief part in the act of faith. It is easier to appeal to the heart than to the head in these things, just as it is easier for the surgeon to get to the heart than to the brain, for the brain is encased in a box of bone, whereas the heart is easily pierced. And the word of Jesus is eternally true, "*Repent and believe the Gospel.*" The chief obstacle to belief is an impenitent heart. A man who does not reproach himself will never believe. Who is the hardest man to convince? The clever man? The sinful man? The ambitious man? Not these necessarily—no; but the man who says, "I am a good man; I can lay nothing to my charge."

On the contrary, when you hear a man, whoever he is, of whatever age, temperament, culture, whoever he is, so long as he is struck by the invisible action of God—when you hear him tell you, "Listen, I don't make myself out any better than I am; I am, like many, a poor wretch,

but I repent"—that man, I affirm, is at the gate of the kingdom of God ; to-morrow he will be on his knees before the crucified One.

Gentlemen, when you have realized in yourselves that admirable and heroic poorness of spirit, and not daring to raise your eyes towards heaven, you strike your breast and say, "Lord, have mercy on me ; I am but a publican"—when you have done that, at the first cry you will believe in Jesus, the Son of God.

It is true that the end of the sermon is taken up with an apostrophe to Mary Magdalene, the patron saint of the church ; but we think that if care were taken to sift the false from the true, the jaded preacher would derive much freshness of insight and of expression from reading sermons such as these.

W. A. PURTON.

Christian Doctrine : A Series of Discourses. By R. W. DALE, LL.D. Hodder and Stoughton.

This is an admirable volume. Dr. Dale has in previous years given us the fruits of his study of Christian doctrine in certain special directions, as, for example, in his well-known book on the Atonement, which may fairly claim to rank as a theological classic. But in the present work we seem to have presented to us, in clear and simple language, the result of Dr. Dale's matured thoughts upon the body of Christian doctrine as a whole. These discourses give us, in brief compass, the summed up teaching of a lifetime.

In a book like this, which deals with problems so difficult and so diverse as "The Existence of God," "The Humanity of our Lord," "The Trinity," and others of similar complexity, it is always easy to find points of disagreement. These, however, it is quite unnecessary to emphasize ; one is glad to discover how much there is on which entire agreement is possible. The twelve discourses which make up the main contents of this book are noteworthy for their impressive and reverent treatment of the great central truths of Christianity.

One of the primary lessons which it is Dr. Dale's object to inculcate is this—that a belief in the truths of Christianity is something very different from an intellectual assent to certain theological propositions, being rather an actual living-out of the inner spirit of Christ's life and teaching. Very strongly, therefore, does he maintain, in his first discourse, that even "God's existence is made certain to us—not by reasoning—but by experience." And elsewhere he goes on to say that it is just because philosophical theists cannot realize this great fact (*i.e.*, that, even in the most vital of all questions, "*experientia docet*"), that they of all men seem least able to receive the truths of the Gospel. To a large extent, this is unfortunately true ; but I do not consider it wise to lay such stress on the argument from experience as Dr. Dale thinks it necessary to do, because it has a certain tendency to make the truths of Christianity depend, for their ultimate acceptance, on individual emotions. Doubtless, Dr. Dale has stated a truth, but it is only a half-truth. In reality God's existence is made certain to us *both* by reasoning *and* experience, which, linked thus together, form a solid foundation for belief.

In his second discourse—upon our Lord's Divinity—Dr. Dale dwells upon that curious mental phenomenon we sometimes observe in the case of pious and thoughtful people, who, from a misdirected reverence, are so profoundly impressed with the Divine in Christ's life as to blind themselves to the fact that, after all, He was a very man, often tempted and tried ; often anxious, sorrowful, weary, hungry, even as we are ; though sinless through it all. Ruskin, in his own unrivalled language, has noted this fact, and comments thus :

"Our preachers are continually trying, in all manner of subtle ways,

to explain the union of the Divinity with the Manhood—an explanation which certainly involves first their being able to describe the nature of Deity itself, or, in plain words, to comprehend God. They never can explain, in any one particular, the union of the natures; they only succeed in weakening the faith of their hearers as to the entireness of either. The thing they have to do is precisely the contrary of this—to insist upon the *entireness* of both. We never think of Christ enough as God, never enough as Man; the instinctive habit of our minds being always to miss of the Divinity, and the reasoning and enforced habit to miss of the humanity. We are afraid to harbour in our own hearts, or to utter in the hearing of others, any thought of our Lord as hungering, tired, sorrowful, having a human soul, a human will, and affected by events of human life, as a finite creature is; and yet one half of the efficiency of His atonement, and the whole of the efficiency of His example, depend on His having been this to the full.¹

On pp. 152, *sqq.* (discourse on the Trinity) there is some characteristic criticism of philosophers who endeavour—very unsuccessfully, according to Dr. Dale—to prove that the doctrine of a Divine Trinity, so far from being a dark, insoluble mystery, from which even faith recoils dismayed, is a necessary factor in any carefully constructed theology. In the view of such thinkers there must be, by an eternal necessity, a Trinity in the Divine life. Dr. Dale is evidently indulging in a sly hit at Hegel here, though he does not actually mention any name. To Hegel's mind Christianity, in the fact that it regarded God as a Triune personality, showed its severely rational character; and this thought was undoubtedly one that formed the keystone of the Hegelian philosophy, which, when all is said and done, remains, and is likely to remain, the high-water mark of human thought.

The sublime truth that God is immanent in His world finds, as Dr. Dale justly says, its highest and purest expression in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Only one must take care not to forget that, while He is indeed immanent in the world, He also eternally transcends it. "In the Father," we read (p. 164), "God personally transcends the life and thought of man; in the Son, God is personally revealed to man; in the Spirit, God is immanent in the higher life of man." This is excellently put; the very brevity and conciseness of the clauses lend weight to the truth they struggle to express.

I have left myself little space to speak about Dr. Dale's interesting and thoughtful discussion of the Atonement—that pivot of Christian theology, on which its whole fabric revolves. The writer's main contention may be given shortly in his own words: "God does not redeem us merely by revealing His love; He reveals His love by redeeming us. The revelation comes through the redemption."

The "notes" appended to the discussions are printed together at the end of the book—a good plan, in many ways. One only hopes the reader will not practise the art of skipping *here*, for he will assuredly miss much of permanent interest. Among the most instructive of these excursions are those which deal with Primitive Beliefs and the Creeds of the Church (Dr. Dale speaks with sincere admiration of the great creeds of Christendom); nor should the note upon our Lord's knowledge be passed by. We are on delicate and debatable ground here; but the topic is handled with skill, notwithstanding the fact that one or two of Dr. Dale's conclusions may well be contested on more grounds than one.

E. H. BLAKENEY.

February, 1895.

¹ "Modern Painters," vol. iii.