

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE Rev. Henry Latham, M.A., Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, whose *Pastor Pastorum* is one of the most intelligent studies in the Gospels which we possess, has published another book, to which he gives the name of *A Service of Angels*. It is not a theological treatise on the doctrine of angels. It is not a theological treatise on anything. Mr. Latham is careful to avoid theology, being more concerned for the practice of religion than for its science. But it does not even cover the whole ground of the ministry of angels. As its name suggests, out of the many services which angels may be believed to render us, this book has to do with one.

But surely before you speak of the ministry of angels, you must prove their existence? Mr. Latham does not think so. Nor, it may be remembered, does the Bible. It does not prove the existence of God before it says 'God created.' That was a 'A Service of God'; and it is the very beginning of the doctrine of God. No; Mr. Latham is not bound to prove the existence of angels before he speaks of their ministry. But he may prove their existence by their ministry, if he will. And that is what he proceeds to do.

And first he proves it to himself. For it appears that the Master of Trinity Hall (perhaps by reason of having his intellect too much exercised in

'advanced' theology) has had his own doubts about the angels. Or it may be that, being a practical rather than a scientific theologian, and finding no good use for the angels in the present economy of spiritual things,—finding that, in actual fact, they were neither known nor apparently needed,—he had come to the conclusion that they never were, or, now at least, had ceased to be. In either case, whether his doubts were speculative or practical, it is clear that Mr. Latham had them, and that his first business was to prove the existence of angels to himself.

He did not go to prove it, however. It came to him. As indeed all our certainties do. He was in the way, and the proof found him.

'I was staying, one spring, at Siena, and after some days of unpleasant weather—which in Central Italy at that season is common enough, but which a travelling Englishman is wont to look on as a fraud—there came one perfect day. It was as bright as summer, but with the freshness of spring in the air. Coming back from a morning walk, I took my way along one of the three rocky ridges on which the city is built, and at the junction of which its chief buildings stand. A tongue of orchard valley ran up between these ridges into the heart of the city, and the vines and the fig-trees reached to the low wall which bordered the road. Looking across this at the noble

view of the arm of the city which stretches along the south-eastern ridge, I caught sight of a lizard lying in the sunniest nook of the broken coping of the wall. He was a glorious green lizard with golden rims to his eyes, presenting the very image of passive animal enjoyment as he lay curled up, blinking and basking in the sun. It was not only the lavish wealth of beauty showered on the creature,—a wealth of colour and curve, and of the nameless grace that goes with living things,—it was not this only that fastened my attention and made me stop on my way; but what struck me in especial was the perfect complacency, the ideal of animal well-being, which the creature seemed to exhibit.

Well, as he watched this glorious green lizard with the golden rims to his eyes, Mr. Latham, like another Poe—

Betook himself to linking  
Fancy unto fancy, thinking.

And the thought which speedily came to him was, that there must be angels still, if for no other reason, then for this, that they may see. For there are things which no human eye can see. There are beautiful things, like this green lizard, which one pair of human eyes saw but for a moment, and that by merest haphazard. There are noble things also. There are two sailors clinging to a raft, and when only one can be sawed, and neither will accept safety at the cost of the other's life, both go down into the merciless waters. There are beautiful and noble things in the world which no human eye can see, and which yet must be seen, or they lose half their virtue; and so there must be angels still, that they may see them.

They lose half their virtue if they are not seen. Not in themselves. Though, even as to that, 'this much,' says Mr. Latham, 'may be laid down: Beauty must have someone to perceive it who knows what beauty is, or else its very existence is null; and goodness and happiness, over and above being blessings to their possessors, exhale more beauty, which only intelligent beings—beings

that are "finely touched"—can adequately appreciate.' But, apart from that, the beauty and the goodness lose half their virtue if they are not seen. For half their virtue is in giving happiness to others; and how can that be if no eye sees them?

When the lizard disappeared over the wall, Mr. Latham returned homeward, thinking of the apparent waste of happiness in that he only, and he but for a few moments, had seen its glorious beauty—thinking how he had been enabled to arrest part of the virtue that lay in that beauty as it was on its way to escape into space; and then he came upon a knot of children just let loose from school. They were shouting and laughing and tumbling one over another in the exuberance of their glee. Then some of them drew near to their mothers, who were sitting on the steps of the pinnacled palaces; and it was evident that, as they drew near, the mothers were made happy in the happiness of the children. 'The unconscious joy of the infant was translated, as it were, into the conscious joy of the mother, and became a remembrance enriching her life.' That much at least was stored away and preserved, because the eyes of the mothers saw it. Was the rest dissipated? And the joy that is never seen—is its virtue of giving lost entirely? Surely, like mercy, beauty and goodness are twice blessed: they bless him that gives and him that takes; but where is half their blessing to be found if no eye sees and there is no heart to receive?

'Of these children,' says the Master of Trinity Hall, 'I singled out an urchin of perhaps eight years old, who was staggering under the load of a swaddled baby, and I asked him if he did not find the weight as much as he could carry. But he kissed the child, and said that he was not tired a bit, the baby was so good. I felt that I should have lost something if I had passed him without a word.' Most like to which is the incident of the little Scotch girl who carried a baby nearly as heavy as herself. 'I wonder you are able to carry so heavy a baby as that,' said the compassionate passer-by. But her answer was: 'He's no heavy:

he's ma brither.' The acts have been twice blessed. Nay, one knows not how often they may be blessed in the telling again. But if no one had seen them, would all the blessing except the children's own have been lost for ever?

That is Mr. Latham's argument for the existence of angels. They are heavenly beholders. They are needed to see the things that this gifted earth contains. They gather up the fragments of its happiness and of its goodness, that nothing may be lost.

Now it must not be hastily supposed that even to Mr. Latham this is the only proof of the existence of angels, and this their only ministry. In the course of his book he discovers other proofs and other services besides this, and clearly believes in them. This, however, is the proof that came to him first, and it is evident that the necessity of an angel's eye to *see* is still to him the best evidence for their presence in our midst. But to us, who did not reach the evidence as Mr. Latham did—to us, to whom no lizard suggested thoughts of beauty scattered in fragments that needed to be gathered up, this proof has probably far less force and carries far less conviction. And the serious difficulty is almost certain to press us: that if all that is needed is an eye to see, then the angels are not needed at all, for there is an Eye to see without them, the Eyes of the Lord being in every place, beholding the evil and the good.

Mr. Latham himself has anticipated us, however. He has quoted that Scripture before we thought of it, and has seen its application. And he simply lets another Scripture answer it. 'Inasmuch,' he says, 'as God is everywhere at once, He must see everything; and inasmuch as He is the fountain of all love, He must care for us more than any angels possibly can. Why should we not be content with this, of which we are assured? Why do we want to imagine beings, more within our own range, on whom our thoughts can rest? To this query, I think I should have

answered, "Why, indeed?" had not certain words of our Lord come upon me with a force that I had never perceived in them before. The words were these: "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." (Luke xv. 10.)

To so loyal a Protestant as the Master of Trinity Hall, that statement, when understood, is sufficient. 'The angels of God then, it appears, *are* ever on the watch, marking what goes on in every man's heart, and delighting in every motion of good which they detect.' But, like a loyal Protestant, he makes proof of Scripture in his own thought and in his own feeling. He has come to this Scripture by 'linking fancy unto fancy, thinking.' The Scripture is not made more true by his thinking, but it is made more true to him. And the Scripture begets more thought. It seems to say that, in the gradual revelation of God's character, the time has come, as Jesus uttered these words, to drop such anthropomorphic expressions as the application to God of repentance, and jealousy, and wrath, and joy. It seems to say that God's cup of joy is already as full as it can hold; to add new joy to it is to take essential joy away from it. And especially it seems to say that in this joy of the angels over one sinner that repenteth there is an element of surprise. Joy to be keenest, joy to be so keen as this, must come suddenly, unforeseen. It could not so come to God. But the angels, though they stand in God's presence, see not into the future. They are deeply interested in the success of Christ's mission to the earth; but they do not know where its successes will be found. And so, wherever a sinner repents and turns to God, there is joy in the presence of the angels, the joy of discovery and surprise.

Thus Mr. Latham finds no necessity for the interpretation of this passage, which was touched upon in these pages last month, that the angels of God are 'a kind of poetic paraphrase for God Himself.' He finds everything against that interpretation. And when he passes to that more

remarkable passage,—for with him, as with all of us, Scripture leads unto Scripture,—the passage about the angels of the ‘little ones’ beholding ‘the face of My Father which is in heaven,’ he finds as little need for its yet more remarkable explanation. In the first place, the ‘little ones’ are not men who are unable to take care of themselves, but children, little ones in years as well as in weakness. And unless the context is hopelessly astray, it is hard to see how they can be anything else. Next, he thinks that in the lives of our little ones there is more direct evidence for the presence of the angels than anywhere else, if only it could be gathered. ‘There are more boys than we should think of who have, floating in their minds, a notion that heaven was “about” them once, and is not yet so far off but that they are objects of care to beings whom they cannot see. This feeling comes on many a lad now and then. It seems as though he were called by name, and made answer, “Here am I.” Autobiographies and journals, not meant for the common eye, have brought to light many cases such as I speak of; and what we find in the lives of notable men may lead us to expect the existence of something similar among those the secrets of whose lives are undivulged.’

Nevertheless, Mr. Latham cannot see his way to the doctrine of Guardian Angels as it is popularly accepted and is so dear to many. For it does not follow that because there are angels for the little ones there are angels set apart to look after us all. And especially it is to be noticed that there is no warrant whatever in Christ’s words, or anywhere else in Scripture, for the idea that a separate angel is set apart to watch over every separate child, much less every separate individual of the human race. All that is said is, that the angels of the little ones ‘behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.’

In his new book, *Central Truths and Side Issues*, just published by Messrs. T. & T. Clark, and elsewhere noticed, Mr. Balfour offers us a

fresh exposition of a most perplexing passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The exposition is doubtless one of the ‘side issues’ to which Mr. Balfour’s title refers, but the passage is of leading importance in theology and in Christian practice, and it is most desirable that we should obtain a credible interpretation of it. Mr. Balfour’s interpretation is new. He apologises for that. But the true interpretation of every passage must have been new at some time. And although there are few passages left for the able exegete to win his spurs upon, this passage from the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is almost certainly one of them.

Its words, according to the Authorized Version, are these: ‘Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment’ (Heb. vi. 1, 2). The Revisers have made no material alteration. But that they spent some time over the passage goes without saying, and indeed is evident in the number of notes they have added in their margin. Of these notes, two are of some consequence. For ‘of the teaching of baptisms’ they tell us that some ancient authorities read ‘*even* the teaching of baptisms’ (that is to say, the word ‘teaching’ is found in the accusative instead of the genitive); and for ‘baptisms’ they suggest the alternative translation ‘washings.’

Now the question arises: How many things are here enumerated as ‘the first principles of Christ’? According to our English translations there are six—repentance from dead works, faith toward God, the teaching of baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And there is no doubt that that is the view which the great multitude of expositors have held. But there is something awkward in the insertion of the word ‘teachings’ where it is. The sentence would

read at least as well without it. And this has led some to make 'teachings' one principle and 'baptisms' another, so finding seven. But it has led Mr. Balfour in quite another way.

Mr. Balfour does not find seven principles of Christ enumerated in this place. He does not find six. He finds only four. After a candid consideration of the views of earlier interpreters, to every one of the innumerable company of which insurmountable obstacles can be raised, he sets forth his reasons for holding that there are but four principles here. And until some abler expositor comes to set his reasons at naught, we are very likely to accept them and the interpretation which they support.

Mr. Balfour translates the passage in this way: 'Not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith upon God (the teaching of washings and of laying on of hands), and of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment.' Here there are four distinct things that are described as 'first principles of Christ,' four articles in the Apostles' preaching that are primary and fundamental. They are—repentance from dead works, faith upon God, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. Moreover, according to the Greek, these four go together two by two—repentance and faith on the one hand, resurrection and judgment on the other. But as we cannot make that clear in English, having only one word 'and' to represent two Greek conjunctions (*καὶ* and *τε*), Mr. Balfour strives to bring it out by accuracy in punctuation.

Thus far, then, all is clear and admitted by all. What of the two (if they are two) that lie between? Mr. Balfour believes that they are two, and gives good reasons. He also places them within parentheses, to show that he does not consider them two additional 'principles of the doctrine of Christ,' but that he considers them to stand in explanation of the two principles that have just been named.

That is to say, he believes that the writer of the Epistle, having mentioned the first two fundamental doctrines of Christianity, throws into a parenthesis the two Jewish ordinances whose place they have taken. These two ordinances are—the ceremonial washings of the Law of Moses (the 'divers washings' imposed by the Law on the Jewish people until the time of reformation—Heb. ix. 10), and the laying on of the priest's hands on the head of the victim about to be slain in sacrifice. Repentance from dead works was the fulfilment and Christian counterpart of the ceremonial washings of the Law; faith in God was the fulfilment and acceptable substitute for the priestly imposition of hands on the head of the bullock or the goat.

So, then, the Washings and the Laying on of Hands are not fundamental principles and first teachings in Christ. They are not Christian doctrines at all, nor Christian practices. They are simply the Old Testament rites which stood till their better substitutes should come. And there is much in favour of this interpretation, startling as it at first appears. There is much in its favour as a mere translation. No other does so much justice to the Greek. It gives the particles their natural force. It explains the introduction of the word 'teaching,' which is now seen to mean what the Old Testament rites of Washings and Laying on of Hands symbolise or teach. It gives that word 'washings' itself its only possible meaning. For it must mean ceremonial washings, and not Christian baptism. Not once is it used of baptism, for which another word is invariably chosen, but in the only instances of its occurrence in the New Testament (Mark vii. 4 and Heb. ix. 10) is employed to describe the ceremonial washings of the Jews. And finally, it removes from the list of Christian 'fundamentals' two things which are not fundamentals at all, unless this passage so misinterpreted is to rule out of existence the whole teaching of the New Testament. Washings and the Laying on of Hands—who dares to make this writer contradict his Lord, himself, and all the

apostles, and utter what after all would be incredible and untrue, that ceremonies of *any* kind are first principles of Christ?

It seems to be now generally recognised that the Bible contains both religion and history. Yet it is a gain of these recent years. There are men still living who were trained to disregard the historical setting of the prophecies of Isaiah, and to leap the centuries that lay between the writing of the seventy-second Psalm and its fulfilment in Christ. It is a gain of recent years, and we have scarcely learned to use it yet.

For a great intellectual gain is like a great intellectual genius—very difficult to make a right use of. It is almost inevitable that for a time there should be misuse and misunderstanding. Many things have been said about the two elements in the Bible, the historical and the religious, that have done us no service and had better have been left unsaid. But the gain is real and manageable. And it is with peculiar satisfaction one comes upon an article that seems at last to put it into our control.

The article is found in a recent issue of *The New World*, under the title of 'The Religious and the Historical Uses of the Bible.' Its author is Professor Porter of Yale University. Writing in *The New World*, Professor Porter does not stay to prove the existence in the Bible of the two elements of religion and history. He recognises cheerfully their existence, and proceeds at once to show how it is possible to make the best use of both.

And, first of all, he shows us that it is still possible to use one so as to drive the other out. 'The historian regards the Bible as a collection of ancient documents, the product and the record of the life of a certain nation during certain centuries of its existence; and his aim is to recover and reconstruct from these records the true course of the nation's history, and to make it intelligible.'

His risk is to look upon it as a record of human history and nothing more, and to believe that when the human history is taken out of it there is nothing left—nothing of any modern utility, at least. The religious man, on the other hand, comes to the Bible for guidance in his search after God, for help in his conflict with sin. Is he not bound, in the interests of his faith, to make a stand against the historian and the critic? He resents the intrusion of the historical student altogether; his criticisms and reconstructions are a painful impiety to him: though he may think he is only displacing Moses, he is really dethroning God.

But Professor Porter firmly believes that both are wrong. 'If the need of God is a real need, and the experience that the Bible helps men to find Him a genuine experience; and if the effort to find order and rationality in the events of the past is justifiable, and the biblical records are found to yield to such treatment, then the right of both ways of treating the Bible, and an ultimate harmony between them, must be assumed.' And he proceeds at once to describe three possible ways in which that harmony may be sought.

The first way would be to go through the Bible and separate it into its two sets of facts. There are so many historical, natural facts, to be treated like those in other literatures; and there are so many religious, supernatural facts, to be apprehended only by faith. And now these two sets of facts, once you have found them, can exist side by side. The historian can spend himself upon the one, the man of religion may live in the other—with mutual recognition or indifference. And this attitude is certainly far better than one of distrust and hostility. It is better than the perverse and vain effort to shut out facts on the one side for the sake of facts on the other. It is better than to say that the Bible contains no history in the proper sense, or that it is nothing but history. Moreover, it is perfectly true that, to a certain extent, history and religion do occupy themselves with different

materials. There are things in the Bible that are of interest to history, but not of much value to religion; there are things that are of great religious worth and of very slight historical concern. There is no chapter in the Bible of more importance to the student of the history of nations than the tenth of Genesis; but there are few evangelical sermons found in it. The solution of the problem by a division of material is so far right.

But it is surrounded with serious, and, it seems, insurmountable, difficulties. Chiefly that it becomes impossible to keep the two sets of facts apart. What is natural, and what is supernatural? At every point confusion and conflict arise. The truth is that every step in the life of a man is capable of both a historical and a religious treatment and explanation. And this is peculiarly visible in the life of the people of Israel. Their history was religious history, their religion historical religion. The historian will not exchange the Psalms for the Book of Kings. He is as much interested in the sayings of Christ as in His acts. We must find another way than this.

Let history and religion then deal with the same materials, so far as they will, but let history deal with them in one way and religion in another. Let it be granted that every fact has both a historical and a religious aspect; let history deal with it as historical, and religion as religious. History will say nothing and care nothing about the value of its facts to religious faith; and religion will make no affirmations as to the historical actuality and relation of things, but only as to their worth to faith and life. The value of the Psalms, for example, lies not at all in their date and authorship, but in the spirit of true religion that fills them. Nothing can perceive this but an answering spirit, and from such nothing can take it away.

And yet even here a difficulty arises. There are certain religious facts which are not independent of what history has to say about them. They are also the most momentous facts of all. It is not a

matter of indifference to the religious man what the historian has to say about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. If impartial history finds that He did not rise again from the dead—then the religious man is of all men most miserable. A third and last method of adjusting the claims of religion and history must be sought.

Now, for the discovery of this third method we may give Professor Porter the credit, or we may not. Only let us recognise its worth. In its patient application lies our hope for the future of Bible study in our land, our hope for the future of true religion.

The method is simply this, that religion and history must go together. They must not be kept separate, either as to their materials or as to their handling of them. They must go together. For there are facts and events whose religious worth cannot be got at without the aid of history; and there are historical questions which cannot be decided without the aid of religion. Nay, it is true of religion, as a whole—that is to say, of the Christian religion, that the better we know it as religion, the better we shall comprehend it as history; and the more clearly we grasp it as history, the more secure and true will be our hold of it as religion. For our religious experience will help our historical insight, and our historical study will further our religious life.

Take the life of Jesus Christ. Is there a single fact which possesses religious value and does not also contain a historical judgment? Is there a single event that does not rise in religious value as it is more firmly founded on historic fact? In the life of Christ, and in all our estimation of Him, history and religion interact, and that not only commonly, but inevitably, not only in fact, but by right.

It follows, then, and even in the pages of *The New World* Professor Porter does not shrink from maintaining it, that when an historical fact is pre-

sented to us, it will make all the difference to our recognition of it whether we are Christians or not. Says Professor Porter: 'Let one be ever so eager to maintain the full and free right of history to its own way and its utmost work, ever so strenuous against any invasion of dogma in the historical sphere; yet the fact remains that certain questions arise in New Testament study, involving matters of historical fact, which have always been, and which must be answered differently by Christians and by non-Christians. As long as it marks and makes a difference in the *man* whether he is a Christian or not, so long will it make a difference in his estimate of certain facts on which the Christian's experience turns. There are facts which cannot even be recognised as real if they do not take hold of the heart and will—facts, the final demonstration of whose reality is their experienced power to free and renew the life.'

That character determines belief is the teaching of our Lord Himself. And though so fair-minded an unbeliever as Mr. Montefiore stands aghast at the teaching, it is coming to be recognised as not less true in reason than in experience. It is not only when we are in immediate contact with Jesus Christ, but even in the wide circle of religious truth, that decisions are made involving the character of those who make them. There are Christian philosophers who regard freewill and immortality as incapable of intellectual demonstration. Arguments can be set over against each other, but the decision belongs to the moral and spiritual sphere, and is, on the whole, an expres-

sion of character. But there are no facts with which heart and will are so inseparably intertwined as with the facts of the life and person of Christ. The wonder of the gospel-picture of Jesus is that no one can behold it without feelings and decisions that involve character; that no one sees in it more or other than he wills to see. Therefore it is that no critic's Life of Jesus of Nazareth can be complete if the critic himself refuses to yield obedience to His name. The history must be imperfect, because the aid of religion has been refused. There in the Gospels stands a holy and loving One who says, 'Come unto Me,' 'Believe in Me,' and he who refuses to become as a little child in His presence, counts himself unworthy and incapable of writing the History of His Life.

And there is the other side also. 'I have been reading Amiel's *Journal Intime*,' says Dean Church (see his *Life and Letters*, just published by Messrs. Macmillan, at the 314th page)—'I have been reading the *Journal Intime*. It is a very awful picture, on the whole, of what fine and religious minds are coming to in the atmosphere of the Continent. It is a strange state, the hold of an idea without its facts, of redemption without a redeemer, and the presence of hope and a kind of faith, with scarcely a shred of comfort, except from a sense of duty.' For on the Continent it is mainly that religion has in these latter days refused the aid of history. And that is why our hope for the future of religion in our own land is, that in all our study of the Bible religion and history may go hand in hand.

## Twenty Misused Scripture Texts.

THE main object of the following notes is to illustrate the importance of taking texts with their context. I trust, however, that some interest and profit may result from the exposition given of the various Scriptures handled in the course of them. I have begun with a crucial instance, to show the kind of thing I am proposing to put forward; and thereafter have followed on in the usual order of

our English Bibles. I may mention that these notes were originally written some fifteen years ago, before the appearance of the Revised Version of the New Testament; and though, in rewriting them, I have availed myself of the Revisers' work, I have left unchanged some arguments which—with such a standard to appeal to—might now be deemed unnecessary.