

and as the King upon it, speaks through that word. No long presumptuous comment shall be ventured, as we close our meditations with it. We will only, in spirit, kneel, and listen, and worship. It is the voice of a "love that passeth knowledge," for it asks, concerning mortals of the dust, that their Lord may have their company for ever. They are such to Him that to save them is not enough; He must have them, and have them close to Him, and have them so eternally. And here speaks a voice whose surpassing truth and beauty is vitally conditioned by this, that it is the utterance of Incarnate GOD. Only HE, Man with men on earth, can also foretell that the Heaven of heaven for men will be to see HIMSELF, "as He is."

Away with dreams of Heaven which leave out "the Lamb who is the light thereof." Thanks be to God who gives to the transfigured sinner this Heaven in prospect, this open vision, fathomless in its light, and life and love; "for ever with the Lord."

HANDLEY DUNELM.

(Concluded.)

Note to No. VI : p. 583, lines 7 and 8 from foot.

Instead of " (as in the case of the second and third Gospels certainly)," read " (the second and third Gospels certainly had not)."

STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

XII. CHRISTMAS AND CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE.

Text.—"That holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God"—(St. Luke i. 35).

"I believe in Jesus Christ, conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary"—(Apostles' Creed).

[Book of the Month: THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF OUR LORD,¹ by Rev.

L. Prestige = P. Other reff., *Virgin Birth*, by Canon Knowling = K. *The Ascent through Christ*, by Dr. Griffith-Jones = J.]

"At every baptism, since about the year 150 at least, the Christian neophyte has made profession of his faith that Christ was born of a virgin" (P. page v).

¹ Published by Robert Scott. 3s. 6d. net. Excellent, modern. Not blind belief but true faith. This Study is scarcely suitable for Christmas Day, but it might well come on the Sunday after.

I. THE BIOLOGICAL SIDE OF THE STORY. It is part of the essence of every Christian creed. The supernatural life and resurrection are in harmony with a supernatural birth. It is not against what biology knows of the deep physiological mysteries of nature. "Professor G. J. Romanes, at a period in his life when he would probably have classed himself among reverent Agnostics, wrote: 'Even if a virgin has ever conceived and borne a son, and even if such a fact in the human species has been unique, still it would not betoken any breach of physiological continuity'" (J. 262). He afterwards became a Christian. But Huxley said similar things. Parthenogenesis need not be a difficulty to the intellect of scientific reasoners.

II. THE MYTHOLOGICAL SIDE. The Jews were the last people among whom such a story could have arisen, unless it had been true. "Such a fable as the birth of the Messiah from a *virgin* could have arisen anywhere else easier than among the Jews," wrote the great historian Neander, himself a Jewish convert" (K. 37). The mythological stories usually told of so-called virgin births are not in this class of thought at all. Frequently grotesque, and often impure. "The first and third gospels, each with its Birth narrative as an integral part of it, have the right to be treated as historical documents of high value for the reconstruction of the events with which they deal; their right is such that if they related to ordinary events of secular history it would not be questioned, far less seriously challenged; and the witness of each to the crucial fact is perfectly straightforward, single-minded, and thoroughgoing" (P. 49).

III. THE HISTORICAL SIDE. (a) *St. Luke*. "It may indeed be said, without the slightest fear of contradiction, that the author of the third gospel, universally assumed to be St. Luke, assented without qualification to the belief that Christ was born of a virgin" (P. 6). "Saint Luke has now been ascertained, at all points where he has been found capable of being tested, to be a careful and an accurate observer" (P. 10). We must allow some weight to "the character of the evangelist's mind, trained, as Greek medical men were trained, scientifically. Whatever else Saint Luke was, he was not credulous" (P. 15). Sir W. Ramsay says: "The present writer takes the view that Luke's history is unsurpassed in respect to its trustworthiness" (P. 13).

(b) *St. Matthew*. St. Matthew tells a frank story, which can only mean that he believed in the virgin birth. Moreover, there are

other implications. "In the latter portion of this double narrative (chapter ii.) Saint Joseph is nowhere referred to as the father of Jesus; but five times the expression occurs 'the Child and His mother,' when we should naturally expect the writer to say 'thy (his) Child' or 'the Child and His parents.' The inference to be drawn from the continual use of this unusual phrase is that the writer did not regard Saint Joseph as the father of the Child" (P. 26). And the following considerations also have their place. "That the infant Jesus was the legitimate Heir was proved for Matthew by the miracles which were performed on His behalf and by the prophecies which were at once fulfilled by the circumstances of His childhood" (P. 63).

(c) *St. Mark.* Omits the story: but then "Saint Mark's Gospel does not purport to be a life of Christ, and his interest is not, like that of Saint Luke, centred in the purely historical figure of our Lord as such" (P. 66). "There is no room in the book for anything so irrelevant to the main purpose of his scheme as a description of Christ's childhood or an exposition of the nature of His birth" (P. 67). Yet observe this does not mean ignorance of the story. "Saint Mark is the only one of the four evangelists who does not mention Saint Joseph. He does not even indirectly refer to him. Christ's mother and His 'brethren' have their place, but His 'father' might never have existed" (P. 67). "The other two evangelists, each in different terms, represent the Jews as calling Christ the son of Joseph. But in place of their expressions, 'Is not this the carpenter's son?' or 'Is not this the son of Joseph?'" Saint Mark writes simply, 'Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?'" (P. 67).

(d) *St. John.* Does not directly mention the mode of the Incarnation. But there was no need: for "the essence of the testimony of this evangelist is that it professes to be a record of what he himself had seen and heard. 'He that hath seen hath borne witness' is the keynote of the book. But the Birth of Christ obviously took place at a time anterior to the recollection of the disciple whom He loved; and that in itself is enough to bar it out of the record" (P. 68, 69). In St. John i. 9-14 and similar passages he is "employing a speaking silence, and his statement of the Incarnation, which after all goes hardly any further than the statement of it to be gathered from different passages in the writings of

Saint Paul, is meant not to supersede but to explain the Virgin Birth " (P. 70).

(e) *St. Paul.* Tells no Incarnation story. But this is hardly wonderful. In Galatians iv. 4, for instance, there is a possible reference. Zahn asks " Why does Paul here only mention the mother ? " " Plainly because in the thought of Paul there was no room for Joseph as the father of Jesus beside His heavenly Father " (K. 65). " When, therefore, we find no explicit reference to the Virgin Birth we are neither more nor less astonished than we are at the discovery that the Galilean ministry is not mentioned, and that such names as Nazareth, Bethlehem, Capernaum, and Bethsaida do not occur in any of St. Paul's epistles. It cannot justly be said in either case that silence is a proof of ignorance " (P. 65).

IV. THE CRITICAL SIDE. So much for the documents. But are St. Matthew and St. Luke, for instance, dependable? " Neither of them has received from the results of historical research anything but confirmation " (P. 61). The fact that they tell different but not contradictory stories is in itself valuable evidence. " Their independence is of great importance and their divergence is not " (P. 61).

V. THE PRIVATE SIDE. Who told the stories? " St. Luke regarded them as proceeding from St. Mary," says Harnack (P. 7). And his testimony is the more striking in that he does not himself believe the story. " As every commentator observes, and justly, the story is told throughout from her point of view. It belongs entirely to her; her revelation, her feelings, her kinsfolk, her humble and triumphant wonder, fill the page " (P. 14).

Then what of St. Matthew's account? Mr. Prestige desires to " suggest that these chapters represent the story imparted after their conversion to the ' brethren ' of the Lord by the Blessed Virgin " (P. 30). This would be the complement to the stories " in Saint Luke's gospel. Those dwell upon her own experiences, her motherly love and wonder and admiration for her Child, and are precisely what she might have confided to her women friends; to the children of Saint Joseph she would more naturally have spoken of what concerned the man, the husband, and their own father " (P. 31).