

secretly in a book, hiding it away till his death, that men who came after him might know what manner of man he was. 'And if after my death, a wise and inquiring man be found, I beg him to add his thoughts to my thoughts . . . and if there be found an intelligent man who understands these things, and things more excellent than these, and who teaches and writes them, may God . . . satisfy him with His good things which are without measure, even as He has satisfied me; and render him joyful and blessed on the earth, even as He has rendered me happy and blessed until now.'

The impression left on the mind by the perusal of Zar'a-Ya'qob's book is delightful, even though one may not agree with all his views; not only was he a good man, but he was—although his contemporaries would have denied it—undoubtedly a Christian, a Christian freethinker if we will, and a Christian in advance of his age. He refused to accept many things taught in the name of religion, and rejected not a few current interpretations of the Scriptures, and even boldly denied the veracity of some things written therein. But this is the attitude of many thinking Christians to-day, who hold that all religions, not exclud-

ing Christianity, have become encumbered by doctrines, beliefs, and practices which did not originally belong to them, and which are not of their essence. Yet these men are in heart and life religious, and are good Christians in the best sense of the word; and such will be interested to find that they had a fellow-thinker in this far away Abyssinian three hundred years ago. Had he lived in our days he would very probably have ranged himself with those who are not afraid to make known their religious standpoint even at the risk of being called unorthodox; but living when he did, who will blame him for not revealing his inmost conclusions and convictions?—doubtless he was right in judging that to do so would 'do much harm.'

I do not propose to notice the second part of *Philosophi Abessini*. It contains the 'philosophy' of Walda-Heywat, the disciple of Zar'a-Ya'qob; he practically echoes his master's opinions, but he is less original and more diffuse, nor does he tell us anything about his life.

It only remains to add that the printing of the book, like that of the others of the series, is excellent, and that Dr. Littmann's Latin translation of the Ethiopic is a model of clearness.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF JEREMIAH.

JEREMIAH VI. 16.

'Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls: but they said, We will not walk therein.'—R. V.

EXPOSITION.

'Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways.'—Literally, *station yourselves on* (or, *by*) *roads*, i.e. at the meeting point of different roads. There, as the following words state, the Jews are to make inquiry as to the old paths. Antiquity gives a presumption of rightness; the ancients were nearer to the days when God spoke with man; they had the guidance of God's two mighty 'shepherds' (Is 63¹¹); they knew, far better than we, who 'are but of yesterday, and know nothing' (Job 8⁹), the way of happiness. For though there are many pretended 'ways,' there is but 'one way' (Jer 32²⁹) which has Jehovah's blessing (Ps 25^{8, 9}).—T. K. CHEYNE.

'The good way.'—Literally, *the way of the good*. Good is in the Hebrew a substantive. The sense is not that there are many old ways, amongst which, by inquiry, ye may find the best; but that the search for old paths will ensure their finding that one path which God approves.—STREANE.

'Walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.'—The Fathers often use this verse in a secondary application, contrasting with the *old tracks*, many in number and narrow to walk in, which are the Law and the Prophets, Christ the one *good way*.—PAYNE SMITH.

In the prophet's mind the people were as a traveller who has taken a self-chosen path, and finds that it leads him to a place of peril. Is it not well that they should stop and ask where the old paths (literally, *the eternal paths*; the words going, as in chap. 18¹⁶, beyond the mere antiquity of the nation's life) were, on which their fathers had travelled safely? Of these old paths they were to choose that which was most distinctly 'the good way,' the way of righteousness, and therefore of peace and health also. The call, however, was in vain. The people chose

to travel still in the broad way that led them to destruction.
—PLUMPTRE.

THE SERMON.

The Old Paths.

By the Rev. J. M. Gibbon.

One of Dr. Samuel Johnson's ideas of happiness consisted in being driven rapidly through ever-changing scenery. 'Life,' he said, 'has not many things better than this.' But a coach is too slow for the nineteenth century. Felicity in our day consists of rushing through the air at express speed. The cry of the day is Progress! Progress! This spirit of progress is especially marked in the Church. A century ago Voltaire believed that the annihilation of Christianity was at hand. To-day the Church of Christ is animated by more daring hopes than ever before. But though this is true, do not let us deceive ourselves with the idea that all rapid travelling is progress. Perhaps we are travelling in the wrong direction. Perhaps we are going back instead of progressing. There are many things, which, though old, are too beautiful to be improved—the bloom of the June roses, the serenade of the nightingale, the oriflamme on the robin's breast, or the iris on the ring-dove's neck. There are other things also which can only be changed for the worse—old tried paths; old proved methods of life and work. Let us echo the cry of Jeremiah, 'Ask for the old paths, where is the good way.'

i. True progress in *business* is along very old lines. The new problem is how to get from one point to another by some shorter way than along a straight line. Men are trying to become learned by 'cramming,' and to become rich by gambling. The old way, the way that God made for success in life is patient, honest, day-by-day labour. And the new way does not succeed. Every morning we read of embezzlements, flights, and suicides. Men take money which is not their own, never intending to steal, but to replace it when their luck turns. But the luck does not turn—the horse is lamed—the stock falls—the day of reckoning draws near. And success is often as fatal as failure. Many men break down under the pressure of prosperity. They go counter to nature, and are crushed. It is impossible to cheat *nature*, for nature is God. Let us progress as far as we can, but only along the lines of honest work on

the one hand, and regard to our dignity as men on the other.

ii. After business comes the *home*. Is Christ honoured more in our homes than He was in the homes of our fathers? Do we every evening acknowledge God's presence as our fathers did, by family worship? No! We plead many excuses. Every member of the family is never at home at the same time; the boys are always out in the evening. It may be that we cannot adopt the old forms literally, but certainly we must acknowledge God in our households—the atmosphere of a Christian home must be Christian. That house is a prison which has not a window opening on eternity. How is it with you? Is your home a mere stall where the human animal feeds? A mere lair where the civilized descendants of the ape sleep? If so, stand and seek for the old way.

iii. Then have we progressed in the keeping of the *Lord's Day*? God gave us this day as a gift, not as a burden; as a day of rest, and as a reminder that time is but a dream, and eternity is the reality. Perhaps our fathers kept the Sunday too strictly. On that day they did not smile, they scarcely liked the sun to shine. We keep it as a weekly bank holiday—a day for lounging, for sleeping, for visiting, or cycling, or boating. Which of these two is the better way for character, for happiness, for mind and soul, for a man's self, and for others? Secularization of the Lord's Day is not progress but deterioration. The Religious Sunday helped to make England—the Secular Sunday, if it ever prevail, will help to unmake our country.

iv. Finally, there is that which lies beyond the bounds of time—*Eternity*. There is the old beaten track, hallowed by the tread of millions of earth's noblest and best, that leads safely through time to rest in Eternity. It is the path of faith in God and love to man. It is the way of Christ. But many in our day are taking other paths to Eternity—the path of doubt, of indifference, of sin. They argue that it is not proved which path is right. But it is certain that these paths do not give them much pleasure now, and when death approaches, afford them no glimpse of the homeland. In life there is little time to try experiments; safety is along the old path. There may be some who are travelling along the wrong lines. To them God says, 'Ask . . . where is the good

way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.'

Reverence for the Old Things.

By the Rev. J. G. Greenhough.

Jeremiah was the most unpopular of the prophets. He was a pessimist, he never flattered, and he was very old-fashioned. For the last of these reasons, especially, did the people dislike him. They were infected with a rage for everything Egyptian—its morality, religions, and luxuries. They wanted to make a clean sweep of everything their fathers had honoured and to mould themselves on heathen Egypt. And then there came Jeremiah preaching continually to regardless ears that alliance with Egypt would bring ruin; that true salvation consisted in holding fast the faith and morals which had made their fathers great, 'Ask for the old paths,' was his perpetual cry.

But are the old paths always as divine, and the new ones as dangerous, as the prophet thought them? We cannot answer simply yes or no to that question. St. Paul, who had seen the higher truth in Christ, tells us to forget the things which are behind, and the Master Himself has said that every wise man will bring out of his treasury things new and old. We must neither despise the old nor shut our face against the new. Wisdom, goodness, reverence, and safety are found in a happy medium.

i. To bind ourselves to the old paths, in many things at least, would be impossible. And if we could do it, it would be paralyzing. Where Christian faith is, there is always a forward movement. But in countries which have never felt the quickening pulses of our faith the stagnation is terrible. Think of the Boxer Risings in China. They were brought about because the Chinese refused to advance. They believed that their fathers had reached perfection, and they were ready to fight to the death against new light, and against destiny. God in His mercy has given us eyes to see that we have progressed beyond our fathers in science, machinery, politics, government, and in freedom of thought and speech. We have progressed in religion also. We would never replace our Protestant faith with the corrupting superstitions of the fifteenth century. We have reached a fuller truth, a clearer light, and a nobler charity.

ii. And yet to forsake all the old paths is a

folly quite as self-destructive as to cling to them all. To-day we cannot write as Plato, or as the Hebrew prophets and psalmists wrote. We cannot build temples, or paint pictures, or carve statues, as the men of old did. If all our wisest heads were put together they could not compose, even from a literary point of view, any one of the nobler books and chapters of the Bible. The prophets and apostles saw visions and heard divine voices because their spiritual nature was more richly developed than ours, and because they lived nearer God than we do. For the momentous questions of morality and righteousness, worship and reverence, God and immortality, we have still to sit like children at the feet of those giants of faith, from Moses to St. Paul, who walked with God and spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. We cannot dispense with the Ten Commandments yet, and the very perfection of the Sermon on the Mount is our despair. If we want to know what sin and forgiveness and prayer are, if we would learn how to live and love, to suffer and to die, it is only in the old Bible paths that we can get the lesson. The new lights will show us how to get money faster, but they will not help us to be patient in cross-bearing and fearless in death. No; we can only find light and strength for these things in the ways that certain sacred feet trod many centuries ago. There is the dark face of sorrow illumined and the eternal questions answered by Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Thus saith the Lord.—If they ought to have listened when Jeremiah said, 'Thus saith the Lord,' how much more ought we, who know so much more about the love of God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit! The words are like a snowball which you make in the winter: it is small at first, but every time you roll it in the snow it grows bigger, until it is as big as you are. So the words, 'Thus saith the Lord,' have been growing more weighty and important because God has always been adding to His deeds of love and kindness to us His children.—*Sermon for Boys and Girls*, p. 66.

The Old Paths.—This road is not a new one. What does the text say? 'Ask for the *old* paths.' The good way is a very old way. Is not the way of sin an old way too? Yes; the Bible says, 'Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden?' (Job 20¹⁶). But the way of sin is not so old as the way of goodness. There was no way of sin before Satan disobeyed God, but there was *always* a way of goodness.—*Sermons for Boys and Girls*, p. 66.

A GENTLEMAN was in the studio of Bacon, the sculptor, and found himself in front of a bust of Whitefield. Whereupon he remarked that after all that had been said, Whitefield was a truly great man—the founder of a new religion. ‘No,’ replied Bacon, ‘Whitefield’s was the *old* religion revived with *new* energy, and treated as if the preacher really meant what he said.’

My dear grandfather, after having preached the gospel sixty-three years in one place, came to die; and as one of my uncles stood by his bedside he quoted that hymn, ‘Firm as the earth Thy gospel stands.’ Said he, ‘James, I do not like Dr. Watt’s saying, “Firm as the earth.” Why, the earth is slipping away under my feet even now. James, I want something firmer than the earth now; I like the doctor better when he sings, “Firm as His throne His promise stands.” Ah, that is it; we want something as firm as the throne of God.—C. H. SPURGEON.

THERE is a legend told by the ancient Greek and Roman churches of two youths who sought concealment in a lonely cave to escape the prevailing persecutions of the time. In this cave God caused them to fall into a death-like sleep. They slept two hundred years. When they woke they cautiously entered Ephesus, their native city, and inquired if there were any Christians there, ‘Christians?’ was the answer, ‘we are all Christians!’ But, alas, how were they disappointed to find that the offence of the cross had ceased. They found that the greater part who called themselves Christians were indifferent to Christ and His laws; they found that, as the world had become Christian, Christianity itself had become worldly. They found that with many the religion of Christ was only a name. They sought to escape from it, as they did from their persecution, and asked God to take them by death to their early friends in heaven.—*The Daily Course*, p. 374.

HAVE you ever been in a large wood or forest? You know that in some parts the trees are very thick, and there are no paths, and it is quite lonely. If any of you were to get into such a place, you might be in a danger of being lost, and you would be very anxious not to stay there until it was dark. You would say to yourself, ‘The best thing I can do is to try and find the footpath, and then perhaps I may meet somebody who will show me the way home.’ Then very

likely you would come to a place where three or four ways met, and you would say, ‘I am sure I don’t know what path to take; I will wait here until I see someone who will tell me.’ And so you would ‘stand in the ways.’ This would be a much better place to stand in than where there was no path, would it not? Yes. And while you were standing in the way you would do the second thing: you would think, you would see how foolish you had been to get so far away from home. And so you would ‘stand in the way,’ and ‘see,’ or consider. Presently a man would come along; and what would you do then? You would *ask*, would you not? You would say, ‘Oh, please, sir, tell me the way to such a place’; and when he had told you, you would take the first step towards home, and you would *walk in the way* and never stop until you reached your father’s house. And so you would get home—first, by *standing in the way*; secondly, by *thinking*; thirdly, by *asking*; fourthly, by *walking*.—*Sermons for Boys and Girls*, p. 62.

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Two Manuscripts of the Rev. Thomas Boston of Ettrick.

BY THE REV. GEORGE D. LOW, M.A., EDINBURGH.

FROM Boston’s letter to his children prefixed to the *Memoirs* we learn that he left for their use two autobiographical manuscripts, ‘committing them to the Lord for preservation and a blessing on them.’ The one, a book bound in quarto, was entitled ‘Passages of my Life,’ and the other ‘A

General Account of my Life.’ It was Boston’s express wish that these manuscripts should remain in the family and be in charge of one of his descendants, ‘if such an one there be, as shall addict himself to the holy ministry’ (see *Memoirs*, 1st ed. p. 3). Accordingly they passed into the