

CURRENT ISSUES.

It was Renan who once said that Matthew's Gospel was the most important book in the world. Professor J. A. Findlay goes further; he claims that it is the loveliest book in the world. This is why he has written a volume on *Jesus in the First Gospel*, a charming study of Matthew's Gospel, which combines criticism and spiritual appreciation.

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When he comes to the well-known passage in the eighteenth chapter about binding and loosing, he makes a daring suggestion. The ordinary form of the text is: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." Most people take this to refer to the Church's power of excommunication or of prohibitory decisions. But Professor Findlay prefers to follow the Western text, which reads: "Whatever you shall bind on earth shall be loosed in heaven." It is a reading, he says, "which I frankly confess may be explained simply as a mistake; but some slips are inspired, and, if ever there was a case of such a happy accident, this is one."

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When we ask why this curious reading appeals to Professor Findlay, we get the following answer. Translate the reading, and the meaning of it is: "God has a solution of the problems that are insoluble from the human point of view." The immediate problem is that of some erring brother in the community, a provoking creature who baffles his fellows by his obstinate refusal to listen to their remonstrances. Attempt after attempt has been made to deal with him. But no settlement is possible, and the Church has at last to excommunicate him from its membership. But not from the providence of God, Professor Findlay argues. Church excommunication "only turns the

brother concerned into one of the lost sheep, for whose rescue and recovery the Father is so eager."

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So the argument is that we must not imagine the case of this man to be hopeless, simply because we have to give it up. Professor Findlay certainly gets a "lovely" meaning thus out of his reading of the text. It may be shaky, so far as its critical basis goes, but it is spiritually suggestive.

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Another fresh interpretation is offered, in describing the betrayal scene at Gethsemane. Jesus, in our ordinary version, says to Judas, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" "Friend" ought to be rendered "Comrade." That is obvious. But the Greek of the following words is difficult. Perhaps they are not a question at all; we might render them, "do your errand." However, Dr. Deissmann has drawn attention to a possible explanation, which Professor Findlay adopts.

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Some drinking cups of the first century in Syria have been discovered with this Greek inscription: "Comrade, why are you here? Be merry." Did Jesus quote these words, which may have been on the very cup used a few hours before at the Last Supper, omitting "Be merry"? "If so," says Professor Findlay, it was "a last most moving appeal."

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It is no argument against this interpretation that it implies Christ's knowledge of Greek. There is good evidence that Jesus was bilingual. "It would seem," as Professor Findlay argues, "that Jesus must have been able to make Himself understood in Greek, if He sought to appeal to all classes resident in or near Palestine." Certainly this interpretation corroborates the idea that Jesus understood Greek as well as Aramaic.

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Mysticism has had its advocates, recently; probably there have been more expositions of it issued during the past ten years than in any similar period of our history. Popular and scientific discussions pour from the press still; philosophers as well as theologians are interested, not to speak of journalists. But lest mysticism be unduly exalted, other voices are lifting up their protest. Among them is the voice of Mr. Hugh E. M. Stutfield,

a vigorous popular writer. He has just published a book called *Mysticism and Catholicism*, which views these two movements as a trout-fisher would view a pair of cormorants or herons.

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To mysticism Mr. Stutfield objects heartily. His pages contain some trenchant exposures of the ferocity, the sentimentalism, the immorality, and the eroticism, which have disfigured religious mysticism. It will be an eye-opener to some readers to see his quotations from some Catholic writers, and any sentimental admirers of Bossuet will do well to avoid this book. But he is not a materialist by any means. Much as he deplores the morbid and dangerous phenomena of mysticism, he realizes the inwardness of true religion. Indeed his great hope is that the dominating element "in the religion of to-morrow will be a higher and more enlightened mysticism, in which the clerical mediator will play a less important part than heretofore." And he illustrates this from his own experience.

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Mr. Stutfield has been a mountaineer. Now, he suggests, the true mountaineer's creed is the mystic's creed; both rest on "the belief that the essence of life lies in exploration." The sense of the Beyond haunts and moves both. The mystic seeks to scale the dizzy peaks of consciousness, in order to attain a vision of the Infinite, and the mountaineer too has his passion for the possibilities that await him as he toils up the slopes.

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In a moving passage Mr. Stutfield describes the really mystical emotions of the true mountaineer. He must be no mere climber. Mountaineering is not an exercise of muscles merely; it implies susceptibility to Nature in her grand and lonely moods. Awe and admiration are stirred in the mind of the climber. "All the cruelty and injustice, the anarchy and waste of the universe, are expunged from our consciousness. We cease to think of Nature as she is in the forests below, red in tooth and claw." On the heights the mountaineer has a better vision. "Yonder, in the distance, earth touches the sky, and in the far-off mountain mists the material world melts into the great Beyond." You may retort, says Mr. Stutfield, that all this is illusion, an emotional relationship with the universe which is of small value. Perhaps it is; yet "man does not live by bread alone, but also by senti-

ment, admiration, and (if you will have it so) by hallucination." So the attack on mysticism resolves itself into an onslaught upon the travesties and abuses of mysticism which characterize the ecclesiastical world. It is in the interests of true mysticism that Mr. Stutfield exposes the false lights and leaders of the movement.

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What did the Feast of Tabernacles mean? It is one of the Old Testament festivals which are mentioned in the New Testament. Jesus, according to the Fourth Gospel, once attended it in Jerusalem, and used some of its symbolic rites to illustrate His teaching; in the seventh chapter of the Gospel we have a summary of this episode.

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It is discussed in a paper reprinted by Dr. F. J. Badcock in his *Reviews and Studies* (pp. 121-126). He deals specially with the strange thirty-eighth verse of the chapter, which runs thus in our version: "he that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." This accords with the rabbinic expression, to drink of a man's water, i.e. to receive his teaching. But some scholars demur to such a view, on the ground that believers receive the Spirit, they do not impart it. Dr. Badcock agrees with this view, and therefore prefers the interpretation which makes the water flow from Christ as the risen Messiah. The verse would then go with the preceding verse as follows: "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and let him drink that believeth on Me; as the scripture hath said, Out of his (or its) belly shall flow rivers of living water."

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He proceeds to make another suggestion. Why does St. Paul refer to this in his word about the Israelites drinking "of a spiritual rock that followed them: and the rock was Christ?" Was this an independent reference? Perhaps. But possibly Paul was at this time in Jerusalem, closely connected with Gamaliel and the Pharisaic leaders. He may have overheard the saying.

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The Old Testament passages upon this Feast of Tabernacles, or rather Feast of Booths, offer some problem of their own. We print this month a contribution to the subject from the pen of

Professor H. Gressmann, of Berlin. Dr. Gressmann requires no introduction to students of the Old Testament; his work is among the finest, and it is a pleasure to welcome this original theory that the Feast was developed out of a Canaanite festival of Adonis. The arguments adduced are certain to excite discussion. Dr. Gressmann, it may be added, is now the Editor of the *Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, to which two adjectives may be fairly applied. It is international and it is indispensable. French, German, British, and American scholars now contribute to its pages, and no one who is working at the Old Testament can afford to miss a journal so living and thorough.

THE TEN BEST BOOKS ON PREACHING.

PECULIAR difficulties await him who tries to write on the "best" books on Preaching. "Best" is almost always a relative term. Subjects where the factual element is predominant can, of course, be classified. The "best" books, in that case, are those which give most truth in the most lucid and persuasive way.

But the relative character of the term "best" comes out very forcibly when an attempt is made to classify the enormous output of really good books on Preaching. So much depends on the preacher: his capacity for, and interpretations of the function of, preaching; his present stage of development as a Christian man and preacher; the special section or denomination of the Christian Church to which he belongs and ministers; the country, district, conditions within whose influence he lives and to which he is called of God to minister.

Nothing but a relative classification will be made, therefore, in this article. The writer will speak of books which stand out in his own judgment and experience. Other books, perhaps of equal merit in the eyes of many, have been read and appreciated but are not mentioned here. The