

SOME TESTIMONIES FROM ST. PETER'S SECOND EPISTLE.

I.

“The relation of Scripture to the prophets is not a matter of private solution.”

I OFFER this as a partial paraphrase of the sentence in 2 Pet. i. 20. The words occur in St. Peter's reference to the Transfiguration.

On reading Professor Cheyne's statement in the *Contemporary Review* for March, that to him “the personal existence of Moses” was a thing “unproved and improbable,” I found myself asking this question: How about the Transfiguration?

Three Evangelists, of whom one is held to have written according to St. Peter, affirm that Moses and Elias were seen “talking with Jesus” on that occasion.

One naturally asks, If so, why should not St. Peter mention the fact in his own allusion to that event? Is there no reference to it there? Looking carefully for any hint of it, I was struck with the words, “We have also the word of prophecy more assured to us [thereby]” (paraphrase). I have always felt a difficulty in connecting this statement with the Transfiguration of our Lord's person. But the words have a simple and obvious meaning when referred to the appearance of Moses and Elias side by side with our Lord. And this reference throws some light upon the saying so carefully recorded by three Evangelists, yet so little understood, even by the speaker, about the “three tabernacles” for our Lord and for Moses and Elias. If these two represented the law and the prophets, he who saw them, and in such company, would certainly feel more assured of the authority of their writings, “the tabernacles,” wherein they live for us still. I suppose, then, that, after all, St. Peter has in this context indirectly attested the appearance of Moses and Elias upon the Mount of Transfiguration. It was said, I think, in Dr. Westcott's work upon the Canon, that St. Peter's Second Epistle had less external evidence of its authenticity than any other book of the New Testament. But since the discovery of the Apocryphal Gospel and Apocalypse of St. Peter, that deficiency has been somewhat compensated. The counterfeits have borrowed so obviously and largely from the true.

The canonicity of the Second Epistle of St. Peter is now sufficiently assured. There is, besides, the inextricable dilemma presented to doubters by the Epistle itself. On

spiritual grounds it can be no forgery. But either it must be a forgery, or we must accept whatever follows if it be true. If, however, Moses and the prophets, as implied in 2 Pet. i. 20 and the context, are really the authors of the "word of prophecy," what becomes of all that "scholars have shown" respecting J, E, JE, P, Deutero-Isaiah, and the Redactors, to whom the authorship of the "prophetic word" is now ascribed? The discovery of these unnamed writers by modern genius is surely a "private solution" of the authorship of the Old Testament. How can it agree with St. Peter's testimony that "men spake (the Scriptures) from God, being borne along by (His) Holy Spirit"?

II.

"Since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from beginning (or 'on principle') of creation" (2 Pet. iii. 4).

The universality of the Deluge was a break in the continuous uniformity of the natural world.

The exception alleged by St. Peter is the universality of the Flood. This universality is implied by the Apostle in a very curious way, when he speaks of "the heavens and the earth," "the world that then was," as involved in the catastrophe.

My attention has been recently drawn to this fact in connection with that very difficult heading or title (for heading it must be, despite the higher critics) in Gen. ii. 4: "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth in the day they were created." The section of Genesis which bears this title (chaps. ii. 4 to iv. 26) carries the story of the "progeny of the heavens and earth" down to the generation contemporary with the translator, who died in the year of the Flood. It records, in short, the progress of the "old world" until it became "the world of the ungodly" (2 Pet. ii. 5).

Now, St. Peter speaks of the "heavens and earth" as they were then, and the "heavens and the earth" that are now, in relation to "the water" and "the fire," employed for their respective conservation and destruction.

No partial catastrophe will suit his language in either case. And the whole context of the passage presents an emphatic warning against building too much in the way of argument as to what has been, or yet may be, upon the state of things in which we live now.

St. Peter's language in this passage is very difficult, and not easily adapted to modern science, still less to modern theories about the allegorical character of the early chapters of Genesis.

But how, if it is not St. Peter's imperfect science, but our own ignorance of the past and the future, that impedes our understanding of the sentences in 2 Pet. iii. 5-7? The marginal reading of the Revised New Testament, "stored with fire," whether intended as a translation of *τεθραυρισμένοι πυρὶ* or *πυρὶ τηρούμενοι*, reminds one more of Dr. Watts's description of the bee's cell, "stored with the sweet food she makes," than of anything that the Greek Lexicon has to say about these words.

And if St. Peter's language can be accommodated to a partial destruction of the old world by water, may it not be just as easily harmonized with a similarly partial catastrophe in the day that is to be revealed in fire?

Connected with this passage by a simple train of thought—the day of the Lord in its special bearing upon the Hebrews—we find a remarkable statement about

III.

"Our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you" (2 Pet. iii. 15).

The "you" here is the same with the "you" in the first verse of the chapter: "This Second Epistle, beloved, I now write unto you." And the persons are specified in 1 Pet. i. 1 as "sojourners of the Dispersion, of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." St. Peter's Epistles are, therefore, "Epistles to Hebrews" in the strictest sense—*i.e.*, migratory children of "Abram the Hebrew" (Gen. xiv. 13), "Hebrews" like those mentioned in 1 Sam. xiii. 3, 7, 19, and xiv. 11, as distinct from more settled Israelites. But what had St. Paul written to those persons? None of his signed Epistles are addressed to them. "Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia" are out of the question altogether. There remain "Galatia and Asia." There is an Epistle to the Galatians, to whom he says: "If ye be circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing" (Gal. v. 2). This is not what we want. The Epistles to Ephesians and Colossians went to dwellers in Roman Asia. But these letters again are written to Gentiles, not to Hebrews of the Dispersion. The persons addressed in these Epistles are as clearly not within St. Peter's jurisdiction as they are in St. Paul's.

Lost Epistles cannot be intended, for St. Peter marks them as "Scriptures." They were not lost when he wrote, and his endorsement of them was the very thing to prevent any such calamity. In fact, he marks them as canonical. "The unlearned and unstable wrest them," he says, "as they do the other Scriptures."

Supposing, then, that St. Paul had written anything to the "Dispersion" of the Hebrews which was not as yet recognised as "Scripture," this sentence of St. Peter would at once give it the Apostolic seal. Just as St. Paul himself, by citing a sentence from Luke x. 7 alongside of the Law of Moses as "the Scripture," stamps St. Luke's Gospel as Canonical, so does St. Peter stamp what St. Paul wrote to the Hebrews of the Dispersion, together with "all his Epistles," with the same character. He sets this writing by itself as remarkable for its "wisdom," and classes the other Epistles separately, but all alike he pronounces to be "Scriptures."

What Epistle, then, can St. Paul's Epistle to the "Dispersion" of the Hebrews be?

There is no difficulty, if we accept this as St. Peter's endorsement of the extant Canonical "Epistle to the Hebrews," and suppose that St. Peter intended (1) to supply the missing signature, in his place as Apostle of the Circumcision; and (2) since the Jews are the appointed trustees of the Divine oracles, to show that it was needful that every Scripture should be formally consigned to them.

What I have said is tantamount to affirming—not my own belief in the Pauline authorship of the Canonical Epistle to the Hebrews, which matters nothing—but that St. Peter has affirmed the Pauline authorship of that Epistle, which, if it be so, is a matter of some importance.

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THE MONTH.

THE special Mission services held by the Bishop of London have been the most noteworthy feature of Church life during the past month. In several of the most prominent West End churches Dr. Ingram has preached to large congregations with undoubted tokens of blessing. This episcopal emphasis on the need of evangelistic work in our Church will doubtless be very fruitful in spiritual results, and we could wish that the Bishop of London's example might be followed in other dioceses, in order to call renewed attention to the necessity of more definite evangelistic effort on behalf of the people of our parishes. Among the plain and telling messages given by the Bishop, we cannot help calling attention to one on the familiar text Rev. iii. 20, in which the following timely words were spoken:

There were people who were apt to think that Missions were rather un-Churchy, and that there was something "not quite Catholic," to use a