

The Epistle to the Hebrews.

WITH NOTES.

BY C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D. MACMILLAN & Co., 1890.

THIS is the work of a good Greek scholar; such a work as might be expected from one who had occupied the position of a master or headmaster in a great English school. The writer in his preface mentions that in recent years four commentaries on the Epistle to the Hebrews have appeared, all written by men who were, "some thirty years ago, masters in one great school." He is one of the four, and Bishop Westcott is another. The fact is interesting, as showing the extent to which the Epistle referred to has engaged the attention of biblical students, and also as throwing some light on the distinctive character of English commentaries. They are commentaries on *words* rather than on *thoughts*. This is true more or less of them all; it is very specially true of the one before us. It is a schoolmaster's commentary on an Epistle which more than almost any book of the New Testament calls for the illuminating influence of theological or philosophical thought. It is not a contribution to an answer to the question—Why was the Epistle written, and what is its meaning in the light of the circumstances? It does not even aim at being this, but merely at throwing light on the meaning of Greek words, as illustrated by classic and Hellenistic usage. A book of this kind, from a competent hand, is certainly not without value, though its importance is quite subordinate; for the urgent need of the Church in connection with this Epistle is not verbal commentary, but aid to clear insight into its drift and spirit. From Dr. Vaughan's work no such aid can be obtained.

That being once for all understood, this book may be consulted with advantage in regard to what it undertakes to do. It will be found a useful companion to the dictionary, and the grammar in the study of the Epistle. The writer knows at first hand all that relates to exact verbal interpretation, and supplies from classic authors, the Septuagint, and other New Testament books, copious examples of the usage of words. The materials are the accumulations of many years study. It is, as the author informs us, the production of "one whose time has been largely given for the last thirty years to the work of explaining the Greek Testament to a long succession of students for ordination." A book having such a history one is prepared to receive with sincere respect, and the perusal of its pages only tends to deepen the feeling. In multitudes of instances the notes are of great value, and in not a few cases of quite exceptional value. Among those which

have struck me may be mentioned the discussions of the words *παραρῶμεν* (ii. 1), *πνεύματος ἁγίου* (ii. 4), *δοκῆ* (iv. 1), *τετραχλισμμένα* (iv. 13), *κεφάλαιον* (viii. 1), *εὐπερίστατον* (xii. 1).

There are crucial passages in the Epistle which may be taken as tests of exegetical insight. Judged by these, the work before us is not so satisfactory. In ii. 9 the clause *ὅπως χάριτι θεοῦ, κ.τ.λ.* greatly puzzles the writer. He first suggests that it may be explanatory of "the suffering of death," and renders the verse: "Him who had been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, for the sake of suffering death,—in other words, that by the grace of God He might taste death for every man,—Him we now behold crowned with glory and honour." But sensible that this arrangement of the construction is liable to objection on account of "its interrupted and dislocated order," he is driven to adopt the more common rendering, "that by the grace of God *He may have tasted* death for every man." Of course, he is fully aware that it is very difficult to find a parallel to this rendering of *γείνηται*, as having a retrospective meaning. The simple solution that Christ was crowned with glory and honour in being appointed to die for others does not seem to have entered his mind as a possibility. His embarrassment, however, may be regarded as in favour of that solution.

On the word *προσερχόμεθα* (iv. 16), the writer remarks: "A great word in this Epistle. . . . *Let us be drawing nigh.* This is religion in exercise—a constant coming to God. It is the opposite to that aloofness from God, which is either the original condition of the fallen or else the beginning of apostasy in the Christian." Homiletically good, but the contrast in the mind of the writer of the Epistle is that between Christianity and Leviticalism.

Πρόδρομος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν (vi. 28). The comment is: "We might have expected the simple genitive after *πρόδρομος*. But the insertion of *ὑπὲρ* is reverential, and marks the disparity of the *πρόδρομος* and the followers." The writer of the Epistle really means to claim for Christians identity of privilege with Christ. They can follow where He goes. In contrast to the people of Israel under the Levitical system, who stood without while the high priest entered the holy place alone. The *ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν* qualifies *εἰσῆλθεν*, and refers to Christ's entering as priest in our behalf.

Θυμιατήριον in ix. 4 is taken to mean the altar of incense, but with hesitation, out of regard to the "difficulties" connected with that interpretation. "On the whole, with whatever sense of the difficulties, we must regard the *θυμιατήριον* as standing here for the altar of incense." It is not perceived that the writer of the Epistle meant to use the difficulty of defining the position of the altar of incense as a means of pressing home to his readers the defective character of the Levitical religion.

The radical defect was the existence of the veil, and the *aloofness* it symbolized.

These samples suffice to show the weak side of this work. Its author has not grasped the fact that the thoughts of the Epistle are not theological

commonplaces, but new truths freshly conceived and eloquently expounded for the benefit of readers whose minds are dominated by an antiquated religion and blind to the worth of Christianity.

A. B. BRUCE.

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