

to appreciate their words as well as we can. That is, so far as these two points of Christ's Godhead and manhood are concerned, the Roman, Corinthian, and Galatian Christians had heard orally within some twenty or thirty years of the death of Jesus what we now read and call the Gospels.

J. RAWSON LUMBY.

### THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES.

#### HEBREWS xii. 1.

THE authorized English translation of the Bible has taken so strong a hold upon the memories and associations of Englishmen, that we find it difficult to adapt ourselves to an improved rendering, or even to correct in our minds an ambiguity of which, when reminded of it, we find that we were quite aware.

In Hebrews xii. 1, the idea of witnesses as persons looking on at a spectacle has so taken possession of our minds, that few of us pause to ask ourselves whether this is really the conception which the writer intended to convey. But if we go into the question etymologically, we shall see that it is at least very doubtful whether this meaning will hold.

What is the meaning of the Greek word *μάρτυς* (witness)? There can be no question that it means one who bears testimony. Neither in classical Greek nor in the New Testament is any instance to be found where any other meaning attaches to it. For example, it is used of the witnesses who gave testimony against Stephen (Acts vii. 58); and in 1 Timothy v. 19, where we read, *Κατὰ πρεσβυτέρου κατηγορίαν μὴ παραδέχου, ἐκτὸς εἰ μὴ ἐπὶ δύο ἢ τριῶν μαρτύρων* (against

an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three *witnesses*); as also, and in the same sense, in Hebrews x. 28. Its most frequent use in the New Testament is as applied to the apostles, whose office it was to be witnesses of the Resurrection. It is also used to denote those who bore witness to Christ by suffering for Him; as, for example, in Acts xxii. 20, *Τὸ αἷμα Στεφάνου τοῦ μάρτυρός σου* (the blood of thy martyr (witness) Stephen); and in Revelation ii. 13, *Ἀντίπας ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός* (Antipas, my faithful witness); and again in Revelation xvii. 6, *Τὸ αἷμα τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ* (the blood of the witnesses (or martyrs) of Jesus). In Revelation iii. 14, Jesus Himself is called *Ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός* (the faithful and true witness). Everywhere the main idea of the word is, not one who observes or looks on, but one who testifies.

Indeed, had the writer intended to convey the meaning, so constantly insisted on in sermons and devotional writings, that we are compassed about with a cloud of unseen spectators, who look on with interest at our race, he had a word ready to his hand—a word not indeed used in the New Testament, but in common use at that time, *θεάτης* (onlooker at a spectacle). In a language so precise in its use of words as the Greek, it seems certain that *μάρτυς* can never have been used in the sense of *θεάτης*. And this remark is confirmed by the fact that the Greek commentators, whose testimony in a case of this kind is most valuable, as giving us almost a contemporaneous exposition, take this view of the word. Thus Chrysostom, quoted by Alford, says with reference to these witnesses, *ἐμαρτύρησαν τῇ τοῦ Θεοῦ*

μεγαλειότητι (they bare testimony to the mighty power of God). And, better, Theodoret, *πλήθος τοσούτου μαρτυρεῖ τῇ δυνάμει τῆς πίστεως* (this great multitude bears witness to the power of faith). Indeed, even in English, the use of "to witness" in the sense of to see or look on, is merely a piece of modern slipshod. In standard English, "to witness" means to bear testimony, and "a witness" is one who bears testimony.

Who, then, are the *μάρτυρες* (witnesses) in the passage under discussion? And do they bear witness *of* us or *to* us?

It is to be noticed that the words *μαρτυρεῖν* (to bear witness) and *μάρτυς* (a witness) seem to be running in the Author's mind in this whole passage. Thus in Chapter xi. verse 2, *ἐν ταύτῃ γάρ* [sc. *πίστει*] *ἐμαρτυρήθησαν οἱ πρεσβύτεροι* (by faith the elders received a good testimony). In verse 4 it is said of Abel, *μαρτυροῦντος ἐπὶ τοῖς δώροις αὐτοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ* (God bearing witness to his gifts); 5, *μεμαρτύρηται ἐναρεστηκέναι τῷ Θεῷ* (he received testimony, literally, he was witnessed of that he pleased God); 39, *οὗτοι πάντες μαρτυρηθέντες διὰ τῆς πίστεως* (these all having been witnessed of, *i.e.*, having had favourable testimony borne of them, through faith). Now in all these passages witness is borne *of* the elders, testimony given in their favour, whether by God (so in verse 4, certainly) or by the agreement of the faithful. If we apply this clue to the word *μαρτύρων* in verse 1, the sense would be: "Having so great a cloud of saints of old ready to bear witness in our favour if we run well." But against this is to be set this consideration, that the whole preceding Chapter is a great

description of faith as exemplified in the heroes of the old dispensation. At the close of Chapter x. the writer had said, ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἐσμὲν ὑποστολῆς. . . . ἄλλὰ πίστεως (we are not of drawing back, but of faith). And what, he seems to ask, is faith? It is the animating principle which enabled the saints of old to do and to suffer, as seeing Him who is invisible. And all these he sets before us to shew us what we may be: he summons them, so to speak, one by one, as witnesses of the unseen power which animated them, to testify to us that as they ran so we can run; as they overcame so can we overcome. They are not one or two, but a cloud; they are not here and there, but they compass us about on every side; they cheer us and animate us by the assurance that the race is ours if we will run with patience, and look steadily away from the things around us to Jesus, the author and finisher of the faith in which they overcame, and in which we have to strive.

We may summon Dr. Watts as a witness to the accepted interpretation of the passage in his day:—

Our glorious Leader claims our praise  
 For his own pattern given :  
 And the long cloud of witnesses  
 Shews the same path to heaven.

It is true that if we accept this, which appears to me the only tenable interpretation of the word, we give up a good deal of beautiful association which has twined itself round the passage. We lose the crowd of onlookers (θεάται) watching us intently, marking every false step, rejoicing in every vigorous effort: but after all, what we lose in one aspect we gain in another; we gain the μάρτυρες, the witnesses

to the prevailing power of faith, cheering us on, encouraging us when we falter, warning us when we stumble, bidding us (to adopt St. Paul's words), "Be ye followers of us, as we also were of Christ."

It is right to add that De Wette prefers the sense of *spectators*; though without shewing that *μάρτυρες* can bear this sense; while Alford (with Schlichting) endeavours skilfully to combine the two. Alford's idea that *νέφος* (cloud) implies their being above us, seems fanciful, *νέφος* being frequently used as a picturesque expression for a multitude, without any further idea. Cf. Homer, *νέφος Τρώων, πεζῶν* (a cloud of Trojans, of foot-soldiers, &c.); Herodotus, *νέφος ἀνθρώπων* (a cloud of men); Euripides, *νέφος Ἑλλάνων* (a cloud of Greeks).

R. E. BARTLETT.

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#### NOTES ON COMMENTARIES.

##### 4. THE NEW TESTAMENT.

MANY difficult questions of Chronology are started by the Scriptures of the New Testament, and much depends on the way in which they are determined. Every student of the New Testament, therefore, is sooner or later compelled to take up these questions and to solve them as best he can. I know of no book more likely to prove helpful to the ordinary student than the "Key to the Chronology of the New Testament," by Mr. Thomas Lewin<sup>1</sup> (author of the splendid "Life of St. Paul," a new and much improved edition of which has recently appeared). For in this able work he will find not only adequate dissertations on the disputed and more difficult dates

<sup>1</sup> "Fasti Sacri." By Thomas Lewin, Esq. London: Longmans.