

## Genesis.

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 xxxii. 31.—Vaughan (J.), Fifty S., vi. 33.

## The Expository Times Guild of Bible Study.\*

## SUBJECTS PROPOSED FOR PAPERS.

**NOTE.**—Any one or more than one subject may be chosen. The Papers must be received by the Editor of the *Expository Times*, Kinneff, Bervie, N.B., by the 25th of April. In length they should run from two to three thousand words.

**I. EXPOSITORY.**—1. The translation and meaning of Job xix. 25-27. 2. An exposition of Psalm cx. 3. Some points of "Introduction" to St. John's Gospel. 4. An exposition of Philippians ii. 5-11. 5. "Note" on the "Sin unto death" of 1 John v. 16.

**II. THEOLOGICAL.**—1. The Anger of God. 2. Some recent literature on the Atonement. 3. The Agnostic and Prayer.

**III. LITERARY.**—1. A review of Professor Robertson Smith's *Religion of the Semites*. 2. Or of Dr. Simon's *The Redemption of Man*. 3. Or of Canon Westcott's *Hebrews*. 4. Dr. Döllinger. 5. Dr. Delitzsch. 6. The Bible in Ruskin's Writings.

\* See p. 145.

## Rother's Exposition of the First Epistle of St. John.

## CHAPTER I. 8-10.

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

VER. 8. The assumption that even Christians still need a cleansing from their sins, the apostle justifies by the assertion of the inadmissibility of its opposite. He speaks of the present condition of his readers, not of sins committed by them before their conversion to Christianity. Notwithstanding the forgiveness of sin, the Christian still has sin; and it is sad that he must still be reminded of that fact. Faith in Christ must, from its very nature, continually awaken the consciousness of sin; delusion in respect of this marks the nominal Christian. In fellowship with Christ our eye becomes ever keener and keener for sin, and more especially our own sin. It is precisely the mature Christian who calls himself a great sinner. The spiritual pride, that might suggest to the Christian that he is sinless, can only be compatible with a falling away from the real Christian faith. Such a blindness as makes us appear sinless in our own eyes is a self-caused deception, and indeed one

that is very dangerous, leading us altogether astray. Nothing is more dangerous than this self-deceit, because it is an almost incurable condition. The very means, which is above all calculated to make us conscious of our sins, is abused so as to make us dream of a sinlessness on our part. From what quarter, then, should deliverance still come?

*The truth is not in us.* The truth is here the sense of truth, the veracity resulting from self-examination and self-knowledge. The condition of inner truthfulness, not only for each Christian, but for all men, is the knowledge of sin. The recognition and acknowledgment of it is the fundamental knowledge, upon which depends, for men, all objective and subjective truth. If a man will really understand himself, he must be sensible of the fact that his actual condition is a sinful one, and that in consequence of this sin he stands in contradiction with himself and with the whole system of things round about him. It is impossible really to understand the unique nature and being of man, if one does not at the same time acknowledge that, as we at present actually are, we are in contradiction with this our nature. If we would look upon our sinful condition as belonging to the nature of man, we should surrender our own dignity and

worth. Only when man at the same time knows himself as a sinner can he believe in his nobility as a man. In the case of the Christian, however, this is even still more important; for in his case this blunting of conscience cannot be mere crudeness; it can only be a blunting artificially brought about.

Ver. 9. Having thus demanded from the Christian the acknowledgment of his sins, John now adds that with this acknowledgment there is by no means connected in his case the torture of despair that belongs to the sinner. The individual sins that still cleave to him do not hinder his fellowship with God, so far as he not only does not deny them, but confesses and acknowledges them. The Christian, as a Christian, knows his sin in such a way that he at the same time knows himself redeemed from it; and for this very reason he can unreservedly follow up the knowledge of his own sin. So long as we know our sin as not yet forgiven us, we shrink back from following up the knowledge of it to the inmost depths, and rather have an interest to minimize it. This interest ceases as soon as we know our sin to be forgiven; yea, it is precisely with this knowledge that we learn to understand divine grace in all its greatness. The Christian is delivered from all bias and prejudice in the judging of his sin. It is for this reason also that, in the interest of a thorough repentance, so much depends upon our having a real forgiveness of our sin, and upon our believing in the complete, full, unreserved forgiveness of our sins, and that too from pure grace; for only then can we appropriate forgiveness with confidence. It is the assurance of forgiveness that first makes us really keen-sighted for our sins. To them that stand without, this seems to be a contradiction; but the Christian knows it from experience, and his knowledge of sin will ever be at the same time also a confession of it.

God is *faithful and righteous* to forgive sins. The principal subject of vers. 5-10 is not Christ, but God. In other places also, and especially in Paul, faithfulness and righteousness are brought into prominent connection with the work of redemption as fundamental attributes, not of Christ, but of God. According to the New Testament type of teaching it is God that forgives sin (Luke xi. 4), Christ being the one that mediates forgiveness (by His propitiation and advocacy). God is called *faithful* in the Old Testament as well as in the New, inasmuch as He keeps His word and fulfils His promises—He abides faithful to the word revealed by Him. Upon this faithfulness of God to His promises Paul (Rom. iii. 3, xi. 29) builds the inalienable character of the unique relation of Israel to God as the trustee of the divine word; upon it he builds (2 Cor. i. 18-23) his conviction of the inner consistency and harmony of the preached gospel; upon it he also builds (1 Thess. v. 24;

Tit. i. 2) his assurance of the eternal life to which we are called by God. In the passage before us, where the point in question is as to the forgiveness of sins, such an appeal to the faithfulness of God as the ground of its confident expectation is relevant, inasmuch as, in His revelation of Himself, God has expressly promised forgiveness of sins, more especially in the time of the Messiah (Jer. xxxi. 31 ff.; Mic. vii. 18; Hos. v. 15 ff.; Zeph. iii. 12 ff.).

John, however, appeals also to the fact that God is *righteous*. The righteousness of God is to him a still further foundation of the confident expectation of forgiveness of sins. At first sight this must be surprising. For how can forgiveness of sins, which according to the uniform teaching of the New Testament and of sacred Scripture generally is essentially an act of divine *grace*, be looked for from God's righteousness? It need not, therefore, surprise us if attempts have been made to impose upon the expression "*righteous*" here significations altogether foreign to it. Thus, e.g., it has been frequently assumed (since Grotius) that it stands by a Hebraism in the sense of "*gracious*." But this assumption is arbitrary and inadmissible. Even allowing that "*righteous*" has occasionally the secondary signification "*gracious*," the primary signification is always that of "*righteous*." That secondary signification arises in two ways. In the first place, in so far as what is spoken of is the righteousness of God. In Old Testament times, to wit, God is generally called righteous, inasmuch as He demeans Himself in keeping with His covenant relation to Israel. In this covenant relation, however, it is essentially implied that God has promised the people to turn towards them with His goodness, compassion, patience, and grace. Looked at from this viewpoint of the covenant relation, the manifestations of God's goodness and grace to Israel present themselves as acts of His righteousness. Similarly in Old Testament times the secondary meaning of which we are treating naturally arises, in so far as what is spoken of is the righteousness of men towards others. In reference to men, righteousness in the Old Testament is, generally speaking, conduct in accordance with the demands of the divine law. Now the Old Testament law expressly demands kindness, benevolence, considerateness, compassion towards one's neighbours. In the mind of the Hebrews, therefore, the fulfilment of these duties as demanded by the law also falls under the notion of the conduct which is in keeping with the law, and which we might perhaps express by our "*(active) piety*." Accordingly we must abide in the passage before us by the idea of righteousness. Nor does the union here of "*righteous*" with "*faithful*" warrant us in the very least to depart from this signification; for the two qualities, faithfulness and righteousness, stand in a peculiarly close kinship to one another (*vid.*

Luke xvi. 10). It is going too far, however, in the other direction, to take "righteous" as substantially synonymous with "faithful" (so Lücke, followed by de Wette), with only this difference, that "righteous," as the more general term, takes up and makes good the more specific "faithful," so that John should say: "God is faithful, because He is righteous. In righteousness He keeps to the penitent sinner that which He has promised and revealed as the law of His kingdom, viz. that the sinner, if he repent and confess his sins, should receive from Him forgiveness and new vital force." The interpretation of Paulus and Jachmann seems much more tenable: "God is faithful, inasmuch as He fulfils His promise of the forgiveness of sins; and He is righteous, inasmuch as He only fulfils it to him who has confessed his sins with heartfelt repentance." But this interpretation also plainly does violence to our passage; and more especially as nothing is said expressly in it of the genuine repentance upon which this interpretation lays so great stress. The thought of the passage is rather this: If we confess our sins, God is faithful; He keeps His word, according to which He has promised us forgiveness of sins; and He *can* keep this word (He is in the position of being able to do so *ethically*), inasmuch as He is righteous, inasmuch as in doing so all possibility of compromising His righteousness is excluded (by the existent propitiation for sin), and (in connection therewith) He stands as righteous in the eyes of men even in this His forgiving of guilt; viz. in virtue of the public revelation of His righteousness through the redemption that has been wrought in Jesus Christ (Rom. iii. 24-26). In accordance with the propitiation for sin that has been wrought in Christ (chap. ii. 2), God, without His holy righteousness being thereby in any way violated and the semblance of a shadow falling upon His holiness, can forgive to the man that believes in Christ the sins still found in him, if he confesses them.

*Sin* and *unrighteousness* are only two modifications of the same idea. Sin is the more comprehensive term; it denotes ethical abnormality in general, without any more specific reference. Unrighteousness, on the contrary, denotes this ethical abnormality with special reference to its bearing upon the relation of man to God, viz. as contradicting this relation, as an interruption of it, *i.e.* of man's fellowship with God. Accordingly, "unrighteousness" is used very appropriately in the place in which it stands here, in which what is spoken of is the way in which God neutralizes the interruption of fellowship with Him that is caused by the Christian's sins. By adding "cleansing from all unrighteousness" to the "forgiving of sins," John means to point out how forgiveness of sin is, from its intrinsically necessary operation, at the same time also an *actual cleansing* from

sin, and indeed a cleansing that is ultimately absolutely complete (from *all* unrighteousness). John desires to give special prominence to this complete forgiveness of his sins in the case of the penitent Christian. In the same measure as we are certain of complete forgiveness, is our attitude and demeanour towards God the right one.

Just as the promise of forgiveness of sins is the fundamental thought of all God's promises in the Old Testament, and the real gift of God, for which Israel has to wait (Isa. liii.), so it is also the fundamental need of man. For this reason no one can understand the provision made by God for man's salvation without having a clear consciousness of this great need. With the satisfaction of it everything has been given him. Man needs nothing further than that he again acquire a heart for God and draw near to Him; and this can only happen if God, notwithstanding His holiness, has a heart towards him. God has faithfully kept this promise, and still keeps it. It is self-deception to imagine that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin from Him; and even in the believing Christian, behind the doubt as to the reality of his forgiveness that occasionally arises in his mind, there is always some impenitence or pride hiding itself. The more sincere our heart is, so much the more easy do we find it to have strong faith in Christ.

Ver. 10. The whole enormity of denying one's own sin, of which he spoke in ver. 8, flashes upon the apostle's mind; and hence this verse, as a supplement to it. He notices that in it he has really said far too little of this denial, and accordingly he now sets forth what he had omitted to state. There he has represented such a denial only as a deceiving of one's self, and as an indication of a want of an inner sense of truth; but it is also something far worse. Thereby a man not only sins against himself, but also commits a trespass against God; he thereby sins against Him, inasmuch as he thereby makes Him a liar. But how by such a denial do we make God a liar? The testimony of God, in reference to which mention is made here of a making Him a liar, is manifestly that which is immediately described as "His word." This is the divine revelation in its whole compass, the Old Testament and the New, as it is set forth in sacred Scripture. Now, this divine revelation is substantially a loud declaration of God that the human world is sinful, and that too without exception. Not only many individual statements in the Scriptures (such as, e.g., Ps. xiv.; Isa. lix. 2-15; with which compare Rom. i. 18-iii. 20) attest this in the most precise manner, but this universal sinfulness of humanity is the necessary presupposition of the whole divine revelation, so far as it is essentially a provision for man's salvation. In the case also of the individual

man this is the constant theme that God discusses with him, to convince him of his sins by His word and His Spirit. In immediate connection with our forgiveness He convinces us of our sins. Whoever, therefore, does not acknowledge his sin, gives God the lie. The direct opposite of this demeanour stands in Rom. iii. 4. He who will

know nothing of his sin is mistaken in imagining that he has received God's revelation (in faith), and that he possesses it as a revelation appertaining to him (for his salvation). In such a case this word of God is not really in him as an effective power unto salvation ; it has only come to him externally, but he does not possess it.

## The Welfare of Youth.

### PAPERS AND PRIZES.

#### REPORT FOR MARCH.

##### *Senior Section.*

- i. R. M. LOCHHEAD, 24 St. Vincent Street, Glasgow.  
*Next in Order.*—M. C. (Dundee).

##### *Middle Section.*

- i. L. E. GRANT, Killimster, Wick.  
*Next in Order.*—C. T. (Gartly), T. J. W. (Glasgow).

##### *Junior Section.*

- i. J. A. GIBSON, Gartly Station, Aberdeenshire.  
*Next in Order.*—C. B. (Hamilton), B. M. M. (Kingston).

This Competition will be resumed in October.

## "After Many Days."

Oh, cast thy bread on the waters  
Of life's dark changeful tide,  
All thou canst spare from thy garners,  
Scattering far and wide !  
Some day back from the fitful sea  
It shall return to thee.

When thou art weary and world-worn,  
Needing perhaps a friend,  
Poor, or despised, or forsaken,  
Lonely at life's late end ;  
Oh, what joy if the bread thou cast  
Long since, return at last !

But if the world-waves restore thee  
Naught but ingratitude,  
Stones for the bread that thou gavest,  
Evil for all thy good,  
What reck these if when life is past  
God's "Well done" come at last ?

SARAH MATHESON.

## Modern Commentaries on Hebrews.

BY THE REV. PROFESSOR SANDAY, D.D.

"The Academy," March 1, 1890.

THE Epistle to the Hebrews furnishes a good landmark for the progress of New Testament exegesis in England during the last few years. At the beginning of the decade just completed, the only books available for ordinary students were the two general commentaries of Alford and Wordsworth, with Dr. Moulton's careful edition in Bishop Ellicott's series, and the translations of Delitzsch and Tholuck. To these were soon added Dr. Kay in the *Speaker's Commentary* (1881), whose results, though obtained at first hand, represent rather an extreme of conservatism. Next came, in 1883, two smaller editions by Archdeacon Farrar and Mr. F. Rendall. Both were scholarly pieces of work; the former might be said to express intelligently the average current views of the Epistle ; the latter took a line which was independent and original, but not free from crotchets, and it covered the ground less completely. More recently there has appeared another popular commentary, by Dr. A. B. Davidson, for its size and price one of the very best theological handbooks with which I am acquainted—a close grappling with the thought of the Epistle by a singularly strong and candid mind. Now the series is fitly crowned by the full and elaborate edition of Dr. Westcott, which will, no doubt, take its place, along with his previous editions of the Gospel and Epistles of St. John, among the classics of every theological library.

## "The Lord's Prayer."

*The Lord's Prayer*: A Practical Meditation. By Newman Hall, LL.B. 2nd Edition. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889, 6s.

Newman Hall's *Practical Meditation on the Lord's Prayer* is not like the "Meditations" we used to be expected to read, which, though they had both a beginning and an ending, could give no reason for the same. It is a full book, but it is orderly and clear. It contains the manifest results of wide, judicious reading, and of strong, accurate thinking. The style is condensed in this second edition, making the book more useful for preachers, without making it less useful for general readers.