

the symbolic language of Christendom. We need no literal "mountain of Elohim," but the Christian heart has still its Arâlu; and since the Church is a "royal priesthood," each member thereof may in a true sense adopt the language even of the king of Babylon. Our angelic visitants have indeed no material heights to descend, and when we dream, it is of no ladder like Jacob's; and yet whenever the Christian poet speaks of heaven and of angels, he involuntarily uses the imaginative material inherited from the days when the world was young. We do not think of our God as "riding upon a cherub" (Ps. xviii. 10), but we do know that He delights to honour the prayers and praises of His servants, and that, like the Cherubim, these Spirit-taught utterances of the heart can at any moment bring Him nigh. He is "enthroned upon" those "cherubim" which are "the praises of Israel" (Ps. xxii. 3).

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THE last quarter of a century has witnessed the rise and growth of an intensely ardent intellectual activity in the theological halls of Scotland. It is, of course, but part of that larger movement of spiritual revival which is manifesting itself everywhere over Christendom, and in nothing more characteristically than in the novel and widespread interest that is shown in questions of a theological and apologetical character. But in the North this mental awakening takes on a peculiar complexion and significance from the past history and natural character of the people. It appears in a race, whose whole thought has for generations been saturated through and through with metaphysical speculation, and whose daily life has to an

almost unique degree been fashioned in religious forms and channels. There, as nowhere else, the experimental trial of the modern reconstruction of Christianity may be made on the broadest scale, in the most practical fashion, and under the most favourable conditions to determine whether the new theology is compatible or incompatible with a deep, warm, and living Christian faith and practice.

The Scotch colleges of divinity are remarkable, alike for their number in so small a country and for the completeness of their equipment. True, they do not possess those positions of affluent and leisurely learning, which secure for the Church of England that regular succession of illustrious scholars and theologians of which she is justly proud. But for the production of a uniformly cultured and thoroughly trained clergy, we question if any country, except Germany, possesses a machinery and curriculum quite equal to the great theological schools of Scotland. Among them the New College, Edinburgh, holds a position second to none, whether for the number of its *alumni* or the perfection of its organization. Every year it puts some forty preachers into the pulpits and mission-fields of the Free Church, besides extending the hospitality of its class-rooms to students from every country of Europe, from America and the Colonies, and frequently from lands and races more foreign and remote.

Beginning with Dr. Chalmers, the New College has had and still has in its chairs teachers of world-wide eminence. Its influence in forming the ministry of its own and other Churches cannot but be very great. Among the various and valuable elements that go to make up that influence, we doubt if any is more potent than that emanating from the present occupant of the chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis. Professor Davidson is not an ecclesiastical statesman or popular leader. He takes no part in the proceedings of Church courts, nor does he intervene in political

or social movements. He confines himself absolutely to teaching the Old Testament to his students. Other personages and principles bulk more largely and prominently on the stage of contemporary affairs, both in matters of Church and of State. Nevertheless it is the opinion of many, that in the Hebrew classroom of the New College there is in operation an influence of the very first magnitude, in the work of shaping the theological and religious future of Scotland. For outsiders it is not quite easy to understand how that may be. Dr. Davidson is known to be an erudite Orientalist, one of the very foremost among living Exegetes, and he is besides a skilful and successful teacher. His work on the *Hebrew Accents* was authoritative when it appeared, though now superseded by later researches. His *Introductory Hebrew Grammar* is a model of clearness, condensation, and felicity in combining scientific delineation with practical serviceableness, and it has justly been adopted as textbook in a majority of the English-speaking schools of Hebrew. An early work, dealing with the problem of Job, was marked by rare brilliancy and dramatic power of presentation, but it remained unfinished, and is now out of print. Since then we have had from his pen a number of able articles and criticisms in magazines, and within the last few years a couple of handbook commentaries on *Hebrews* and *Job*. These volumes are packed full of solid exegesis, sound scholarship, and suggestive thought, but their golden treasures are put forth in such an unpretentious fashion, as almost to make us believe that the author wished to take precautions against notoriety. Where other men would have published a portentous volume, and blown a trumpet, our author has slipped out his good things by stealth, and has done his best to conceal his light under a bushel of diffidence and modesty. The same thing is true of him in everything else that he does. As a preacher he might command the rapt attention

and sway the souls of multitudes ; but he has been chary of preaching at all, and when he does he selects inaccessible and thinly tenanted churches, as though it were his predestined *rôle* to be the voice of one crying in the wilderness. As a teacher he possesses a power of domination, that might create echoes of himself in his pupils almost wholesale, but he deliberately abjures the tempting ambition to form a school, and limits his action on his scholars to the less flattering task of stimulating and developing their own faith and thought and character. What then is the secret of his profound and far-reaching influence ? Wherein resides the virtue that goes out of him ? Manifestly it is not in the mere matter and manner of his teaching. Nor is it in the vastness of his erudition, nor in his public position, nor in the pressure of individual dogmatism, nor in the tyranny of an assertive will, nor indeed in any external work or action, nor in any single element of character. His singular and significant influence does not consist in what he does, but in what he is. It is not the quantity or the contents, but the quality and the kind of the thinking. It is not even the thought so much as the mind that secretes it. It is not its clearness nor its profundity, not its reserve nor its passion, not its scepticism nor its intensity of spiritual faith ; but it is the combination of all these, and the strange, subtle, and fascinating outcome of them. The central and sovereign spring of Dr. Davidson's unique influence in the literature, scholarship, and ministry of the Church is his personality.

The truth of this statement will be recognised even by those who know him only through his writings. Beneath the wording, that on first acquaintance has an appearance of coldness and hardness, readers speedily become conscious of a moral heat and tension, that stir the chords of thought and feeling in them to an unwonted extent, and produce—as few works of learning do—the impression of vital contact

with the glow and vibration of a living intellect. Those who have the good fortune to be acquainted with him in the pulpit, are still more sensible of this potent influence, which escapes from the preacher and inhabits his utterance. But, in its full breadth of compass and enthralling power, the spell of the Professor's personality is known, we imagine, only to those who have passed through his class-room, and perceive in after years how profoundly its magic atmosphere has permeated their thought, kindled their enthusiasm, braced their faith, and determined the shape and direction of their spiritual growth and development.

It is especially in the lectures on exegesis and Biblical theology, that the creative genius of the Hebrew class-room resides and finds expression. Very memorable is the first impression of these lectures on the minds of generation after generation of students. They come up, these young men, as a rule from religious homes, with a warm-hearted zeal for the salvation of souls, with very definite doctrinal notions and dogmatic prejudices, and with that ingrained certainty of the infallibility of the parental creed, which is the unavoidable shadow of an earnest, genuine, and unlearned piety. They take their seats in the college class room, and in the silence of set attention the Professor begins his lecture. The subject is some Messianic psalm or prophecy with a fixed and well-known traditional interpretation, or some venerable and unquestioned statement of doctrine. With measured movement and slow precision the speaker begins to collect the elements, to trace the outlines, and to erect over us the customary habitation of our thought, to our infinite satisfaction and content. Presently there is a change of voice and manner. With sharper intonation and swifter utterance, but equally without haste and without hesitation, he proceeds to subject the structure to practical use and service. Suddenly we wake up to discover how narrow and contracted are its dimensions, how clumsy and

awkward are its communications, how artificial and unstable its construction, and how dark, dismal, and forbidding its atmosphere. The perception is a shock, but irresistible. The disenchanter, though so trenchant and effective, is calm and dispassionate. The defects of the edifice are manifestly not his invention, but simply his discovery. He now advances to more serious measures. The fabric is assailed with a stream of suggestions, subtle and disintegrating as a chemical solvent. In quick succession he discharges searching questions, that pierce through the arguments of defence, like cloth-yard arrows. These are followed by reasonings compact and massive, that fall on the walls like blows of a battering ram. The ancestral mansion of our faith trembles to its foundation, the battlements topple and tumble, the walls one by one fall in, and the whole edifice crumbles into ruin. The first impression was one of unmitigated disaster and homeless destitution. But, presently, when the dust cleared away and our eyes could see truly, we discovered that it was not ruin but emancipation. It was not disinheritance but disimprisonment. We had been set at liberty from a dark dungeon, and found ourselves out on God's broad, green earth, with the free air of heaven about us, and the blue sky over us. Looking back on such experiences, surely we may be forgiven for seeing through a halo of grateful admiration, scarce intelligible to others, the man who brought us out of the pit of ignorance, and the miry clay of prejudice, and set our feet upon a rock, and established our goings.

The Professor's style and delivery are strongly characteristic. His vocabulary is limited, choice rather than copious, but always forcible and expressive. He has the happy knack of planting in the point of a sentence precisely the word that is the pat and perfect embodiment of his idea. Without the cumbrous machinery of elaborate illustration, his expositions are everywhere lit up with suggestively

coined phrases, that have all the pictorial effect of set simile and metaphor. His thought is clothed in language of limpid clearness, and set forth with sharp-cut precision. The style is lithe and sinewy, moving with the supple ease of a living creature. In structure it is at once strong and subtle. It has the elasticity and toughness of steel. Grace and polish are never sought as mere artistic effects. Perchance they are sometimes unduly scorned. But the very fineness and truth of the thinking, not infrequently, compel the speech involuntarily to glow into beauty, and melt into poetry. It is characteristic of their author to hurry over such passages, as though he had been guilty of a weakness, and were ashamed of it. The delivery is quiet, composed, almost nonchalant. But within the cold, calm exterior there is hidden heat and fire. The pace is slow and steady, but each sentence falls with the measured force of a hammer stroke. That reserved manner is the disguise, that covers intense but restrained impetuosity. The utterance never becomes vehement or excited. The energy of the speaker is not expended in voice or gesture, but is concentrated in the essential feeling, thought, and purpose of his theme. The dynamic force is latent in the lecturer, and so remains potential in his hearers. He does not burn away his gunpowder in useless noise, dazzling the eyes of his audience for a moment with rhetorical fireworks, and leaving them and his subject spent. He puts the gunpowder into his students, which has indeed on occasion resulted in explosions, but for the most part has been expended in regular service. And, perchance, the explosions have had their use in clearing the air, and, like thunderstorms, have left a purer and sweeter and more transparent atmosphere behind them.

A lecture by Dr. Davidson or a passage from his writings furnishes an inimitable lesson in the art of intellectual analysis. It is like an anatomical demonstration by an

expert dissector. With unerring accuracy his eye detects the finest lines and angles of his subject. With light touch and swift movement, his lancet passes along the edges, and glides round the curves of the complex structure. Without exertion, as it were of itself, it parts asunder, and breaks up into its component elements. Flake falls from flake, section from section, each perfect, smooth, and uninjured, like the petals of a dismembered flower. The operator has hit the lines of cleavage, and severed the joints and articulations with infallible precision. It looks like the achievement of instinct rather than of skill, of intuition or divination rather than of reasoning. There is about it such a freedom from the appearance of strain or effort, and such an air of ease and certainty and perfection. But it is simply the work of a perception naturally penetrating, and an intellect keen-edged as a razor, that have been trained in the strictest school of honest investigation and unwearying practice and experience. This instantly becomes apparent, as the teacher takes up in turn each of the divided fragments, and shows its relative size and shape, its fittings and connexions, its nature and function, and its corporate value and significance. Bit by bit he reconstructs the organism before our eyes, restores it to its place, sets it in action in our sight, and explains how that operation is the result and outcome of the marvellous mechanism we have been privileged to behold. Nor does he stop there. He tells us the history of its first inception, its infancy, its growth and maturity, its analogues and affinities, its relations and organic place in the universal order of things. The secret of its nascence, the mystery of its life, the enigma of its ultimate causation are left, as these things ever must be, unexplained. But we know that it was born from above. The story of its natural history is told so that at every step it glows with the glory of its supernatural origin. We do not, indeed, see the Spirit, but we hear the

sound of it. And it is the Spirit—the Spirit of the living God.

It is in the realm of Biblical theology that Professor Davidson's rare faculty of analysis and construction is to be seen at its best. Those who have watched the minuteness of his dissection, the subtlety of his definition, and the deftness of his manipulation, will understand why the description borrowed inevitably the imagery of physical science. The exactness of the parallel springs from the intensely realistic character of the operator's mind. His thinking is never worked out in words and axioms and phrases—a sort of mental algebra that is far from uncommon. By an irresistible necessity his thought pierces through the symbols and formulas, till it reaches the realities they represent, and plays directly on the things themselves. His attitude to the technical terms of theology is significant. He has an inveterate distrust of the itinerant words and vagrant phrases that make up the every-day commonplace of popular religion. He treats them as a magistrate does suspicious characters. They are haled before him summarily, and required to give an account of themselves. Testimonials of character even from influential persons are not enough. He will not let them go at large, unless they can prove themselves in possession of the means of a legitimate subsistence. He knows how many phrases, once reputable and useful, have degenerated into worthlessness, so that their ancient and deserved credentials have become the instruments of imposture. He knows how much counterfeit coin, in the commerce of thought, passes from hand to hand unthinkingly, and performs the functions of honest currency. Therefore he will not admit into his reasoning any formula however august, nor any phrase however respectable, till he has tested and proved them. He rings each coin to see that it is genuine, and weighs it in the balance to make sure that it contains its

due value of solid meaning. It is not well to try and deceive him. When he asks for bread, it is dangerous to put him off with a stone, for he has a vigorous arm and an accurate aim. Dealing with learned pretences, he has been known to describe them by a word that is not always confined to things. Of innocent ignorance he is tolerant enough, but shallowness and superficiality in high places he cannot abide. Artificial distinctions, that exist in words only and do not exist in fact, imposing statements that move in the air but never touch reality, high-sounding explanations that are not worth the paper on which they are printed, are his abhorrence. A theory that substitutes formulas for facts, metaphors for realities, the robes and vesture of truth for truth herself, rouses him to resentment; and it is curious to watch the slow deliberation and cruel playfulness with which he proceeds to demolish it, almost as a cat destroys a mouse. It is, however, not vindictive spleen but righteous indignation. For he remembers Mephistopheles' definition of theology,¹ and it is a work of the arch-enemy that he annihilates. Moreover the measure he metes out to others he applies to himself as well, and with still sterner severity. His theology is never a theology of words; his reasoning is never empty verbiage; his sentences carry each its full tale of significance; he never steals lazily along the easy pathway of rhetoric, but plods

¹ "Meph. Am besten ist's auch hier, wenn ihr nur Einen hört,
Und auf des Meister's Worte schwört.
Im ganzen—haltet euch an Worte!
Dann geht ihr durch die sichre Pforte
Zum Tempel der Gewissheit ein.

Schüler. Doch ein Begriff muss bei dem Worte sein.

Meph. Schon gut! Nur muss man sich nicht allzu ängstlich quälen,
Denn eben, wo Begriffe fehlen,
Da stellt ein Wort zur rechten Zeit sich ein.
Mit Worten lässt sich trefflich streiten,
Mit Worten ein System bereiten,
An Worte lässt sich trefflich glauben,
Von einem Wort lässt sich kein Iota rauben."—*Faust.*

along the rough and thorny pathway of reality. Is it not, indeed, a too scrupulous dread of unreality, that underlies his shy reluctance to admit into his thought even sentiment that is true, and poetry that is genuine?

Closely allied with the realism of his thinking is another attribute, that stands out in strong relief in everything that emanates from his pen. It is the singular absence of dogmatism, alike in his statements of fact, and the inferences he draws from them. Professor Davidson is one of those men, who make on others the impression that their personality is greater than their performances. We feel that he might be capable of anything—with two exceptions. He could not be a dictator in actual life, nor a dogmatist in theology. The entire bent of his temperament, mind, and will is against positivism of personal assertion. He takes up a question dispassionately, lays his mind open to opposing considerations, works along all paths, surveys the entire field of observation with comprehensive gaze and impartial scrutiny. He prosecutes the investigation broadly and tentatively; he asks questions and traces out probabilities; he weighs evidence and balances alternatives; he rejects no testimony however trivial and forecloses no probability however faint. Even when he proceeds to communicate to others the result of his researches, he is still studiously just and temperate in his declarations. He puts nothing certainly that is only likely, and he is careful to note objections as well as arguments. He is not an attorney making out his case, but rather a judge summing up for a verdict. For his students we count this quality to be of great value. In one way, no doubt, the immediate impression is less, but the ultimate effect is immeasurably greater. He has not the triumph of the orator, who sweeps his auditors away on the torrent of his own conviction, nor have his pupils the ready-made and serviceable, though of necessity one-sided and second-hand, opinion of their teacher stamped

upon their mind and stereotyped, to the exclusion of wider views and independent thinking. But the method of Dr. Davidson possesses advantages, that outweigh all temporary gains, secured at so heavy a loss. He compels his pupils to face the whole truth with its difficulties and contradictions, its lights and shadows, its certainties and uncertainties. They have seen and felt the forces that are at work weaving out the solution. The active interest and energy of their own thought have been stirred, and entangled into the strain and struggle of the problem. And precisely because they have got no quite complete and satisfactory solution, they set to to grapple with the problem for themselves, to scale its heights and sound its depths, and to achieve a conviction which shall be their own and not another's. This pedagogic benefit may be partly intentional, but mainly it springs from personal idiosyncrasy. The perceptions of Dr. Davidson's mind are fine and universal. His sense of the balance of contending forces makes partiality and arbitrariness impossible. He is intensely conscious of the dimness and fragmentariness of truth's revelation of herself. Besides, he is diffident of his own decisions, and vividly susceptible to the influence of opposing judgments. He is probably liable to an excess of self-distrust. But, beyond all that, he ever speaks and acts under the restraint of a reverent respect for the personality of others. He shrinks from the thought of intruding on their freedom, or of overbearing their convictions by the mere pressure of personal assertion. He is jealous of creating beliefs in his hearers by aught but the truth itself, and he would not, if he could, overcome an opponent by the force of a more dynamic personality. It is a delicate, a gracious, and a rare scrupulosity. Surely, if any man ever did, Dr. Davidson has earned the benediction pronounced by Daub on "the man who has not forced his convictions upon others."

It is a question in some minds, whether Professor Davidson does not push his reticence of judgment too far. Does not his neutrality amount to self-effacement? And has not his reserve the effect of paralysing that moral influence which personality was meant to have in the formation of opinion? We think not. Probably our Professor could not be other than he is. And for our own part, we would not have him different if he could. There are plenty of people to be definite and dogmatic; not many to be believably diffident and doubtful. Surely it is good, now and then, to have with us one, whose attitude to the enigmas of life is like that of the old Hebrew poet, who said:

“Lord, my heart is not haughty,
Nor mine eyes lofty;
Neither do I exercise myself in great matters,
Or in things too high for me.”

More harm to truth and human happiness has come from over-certainty and presumptuous self-assertion, than has ever resulted from suspense of judgment and patient waiting. As was sagely remarked by Rousseau: “Si nous savions ne vouloir pas guérir malgré la nature, nous ne mourrions jamais par la main du médecin; si nous savions ignorer la vérité, nous ne serions jamais les dupes du mensonge.” It is a weakness of human nature to be impatient of indeterminate issues, to demand clear-cut verdicts, and to snatch at premature decisions. It is a grievance we have against Providence, that it will not satisfy our craving. Perchance the delay is due to a wider vision, and a juster sense of the mixed and conflicting elements that complicate every problem of human existence.

It is usually in the domain of criticism that Dr. Davidson is blamed for excessive reticence. Unjustly, we imagine. For, so far as he has found solid footing amid the shifting sands of conjecture, he has made known his opinion modestly but without reserve. If he has not been able to

announce much that was either very positive or very startling, those who are acquainted with the history of Old Testament criticism will hardly count that his fault. In good sooth, we are not sure that our Professor occupies himself much with abstract critical questions. Possibly, having a taste for the poetry and religious genius of the Old Testament, he prefers a more succulent and nourishing diet. He is content to crack the nut without standing on ceremony with the husk, appropriates the kernel for his own enjoyment, leaves the mastication of the shells to those who like them, and stands by to watch the operation with interest and admiration, but without envy. We cannot resist the suspicion that this is at least often his attitude to critical discussions. In the following passage from his pen there is, in the tense terseness of the wording, something that reminds us of that movement of accent and emphasis of delivery which modify the Hebrew tense, when the personal feeling of the speaker escapes into what he is saying. "The critics are very fond of going into the prophet's workshop, and revealing to us the whole genesis of his great works. It is very pleasant to hear them talk, and to be told with certainty what suggested this touch, and to whom is due the merit of first creating this other beautiful line or charming curve. And their conversation so corruscates with first principles that no guide is so entertaining as a good critic. There are persons dull or dreamy enough to feel bored by them, who are so intoxicated by the beauty of a great creation itself that they do not care a whit how it arose, and who prefer to stand in silence before it, drinking in what of its meaning they are able through their own natural untutored eyesight." If those of us, who are critics, should find this somewhat too cavalier in tone, we must remember the realistic bias of Professor Davidson's mind, and forgive him. His spirit searches out instinctively the substance, and may be too scornful of forms. With

Zwingle he would say, "*Christiani hominis est non de dogmatis magnifice loqui, sed cum Deo ardua semper et magna facere.*" Therefore he has religiously eschewed petty religious controversy, and has resolutely put from him the profitless occupation of logic chopping and word splitting. He leaves artificial distinctions and metaphysical abstractions to take care of themselves, and concentrates the attention of himself and his disciples on the actual forces, and laws, and realities of this solemn life of ours, and on that God in whom we live, and move, and have our being.

In this high calling, it seems to me, that that same quality of self-repression stands him in good stead. Is not the supreme excellence of his commentaries precisely their impersonality? We have, where it is wanted, the opinion of the commentator; but for the most part, with no third personality interposed between, we confront the thought of the author restored to life and breath and motion. What of those expositions of Old Testament theology, in which we seem to see the actual operation of inspiration and revelation, and feel ourselves not discussing a doctrine, but beholding human souls touched and fashioned by the fingers of God, till we put our shoes off our feet because the place we stand upon is holy ground? And what shall we say of those ethical delineations of the movements of sin and salvation, faith and doubt, of temptation and despair, of repentance, love, and aspiration within the sanctuary of the human heart, that hold men spell-bound, that stir deep and strange memories, and that light up the perplexities and enigmas of spiritual experience with the radiance of a revelation? Whence comes this fine faculty of interpretive realisation? Whence this gift of historical and dramatic reproduction of the life of other men and alien ages? Must not one lose his own life before he can gain an inner knowledge of the life of another? It is the harvest of self-repression. How too are we to account for

the most potent ingredient in the preacher's spell? How is it that we come to forget him, and feel ourselves in actual and awful contact with the ultimate mysteries of existence, as though through him forces reach us that emerge from eternity? Were this possible with a preacher of more assertive and obtrusive personality? Is it not the predestined guerdon of him, who with a powerful and intense personality combines the exquisite gift of a lowly spirit, and practises habitually the virtue of self-abnegation?

In Dr. Davidson's contribution to the religious future of his country, this quality has played an important part. He has taught his students patience and self-distrust; he has inculcated in them intellectual humility; he has inspired them with a wise dread of that hard dogmatism, believing or unbelieving, which is not faith but rationalism. He has showed them that unbelief has its difficulties as well as belief. He has accustomed them to doubt their own doubts. Better than a more positive thinker could, he has prepared the ministry of the future to encounter a period of strain and transition. For the temper best fitted for such an ordeal is not the unbending hardness of cast-iron, but the elastic toughness of steel. They will be ready to give all to criticism that is its due, without fancying that change of form is loss of faith, or fearing that the progress of science will banish the mysterious and the supernatural from our world. If the Church of Christ within our borders should pass through the present trial of faith without panic, without reactionary antagonism to truth, and without loss of spiritual power, a very large share of the credit will belong to the quiet but commanding influence of the Hebrew chair in that college, which rises so picturesquely on the ancient site of Mary of Guise's palace in Edinburgh.

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