UNSPOKEN TESTIMONIES.

By the Rev. Henry L. Bleby.

THERE is an exceptionally interesting line of study, rich in suggestion for thought, which presents itself to us if we put aside, for the moment, the words spoken by contemporaries of our Lord and by His Apostles, to investigate the teaching, the view point, and the beliefs which are implied in the attitude they adopted and the actions they took in various instructive instances. The evidence which these afford us is not without a peculiar value of its own. It is free from that inadequacy inevitably appertaining to any expression, in mere human speech, of things transcending our human limitations. It does not offer ambiguity and uncertainty of language as an opportunity to those who will to "wrest . . . Scriptures" (2 Pet. iii. 16). It is to a large extent free from complication by questions of textual criticism. It is not as readily obnoxious to the attacks of Higher Critical controversy as are arguments which depend directly upon terms of expression. Further, we hope that the following examples will show that the results are singularly cogent and convincing. We must notice that unspoken testimony is most frequently also quite undesigned.

Testimony Concerning the Miraculous.

Let us select as our first illustrative examples the actions of our Lord's enemies upon certain important occasions. The opposition of the Jewish authorities to the Prophet from Galilee developed a new and acute phase with the controversy which arose when Jesus wrought His miracle at Bethesda on the Sabbath day (John v. 16). Are we not at once confronted with the question: What did this activity of the rulers of Jerusalem mean, unless a miraculous healing really had occurred? Is not their sudden access of fresh vindictive opposition more eloquent than any protestation, more conclusive than any verbal argument, in confirming the miraculous story which precedes it? Furthermore, the deputation of "the Scribes which came down from Jerusalem" (Mark iii. 22), who from that time with hostile intent dogged the footsteps of the Christ, seem to have been intent at first upon this now prominent question of Sabbath

observance, and to have taken the earliest opportunity on their arrival in Galilee to open their attack upon this line. They seized an immediate opportunity presented by the action of Christ's disciples in plucking and husking the ears of corn (Matt. xii. 1–8); and this was followed by a test case in which they deliberately challenged Him in the synagogue, as to the propriety of His exercising healing powers on the Sabbath (Matt. xii. 10). What an admission of His miracles is implied in the fact of this challenge, and how far is such an admission from their intentions! Nor is it the challenge alone. Their whole action on this occasion, and their plan for bringing an accusation against Him, depended upon a knowledge that He did indeed exercise such powers. Their watch was to see if He would, not if He could, heal. Here we find that their attitude affords us another altogether convincing proof that the miraculous accompaniments of His mission were not the exaggerations of favourably disposed advocates, nor the superstitions of an excited and uncritical audience, but realities which compelled the unspoken acknowledgment of hostile authorities.

The High Priests and Rulers of the Jews, when negotiating with Pilate, carefully guarded their speech and disdainfully termed our Lord "ἐκεῖνος ὁ πλάνος" (Matt. xxvii. 63). But the fact that they sought for authority to seal the tomb and place a guard furnishes most conclusive evidence of a disturbing consciousness that in dealing with the Nazarene they were liable to meet occurrences beyond the ordinary and natural.

We submit that all this is valid evidence of the most reliable sort for the miracles of our Lord. Moreover it is contemporary evidence, carrying us right back beyond the possibility of any allegation that the miraculous element is a later accretion to the Gospel narrative, growing from the fond adulations of devoted reverence.

Concerning some Points in the Character of Jesus.

Let us now look at some small incidents in which the actions of those who are connected with Jesus Christ are evidence for points in His wonderful and beautiful character.

The hesitation of John the Baptist in being the ministrant of baptism to our Lord (Matt. iii. 14)—a hesitation and witness occurring before the descent of the Holy Dove, which first revealed to

John the Messiahship of Jesus (John i. 33)—must have arisen from some knowledge of His holiness of character. It therefore throws a flood of light back upon those earlier years of which no account is given us in the Gospels. Most impressive is the unpremeditated attitude of the great Preacher of Repentance to the Sinless One.

The request of the man who came to Jesus with a mistaken plea for judgment between himself and his brother (Luke xii. 13) seems to certainly imply a public reputation for acumen and justice in dealing.

The over-hasty reply of Peter with regard to the payment by our Lord of the "δίδραχμα" (Matt. xvii. 24–27) must surely represent what seemed to him the obvious conclusion from our Lord's habitual attitude towards the temple and religious observances. Very often the record of gainsaying and opposition by the religious authorities so occupy the forefront of the Gospel narrative that they preclude an adequate view of things we would fain have studied more deeply. On this account there is very great value even in the record of Peter's mistake, since it shows us what impression was being made upon those who saw the ordinary daily exercise of the Master's attitude towards the religious organizations of His day.

It is possible that the dispatch, by Martha, of a messenger to Jesus informing Him of the illness of Lazarus may have been prompted largely by the hope of a miraculous cure, but it certainly seems to indicate a knowledge that there was deep and understanding sympathy in One whose presence was longed and called for in a time of stress and anxiety.

There can be no doubt that Zacchæus knew something of Jesus by repute: otherwise he would hardly have taken so much trouble to obtain a sight of Him. The events which took place in the house of Zacchæus may indicate some elements in this public reputation. It is clear that in his profession of charitable beneficence and restoration (Luke xix. 8) it was his intention to gratify his Guest; and we must conclude that he knew the character of Jesus to be such as would be pleased by altruism and reparation.

We see then in the above, wordless witness to the Holiness, Justice, Piety, Sympathy, Altruism and Equity of the Man of Nazareth.

Leaving the Gospels, let us now take further examples chosen

from the events recorded in the book of "Acts." This book furnishes us with evidence of the manner in which the Apostles understood the commission given to them and the Church: how they exercised the gifts, prerogatives and graces with which they were endowed. It is a divinely inspired commentary on Matthew xvi. 19, xviii. 18; John xx. 23. The powers conveyed on these occasions are seen in practical application in the hands of the Apostles themselves. The actions taken by them under various circumstances bear testimony to their beliefs and attitude of mind. We shall do well therefore to consider these with the greatest care.

CONCERNING THE DIVINITY AND THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

We find it recorded in the first chapter of Acts that in the interval between the ascension of our Lord and the day of Pentecost, the thought occurred to St. Peter that it would be proper for the assembled disciples to appoint a successor who should fill the vacant position in the Apostolic band. (It is not necessary, for our present purpose, to enter upon any discussion concerning the vexed question as to the rightfulness of their action upon this occasion. It is sufficient that as a matter of fact such an election took place.) The most arresting feature of the transaction appears to be that, when proceeding to find an occupant for one vacancy, *they made no attempt to fill the greatest vacancy of all.* On the basis of a Rationalistic or a Unitarian view of the person of Jesus there can be no satisfactory explanation of the omission by the Apostles (assembled for the very purpose of election) to take the obvious course of appointing a new leader for the bereaved band in place of the Carpenter of Nazareth. If we acknowledge that they apprehended the true divinity of the Master; if we believe that they had experienced "many infallible proofs" of His actual bodily resurrection, so that there was not any real vacancy because the risen Christ is the Head of His Church; if we accept the story of the visible bodily ascension into heaven: then the inaction of the Apostles was inevitable, and so natural that we are in danger of overlooking its vast significance. But if, on the other hand, we suppose that the Apostles knew no divinity in Jesus Christ, that they had not indubitable evidence of His return from the tomb: then their attitude upon this occasion would become an insoluble enigma. Here, then, within two months of the crucifixion, before

there could be time for any alleged accretions to the historical narrative, before any possibility of a Pauline—or other—development modifying an earlier simpler non-miraculous story, we see that the convictions of the original witnesses are definite and in accord, and so unhesitating that neither the possibility of a successor to the Master, nor the idea of the existence of a vacancy occurred to any one of the assembled company.

Concerning Direct Spiritual Work.

At the present juncture, when the relative importance of "Social Service" on the one hand, and direct evangelization and spiritual edification on the other hand, is a matter of much debate, there seems to be a peculiar importance in studying the lesson which may be found in the action of the Apostles in delegating to "The Seven" those duties which were concerned with the administration of church funds and relief of the poor. That the Apostles considered "Social Service" a necessary part of church work is clear from the provision they made for it to be effectively carried out. That they regarded it as a high grade of Christian activity cannot be gainsaid when we note the type of men to whom it was entrusted. That they even recognized it as a definitely, though indirectly, spiritual ministration, we gather from the choice for these duties of men "full of the Holy Ghost." Yet, in contrast with this, the action of the Apostles is not less eloquent than the words of the passage (Acts vi. 2) in teaching us that to "give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" is a higher commission, which we should not do well to subordinate to its accessories of bodily provision for the needs, or (softly be it spoken) even the amusements of the brethren.

Concerning the Priesthood.

We must now consider the attitude of the Apostles in its bearing upon a question of fundamental importance to our view of the Christian ministry. The subject is suggested by the startling and effective argument put forward by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. viii. 4), that the Aaronic priesthood still occupied the ground during Apostolic times, to the exclusion of the possibility of any other sacrificing priesthood upon earth: even rendering impossible the mundane exercise of such an office by the Divine

Head of the Church Himself. It becomes then of the greatest moment that we should investigate the attitude of the Apostles to the priestly functions and the position of the Aaronic line during the period covered by the inspired record. (We are tempted to pursue the question further, and to ask whether even the destruction of the Temple, and the suspension of the Mosaic sacrificial ritual, could so far modify the situation as to make possible a second valid hierarchy, even in later times. But this lies beyond the scope of our present considerations.)

Perhaps we should be unfair if we insisted on an argument that the continued frequent use of the title "ἱερεύς" was anything more than a conforming to popular usage in the term employed. Yet it is not without suggestion that the functions and exclusive rights of the priesthood still belonged to those who were thus described.

What first claims our attention in this connection is, that the Apostles, in common with the other members of the primitive Jerusalem Church, made use of the Temple and its ministrations for their daily worship at the Jewish hours of prayer. (Acts ii. 42. Note the use of the article, ii. 46, iii. 1.)

We must not take it for granted that the recognition of the High Priest and Chief Priests, by the Apostles, when brought before them for trial, was more than an acceptance of their position as *de facto* judges; although we are ourselves convinced that it did go beyond this. But when we turn to examine the attitude of St. Paul to the High Priest, at his trial (Acts xxiii. 2–5), the case is very different, for we find that while administering a rebuke to his unjust judge, he afterwards apologizes to the same man as High Priest. It would be wholly disingenuous exegesis which could find in this anything but an acceptance of a still existing authority and sanctity, belonging to the then holder of the High Priestly office.

Our most convincing evidence in this connection is afforded by the incidents recorded in Acts xxi. 19–27. Here we find St. Paul, St. James, and a number of the "πρεσβυτέροι" of the Church at Jerusalem, all in agreement in availing themselves of the sacerdotal functions of the Temple priests. It seems impossible that the course here pursued should have been taken by men who knew themselves to be "ἱερεῖς," the successors of and substitutes for the Aaronic priesthood. Neither would the situation harmonize well with even

a position of equal and temporarily overlapping co-ordinate functions, even were it possible to entertain such an idea. We cannot escape from the dilemma by suggestion of latent powers which should come into full activity with later developments; for whatever of priesthood is (according to sacerdotal theories) necessarily associated with the Lord's Supper and the rite of Ordination was certainly in exercise during the whole of this period. Since we see, therefore, that the Apostles by their attitude and action bear unspoken testimony, more convincing than any verbal statement, to the continued validity of the Aaronic priesthood, unless we frankly admit the truth that Christian priests are "πρεσβυτέροι," not "ἱερεῖς," we are shut down to the following alternatives: either we must accept the theory of a dual, co-existing, valid hierarchy upon earth (with all the difficulties this involves, including a rejection of the teaching of the epistle to the Hebrews), or we must try to explain away somehow the hiatus at the commencement, which of itself is quite fatal to any later validity of a sacerdotal order.

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THE SOURCE OF POWER.

SYMBOLS OF THE HOLY GHOST. Outline addresses by Canon W. H. Cole, M.A., Vicar of Aston. Birmingham: *Midland Educational Co.*, 6*d*.

Birmingham is holding this year a "Mission of the Holy Spirit." These outline addresses by the Vicar of Aston have been published to give suggestions and helps to those who desire to speak or preach on the subject. The symbols dealt with are Fire, Dove, Water and Dew, Oil, Wind, and Seal. The teaching is clear, vigorous and scriptural, and the appeals are truly pointed and searching. Illustrations from nature and the Bible abound. The country has no greater need to-day than that the Church should experience a second Pentecost. Clergy, therefore, who awaken their people to a consciousness of the work and Person of the Holy Spirit on the lines of Canon Cole's pamphlet are doing a great work, and there is no need to wait until Whitsuntide before speaking on the subject. We recommend these addresses for an autumn or Lent course.

F. M.