

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

of the 18 occurrences of LORD God and some other variations as consciously made, and the other variants as in 'nearly,' if not quite, all cases due to transcriptional error.

If the preceding considerations are duly weighed, the conclusion which will commend itself to judicial minds must surely be that the attack made upon the reliability of the MT in the matter of the Divine Names in Gen. 1-Ex. 6 has failed. The claim made that the witness of the LXX, where it differs from the MT, should outweigh the witnesses on the other side has not been substantiated. On the contrary the unreliability of the LXX text has been shewn and the substantial accuracy of the MT has been brought out. So far from the basis of the whole documentary theory having been "seriously shaken," it stands unshaken and I believe unshakable.

J. BATTERSBY HARFORD.

JESUS AND ART.

LOWELL in one of his poems tells the tale of a prophet who, feeling that God had forsaken him, set out for a certain holy hill in the belief that there if anywhere upon earth His presence still lingered, and on the hillside he prayed for a sign and listened for an answer to his prayer. But there was no burst of thunder, and not even a murmur stirred the air. Only the tuft of moss before him opened, and a tender violet appeared ; and at the sight of it he remembered that ere he entered on his journey his child had run to him, holding in her hand a flower just like this, which she had plucked beside his very door. He had no need, therefore, to fare away to a far-off holy hill to see the homely flower, or to seek the Presence whose glory stood over the threshold.

The prophet had fallen into the ancient error of thinking

that in order to believe in God he must needs see signs and wonders and come before His presence in some specially appointed meeting-place apart. If he had only trusted in his nature, as the poet says, and learned to look for God in the things of home and at hand, he would have seen that God is revealed in the known and not hidden in the unknown, and is to be found of all them that seek Him where they are.

Now it is a signal part of the witness of Jesus, meaning by witness not merely his few reported sayings but his whole attitude in silence as well as in speech, in life as well as in teaching, that God is such that He is to be found and known not through any vastness or through any vacancy spread betwixt Himself and the soul of man, but in and through all things that move the soul to love. Jesus looked with the same eye upon nature as upon humanity, the eye with the long deep gaze in it before which nature could not but unfold like a flower before the sun, the eye of the heart

“That watches and receives.”

Amid the labours of his life it was his wont to turn aside and look upon nature not as a pilgrim only, or a passing guest, but as one at home in the meadows and among the mountains and there where the silences and far horizons could be deeply felt and could feed “the happy stillness of the mind.” Hence it was not merely out of the midst of a single bush that burned with fire upon a sacred mount apart that Jesus caught the vision of his God, but in the common flowers of the field, and in the fowls of the air, and even in the sparrow falling to the ground.

One of the marked features of his personality and one peculiarly his own when he steps upon the stage of history is his ingrained habit of going away into desert places and to the heights of mountains.

“How use doth breed a habit in a man.”

Thus he is no sooner baptized and conscious of his task than he is led up of the Spirit into the desert that there in the solitude and space he might think out the mighty apocalypse which had rent the heavens and revealed him to himself : and scarcely has he begun to preach and to heal and to cast out demons before it is recorded that "in the morning, a great while before day, he rose up, and went out and departed to a desert place," and again, so rapid is his early fame, and the popular excitement so intense that he must needs escape from it all for the time being : "He could no longer openly enter a town, but stayed in the country, in desert places." And on a later occasion, under the stress of a similar necessity, he says to his disciples : "Come you yourselves apart to some desert spot, and rest a little while." In every case, as it will be observed, it was an inner need or purpose which impelled him to withdraw at the bidding of a spirit which craved the solitudes of nature almost as it craved the souls of men. May we not recall in this connexion what Wordsworth says of Nature.

"A Power

That is the visible quality and shape,
 And image of right reason ; that matures
 Her processes by steadfast laws ;
trains
 To meekness and exalts by humble faith ;
 Holds up before the mind intoxicate
 With present objects, and the busy dance
 Of things that pass away, a temperate show
 Of objects that endure."

Mark and Luke both relate that he "there prayed." Sometimes, worn in body, and sometimes disquieted in soul, it was his to regain the power which had passed from him, and to receive

"Authentic tidings of invisible things,
 And central peace subsisting at the heart
 Of endless agitation."

And, frequently, for the same besetting need or purpose of the spirit "He goeth up into the mountain." Luke mentions that he went out into the mountain to pray and "he continued all night in prayer to God." That was just before the choosing of the Twelve, and it would seem that either before or after some such decisive moment of his ministry, Jesus was in the practice of taking to the heights. "Great things are done when men and mountains meet," says Blake, and nowhere is the truth of that so evident as in the life before us. The mountains, like the wilderness, were no small factor in his growth as in the ripe product of his grace and truth.

Thus it is profoundly significant in this connexion to find it stated—by Luke alone—that at the close of his career, "during the days he was teaching in the temple; but during the nights leaving (the temple) he used to go and lodge on the hill."

Wordsworth says that the language of the hills,

"Aids the thoughts,
However multitudinous to move
With order and relation."

and of one, a herdsman, whom he knew, that

"Early had he learned
To reverence the volume that displays
The mystery, the life which cannot die;
But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith,
All things responsive to the writing, there
Breathed immortality, revolving life,
And greatness still revolving; infinite;
There littleness was not; the least of things
Seemed infinite, and there his spirit shaped
Her prospects, nor did he believe—he *saw*."

Now of Jesus, too, going out, as his custom was, to the mountains at times so fraught with destiny, may it not be said that there his spirit shaped her prospects and he saw? Faith rose to the pitch or point of vision. And things,

“all things” were revealed to him of his Father and power was with him to reveal. Lesser things as well as greater, the flowers arrayed in beauty at his feet, the fields white to harvest, the wild birds tended in their flight, and the sparrows unforgotten in their fall, such things as these no less than the “mysteries” of the kingdom and the spirits of the blest. There is no trace in him as in so many of his followers of any hiding of his face from the life of nature for fear that its beauty, its wonder, or its power would steal away his heart from God. No one who tries to appreciate the witness of Jesus as a whole can charge him with gloom or asceticism, or with a form of piety that moves men to forsake the body and flee from the dear life of earth. “I cannot read the New Testament,” says Symonds, “the *Imitatio Christi*, the *Confessions of St. Augustine*, and the *Pilgrim’s Progress* without feeling that Christianity in its origin, and as understood by its chief champions was, and is, ascetic.”

Now it must be admitted that many of the followers of Christ, and even his chief champions, so to name them, have been ascetics, pursuing the narrow way as they perceived it, intent upon an aspect of the truth, as if it were the whole, and often in their haste desiring naught except the fire from heaven which he himself refused to bid. Consumed with their own zeal rather than with his, a zeal to destroy, they forgot to fulfil, thus wrongly dividing, or giving a wrong direction to, the word of truth, and meriting the rebuke of the early writer who describes them as “men who prohibit marriage and insist on abstinence from foods, which God created for believing men who understand the truth to partake of with thanksgiving. For everything that God has created is good and nothing is to be refused so it be received with thanksgiving, for then it is consecrated through the word of God and through prayer.”

This great utterance—even supposing Paul is not the author of it—is the utterance of a primitive Christian who was of the same mind as Paul and of the same mind as Jesus himself. It were enough, perhaps, to recall a single passage like Mark vii. 19, “thus he pronounced all food clean.” But there is more than a single passage or many passages, there is his whole witness in silence as in speech, in practice as in preaching, in what lies in the background as well as in what appears in the foreground of his Gospel. For the word of truth as it flows in parable and precept from his anointed lips and from the deep breathings of his spirit covers and enshrines the whole of life without and within. Thus it is God Who clothes the grass of the field, and Who makes the sun arise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. He is the Lord of heaven and of earth. Heaven is His throne and earth the footstool of His feet. An able writer has said that “almost all Christ’s moral sayings might be paralleled or illustrated by something in Hebrew or Jewish literature. The praise of the beauty of flowers cannot apparently be so paralleled. Of all Christ’s sayings it is the most original.” “Consider” (Luke has “fix your mind upon”) “the lilies of the field how they grow! They toil not, neither do they spin; Yet I say unto you, even Solomon in all his splendour was never robed like one of these.” “In the first century,” as the same writer says, “it must have seemed a paradox of paradoxes that the glory of Solomon’s clothing is not so great as that of a flower.” Even yet its “marvellous originality” is but little understood. The truth is that Christ was long before his time in this creative utterance, and it would be possible to show that it was only gradually, “here a little and there a little,” that the arts began to catch up with his profoundly spiritual view of nature. A sense or sensibility like his, so fresh, spontaneous and deep,

must have been in him from his youth, and have grown with the vast conceptions and ideals which more and more became his own as he strove with them in lonely places and in watches of the night and day. And, perhaps, one might here suggest that a poem like *The Prelude* of Wordsworth, with its finished picture of the growth of a soul through fellowship with nature, has that in it which may help one most of all to appreciate something of the inspiration and the discipline by which the spirit of nature, manifestly an abiding power in Jesus' life, far more so even than in that of any Hebrew sage or poet, acted on his soul and wrought in him the passions which strengthen character, and the pieties which exalt it.

Jesus has often been presented as an enthusiast, almost indeed, as a fanatic concerned about the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and about the last things, but little if at all about the present time and tide in the affairs of men. He was no reformer of society of the usual or even of the prophetic type. He made no attempt, for example, by agitation or revolt to change the form of government which hung like a millstone around the neck of his people. He moved in another plane of things, and, as one has said, "he roused a spirit which moved in another plane than that of resistance or submission to imperial power." But to say that Jesus was absorbed in a kingdom and a crisis that lay within the future, and within the sovereign will of God alone, and that his "ethics," is only a sort of code in keeping with the passing stage or interval preceding this event is strangely to overlook, for one thing, and it is but one of many, those serene and songful words of which "consider the lilies" is the chief, the keynote, as it were, of them all, which express his sheer delight in "the mighty world of eye and ear," and in the present personal reign of the Father, Lord of heaven and earth. As this is not the time

or the place to discuss the difficult problem of the kingdom it may be enough to say that no solution of it will be found by ignoring a group of sayings which forms such a vital and original part of the recorded thought of Christ. His thought is too free, imaginative, spiritual to be forced within the limits of a single doctrine of the future ; and indeed it is far less his thought that is on trial now as the thought of those who try to interpret parts of it as if they were the whole and who turn its flower of poetry into the dust of prose.

The truth is, and one may not forget it, that Jesus brought the poet's eye to nature, the poet's insight or his second sight, and what he saw he sang with the poet's truthfulness and charm of speech. Everywhere he touched things common till they rose to touch the spheres. He shot his teaching through with pictures drawn from the loveliness of a world whose life he loved like his own in God. With a rare understanding he drew nature in and made it one of the strings of the instrument upon which he discoursed the music of the gospel. And this was nature not only as a "realm of pleasance" close at hand with its dayspring and its rain, its seasons and their fruits and flowers, its trees and the birds lodging in the branches thereof, but also as a realm of solitude far withdrawn, of desert places and mountainous retreats : "Regions consecrate to oldest time!" It was with the same eye he looked upon the things beneath him and looked up to the hills above him. It was with the same mind "steeped in feeling" he went through the cornfields and resorted oftentimes to the wilderness. He was equally at home in the near and the far. Hence, surely, it was from no mere ascetic impulse that he betook himself so often to the solitudes like one content to live the silent life secluded and alone. The solitudes might be his favourite haunt of prayer, but prayer was a task to him and a tryst

as real and urgent as his preaching to the poor. The one was as much a choice of his spirit as the other, and so, apparently, were the spots of earth appropriate to each. Both by speech and action, then, by his witness here "in the midst," and there "by Himself alone," Jesus shed upon nature a new light, full of warmth and colour, and such as has little in common with the pale and ghostly light of asceticism.

It would, indeed, be true to say that nature became a new world from the day that Jesus dwelt among its trodden and untrodden ways, and found it everywhere so friendly to his spirit, instinct with a life that mingled with his own, and that helped him both to apprehend and body forth his thought of God. The tidings which it brought were all of one with the tidings which he came to proclaim. It was one of the "all things" handed over to him by his Father to reveal. Its message, therefore, was a joyous message, like a repetition of the first creative word "it was very good."

How very good is shown by this that in all that he beheld

"From this green earth,"

in the seed growing up spontaneously, and in the blade and the ear and full corn in the ear, in the bloom of the flower and the bounty round about the creatures, as well as in the ministries of sun and sea and those shrines among the hills, Jesus recognized and adored the same Spirit of beauty and beneficence Whose presence he cherished and confessed in the depths of his soul. If he gazed upon the things he beheld with the long deep gaze of which he spoke he reaped the harvest of it in that intense love, or, that open vision of the spiritual life of nature which was not only a foretaste of, but the active participation in the creative joy of the Father. And one of his ways of revealing to men the Father Whom he knew was by teaching them to inquire of nature

and by inquiring to admire, until the spiritual life within, the love and the loveliness alike, kindled in their hearts a kindred joy to his own. Only by fixing the mind, by gazing intently, by giving oneself up without thought of self to "watch and receive" is it possible for men to enter into and abide in Jesus' joyous experience. No one can be said to "listen to his voice" unless he hears the ringing cry of joy in such words as these: "even Solomon in all his glory was never arrayed like one of these." "If God so clothes the grass which blooms in the field to-day, how much more shall he clothe you." "Not one of them will fall to the ground without the knowledge of your Father. Fear not, therefore, you are worth far more than sparrows."

There is a charm in these words, a glamour as of a newborn day upon the sea which recalls what Sir Philip Sidney says about the poet: "He beginneth not with obscure definitions which must blur the margent with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulness; but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well-enchancing skill of Music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner."

It is sometimes said that our Lord did not argue, but simply made assertions and left them to make their own impression on the mind. But it is to be observed that there is a striking mode of argument which he was wont to use, and which nature in a sense supplied. Only one profoundly sympathetic to the spiritual life of nature could ever have made such use of it. From time to time in conversation and address he begins with some phase of truth upon the plane of nature open and familiar to his hearers, and from this being admitted, he proceeds to a higher phase which thus, by comparison, becomes intelligible and clear. On

one occasion being asked "is it right to heal on the sabbath day?" he replied by asking a question which allowed of but one reply: "What man shall there be of you, that shall have one sheep, and if this fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?" And from this he passes to the truth which follows of necessity, "How much more is a man worth than a sheep. Thus it is right to do good on the sabbath day."

And as he used this simple but conclusive form of thought to unfold his doctrine of the worth of man, and of man's relationship to man, so he applied it to express the truth about the Father and His Fatherhood. "Look at the wild birds, they sow not, neither do they reap . . . and yet your Father feeds them. How much more will He feed you who are worth more than birds?" "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings? Yet not even one of them is forgotten by God. Fear not, you are worth far more than sparrows." "Look how the lilies grow, they neither toil nor spin, and yet what a glory is theirs, nay, look but at the common grass in the field, its texture like the lilies', finer far than any silken thread of man's device, its swift and fruitful growth across the naked soil until the soil is clothed with pastures green, and is meet for the various use of man. Now if God so clothes the grass in the field . . . will He not much more clothe you?" The argument is sound, it is lofty common sense, it is profound wisdom, part of the wisdom in which he grew through long communings with the life without him and within. And it is worth noting here that it is the same argument which men have adopted, and been driven to adopt, by reason or by faith or both, when they have turned now like Mungo Park from the depths of woe, and now like Wordsworth from the heights of wonder and felt "A Presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts."

Mungo Park relates that on one occasion he considered his fate as certain, and that he had no alternative but to lie down and die. "At this moment, painful as my reflections were, the extraordinary beauty of a small moss in fructification irresistibly caught my eye. Can that Being (thought I) Who planted, watered, and brought to perfection in this obscure part of the world, a thing which appears of so small importance look with unconcern upon the situation and sufferings of creatures formed after His own image? Reflections like these would not allow me to despair. I started up and disregarding both hunger and fatigue travelled forward assured that relief was at hand; and I was not disappointed."

The argument "how much more" is one of those lucid openings into the mind of Christ which disclose the order and direction of his thought, his way of thinking things together, relating them to one another and to the unity within which they fall. The world in which he dwelt was not a world only visited at times, or haunted here and there by an elusive power, but was everywhere and at all times the abode of the one Father who is such that he adorns the flower and the field, and gives of His bounty to the creatures great and small, and reveals all this to the "babes." To Jesus moving about so freely, and without fear like a child in the home, God moved in no mysterious but ever in a luminous and friendly way His wonders to perform. Hence it would be a mistake from Jesus' point of view to think that God is present mainly in the unfamiliar and remote, in miracles and portents and rendings of the heavens, in secrets and in sources patent to the few. Since, in truth, there is not a spot of earth where the seed is sown and grows apace, or where the sparrow falls but is sacred to His presence, and if only men have eyes to see and ears to hear, there is not a blade of grass but speaks the ancient oracle :

“ Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

Thus by this homely but original mode of thought Jesus cleared away a mass of cloud and darkness from the face of God, and the problems of the wise and learned vanished in the visions of the simple-minded. Men have been wont to think of God as a God Who hides Himself, and have paid respect to priesthoods and the like who have sought His presence in sequestered shrines and in “ dim religious light.” As if God does not clothe Himself with light as with a garment, and is not fain to reveal Himself, and as if God is not Love, and must needs be loved and known. The truth is that men are upon a wrong track with their priesthoods and agnosticisms and their dark misgivings of His “ divine simplicity.” Whereas in going the way of Jesus’ thought it is theirs to begin with the manifestations of God rather than His mysteries, and instead of peering here and there for glimpses of the vast enigma to catch the shining of His countenance in the beauty and bounty of the present world.

And, what if there are tares among the wheat and thorns that choke the seed, and scorching heat, and what if there are tempests beating down the houses built on the sand, and falling towers that kill, and all the evils that afflict the bodies and the souls of men, and even if “ an enemy hath done this,” yet things innumerable as these, and Jesus did not fail to observe them, failed to disturb the order of his thought or break its inward harmony. Just because there was no unkindness in his heart and never a breath of malice or of hate, he refused to believe that this or that was any stain upon the radiance of his Father’s love. “ If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father give the Holy Spirit from heaven to those who ask Him.” Here is another instance

of the kind of argument which Jesus used, and it opens up a further reach of truth.

He has been out among the fields gazing fondly on the handiwork of God, and now he goes into the homes of men to find the same substantial evidence of God therein. The home no less than the flowering field is all a witness to His Fatherhood. As before, he starts with something open and familiar in order to present the truth as he beholds it. It is nothing distant or abstruse, but simply the common lot of the ordinary household. And once again he shows that there is no impenetrable veil obscuring the Divine, but that the elements of right thinking and true belief are close beside us, in our hands and homes. To Jesus heaven and home were always "kindred points." Here, then, is the home consisting of a small community closely knit together by the bond of love which is the bond that makes it possible. But the love is a many-coloured thing, and now its tone is tender and now severe. And whilst the nature of parental love is to give, yet its giving does not always answer to the wishes of the child, but rather to the deeper impulse which is fain to help and not to harm, and which would not give a stone for a loaf or a scorpion for a fish. Taking it all in all the home is where they know how to give what is good to their children. And thus if parents for all their evil are faithful to the soul of goodness in the home, does it not stand to reason, "how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him?"

Now it was in this way all so simple and so sure that Jesus set free the significance of the home as he set free the significance of nature. As he widened nature without going beyond it, so he widened human nature without going beyond it. He made them both reveal the whole to which they belong. Or, in other words, he drew out their luminous background, and set them both upon it as the

great poet or painter does in dealing with his theme. It is given to the seer,

“To see the world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower ;
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.”

And Jesus, by virtue of the same expansion of sight, by insight, by imagination which is reason in her most exalted mood, caught up the facts or factors as a whole which make nature and human nature what they are, and seeing what he saw, he said what he said. His language is the language of vision even though at times it is cast in the form of argument.

Nothing was farther from the workings of his mind than the idea of “a Godless nature and an unnatural God,” a mechanical world-order and an external world-architect, or world governor who “lets the world swing round his finger.” It was Jesus’ great idea that nature in general, and human nature in particular is inseparably bound up with the Divine, and that neither the one nor the other can be seen or known save in the light that lighteth it. And it was this idea reigning in and radiating through his personality that made it so many-sided, and at the same time so harmonious and one. It was the secret of his “sweet reasonableness,” that subtle virtue, as one has shown, so pervading all the strata of his being that “in Christ alone among men we have faith without dogmatism, enthusiasm without fanaticism, strength without violence, idealism without visionariness, naturalness without materialism, freedom without licence, sacrifice without asceticism, purity without austerity, saintliness without morbidity, a light which was too strong to dazzle, a fire which was too intense to flame.”

It is chiefly in his attitude to men, as one might expect, that this subtle virtue appears rising to an appreciation of

man beyond even that of nature. Or, more truly, one might say that it is the same original attitude to nature carried to a farther point in keeping with the facts. For the appreciation of the one flows from the same source as the appreciation of the other, and follows the same new imaginative line, but in relation to humanity it touches a height of thought and action which stands by itself alone. Appreciation is the capacity to see and to say, and if it was such in Jesus that it lifted up the humblest of growing things in nature into a new and rare significance which it has taken a length of ages to perceive, disclosed the inner in the outer life, it accomplished as much and more as regards "the least of these his brethren." His principle is, as we have seen, that if God clothes the grass of the field, and forgets not a single sparrow, He will much more clothe men and remember men since they are worth more than sparrows. It was always in the light of this his essential worth that Jesus regarded man and spoke and acted towards him. It is summed up in the one word: "For what could a man give in exchange for his soul?" Hence he took and set man, so instinct with soul, in the midst of the minute and comprehensive care, or providence,

"that knows no insulated spot,
No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds."

and bade him to be faithful in a very little and faithful also in much, and to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Wordsworth in *The Prelude* following closely the same line of imaginative thought speaks of

"that bursting forth
Of sympathy, inspiring and inspired,
When everywhere a vital pulse was felt,
And all the several frames of things, like stars,
Through every magnitude distinguishable,

Shone mutually indebted, or half lost
 Each in the other's blaze, a galaxy
 Of life and glory. In the midst stood Man
 Outwardly, inwardly contemplated,
 As, of all visible natures, crown, though born
 Of dust, and kindred to the worm; a Being,
 Both in perception and discernment, first
 In every capability of rapture,
 Through the divine effect of power and love;
 As more than anything we know, instinct
 With godhead, and by reason, and by will,
 Acknowledging dependency divine."

Now this new and lofty and unrivalled sense of the worth of man, or what man has it in him to become, (thus finely drawn out by one of the great interpreters of the mind of Jesus) underlay his every approach and appeal, and explains his dynamic influence, the faith, the hope, the love he evoked in men and still evokes. The Gospels form a kind of gallery of scenes, in the foreground of each of which stands Jesus face to face with one or other of those who have sought his presence, and now he looks upon and loves them, and now he knows their thoughts, and now he answers their spoken or unspoken need. Now he stands still at the voice of their cry, and now he takes them by the hand, or lays his hand upon them, and now he only says "with a word." Even his enemies are drawn to exclaim "This man welcomes or, is on the look out for sinners, and eats with them," bearing unwilling and unwitting witness to the truth. "A man to be greatly good," as Shelley says, "must imagine intensely and comprehensively, he must put himself in the place of another and of many others: the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination."

JAMES ROBERTSON CAMERON.

(To be concluded.)