

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE great event of the month in theological literature is the publication of the New Syriac Gospels, and of their translation, the one by the Cambridge Press, the other by the Messrs. Macmillan. The story of their discovery at the Convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai by Mrs. Lewis, and their subsequent photograph and decipherment by herself and her friends, is romantic enough to arrest the attention even of untheological persons. But the work itself seems to have an importance that will make its publication memorable after the romance has been forgotten.

The first clear account of the characteristics of this Syriac edition of the Gospels is given by Professor Rendel Harris in *The Contemporary Review* for November. After reminding us of what we were already told, that the Syriac is closely akin to that published by Cureton in 1859, Professor Rendel Harris says: 'There is not the least doubt that, as far as Syriac Gospels are concerned, a text has been recovered, superior in antiquity to any yet known, and one that often agrees with all that is most ancient in Greek MSS.; a text which the advanced critics will at once acknowledge to be, after allowance has been made for a few serious blemishes, superior in purity to all extant copies, with a very few exceptions; and, at the same time, a text which,

by its dogmatic tendencies, will arouse the interest of theologians of every school of thought.'

First of all, the new Gospels are 'peculiarly rich in omissions.' They lack the story of the adulteress in St. John vii. 53-viii. 3, the last twelve verses of Mark, and a number of passages in the last chapters of St. Luke, which are omitted by the latest editors often on the sole authority of early Latin copies. The additions, on the other hand, are not numerous. The two of most interest are (1) the reading in Matt. xxvii. 16, where Pilate's question is made to run, 'Which will ye that I release unto you, Jesus Bar-Abba, or Jesus that is called Christ?'—a reading which 'adds an antithetic force to the question, making Pilate say, "Which Jesus will you have?—Look on this picture, and on that!—The anarchist or the saint?" And (2) a very curious reading in John xi., which Professor Rendel Harris does not remember to have seen elsewhere. The command of Christ to take away the stone from the grave of Lazarus is followed by a question on the part of Martha, 'Why are they taking away the stone?'

But the most original feature in the MS., and perhaps the most archaic of its peculiarities, is one that is due partly to omission and partly to addition. It is nothing less than a new version of the

birth of our Lord, by which His paternity is definitely and designedly assigned to Joseph.

‘Does not the whole question of the divinity of Jesus turn upon the miraculous birth?’ was asked in all sincerity by a recent reviewer of a prominent theologian. This seems to have been the guileless opinion of the person whose hand is now traced in this early Syriac manuscript of the Gospels. But he had a distinct advantage over the modern reviewer, that it seems to have been in his power to make the miraculous birth disappear from his Bible. Something he added and something he left out, and, behold, Jesus was born by ordinary generation, and Joseph the carpenter was His father! Thus, in the sixteenth verse of the first chapter of Matthew, in place of the familiar, ‘And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ,’ he reads, ‘Jacob begat Joseph: Joseph (to whom was espoused the Virgin Mary) begat Jesus, who is called Christ.’ Again he turns the words of the twenty-first verse, ‘And she shall bring forth a son’ into ‘she shall bear thee a son.’ And the last verse of the chapter has the audacious alteration of ‘and knew her not till she had brought forth a son’ into ‘and *she bare him* a son.’

Professor Rendel Harris has probably as kindly a feeling towards the ‘Lewis Gospels,’ for which he has done so much, as anyone, yet he does not hesitate to say that these interpolations and omissions are deliberate and designed. He says so after careful investigation both of this MS. and of the whole question of the Virginity in the earliest Church; and it is improbable that anyone will after him be found to maintain the priority and genuineness of these peculiar readings. For, in the first place, he shows that the expression ‘the Virgin Mary’ in the sixteenth verse quoted above, is a late expression relatively to the New Testament. ‘Even in the Apology of Aristides, which is one of our earliest witnesses for the Virgin Birth, she is simply “a Hebrew Virgin”; so that, “if we were to receive the words, “Virgin Mary,” or

“Mary the Virgin,” as a popular and understood title, into the earliest form of the Gospel, we should be guilty of an anachronism.’ And in the second place, and much more seriously, this new narrative is inconsistent with itself. The received story is miraculous and consistent, the new account is miraculous and inconsistent.

And then Professor Rendel Harris ends his article with these most characteristic sentences:— ‘To the devout readers it may, perhaps, seem that this cold-blooded criticism of vital questions is wanting in due reverence. I can, however, assure them that such is not the case. Upon two separate occasions I have taken off my shoes in the Chapel of the Burning Bush on Mount Sinai, although in the habit of regarding

Earth crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God.

Should we, then, fall short of adorations in the Convent Library, or in the study of MSS. of the Scriptures, veritable bushes of fire, common or uncommon? Nay! I hope that, whatever may be the outcome of our studies, and apart from the question of their furtherance of orthodox theology, we may perhaps belong to the order of discalceate friars.’

In forcible antagonism to some recent writers, Professor Godet, in his new *Introduction*, finds that the Christology of St. Paul is in closest agreement with that of St. John. He touches the subject as he gathers together his conclusions upon the Epistle to the Philippians. In this Epistle alone, he finds the Pauline ‘being in the form of God,’ in exact correspondence with St. John’s, ‘and the Word was God’; ‘He despoiled Himself, having taken the form of a servant, and being made in the likeness of men,’ is nothing else than ‘the Word was made flesh’; and in ‘therefore God has highly exalted Him,’ we find again the thought of that prayer of Jesus in St. John: ‘Father, render Me the glory that I had with Thee before the world was made.’

Professor Godet, therefore, has no sympathy with Sabatier's distinction that 'the Christ of John does not come to be fully and simply man,' while 'the Christ of Paul does not attain to be simply and purely God.' First remove the ambiguity lurking under the adverbs *fully, purely, simply*, then reduce the thought to its clear sense, and it comes to this: 'The Christ-God of John does not *really* become man, and the Christ-man of Paul does not *really* become God.' Whereupon it is easy to show that it is false.

For even if the author of the Fourth Gospel was not St. John, the evangelic tradition which it contains proceeds from him. And it would be strange if he who lived so intimately with Jesus during those three earthly years should form his conception of Christ from the point of view of God rather than of man; while, on the other hand, he who knew Him only in His awful appearance, as the Son of God, should think of Him and write of Him mainly as man. But the facts themselves do not support Sabatier's well-turned antithesis. 'To be *exhausted* with thirst and fatigue after a day's journey; to *weep* before the tomb of a friend; to *shudder* in contact with diabolic perversity; to have *His soul troubled* in the prospect of a cruel death,—are not these the features of a real humanity?' It is St. John who has preserved them to us. To share originally in the *divine state*; to be associated in the creative act; *freely to choose* between a glorious appearing here below, such as that of a God, or an advent in the state of a servant obedient unto death; then to be raised to the position of Lord of lords, of the Son in whom dwells the *fulness of the Godhead*,—are not these the features of divinity? It is Paul that shows them in Jesus.

Mr. Joseph Jacobs, who was chosen by *The Athenæum* to review the Revised Version of the Old Testament when it appeared in 1885, has just published a small volume of essays to which he gives the title of *Studies in Biblical Archaeology* (David Nutt, foolscap 8vo, pp. xxiv, 148, 3s. 6d.).

The title is comprehensive. It includes the review of the Revised Version referred to, and six other subjects: Recent Research in Biblical Archæology; Recent Research in Comparative Religion; Junior Right in Genesis; Are there Totem-Clans in the Old Testament?; The Nethinim; and the Indian Origin of Proverbs xxx.

The essay on 'Junior Right' touches a subject that has perplexed many a Bible student—the reason for the frequent preference of the younger son over the elder. The examples in the Book of Genesis are numerous. We know them by rote before we leave the primary school. And we know the usual explanations. But they do not always seem satisfactory.

And by and by this becomes to some of us the most perplexing of all the things in the Bible. We read that Jacob was chosen before Esau. And we ask, Why? Because God, out of His mere good pleasure,—but that does not satisfy us all. And when we read the bare words of Scripture—'Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, but Esau I hated,'—the perplexity becomes often very acute.

Mr. Jacobs, who is a Jew, is also a higher critic. Therefore, he is a thoroughgoing higher critic. His way of explaining the difficulty is not the way we have been accustomed to. He believes that in the days of the patriarchs 'junior right' was the law, or at least the social custom. That is to say, it was the custom in that society to which the patriarchs belonged for the *youngest* son to succeed to the property and carry on the family name. 'I would venture to suggest that the custom would naturally arise during the latter stages of the pastoral period, when the elder sons would in the ordinary course of events have "set up for themselves" by the time of the father's death. The youngest son would, under these circumstances, naturally step into his father's shoes, and acquire the *patria potestas*, and with it the right of sacrificing to the family gods by the paternal hearth.'

And thus he thinks that 'many of the out-of-the-way incidents in the lives of the patriarchs, and almost all those that have especially shocked the theologians,' receive a natural explanation. But Mr. Jacobs is aware that these incidents have been already explained, that they are all, or nearly all, explained in the Old Testament itself, and that the explanations given there are very different from the simple, all-absorbing explanation he has discovered. He knows that, and as a thorough-going higher critic he has his answer ready. The facts belong to one period, the explanations to another. That Jacob, the younger son, was preferred before Esau, the elder, is a fact which carries us back to the early pastoral days of the Hebrew family. Why Jacob was preferred is an explanation which belongs to a much later time and a far different society.

The explanation belongs to a time when primogeniture and not junior right was the law or social custom. And here Mr. Jacobs indulges in a little criticism on his own account. It is highly probable that these explanations would not be given for mere literary reasons. If the writers of a later period put themselves to the trouble to find theological explanations for what were instances of a social custom, they must have been driven to it by some pressing necessity. That necessity existed in the time of the temple worship, and the days when it was most insisted on that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Then the priests 'felt bound to show that what was seemingly the rule in patriarchal times—the birth-right of the youngest—was really the exception to the rule with which they were familiar—the birth-right of the eldest. It was important to show this from the sacerdotal point of view, since the whole maintenance of the priests depended on the system of first-fruits' (Deut. xviii. 4).

Both Kuenen and Wellhausen hold that the priests had no more share in the sacrificial banquets than anyone else who joined them. But Mr. Jacobs asks, 'What then did they live upon?' And

it is very clear to him that to maintain the antiquity of the rule of primogeniture, and show that the cases of Isaac and Jacob and the rest were exceptions, for special theological reasons, was a matter of vital importance to them. The sanctity of the first-born comes out strongly in the earliest legislation: 'All that openeth the matrix is mine' (Ex. xxxiv. 19), *i.e.* belonged to the priests, which is extended in the next verse even to the children of men, when it is said: 'All the first-born of thy sons thou shalt redeem.' And as this legislation is the legislation of priests, it is clear to him that the sanctity of the first-born must in Israel have come in with the establishment of a priestly caste. Whereupon it is not without significance that Aaron was a first-born, and that he was succeeded in his office by his eldest son Eleazar.

Must the sense of Col. i. 20 be, as Origen thought, that the *fallen* angels themselves will one day share in the pardon acquired by the Cross? The words of the verse are: 'And through Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, *I say*, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens' (R.V.). In his *Introduction to the New Testament*, of which the first volume has just been issued (T. & T. Clark, 8vo, pp. 621, 12s. net), Professor Godet asks the question and answers it in the negative. For the idea of pardon for the fallen angels is, he says, entirely foreign to what we know of the conceptions of the apostle. And then he points out that the expression which St. Paul here uses varies slightly but significantly from that which elsewhere he employs to designate the reconciliation of men with God. His construction elsewhere is a simple dative (*ἐαυτῷ καταλάσσειν*), as in 2 Cor. v. 18. Here it is the preposition and the accusative (*εἰς ἑαυτὸν καταλάσσειν*), which Professor Godet would translate, 'to reconcile *with reference to Him*.' And then he suggests that the angels, having been actors in the promulgation of the Law, must have felt surprised at the multitude of transgressions that were left unpunished during the epoch of

forbearance (Rom. iii. 25 ; Heb. ix. 15). But now the blood of the cross has flowed ; and the angels are satisfied that sufficient reparation has at last been made for all past sins, and so they are reconciled, not to God, but *in relation* to Him and to His mode of working.

Mr. Claude G. Montefiore, M.A., who recently contributed an article to *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, giving his 'First Impressions of Paul,' continues his study of the New Testament, and the current issue of the same periodical contains a paper on the 'Religious Value of the Fourth Gospel.'

At the outset Mr. Montefiore draws attention to the limits within which he has chosen to work. It is not the Fourth Gospel, it is only its religious value. And it is its religious value to an outsider, to a Jew, to one who, with all his philosophical toleration, does not believe in the Fourth Gospel.

For Mr. Montefiore recognises, and frankly admits, that if you do not believe in the divinity of Christ, you cannot believe in the Fourth Gospel. 'The object of this Gospel,' he says, 'is not to teach ethics,' but 'that the Eternal and Divine Word became flesh, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' And he quotes with approbation the statement of Dr. Martineau, in *The Seat of Authority in Religion*: 'Take away the *Godhead* of Christ, and there is not an incident or a speech in the Fourth Gospel which does not lose its significance.'

Mr. Montefiore takes away the 'Godhead of Christ,' and then he approaches the Fourth Gospel to discover its religious value. He acknowledges that his method of procedure is not very 'sympathetic to the author.' 'I assume that the main contention of the Gospel is false ; and then I coolly proceed to ask: What is its religious value?' Nevertheless he does ask the question, and struggles through fifty pages to

answer it. He finds some things in the Fourth Gospel, but he does not find much religious value.

He finds 'exquisite beauty.' 'First of all there comes the beauty of the manner, apart from the matter of the book. Its simplicity and elevation of style, the sustained dignity, and occasionally the dramatic power, all hold the interest of the reader. The greatest subjects in heaven or on earth are dealt with, and while the sentences are clear and unadorned, the sense of grandeur is usually well maintained. We feel that we are reading the work of a genius, and, moreover, the work of one who has full control over his material, his thought, and his words. How delightfully the shortness and pointedness of St. John contrast with the diffuse rhetoric of Philo. The very same ideas offend us in the one writer which charm us in the other. A single crisp verse takes the place of pages of involved and florid rhetoric. The taste of the one was doubtless excellent for his own age and environment ; the taste of the other still seems excellent to our own. A thought strangely expressed in Philo fails to arrest our attention. The same thought in the Fourth Gospel compels reflection or astonishment. Again, the Fourth Gospel, like so many books both of the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures, is alone of its kind. It is very short, but there is no other book exactly resembling it. Like the Prophets, the Psalms, or the Epistles of St. Paul, it has a uniqueness and isolation of its own.'

And Mr. Montefiore finds more in 'St. John,' as he curiously calls it, than beauty of manner. He is attracted by the spirituality of the book. 'The Fourth Gospel has, I suppose, gone a good way to form the religious consciousness of civilised humanity, such as it now exists, and yet we have not, I imagine, got beyond—it may be hoped that we never shall get beyond—these oppositions between the seen and the unseen, the outward and the inward, the flesh and the Spirit, which our Gospel has helped to make a permanent item in the forms and categories of cultivated, and even

uncultivated, thought. Great primal phrases, such as "God is a Spirit," the "Bread of Life," "Peace not as the world giveth," in their striking simplicity, and at their fountain source, will always, I should imagine, continue to attract and fascinate the spiritual and religious consciousness of man.'

And Mr. Montefiore even finds philosophy in the Fourth Gospel. 'Unconsciously to ourselves we philosophise, and this philosophy may truly be called divine. More even than with Plato, we are elevated and carried out of ourselves. In Plato we are invited to side with Socrates; in the Fourth Gospel we are invited to side with Christ.'

But now we have come to the end. This is the religious value of the Fourth Gospel—its exquisite language, its spiritual or ideal sense of goodness, and its divine philosophy. We have come to the end. And in a moment we are on the other side. Here Mr. Montefiore 'parts company' with the Fourth Evangelist. And now certain strange things are brought to our ears, which, notwithstanding occasional parentheses of mitigation, seem to take back all that has been granted, or make it less than worth our having.

For it seems to Mr. Montefiore that the author of the Fourth Gospel recognises two classes of men, and two only, those who believe in Christ and those who do not; and then that, according to St. John, whether a man believes in Christ or not depends upon his moral state. And in itself Mr. Montefiore does not object to that. He admits that religious belief, the belief in God, does depend upon a man's moral character. 'Not merely is it true,' he says, 'that religious belief may ethically transform, but it is also true that the essential character of your belief, as realised and appropriated by you, is partly dependent upon your prior or present ethical condition.' He makes a distinction between belief in a fact which has no relation to morality, and in a person who *is* morality itself. 'Every man, good or bad, is at

once capable of believing that a great battle was fought at Fontenay in 841. But the belief in God—and here is one aspect of its solemnity—is not as easy as the belief in a battle. At all events there is, I apprehend, a sense in which it is true to say, that though a scamp can believe in God as well as a saint, his belief must be of a different texture and complexion.'

So Mr. Montefiore does not part company with St. John here, after all. He admits that men may be properly divided into believers and unbelievers, and he acknowledges that a man's moral state determines his belief. But he says that, according to St. John, a man's moral state is already fixed and unalterable. They who are good believe in Christ, they who are evil do not, and the evil have no way of making or finding themselves good, and therefore no hope or chance of ever believing in Christ. In all this he thinks that the Fourth Gospel is immensely behind the first three. The Synoptic Jesus can say, 'I came to call sinners to repentance.' But the Fourth Gospel knows nothing of repentance. The word is not found in it. The followers of Christ no longer include a contingent of publicans and sinners. They are the morally good. And Christ cannot even pray for sinners, as in the Synoptics he prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' 'The intense dualism of the writer of the Fourth Gospel is finally and consummately revealed to us in the great prayer in the seventeenth chapter, where Christ is made to say, "I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given Me."'

And then we are not surprised to remember that it is the Fourth Gospel that contains the New Commandment, 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another.' Mr. Montefiore will not 'attempt to depreciate in a hasty or grudging spirit the value of so famous an injunction,' yet it must be pointed out that this love is merely reciprocal. 'It is restricted to the fellow-disciple, and is thus in sharp and violent contrast to the bidding of the Synoptic Jesus. The

particularism of race is exchanged for the new and more dangerous particularism of creed.'

But the same moment that we remember that the New Commandment is found in the Fourth Gospel we remember that this verse is found there also: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.'

We may have been mistaken hitherto in thinking that that verse is characteristic of St. John's Gospel; but at least we are not mistaken in thinking it is there. And surely Mr. Montefiore, who finds St. Paul so much more to his liking than St. John, has forgotten that it is the Apostle to the Gentiles who writes: 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged.'

The Theology of the Epistle to the Romans.

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II. THE GOSPEL.

THE first seven verses of the Epistle to the Romans contain the salutation of St. Paul to the Christians whom he is addressing. But they contain much more. St. Paul does not content himself with sending a message of grace and peace in the name of God, he inserts in it certain clauses containing statements of doctrine, in words which imply a great deal.

In the first place, they tell us of the mission of St. Paul. Twice he reminds us of his apostolic office. He tells us that from Christ he received his mission. To Christ he is responsible. And the aim and duty of his apostleship is to preach the gospel of God.

And secondly, he tells us that the subject of the gospel is Jesus Christ and His divine mission, and he tells us what Jesus Christ is in a very clear and definite way. He was the Messiah of the Jews; the Christ and Anointed of God, Him whom the prophets and the Scriptures foretold. He who had fulfilled in His person all these hopes and expectations which had been raised in the Jewish nation. And then he tells us that this Jesus was a man and a Jew, born according to the flesh the son of David, but that He had been declared by His resurrection to have been more than this. He was Son of Man, He was also Son of God. And then St. Paul sums up the whole description by ascribing to Him the name of Lord, that name which in the Old Testament has implied all the majesty and power of the

Jehovah of the Jews, and had become recognised as the official title of the Messiah.

And then, thirdly, St. Paul in these words declares the universal character of the gospel. It has to be preached amongst all nations.

And now let us consider the importance of these doctrinal statements. St. Paul does not in the body of the Epistle treat of the whole of Christian doctrine; he does not discuss the whole of the gospel message. He assumes that his hearers have had Christianity preached to them, that it is only in certain parts that explanation is required.

What, then, was this teaching which he assumes? It was the belief that Jesus who had lived among men was the Son of God, and was proved to be such by His resurrection. This was in St. Paul's mind the beginning and the starting-point of Christianity. He says (Rom. x. 9), 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.' And this we hold now as the central teaching of Christianity.

It is sometimes said it is a little difficult to find St. Paul's belief about Jesus; he does not treat it definitely or prominently in his earliest Epistles—those which it is universally admitted that he wrote. Now that is quite true if we mean he does not devote much time to proving it; but the reason is, he assumes that it is proved. Is not, then, the evidence stronger if we will take the trouble to