

CURRENT ISSUES.

WHAT is it that troubles us to-day? What is the trouble that besets the moderns who live by the ideas of the Bible, with their permanent value for life and their primitive Oriental setting? We are more and more alive to the latter, in these days of anthropology. Our great sacred Book shows stages of development in morals, and in the expression of religious conviction, which we can no longer share. In other words, the primitive survives in our religion. And this creates the difficulty. It is raised by Dr. Israel Abrahams in his lectures on *Some Permanent Values in Judaism*. As he says, 'it is not the great ideas of the Bible that trouble us; these great ideas console, guide, strengthen us; they do not trouble us. What we live by, what our fathers lived by—this is patent. But what of those things by which our fathers lived and we live no longer?'

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This is the condition of every historical religion. And the first thing we have to do is to be sure that we have learned the full lesson of the past before we turn our backs upon it. The modern is apt to discard the past too abruptly. He is impatient of what seems to him an outworn superstition or a bygone phase of thought, so impatient that he may fail to appropriate the good in it as he passes forward. "I often say to myself," Carlyle declared, "Jesuitism and other Superstitious Scandals cannot go, till we have read and appropriated from them the tradition of these lost noblenesses, and once more under the new conditions made them ours." True progress means this patient effort to appreciate what was valuable in the past. Otherwise it is thin and narrow in facing the future.

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But Dr. Abrahams claims more than this. He glories in the survival of the primitive in religion. He admits that the vital thing is present values, not past origins. But he is glad that in

Judaism there are primitive survivals, reminders of the far past. For these, he argues, help to prevent the modern mind from becoming onesided and vague. Thus he sees in the primitive Hebrew religion a lasting significance attaching even to its crude representations of the Deity. "It is primitive to think of God as close at hand, speaking to Moses face to face as a man to his fellow; it is primitive to place God in a local heaven, above the earth, for science has left us no room for any divine seat in the skies." Such primitive views are no longer ours. But mark, says Dr. Abrahams, how much good they have done. They have worked together to yield the two vital ideas of an immanent and a transcendent God, and without these ideas there is no adequate religion. So the primitive need not trouble us unduly, if we have learned its truths for ourselves. It may even serve us.

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Only, we must be sure that we are not making primitive things out of what is not primitive. Some things are not so old as they seem. We know this in many departments. A practice is sometimes claimed as "catholic" and mediæval, for example, which is only a few centuries old, maybe not even that. Dr. Abrahams gives one amusing instance from music. One favourite melody in the synagogues, he says, is frequently described as "traditional," whereas "it was composed by Mr. Membach in my presence and at my suggestion less than half a century ago." So rapidly may a false antiquity attach to some modern custom! It would not be difficult to give some parallel cases from Christian music. Because an idea or a practice in the Church has won acceptance, those who desire to conserve it are tempted unconsciously to invest it with the sanctions of age.

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But the same applies to origins. And here Dr. Abrahams chooses the old Hebrew command, "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk," to illustrate his point. This sounds very primitive, as if it were a reference to some early superstition about using such milk to produce fertility in fields. It may prohibit some form of sacrifice, for in Exodus xxiii. 19 and xxiv. 26 it occurs in such connexions. Or again, as it is a food prohibition in Deuteronomy xiv. 21, it may mean, as Robertson Smith thought, a forbidden food, since "many primitive peoples regard milk as a kind of equivalent for blood, and thus to eat a kid

sæthed in its mother's milk might be taken as equivalent to eating 'with the blood,' a violation of Hebrew law. Whatever be the explanation, it denotes some very primitive tabu. So at least most scholars take it. Indeed some, like Professor Kennett, make it the tenth commandment of a special decalogue contained in Exodus xxxiv. Dr. Abrahams, however, pleads that it has no such primitive origin and aim. He views it as a humanitarian regulation, just as Philo the Alexandrian Jew did. Philo's point was, "Keep cruelty out of your kitchen. You need not be so inhuman as to choose the very mother's own milk in which to cook her young." On this view the presence of the regulation in the Bible would not be the relic of an ancient tabu, but a moral precept. But was it so? This so-called humanitarian principle sounds rather sentimental. It is the sentimental fallacy over again, attributing to a goat some sense and feeling about the use made of its milk. One can readily understand Philo putting such an interpretation on the passage. It is like a number of similar fancies in his exposition of ancient Pentateuchal laws, which seemed unintelligible to him and his cultured age. Details of the code, as they stood in the letter of the Old Testament, had to be explained in such a way as to yield a lasting sense for later days. Hence Philo moralised this law. We hesitate to agree with Dr. Abrahams that the humanitarian aim was the original motive of the prohibition.

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In reading the Bible we have to bear in mind another truth. It is this, that the writers occasionally assume truths; they mention a fact, and do not insist upon it any further. It is there, and no more need be said about it. Professor E. F. Scott, in his recent book upon *The Spirit in the New Testament*, reminds us for example that Mark assumes the constant possession of the Spirit by Jesus after His baptism. The evangelist tells how after that episode the Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness. After that, Mark "does not explicitly return to the idea of a control by the Spirit. He feels that henceforth it is unnecessary to insist on a fact which may be taken for granted." Unlike older prophets and heroes who had occasional ecstasies and accesses of spiritual energy, Jesus experienced always the power and presence of the Spirit. The relationship noted at the baptism underlay the whole course of his subsequent career.

Another assumption which is sometimes overlooked is that Jesus was from the first conscious of supernatural powers. The story of the three temptations is unintelligible except on this supposition. Jesus was tempted not to claim but to misuse His unique endowment. The subtlety of the temptations lay in His consciousness that He was the Son of God, with power over nature and with superhuman faculties. It was not a consciousness to which He gradually came. It was the start of His career. And it is again only as we bear this in mind that we can understand much of what follows in the story of his life.

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As for the narrative of the temptations themselves, two points are to be noted about the first temptation. One is that spiritual exaltation can hold up nature for a time, but only for a time. Jesus did without food, He fasted for a while, and then felt hungry. Not long afterwards there is another case of absorption in spiritual work rendering Him indifferent to the physical claims. When He was talking to the woman of Samaria, He became so interested that He forgot to be hungry ; the disciples came back with the food He and they had required, but He replied, " I have meat to eat that ye know not." The other point about the first temptation is that the first word spoken by him after his baptism is a word upon the religious duty of men. " Man shall not live by bread alone."

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In this number Dr. Vacher Burch discusses the psychical basis of the temptations. This is the first of some articles upon certain phases of the life and teaching of our Lord in the Gospels, by various writers, which will appear during the next few months. Meantime, if any student desires to see how much or how little light may be thrown by the new psychology upon the temptations of Jesus, he may consult M. Georges Berguer's new book upon *Some Aspects of the Life of Jesus* (pp. 164 f.), where we are shown that the significance of the episode lies here, that while Jesus hitherto had simply to direct His own life, He was now confronted by the problem of how to communicate His life and the truth of God to sinful humanity, or, in other words, to serve and save them without compromising what had been entrusted to Himself by the Father.

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Now that Mr. Cannon's studies on Hosea are concluded, we begin the publication of two special studies in the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament. There is a revival of interest at present in the ten commandments, both from the critical and from the ethical or expository side. The decalogue is being studied afresh, and Mr. Flowers begins a set of papers upon the sense and scope of the ten commandments which will prove a boon to many students of the subject. Also we begin the publication of an essay by the veteran scholar, Hermann Gunkel of Halle. Practically nothing of his work has been translated in this country, and yet he has been one of the pioneers in the newer movement of Old Testament criticism, which is not content to analyse documents but insists upon penetrating to the thought and emotion behind the letter. His edition of Genesis is one of the commentaries to which the most scrupulous would not hesitate to apply the term "great." The present essay is one contributed to a remarkable popular edition of the Old Testament called "Die Schriften des Alten Testaments," in eight volumes. The commentary began in 1915. It gives a fresh translation, and is accompanied by running notes and introductions. Gunkel's study is contributed to the volume on the Prophets, edited by his friend and pupil Hans Schmidt of Giessen. It has been translated for our columns by Rev. A. K. Dallas, M.A.

THE TEN BEST BOOKS ON THE LIFE AND TEACHING OF ST. PAUL.

A RECENT writer on St. Paul remarks that in the Library of the Theological School with which he is connected there are "more than two thousand volumes dealing with the life and letters of the Apostle Paul, or more than one for each year since his time, not to speak of the multitudinous commentaries and histories in which the teaching of Paul has a prominent place." And the Editor desires a list of the ten best books! It is obvious than any such list must be arbitrary and individual, and, as I look over what I