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E. A. ABBOTT'S "FROM LETTER TO SPIRIT."

From Letter to Spirit, An Attempt to reach through varying Voices the abiding Word. (London, A. & C. Black, 1903.)

THIS brilliant book is so full of good things that a reviewer can only attempt to draw attention to a very few points that most appeal to him individually. The book indeed offers various points of interest to various students. Dr. Abbott is the instructor of many classes, not of one class. To some, Dr. Abbott's work will chiefly appeal from the point of view of the authenticity and significance of the Fourth Gospel. To others it will be a revelation of critical *method*, for the book is not more remarkable for its striking hypotheses than it is for its careful and systematic collection of evidence. Yet others will find themselves fascinated by the valuable help it offers to the understanding of religious metaphor, in itself an important though neglected factor in the development, not only of the expression given to religious doctrine, but also of the contents of religious doctrine. Or again, students of Rabbinical literature will be moved to admiration by Dr. Abbott's ingenious use of Jewish sources as illustrations of New Testament phraseology and ideas. It is my own special interest in this last topic that has impelled me to call attention to some of the conclusions arrived at in this able essay. Dr. Abbott's recent series of volumes (soon happily to be followed by another) really constitute a new and enlightening commentary on some of the most important passages in the New Testament. And the commentary is equally illuminative of the Rabbinical passages quoted.

To take what many will regard as the most original and convincing of Dr. Abbott's suggestions, viz. his endeavour to show that underlying the phrase "to take up the cross" is a spiritual meaning differing from the commonly assumed one. Dr. Abbott starts with the contention that such a phrase would have had little meaning to Jewish ears in the time of Jesus. In the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, art. "cross," Dr. Kohler asserts, on the contrary, that the Roman crucifixion "was so familiar to the Jews in New Testament times that they spoke frequently of 'men carrying their crosses before them while going to be executed.'" But the only reference that can be given is to one special case, viz. the binding of Isaac; I know of no other reference. As Dr. Abbott argues: "After the first century, Jews might naturally point to the Sacrifice of Isaac as constituting *their* national and mediatorial offering, and might liken Isaac, carrying

the wood on which he was to be offered, to a man carrying his own cross. The simile would receive point from the persecutions undergone by the Jews under the Romans, and might be used pointedly in controversies with Christians. But no evidence has been alleged that the phrase was in use among Jews as a metaphor during the first century." (I have quoted this note both for its relevancy to the subject under discussion, and as an example of Dr. Abbott's careful scholarship and penetrating criticism.) But now comes Dr. Abbott's solution of the puzzle. The entry into the Kingdom of Heaven depended on the fulfilment of the command to love God. "The verbal repetition of this Commandment, somewhat like the repetition of the Creed with us, was a daily duty for the Jews and was called '*taking on oneself the yoke*,' sometimes called '*the yoke of the Law*,' '*of the Kingdom of Heaven*,' &c., but sometimes simply '*the yoke*.'" It was this *yoke* and not the *cross* that Jesus mentioned and meant; and Dr. Abbott gives further point to his suggestion by showing that the *yoke* was sometimes preparatory for martyrdom, as in the case of R. Akiba, and that Greeks as well as Romans frequently wrote of the *yoke* or *collar* worn by the condemned on the way to the cross, as if it were the *cross* itself. Dr. Abbott further throws a flood of light on similar metaphors, such as driving the plough. He says that the metaphor of the disciple represented, not as wearing the yoke, but as driving yoked oxen, seems to be uncommon in Jewish literature. But a slightly different form of metaphor is not uncommon. Thus Eccles. xii. 11 is explained, in great detail, of the Law as acting towards its disciples the part of the ox-goad; see T. Jer. Sanhedrin (ch. x halacha i) and Koheleth Rabba (loc. cit.). Finally, Dr. Abbott suggests that the Greek writers adopted the phrase "bear the cross" instead of "bear the yoke" in order to prevent confusion between the yoke of Christ and the yoke of the Law. It is always curious to recall in this connexion that every religion tends to regard itself as bearing the chart of freedom, and its predecessors or rivals as making men slaves under bondage. In Mishna Aboth, vi. 2 (Perek R. Meir), the Jewish law is claimed as freedom: "read not *charuth* (Exod. xxxii. 16), graven, but *cheruth*, freedom." No religion, we should rather say, can imply slavery when it produces willing and enthusiastic obedience. "This do, and thou shalt live," Luke x. 28, is almost identical with Levit. xviii. 5.

Turning now to one of the main subjects of the book: the Bath Kol (Daughter of the Voice) or "Voice from Heaven": we find even more that arrests attention and wins applause. To analyse this section would need the reproduction of far more than is fair. Suffice it to say that Dr. Abbott has collected a great mass of material (even

reprinting in German, as Appendix IV, the long list of references to Bath Kol from Pinner's edition of Berachoth) which he has classified with skill. Classification where the Bath Kol is concerned is a matter of no little difficulty, and it is rather a pity that, as he has succeeded in the harder task, he has not always attempted the easier task of giving clearly in his text the first-hand references for the quotations. The references are, however, to be found in the Appendix from Pinner. Dr. Abbott also pays deserved attention to the fine article on "Bat Kol" which Dr. Ludwig Blau contributed to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*. In the whole section, as remarked at the outset of this notice, different readers will find different points of interest. To some, the "heavenly voice" will chiefly appeal by reason of its mystical associations with theories of revelation and inspiration. To me, the most wonderful thing is the series of facts collected by Dr. Abbott in chapter III of this section: "Bath Kol on its Defence." Dr. Abbott quotes as the head line of § 1, "One does not trouble oneself about Bath Kol." The struggle that took place at the Jewish Synhedrin at the beginning of the second century A. D., was one of the greatest and bravest struggles recorded in human annals on behalf of the liberty of man's intellect and conscience. The Law, it was decided, was to be interpreted not by supernatural interventions (Bath Kol) but by "the vote of the majority," by man's own reason. And so throughout Dr. Abbott's book. It is full of learning, of originality, but above all of suggestiveness. He has read himself into the spirit of the ideas which he seeks to explain, and he has therefore very often arrived at the truth. On the Baptism, the Transfiguration (the "Dove"), he writes many valuable notes, in which besides the main issues many important side issues are treated. The principle on which he proceeds is described by him (p. viii) as "ascending from the *known* to the *unknown*. We *know* instances where varying Greek versions, those of the LXX, Aquila, Theodotion, and others, have ramified from one Hebrew Original, owing to erroneous translation. Tabulating these instances we can compare them with the Greek of the three Synoptists and ascertain whether they, too, deviate from one another in a manner corresponding to the deviations that we have found in the Old Testament. If they do, there results a probability that the Synoptic deviations also proceed from mis-translation of Hebrew." This principle Dr. Abbott applies with skill, and if he does so with less success and moderation in some cases, yet, as it seems to me, he attains to considerable success in a very large number of other instances. Sometimes, as is inevitable, one or other aspect of the truth may be missed. This is the case with the following passage (p. 412): "In Hebrew and Jewish

literature, and in any early Christian literature based on Jewish tradition, legend would probably be very largely based on plays upon words, on interchange of similar letters, and on consequent confusions, corruptions, and conflation, resulting in amplifications of the Original to an extent unparalleled in Western literature." All this is true, but a good deal of legend of this class has not arisen from the text, but has been adopted from other sources and then more or less ingeniously wedded to the text. A large part of the series of Abraham and Isaac legends, for instance, are of heathen and Islamic origin; then the Jewish homilist tacked them somehow on to the text of Genesis. No doubt Dr. Abbott's canon is true within a very extended range, especially where earlier haggadic expansions are concerned, but it would not be safe to apply the canon too consistently.

I am parting with Dr. Abbott's book after giving a very inadequate account of the wealth and excellence of its contents. Page after page scintillates with brilliant points. It is a book to read and re-read; it is a well to dip into again and again with sure hope of finding a pure and refreshing stream of information, guidance, and inspiration. Dr. Abbott has clearly relied a good deal on secondary sources; but he has so carefully verified and examined his materials, he has applied to them so penetrating and sound a criticism, that his book is distinguished by its accuracy in details. Dr. Abbott stands forth as a conspicuous example of the salvation which lies in precision of thought and exactness of method.

I. ABRAHAMS.

DAVIDSON'S "OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY."

Old Testament Prophecy. By the late Prof. A. B. DAVIDSON, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D. Edited by Prof. J. A. PATTERSON, D.D. (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 10s. 6d., 1903.)

"*Old Testament Prophecy*," writes Prof. Patterson in his course of a sympathetic Preface, "was Dr. Davidson's favourite study, and the final results of forty years' strenuous thinking on this profoundly interesting subject are contained in the present volume. The very first winter he was professor, Dr. Davidson gave several lectures on Prophecy, and he was still busy with the same subject when, in the end of January, 1902, his work was suddenly ended by death." In common with Robertson Smith he was responsible for the great change that has come over the attitude of the churches in Scotland