

## Paul's Latest Biographer.

*Spiritual Development of St. Paul.* By the Rev. George Matheson, D. D.  
New York: A. D. F. Randolph & Co. Pp. 324.

Words cannot too highly praise this new book on St. Paul for the stimulating quality of its thought and the self-convincing weight of much of its impressive argument. It is emphatically a new book, new in method and object. The purpose is to trace the inner biography of the Apostle Paul. The method is to draw the materials for this study not from historical memorials which may be available but from the Apostle's own writings. The book thus becomes in some sense an autobiography in which the task of the editor is merely to gather, arrange in orderly fashion, connect and discuss the various and fragmentary elements of the material which throw light upon the subject. Now while every biographer of Paul has done this in a disconnected and imperfect way, it is the feature of Dr. Matheson's book that this object has been foremost and the accomplishment of it reasonably full, comprehensive and satisfactory. Every subsequent biographer will have to reckon with this book. It will modify more or less profoundly all our conceptions of the man, and its line of thought will be gone over with carefulness, perhaps to correct and dislodge some of Dr. Matheson's favorite ideas, but with increasing confidence in the fruitfulness of the line of thought itself as well as with resulting impulses to apply the method to other Scripture characters. What possibilities in a "spiritual development of St. John," following him through the Apocalypse, the Gospel and the Epistles!

A brief outline of Dr. Matheson's discussion must suffice to hint at its rich fullness and suggestiveness. The peculiarity of Paul's elementary Christian experience is that he began with a vision of the divine Christ not with a personal relation to the historic earthly Jesus. Hence Christianity from the first came to him with a sense of exaltation. But conjoined with this is a sense of personal humiliation, the "thorn" which is a physical weakness probably of the eye-sight. It is in his attitude toward this "thorn," the religious experience which it involves, that the key to his spiritual development is found. Thrice he besought the Lord to remove it but in vain. Here are three great spiritual struggles hinted at. First, he was overcome with a sense of the disgrace of

this "thorn," which according to the Jewish idea was a sign of moral defect. Hence he fled away into Arabia and there sought to do penance, but found that the law would not produce righteousness. He falls back on the faith of Abraham whom God made strong in spite of his physical weakness. Thus Paul as a missionary of the new faith gained strength and began his first preaching. Second, Paul came into contact with the original apostles and learned of them the life of the historic Jesus. At once in the presence of this meek and lofty character Paul was smitten with a sense of personal sin. He abhors the flesh, and the circumcision in the flesh which cannot save, becomes an ascetic and gains strength through the hope of a new and renovated world when Christ shall come a second time. Third, the development of Paul's non-Jewish views, his giving up of circumcision, provokes the opposition of his brethren. They attack his apostolic authority and point to his "thorn." Hence his third struggle out of which he rises into the consciousness of a present fellowship with Christ in sufferings and learns that his work is to follow Christ in suffering and in the ministry of reconciliation through suffering. This glorying in suffering as a means to helping others into light marks the height of Paul's achievement. Henceforth follows only the working out of this great thought as it is modified by circumstances. The chief of these circumstances is the introduction of Paul to the centre of the Roman Empire. There he realizes that the power of Christianity in the world is a power to suffer and to enter into sympathy with the suffering. Christianity is universal because the religion of sacrifice. This applies itself in Paul's new conception of the universe, God sovereign because serving; of the family, man the head because serving his wife; in social relations the Christian slave remaining a slave because thus best helping the world. The glory of Christianity, as finally conceived of by Paul in the pastoral epistles, shows him at the last to have reached a point the farthest removed from asceticism; Christianity is the world's servant, man's natural rights are sacred. Thus Paul beginning with the conception of Christ as divine and Christianity as something separated from secular life comes at last to see the Christ in his divine representative humanity and Christianity as in its truest sense the gospel of the secular life.

These propositions, illustrated and enforced by many striking interpretations of passages from Paul's epistles, contain the gist of the book. The growth of his thought is shown to be dependent on the growth of his personal life. The problems of his own spirit are solved and their solution wrought into his system of religious thinking. Instead of a consistent and essentially unchanged series of ideas we find a constantly changing, progressing insight into truth. Paul is inconsistent with himself simply because he is growing. All this is very new and strange to our ideas of the great Apostle. The question is, Can such a representation be true? No one can fail to be charmed by Dr. Matheson's enthusiasm and fascinated by his brilliant arguments. The feeling, however, cannot but be aroused at times that all is too brilliant, that the author proves too much, is led astray by his thesis and sees arguments for it where no one would suspect them. The book ought to be read by every one who is interested in Paul. It is a remarkable contribution to biblical theology and to the psychological study of biblical character. No more striking and intensely interesting book has appeared in many years.