

Point and Illustration.

Was it Solomon who said there is nothing new under the sun? Surely he thought that his own famous judgment was new, and also inimitable. But there is a perfectly true story in *The Monthly Messenger* of the Presbyterian Church of England, and it is exactly on the same lines. This Chinese Solomon presided over the District Court of Chau-an, where the Swatow and Amoy missions of the Presbyterian Church of England touch one another.

Two brothers and their families lived together. Each of the wives had an infant, born within a day or two of each other. The child of the older woman was accidentally crushed to death; and in the younger woman's absence the bereaved mother changed the children. The sister-in-law soon found out the fraud. The older woman would not give up the living child, and the mother appealed to Yang, the District Magistrate. Unable to make out which woman was telling the truth, he at last said, 'As you both claim the living child, I shall settle the dispute by taking it myself. But,' he added, 'to-morrow I shall carry it to the sea and drown it.'

On the morrow a crowd of people assembled outside the yamen to see the issue of this strange judgment. The central gate was thrown open, and the procession set out: the heralds announcing the approach of the Hsien with nine strokes of the gong, and their cry of O-O-O! the yamen runners bearing rusty iron chains, the symbol of retributive justice; placards inscribed with the magistrate's official titles; then his umbrella and his great fan; and, last of all, the mandarin himself, carried by four bearers, his chair open in front according to law. His precious charge was protected from the air by its cap and wrappings. When they reached the sea, the mandarin stepped from his chair to the water-side, and with a swing threw his burden into the waves. It struggled in the water, until the younger woman, unable to bear the sight, rushed in and clasped in her arms—a large fish, on which were tied the baby's cap and swaddling clothes. The true mother's heart had been discovered, and she found her baby alive and well in the magistrate's yamen.

2. Here is an illustration of the Passover rite, and an item for Dr. Trumbull in view of the next edition of his book, *The Threshold Covenant*. It is sent us by the Rev. J. Reynolds Mackay, of Providence, R. I., who copied it out of a letter he had just received from a missionary in Sousee, Tunisia, N. Africa:—

These Mohammedans are deeply sunk in superstition. A friend of mine was knocking a doorway between two rooms in his house when the landlord became very excited, and begged him to stop till a fowl was secured, and its blood sprinkled upon the doorway.

3. The same American correspondent sends the following illustration of Matt. viii. 21, 22:—

A missionary, who has spent more than thirty years in Syria,—most of the time in the Lebanons,—relates an experience that throws light on Matt. viii. 21, 22.

Sixteen years ago he had occasion to proceed to London. Just before leaving he was talking with a young man who had very frequently attended the mission meetings. This young man suggested he would like to go to London. The missionary told him to get ready at once, as he would be glad to take him. When the missionary continued to press him to come, the young man said, 'Suffer me first to bury my father.' The 'father' was standing listening—a man who looked every inch as hale and hearty as the missionary himself.

In commenting on this, the missionary said this is regarded as a final excuse—an attempt to get out of an uncomfortable position—given irrespective of the father being dead or alive.

May not Christ's words, in ver. 22, have had reference to a similar concrete case, and thus mean—'Your father is not dead—the living cannot bury the living any more than the dead can bury the dead—if you are in earnest "Follow Me."' Or, 'Let that sort of dead person attend to his own burial—time enough to bury the dead when they die—if you are in earnest "Follow Me."?'

4. In the January number of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES the question is asked and answered—"In what sense do the works of the blessed dead follow them" (Rev. xiv. 13)? The following quotation bearing upon the point, from a recent clever work of fiction, may be interesting:—

For the great sympathy was his—that love of the neighbour, which is thrown like a mantle over the shoulders of some men, making them different from their fellows, securing to them that love of great and small, which, perchance, follows some, when they are dead, to that place where a human testimony may not be all in vain.—*The Sowers*, by H. SEATON MERRIMAN, chap. xxiv.

5. Professor George Adam Smith has forwarded the following letter from Dr. Henry Bailey on the qualities of the water in Jacob's Well, and why the Samaritan woman went there to draw. Dr. Bailey was for three years medical missionary of the Church Missionary Society at Nablus:—

'BISHOPSTOKE, NEAR SOUTHAMPTON,
'15th October 1896.

'The question as to why the woman of Samaria should have gone to such a distance as Jacob's Well, when a copious fountain gushed forth from the mountain-side close by, does not present any difficulties to anyone familiar with the locality and people.

'Apart from the sacred character of the well, which some might suppose an attraction, its waters have a great local reputation for purity and flavour amongst the natives of El 'Askar and Nâblus. The excellence of various supplies of water and their respective qualities are a favourite topic of conversation with Easterns, and in a hot climate, and where other beverages are almost unknown, it is not surprising to find that the natives are great connoisseurs as to the quality of water. Pure water is the mineral beverage, in Mohammedan districts at anyrate,—coffee, lemonade, etc., being reserved solely for guests and special occasions. The people, therefore, as we should expect, have a keen appreciation of the various qualities of different waters to a degree which we can scarcely realise in more favoured climes.

'The numerous springs of water at Nâblus are, from the nature of the soil, mostly of very hard water, very "heavy," as the natives expressed it. They, not unjustly, attribute many of their complaints to this cause, and speak with longing of the "light" waters of Gaza and various other places.

'Now, Jacob's Well has a reputation amongst them of containing cool, palatable, and refreshing water, free from the deleterious qualities of their other supplies of water. Frequently I have been told, that after eating a hearty meal (and a hearty meal with them is something appalling!), a good draught of water from this particular well will disperse

the feeling of abnormal fullness in a remarkably short space of time, and, moreover, make one ready for another good meal in an incredibly short space of time.

'The copious fountain at El 'Askar gushes forth from the very bowels of rocky (limestone) Mount Ehab, and is therefore of particularly hard ("heavy") water. The woman would, therefore, gladly take her jar to this celebrated well for a supply of drinking water.

'Although 30 feet and more of rubbish has found its way into Jacob's Well, the supply of water even now lasts till the month of May most years, or even later. The source of supply to this well has not yet been accurately ascertained, but it is doubtless greatly due to percolation and rainfall. The latter may account partly for some of its special qualities as to "lightness" (softness).

'It is not uncommon in the East to send to a great distance for a supply of drinking water, as you may know, especially by those who can afford to do so. The woman of Samaria may, if poor, have been hired to convey the water for some richer person. When at Nâblus, I used to send to a certain spring some mile or so from my house for drinking water, and soon quite a regular little cavalcade repaired to this spring every morning and evening to supply the richer families with water, which the English doctor recommended. Bishop Blyth of Jerusalem sends three miles from Jerusalem, to Ain Karim, for his water supply.'

Recent Foreign Theology.

Did the Jews return under Cyrus?

THIS, according to the editor of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, 'is perhaps, for the moment, the most keenly interesting of all Old Testament questions.'¹ In this estimate the editor has the support of a scholar of the first rank, to whose contribution to the discussion it is the aim of these lines to call attention. In the 'fore-word' to his recently published *Origins of Judaism*, Professor Eduard Meyer refers to the rise of Judaism and the question of the genuineness of the Persian documents in the Book of Ezra 'as one of the most interesting problems with which historical research is at present confronted.'

In order, however, to appreciate aright the full significance and value of the results to which Meyer's investigations have led him, it is necessary to supplement the brief indications given last month as to the trend of some recent criticism of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. To understand this last, again, we must summarise what may be called the traditional view of the course of Jewish

¹ See last month's issue, p. 200.

history during the eventful century that followed the downfall of the Babylonian Empire.²

Very soon after the capture of Babylon in 539 or 538 B.C., the Jewish exiles received from Cyrus permission to return to their ancestral home, in pursuance of which a first band of exiles reached Jerusalem, 537-6, under the leadership of Zerubabel and Jeshua. By these the altar of burnt-offering was re-erected and a beginning made with the rebuilding of the temple. Through the persistent animosity of jealous neighbours the building operations were suspended for some sixteen years, until, at the instigation of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, early in the reign of Darius Hystaspis, 520 B.C., the work was resumed, and at last brought to a successful close in 516. Then follows a blank of almost sixty

² The best English history of this period is the Rev. P. Hay Hunter's *After the Exile, a Hundred Years of Jewish History and Literature*, 2 vols., Edinburgh, 1890, a work which so competent a judge as the late Professor Kuënen has characterised, 'a popular book written with great talent, with which I rejoice to find myself in agreement as regards all the main positions' (see Kuënen's academic dissertation quoted below).