
work. As regards the word already spoken—that is past. If there has been error or shortcoming, all that can be done is to amend in the future, and to strive through the aid of one's critics to avoid the perpetuation of error. In the end, the true lives, the false dies away. All we have a right to require of every writer is, that he should be honest, well-informed and open to conviction, conscientious in doing his best, and conscious of his own fallibility.

Prof. Socin is not the only competent critic who has reviewed the work of the Palestine Exploration Fund. Others have done so, and have pronounced it good, recognising that it has no "tendency," but is based on observation of fact, leaving to others to draw their own inferences, and embracing the labours of men of very different casts of thought, united only by a desire to ascertain the truth. I hope that Prof. Socin will recognise that it is the design of the English explorers rather to work in friendly emulation than to waste the time by carping at the efforts of others in the same line of study.

C. R. CONDER.

THE BOOK OF ZECHARIAH.

II. THE FOURTH VISION.—ZECH. iii.

THE object of the fourth vision which was seen by Zechariah, was to restore the confidence of the people in the priesthood and its ministry. In commencing to rebuild the Temple the people naturally felt some doubt whether it was any use doing so. A temple without an inhabiting God is a mockery. No doubt the preceding vision had contained the promise, "I will dwell in the midst of thee." But they needed a further assurance. They knew that they

had sinned, and that their priests had sinned with them. They felt the justice of Ezekiel's words (xxii. 26), "Her priests have violated My law and have profaned My holy things"; and they were not sure how the services of these priests would be received by their holy God. In this feeling of doubt which prevailed among the people the vision finds its starting point. Joshua the High Priest is seen standing as the people's representative before the Lord; and the guilty fears of the people find a mouth-piece in Satan, who resists Joshua's intercession on the ground of the past transgressions of the people. This scene in the presence-chamber of Jehovah was the picture sketched by the conscience-stricken fancy of the thoughtful Jews; and the vision was designed to remove their fears by showing that the sin borne by Joshua as their representative was removed, his ministry accepted, and the priesthood established anew. His filthy garments were removed, the mitre placed on his head, and explicit assurances added that he was accepted as ruler in God's house.

This apparently might have closed the vision; but God's graciousness overflows, not only scattering the fears of the people and reinstating the High Priest, but using the opportunity to promise further favours to the people. The "Branch" had now become a recognised title of the Messiah, and the promise of His coming is here renewed. And to this promise is added one which to us is obscure but which no doubt was easily intelligible when first uttered. "For behold the stone which I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone seven eyes; behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts." The stone spoken of was one which the people had seen lying before Joshua, perhaps the foundation-stone which had been laid immediately after their return, perhaps a stone still in the hewer's shed, selected for its dimensions or designed by its carving to be the topstone of the building. The "seven

eyes" are in the next chapter interpreted as "the eyes of the Lord which run to and fro through the whole earth," and must therefore symbolize the providence or watchful care of God. This care was to be displayed in connexion with the stone; God Himself was to carve it, was to defend and uphold it as if it were His own handiwork.

This vision is full of permanent instruction. It can indeed bring encouragement or even interest only to those who have some anxiety about the reception their services are likely to meet with. But as it was no empty dream of an excited timidity which represented to the Jews their High Priest in filthy garments, so it may be expected that similar anxieties may be generated now by the reflection of common sense and by a truthful conscience.

The figure here used to represent the effect of sin upon us tells its own tale. Filthy garments make a man unpleasant company; they make him offensive and disgusting, perhaps contagious to others; and if he has not lost all sense of decency they are to himself a source of constant shame and discomfort. However anxious we may be to be hospitable and friendly, we cannot sit at table nor spend hours and days in the close society of one whose clothes and person are justly termed "filthy." It is easy to overcome, or at least it is possible to overcome, the revulsion and nausea produced by the disagreeable concomitants of certain diseases; for here pity and necessity take the part of the unhappy sufferer; but where the filthiness is not the unavoidable result of disease, but the result of mere carelessness and low habits and contentment with dirt, it forms an insuperable barrier to intercourse.

This vision says that sin forms a similar barrier to intercourse with God. God will not, cannot, ought not to, find pleasure in intercourse with those who are stained with sin. Possibly we have ourselves met with persons whose conversation was so foul or whose habits were of such a kind

that we felt we could not remain in their company. We have learnt that certain sins are disgusting even to ourselves. The ancient Germans used to punish certain criminals by sinking them under a wicker crate in a mud-hole, recognising that in certain sins there is a foulness deserving a foul death; a defilement which men cannot stand and must avenge by a death and burial out of sight in one. And if we see nothing in ourselves which could reasonably be supposed to excite similar feelings in a perfectly pure mind such as that of God, it may be feared that this can only be because we have not the keen spiritual discernment of the prophet. This is a theme for the individual conscience; it is for each to look upon God as He is here depicted, not angry, not taking vengeance, but compelled to turn away from us. Men ought not to be encouraged to believe that good and evil are much the same to God. It is the hope of the world that righteousness will one day prevail, and this hope has for its foundation the fact that God abominates all sin.

The cleansing of Joshua is effected by God. Joshua is helpless. He has no better garments to clothe himself in. Had he had clean raiment, he would have put it on before appearing in God's presence. He appears as he is, because he can do no better. It lies with God to take action regarding his unseemly condition; either, as Satan recommends, by refusing to have any dealings with one in such a state, or by making him fit for the Divine presence and favours. God adopts the latter course.

But what is it in sin that can be thus, suddenly and by another, removed from the sinner? Obviously, our guilt may thus be removed by a simple act of pardon. This God can at any time grant. When we have wronged another person, it lies with that person to forgive us. We may try to forgive ourselves, and may persuade ourselves the injury was slight or done without malice, but this does not prevent

the injured person from refusing forgiveness and taking us to law. Our friends may forgive us, but until the injured party forgives us, we are not clear. This forgiveness may be granted by a word. It calls for no long process. And thus our guilt as transgressors of God's law may at any time be removed by a momentary act of God.

But that which defiles us in God's sight is not only our guilt. We have not only laid ourselves open to punishment, but we have given harbour to wicked imaginings, and we find in our hearts evil propensities and dispositions which excite loathing even in ourselves. These defile us, and make it impossible that a pure God should find pleasure in intercourse with us. A criminal at the bar may be acquitted, and may walk out of court free; but he may, as he goes, use such language regarding the trial, the judges, the crime and his acquittal, as fills us with a deeper loathing of his character than if he had been convicted. Can then the forgiveness pronounced by God be thus dissociated from inward purity? or does this change of raiment include inward cleansing as well as the removal of guilt?

Now the answer is obvious when we consider that the one condition on which we receive forgiveness is that we desire it. Joshua did not provide the clean raiment, nor did he put it on; but he came into God's presence seeking His favour. And this carries with it a great deal. It is the man who wishes forgiveness who gets it. God does not bestow it on us all. He does not scatter it blindfold and indiscriminately. He grants it to the man who feels that above all else he must be reconciled to God. The man who merely fears consequences may not be pardoned; but certainly every man who thirsts for God, and cannot live under His frown, every man who sincerely seeks friendship with God, receives God's forgiveness. But this craving for God's love, this feeling that life is lonely and soulless and vain without

God, this thirst which only reconciliation with God and a sense of His love can quench, implies that the love of sin has got its deathblow in us, and that violently as it may struggle and hideous as may be its contortions, a stronger power has entered us and will at last prevail. Where God sees love for Himself He sees the root of all purity. In every heart that craves His pardon because it prizes His favour, He sees a cleansing power that will gradually assert itself throughout our whole nature, and leave no spot nor stain upon us.

Forgiveness, then, though it cannot be earned by us, and though it is the act of another, implies that we are in a certain state of mind. Forgiveness is never a merely external and superficial thing, but it involves the supposition that we are seeking with our whole heart the favour of a holy God. Forgiven persons are therefore persons who already have the root of all good in them, whose tastes have now a purifying element in them, who are clean because they love God—in a shamefully small degree it may be as yet, but if that love has even found a root for itself in their heart, it will grow and ultimately rule.

More than this the fresh clean raiment given in exchange of the filthy garments can hardly mean. Yet more than this we naturally crave. We may be freed from guilt, from liability to punishment, and we may have present purity of purpose and of inclination; but there remains the painful remembrance of past defilement. Life as it passes leaves indelible traces. It writes itself even on the features of the face. Suffering does so. There are faces you cannot look at without thinking of the long experience of bodily pain or mental anxiety or bereavement which has ploughed those furrows in them. Trace one of those furrows back to its first beginnings and what a continuance of suffering must you pass through. And so it is with vice. It writes itself on the face; and if you would account for that shame-

faced look, that wandering averted eye, that loose mouth or bloated face, that hard, cruel expression, you must pass through a long series of sins that have stained all the past, hardening the once reluctant and compunctious sinner into a reckless profligate, wearing out all strength of will by self-indulgence, and narrowing the spirit till nothing but what is sordid and petty can find a place in it.

And deeper than the features of the face has the past written itself upon us. God assures us we are forgiven, and we believe Him; but no assurance can make us forget what we have done and what we have been. Nor can any present freedom from actual transgression nor any present superiority to inward evil, make us satisfied with our past. On the contrary, the more entirely we are possessed by right ideas and right feelings, the more thoroughly hateful do we seem to ourselves to have been. And as we begin to estimate more justly the true character of our past life, the remembrance of it becomes intolerable. The higher we rise above our past the more clearly do we see its proportions and true bearings. The more entirely dissociated from it in spirit we become, the more keenly do we feel its inexhaustible malignity. Let any man give free play to his memory, and let conscience travel through the contents of that memory and pronounce upon them; let him fairly weigh and consider his selfish actions, the cruelty and meanness of them; let him consider his love of pleasure, the vileness and wrong-doing it has led him into; let him think of the persons he has been connected with and had to do with, how many grave injustices he has unwittingly done them, how he has let their interests suffer that his own might thrive, how intercourse with him has lowered their spiritual tone or even stained them with dark sin, on what a low level he has lived, and what poor and often vile purposes he has harboured; let him lay out his whole life before him and pronounce upon it as if it were the life of

another, and he will feel that until that past be somehow wiped out he must be pursued by feelings of the profoundest regret and shame, if not of self-loathing.

But what is to deliver us from this memory? Are we to forget in heaven, if not in this life, what we have here been? Are we to engage so actively and constantly in present duties that the past shall find no opening to intrude itself? We have no right to forget. We have no right to banish from our minds those who are for all we know still and for ever suffering from the results of our sin. We have no right to turn aside from the evil we have done. It is part of the work of grace to shed a strong light upon our life and to disclose to us its actual colours and proportions. And it is only the weakness of a shallow nature or the artifice of a self-indulgent temperament, to treat the evil we have done as if it were not and had never been. It is difficult to see how even in eternity peace of mind can be perfect. Reparation may be made, the actual injuries we have done may be amended, but nothing can obliterate the fact that we did these wrongs, and apparently we must for ever live under the shame and regret that must and ought to accompany memories such as ours. Nothing that can now be done can make it cease to be true that we have proved ourselves selfish, cruelly thoughtless, shameful and vile transgressors. The deep abasement which possesses us in our moments of clearest insight must, for all that we can see, possess us in eternity as well. Part of the equipment of a perfected soul must be a perfect candour which can look steadily at the actual state of matters, and a perfect justice which will strongly condemn and bewail wrong-doing.

How then can we promise ourselves happiness if these memories are to continue with us? Would not many of us almost prefer annihilation to the prospect of living for ever with a constantly-increasing sense of the natural weakness

and hatefulness of our character? If every increase to our moral stature and all improvement in our spiritual health must give us a deepening conviction of our own depravity, is not this too painful a price to pay? How many of us can remember hours when we were almost maddened by the thought of our own folly and wickedness, when we went for days and weeks with all life made dark and desperate to us through the consciousness of our own sin. If such hours are to become more frequent, how can eternity be tolerable, not to say happy?

It may be replied that we should in the first place be content with our prospects if we can look forward to an amended life in which we shall have ample opportunity to give proof that we no longer are what we once were. The shame and burden of the past may to many seem quite incompatible with happiness; they may feel convinced that a memory such as they bear carries misery with it inseparably; they may question whether it would not be more satisfactory to cease altogether than to live on so burdened and embittered. Still even such persons must acknowledge that the worthier part to choose is to live on, seeking to do good as formerly we have done evil, gladly accepting a life which gives promise of good. Ashamed and cut to the heart we may be with the memory of the past; for all that we can see our happiness must be dimmed and disturbed, but our happiness is not the first consideration, and ends even more to be desired may yet be achieved by us.

And if memory cannot ever be emptied of its contents, and if there is nothing that can sweeten these contents and make them other than most bitter to us, there is at least a present purity to be found in Christ. "Now ye are clean," He says to His disciples "through the word that I have spoken unto you." Seeking in integrity of heart to be conformed to the best we know, resolutely turning away from all evil and setting our faces honestly towards what is

perfectly pleasing to God, we are filled with the peace and joy that reconciliation to God and purity of conscience bring. Present purity of conscience only in part effaces the shameful past, but if it is all that in the nature of things can be accomplished, we rest satisfied with this and breathe a new air, the air of an emancipated and hopeful life.

The reason assigned by God for dismissing Satan's accusation of Joshua has caught the ear and the heart and has become one of the most familiar quotations from this book: "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" Arising like other proverbial expressions from the colloquial speech of the people, it vividly depicts the eagerness with which a valuable is snatched from imminent destruction, as a man snatches from the fire the bank-note he had thought was a piece of waste paper, or the letter from which he had forgotten to copy an address or an expression. In every such case it is obvious that the rescued article has a special value to the rescuer, and is reserved for some further use. The marks of burning, the unsightly blackened edges, the portions awanting, the ruined and wrecked look of the remaining fragment, tell us not only of the narrow escape and not at all of the worthlessness of the article, but rather of its worth to him who interposed to rescue it from the flames. It tells us of some purpose the owner means it yet to serve. So here Satan's malignant exposure of the marks of fire on Joshua is out of place. Why is he here at all? says the Lord. Is it not because I have chosen and rescued him, charred as he is, that he may serve My purposes? I have chosen Jerusalem.

This then is the conclusion we are to draw if, in surveying our past life, we cannot but be struck with the narrowness of our escape from certain dangers. We see that in many instances things were not allowed to run on to their natural issues with us, but that we were snatched from consequences which destroyed other men. Blackened by the smoke,

charred by the fire we were, but not consumed. We formed habits or we were forming habits which we know have destroyed others. We ventured upon practices or single acts which in many cases known to ourselves have produced the most disastrous results. As young men we formed companionships which commonly end in social disgrace, moral degradation, and a wasted life. In others we have seen the terrible consequences which often flow from one mistake, from one unguarded action, from a single day's folly, from the reckless passion of an hour; we have been guilty of similar carelessness, and yet have only partially felt the consequences. We have been charred but not consumed.

Most thankful should he be who has thus been rescued. It is true, he finds he is not the man he was. He is to a greater or less extent a wreck. He has introduced into his character weaknesses which pain and shame him all his days. He has memories which now and again sting him. He cannot live the strong, straightforward, fearless life of the innocent. In every part of his life he meets the stain of his sin. But when he is dismayed by these traces of the past, when he finds with what disadvantages he has weighted himself, when he recognises how much of life he has shut himself out from, and how many pure and high enjoyments he is now incapable of, and how many of the highest parts in life he can never play; when he sees that he is half-consumed and the remainder blackened and crumbling, he must yet recognise in the very fact of his rescue evidence that God designs him yet for some good purpose. When tempted to put away all hope, he must listen to the voice of this vision rebuking his accuser: "The Lord that hath chosen him rebuke thee, O Satan; is he not a brand plucked from the burning?"

MARCUS DODS.
