

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE hope of the unbeliever in miracle is Prophecy. There was a time when Prophecy was looked upon as the most undoubtedly miraculous of all the miracles in the Bible. For there is nothing that appeals to men more forcibly than the foretelling of the future. But Prophecy is not miraculous now. The fore-teller has become a forth-teller. Give us time, says the unbeliever in miracle, and we shall drive the miracles altogether out of the Bible.

That a change has come over our conception of Prophecy is true. There may be an 'Argument from Prophecy' still, but it is certainly not the argument that it used to be. Whether it means that Prophecy is henceforth to be regarded as a natural occurrence we shall consider in a moment. But even if that is so, it does not follow that miracles are about to be swept out of the Bible. There is a good reason for the change that has come over our conception of Prophecy. And there is a good reason why that change should leave our belief in miracles unaffected.

Whatever happens to Prophecy our belief in miracles will remain, because our Lord Jesus Christ is a miracle. We cannot get rid of the miracles of the Bible without getting rid of Him. It is some years since Professor Huxley seized upon the miracle of the sending of the demons

into the swine, and nicknamed it 'the Gadarene pig affair,' in the hope of discrediting all the miracles that the Gospels contain. There is something to be said even for 'the Gadarene pig affair,' and we may have occasion to refer to it also in a little. But Professor Huxley should have been held to it then, and we must hold all his successors to it now, that the miracle of the Gospels is the Lord Jesus Christ, and that we cannot get rid of miracle from the Bible without first getting rid of Him.

The change that has come over our conception of Prophecy is easily accounted for. It is due to the fact that in the study of Prophecy, attention has been called to the circumstances of the prophet's own time.

It was the great, and it became the glaring, blunder of our fathers that they separated the prophet from his own people and his own time. They understood that he spoke for the future,—not for his own generation, but for generations that were long afterwards to be born. They seemed to think that that was what the Apostle meant when he said that these things were written for our admonition.

And not only did they think that he spoke *for* the future; they thought also that he spoke *about*

the future. They remembered that he was sometimes called a seer, and they seemed to think of a seer as one who had second-sight. They knew that the prophet was in some sense sent by God to those who were within reach of his living voice. But that was little more than an accommodation. He really spoke, they said, to those who came after, and he spoke of the Messianic age, seeing it afar off and foretelling it.

When the historical method was applied to Prophecy, it came to be believed that all this was a mistake. For it was evident that the prophet was sent to the men of his own day, and that in many instances the message which he carried was applicable to them alone. Whereupon was struck the telling phrase, 'not a fore-teller, but a forth-teller.' And it was generally denied that the Hebrew prophet ever spoke either for the future or about it. There is a memorable passage in a book by Professor Driver, in which he asserts his belief in a case of actual prediction on the part of the prophet Isaiah. The passage is characteristic of one of the most courageous scholars of our time. But its very existence makes clear and emphatic the difference which the historical method has made.

Now, it would be unrighteous of us to seek to undo what the historical study of Prophecy has done. And it would be vain. But it would be untrue to say that we are satisfied with it. If the prophet spoke only for his own time, why do we call him a prophet? Was he not, on the lowest estimate of him, simply a statesman? Was he not, on the highest estimate, simply a preacher? But there is a greater difficulty than that.

Is it possible for a man, call him what you will, to speak to his own time only? He is the forth-teller for God, you say. Well, God is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And His purpose is the same. Is it possible for a prophet to cut off just so much of God's purpose as suits his own generation, in the same way as a tailor cuts off a

'length' from the web in order to make one particular garment? If we can no longer believe that the Hebrew seer overlooked the present, can we believe that he did not look into the future? 'Your father Abraham,' said Jesus to the Jews, 'rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad.' If Abraham saw it, so did Isaiah and all the prophets. The student of Prophecy may once have made the mistake of thinking that Isaiah did not speak for his own day and generation. We should make a much greater mistake if we were persuaded that he spoke only for his own day and generation. We shall never again forget that the Sign of Immanuel was a sign to Ahaz, king of Judah, or that the Suffering Servant was sent as a comforter to those who returned from the Captivity. But we should miss the grander purpose of Prophecy if we were to say that the Sign of Immanuel had nothing to do with the birth of Christ, and that the Suffering Servant had nothing to do with His death.

There is an article on the Sign of Immanuel in the *Journal of Theological Studies* for July. The author is Dr. C. F. Burney, Fellow of St. John Baptist College, Oxford. Dr. Burney is dissatisfied with the current interpretation of the Sign of Immanuel. He does not himself connect it with the birth of Christ, but he leaves the way open for the connexion. He does call it a miracle.

Dr. Burney calls the Sign of Immanuel a miracle because he believes that it was the prediction of a virgin birth. Our fathers always understood that it was the prediction of a virgin birth. But when it was seen that the word which Isaiah uses for virgin does not necessarily mean a virgin, but only a girl of marriageable age, and that there is another word which means virgin, and only virgin, which he might have used but does not, the idea was dropped: that he meant to speak of a virgin birth. And with the idea of the virgin birth went the idea that his prophecy was a prediction. Dr. Burney was trained in the

historical method. We understand that once he disbelieved in the virgin birth and the prediction. Further use of the historical method has restored his belief in both.

There is no doubt that Isaiah might have used a word which only signifies virgin. There is no doubt that the word which he uses, although it may mean virgin, and indeed is used in that sense in the Old Testament, possibly in every case of its occurrence, is nevertheless a more general word, and denotes any young woman who is come to marriageable years. But why should Isaiah use the narrower word? Let us suppose that a Messianic birth was looked for in the days of Isaiah. And let us suppose that it was to be a virgin birth. Dr. Burney gives good reasons for both suppositions. Then it was needless for Isaiah to say virgin. It would have been bad style. And we know the master of the Hebrew language that Isaiah was. All that he had to say was 'the girl,' 'the expected one.' And this is just what he does say. For we must not fail to notice that he uses the definite article before the word 'girl.' A virgin birth was *in the air*, as Dr. Burney puts it. The sign to Ahaz lay in fixing the time and circumstances of it.

The Suffering Servant is dealt with this month also, and again by a man of ripe scholarship who has been trained in the historical method of study. The Fernley Lecture for 1909 was delivered by the Rev. Wilfrid J. Moulton, M.A., Professor of Old Testament Languages and Literature in Headingley College, Leeds. It consists of a survey of God's dealings with His ancient people of Israel, and is now published under the title of *The Witness of Israel* (Culley; 3s. 6d.). About the middle of the volume Mr. Moulton offers us a fresh interpretation of the meaning of the Servant of the Lord.

Dr. Burney did not connect the virgin birth of Immanuel with the virgin birth of Christ. But he left the way open. Professor Moulton does

not connect the Servant of the Lord with the agony in the Garden and the death on Calvary. But he also leaves the way open, and he makes the connexion inevitable. Who is the Suffering Servant of the Lord?

Professor Moulton runs over the recent interpretations. It is not the nation of Israel suffering innocently for the other nations of the earth, as Dr. Peake believes. It is not the ideal Israel, approximately realized in the loyal section of the nation, suffering many things for their faithfulness, with a suffering that is somehow redemptive, as Dr. Skinner so admirably argues. It is a person, as Duhm declares. Not Jehoiachin, however, as Sellin attempts to show; nor some mythological god dying and reviving, and celebrated in some Babylonian hymn which the Israelites may have heard in the Captivity, as Gressmann temptingly urges. Who is the Servant?

It is the Messiah-King of whom earlier prophets spoke. Professor Moulton does not say that this was present to the prophet's consciousness at the beginning. But he says that when the description of the Servant's death and glory is complete, the prophet returns to knit his own hopes with those which had gone before. He remembers the words of the ninth chapter of Isaiah, 'unto us a Child is born.' The Servant who has been exalted to be a King is this Child who is to sit upon the throne of his father David.

'Every man has the gift of imagination, and every one who cultivates it will find how serviceable it is. To listen to a sermon that shows not a particle of imaginative power, is like walking along the dry and dusty highway that traverses a featureless country. But to listen to a discourse which in all other respects is excellent, and has been illuminated by the play of well-trained imaginative power, is like walking across Ilkley moors in the early autumn, when the turf springs under your feet, and an Italian sky is overhead,

the air is exhilarating, and the rich and varied landscape exhibits new scenes of beauty at every advancing step you take. If you wish to hold your hearers bound by a spell which they cannot resist, in order that you may sway them towards the highest purposes at which man can aim, then cultivate the imagination.'

These sentences are quoted from the Rev. B. Hellier, in a volume entitled *The Art of Illustration Illustrated* (Culley; 3s. 6d. net), of which the author is the Rev. John Edwards. The immediate object of the quotation is to encourage the use of illustrations in the pulpit. For Mr. Edwards rightly judges that the choice of an illustration, and not its manufacture only, is a work of the imagination. But the quotation raises another question.

How far is a preacher entitled to use his imagination in the exposition of a text of Scripture? In the new volume of the *Christian World Pulpit* (James Clarke & Co.; 4s. 6d.) there is a sermon by the Rev. James Burns on 'Pilate's Wife.' The subject is a tempting one. The sermon is an excellent illustration of our meaning.

The text is Mt 27¹⁹—'And while he was sitting on the judgement-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.' The temptation, we say, or the call, whichever it is, freely to use the imagination in the treatment of that text, is very great. Mr. Burns uses it freely. Let us exercise our own freedom also in following him.

'All that we know of Pilate's wife,' says Mr. Burns, 'is found in this one text.' He means all that we know from Scripture. From other sources we learn some little things about her, one of them being her name of Claudia Procula. These things may not be reliable. They may be due to that very use of the imagination which Mr. Burns

enjoys. But Mr. Burns cannot refuse them on that account. And he does not refuse them. As his sermon proceeds he accepts the legends about the later life of Claudia as unhesitatingly as he himself invents the circumstances of her earlier life.

Pilate's wife 'appears but once in Scripture. It is at a moment when the suspense which surrounds the trial of our Lord is at its height, when the life of Christ seems hanging in the balance, when the mind and heart are enthralled with the awful issues that are at stake, and when every nerve throbs with a pained excitement. Her appearance relieves for a moment the almost unbearable strain; her message, with its pathetic warning and loving appeal, diverts the thoughts away from the Central Figure, and gives opportunity for self-recovery.' In that way does Mr. Burns prepare the stage for the introduction of the central figure. Her introduction suggests to the imagination three separate pictures—her home, her cross, and her act of daring.

Her home at this time was in Jerusalem. How was it there? Her husband was there because his work was there. But Augustus had passed a law forbidding provincial governors to take their wives with them. It is true that Tiberius had relaxed the rule. If a wife was anxious to go, and if her husband was ready to offer special security for her non-interference in affairs of State, then husband and wife were allowed to go together.

Yet Claudia knew what it meant to go with her husband to Jerusalem. She was far from being insensible to the attractions of Rome. Moreover, Palestine was distant, and Jerusalem was dull. Or if at any time Jerusalem should awaken out of its dullness, it was only to bring Pilate and his wife into a danger that was more to be dreaded than the deadliest dullness. For the Jews were difficult to manage. And for a nation that was really so advanced in some ways they were surprisingly indifferent to the shedding of blood. Pilate's wife

knew what she did in pleading to go to Jerusalem. But love casts out fear. Pilate also knew what he did in taking her with him. But Pilate loved his wife.

And so they made their home in Jerusalem. And Jerusalem became their home for ten anxious momentous years. 'This noble woman,' says Mr. Burns, 'fulfilled in highest measure the task of womanhood. She was her husband's better self: the guardian angel which presided over his honour. I think that I can see her welcoming him back to his home after some specially trying day, when his pride had been severely strained, and his patience utterly broken by the turbulent mob he was called upon to govern—welcoming him with gracious smile and loving word, seeking to lead his mind away from the irritating incident through which he had passed, and to guide his thoughts into a smoother channel; and I think, too, that I can hear her speak from her womanly heart words of pity and compassion, for those for whom her scornful husband had only bitterness and contempt.'

But Claudia Procula had her cross to carry. Her home was not a happy one. Pilate's love for his wife, and his wife's love for him, were not sufficient to save him from spiritual ruin. She was a good woman; he was a bad man. Long before Pilate saw Christ he began a course of life which sapped his sense of right and wrong. When in the providence of God Jesus stood before his judgment-seat, Pilate was already a slave to his own guilty past.

The cross which Pilate's wife had to carry was a heavy one. She had to live with a man whom she loved but could no longer respect. She had to stand at his side and see him sink lower and lower in his own estimation and in hers. The man whom once she had loved as the soul of every virtue had become shifty, unscrupulous, dishonourable. She loved him still, but now her love burned in upon her soul, and scorched her

night and day. 'There are many things which darken human lives, many unspeakable tragedies in this strange world of ours; but tell me is there anything more tragic than this—for a woman to be bound by the indissoluble bonds of marriage to a man who is unworthy of her?'

What Pilate wanted was that foundation upon which character is built. He had no faith in God or man. 'What is truth?' said jesting Pilate; and possibly it was a jest, as Bacon calls it. For the outward signs of conduct—firmness in little things to the length of obstinacy, weakness in great to the length of contempt—these were but the outer signs of an inward emptiness. His wife loved him still, but she could not help him. As she waited for him the days grew longer. Her mind was occupied more with memory than with hope. And even the memory was bitter. For a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things. She knew much and dreaded more. She dreaded by day and dreamed by night. She felt that something was coming. And it came at last, And when it came it was more terrible than in the darkness of her darkest fears she had anticipated.

Then Pilate's wife did her great act of daring. How she came to know Christ we cannot tell. Tradition says that she was already a proselyte of the gate. But in the tradition there is possibly religious pride, which is certainly not a legitimate use of the imagination. Nor is the tradition necessary. She had already been four years in Jerusalem. These years covered the whole period of Christ's public ministry. How could she fail to hear of Him? A few mornings ago there had occurred an incident, of every detail of which Pilate would be sure to obtain accurate information. It was the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It seemed certain that some day her husband and He would meet face to face. The meeting was no longer to be hoped for, only to be feared. As she awoke, startled, in the yet early morning, she knew that her dream was more than a dream, and she sent her message.

It was undoubtedly a daring thing to do. For she knew that she had been allowed to accompany her husband on condition that she should not interfere with affairs of State. But there is a call that comes sometimes to a man or a woman which is higher than the call of duty. Sometimes we have to dare not to do our duty in order that our duty may be done. Claudia Procula was not the woman to forget the vow that she had made. But even if the breaking of her vow should mean degradation to her husband, even if it should mean death to herself, hearing a call from a higher world than the world of Roman politics, she sent her message, 'Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.'

Pilate was greatly moved. His first flash of angry amazement gave place to the amazement of love. He knew what it had cost her to send that message. And now, for a moment, the history of the world, as it were, waited upon a woman's dream. Will the prayer of Pilate's wife prevail?

It would have prevailed once. But not now. Now it has influence enough with Pilate only to send him to wash his hands superstitiously. For he has his own past to reckon with. As the soldiers led Jesus away to be crucified, Pilate entered his home. His wife was waiting, and their eyes met.

What is it that gives the story of Jacob its peculiar interest? Is it the way in which it is told? It is certainly well told. The selection of incident, the development of character, the surprise of felicitous phrase, all acknowledge some master in the art of story-telling. But that is not what gives it its interest.

Is it the contrast between Jacob and Esau? That contrast is very striking. And it is more than a difference between two men. It is more

than a difference between two types of men. Far back beyond the birth of Jacob and Esau we discover some purpose of God which baffles our understanding and which we hope to find unravelled in the history of their lives. It is the purpose we denominate Election. Yet it is not the mystery of 'Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated' that gives this story its peculiar interest.

Its interest comes from this, that the life of Jacob is the life of the religious man. There is such a thing as religion. It is found in the Bible; it is found in all human life. And it is always the dominant interest. In the life of Jacob we see its influence manifesting itself more individually, and yet more typically, than in any other human life we have record of. Jacob the natural man is a poor creature, cunning and crawling: Jacob becomes a power with God, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile.

There are four periods in his life. The first is at Beersheba. Here Jacob is himself his only concern. He is religious, which Esau is not. He knows the value of the Birthright. He appreciates the possibilities of the Blessing. But his religion is a family religion. It is personal only in so far that he identifies himself with his family, is acquainted with its religious history, and shares its religious promise. His religion does not diminish his selfishness, but accentuates it, giving it occasion, and almost excuse, for its exercise. If Jacob had been as profane as Esau, he would not have waylaid his brother in order to obtain the Birthright, he would not have circumvented his father in order to snatch the Blessing.

The next period is at Bethel. Jacob is now alone. He has left the family behind him, and the family religion. Family religion is a great blessing. The boy is sometimes a sneak, oftener a prig, who finds pride in it. But he has a future before him. The testing time comes when he leaves the family behind. Jacob has left the family behind, but not the God of the family. The

God of his family had been the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac; He is now the God of Jacob. It came as a surprise. He dreamed and he awoke. 'Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not.' But we dream our own dreams. Esau would not have seen the angels or felt the awfulness of the place.

It came as a surprise, because God had been associated with Beersheba and the family resident there. Faring forth towards Paddan-aram that day, he had left behind him all that made life great, all that he had planned and won, the Birthright and the Blessing, the family pride and the family promise. And his surprise is to find that he has not left behind the family God. God is in this place, in this place where the family is not, in this place where Jacob himself is alone. That is the surprise.

So he makes a bargain with Him. On the side of Jacob well-doing, on the side of God prosperity—that is the bargain. And it lifts Jacob a little out of his selfishness. For selfishness is sin, and the greater the sin the greater the selfishness. The man who makes a bargain with God at the threshold of independent life—so much well-doing, so much prosperity—is a selfish man still. But well-doing is the young man's heaven. And it saves him from the future of remorse, the old man's hell. And then, a bargain though it be, and a selfish one, it is Jacob's assurance that God goes with him to Paddan-aram.

The third period is at Paddan-aram. Here Jacob discovers that God is not content to be a partner in a prosperous business. Laban prospers also. What is more significant, Laban prospers through Jacob's own prosperity, and that is through the presence of Jacob's God. Now Laban never made a bargain with God as Jacob did. Why then should he be prosperous? It is evident that this partnership with God is not to be the simple matter of so much prosperity for so much well-doing which Jacob expected it to be.

It is significant also, though perhaps not more significant to Jacob, that all his well-doing does not bring him unclouded prosperity. He has to wait for Rachel. It is a long service and galling, though the presence of Rachel softens it. Then Leah is substituted. The trick is worthy of Jacob himself, which makes it none the pleasanter. He has been duped in his dearest desire. And the years must go on again, long service with drudgery, and the hope less confident than before. Jacob cannot say that God has not kept to the bargain, for he has succeeded in business beyond expectation. But it is not the simple engagement that he expected it to be.

And now how easy it would be for Jacob to repudiate God. Men have rejected Him for less, and have cried out that it is vain to serve God, and what profit is it to have kept His commandments? But Jacob does not reject Him. What he repudiates is his own selfishness. Slowly and painfully he discovers that God signs a deed of partnership not to be the partner of a man of business, but to be the partner of a man. For why should He spend His time planning the prosperity of a trading enterprise? The cattle on a thousand hills are His. The only acquisition He has to plan for, and to wait for, is the acquisition of a human soul. As Jacob loses faith in himself, beaten partly by Laban's checkmate but more by God's chastisement, we begin to have faith in him.

The fourth period is at the brook Jabbok. At last it is self or God. There is to be no more compromise. As the crisis approaches Jacob excels himself as a strategist. He seems determined to earn our supreme contempt for cowardice and for cringing. 'When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau; and, behold, he also is behind us.'

But the Jacob who disposes his following so adroitly, and whose mouth is so ready with 'my lord Esau' and 'thy servant Jacob,' is the same who has prayed a prayer by the brook Jabbok. Then Esau came and fell upon his neck and kissed him. And Jacob was not astonished. It was not 'my lord Esau' that softened his brother, nor the present. It was that prayer, preparing Jacob for the wrestling, the last struggle of selfishness with the will of God. Why should Esau be angry now? Jacob is a man, and God no longer needs an instrument of chastening.

Theodore Monod does not seem to have had the history of Jacob in mind when he wrote his hymn in four stanzas. He seems to have had in mind his own history, the history of the religious man. But how well it fits the history of Jacob.

O the bitter shame and sorrow,
That a time could ever be

When I let the Saviour's pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answered,
'All of self, and none of Thee!'

Yet He found me; I beheld Him
Bleeding on the accursed tree,
Heard Him pray, 'Forgive them, Father!'
And my wistful heart said faintly,
'Some of self, and some of Thee!'

Day by day His tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full and free,
Sweet and strong, and, ah! so patient,
Brought me lower, while I whispered,
'Less of self, and more of Thee!'

Higher than the highest heaven,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last hath conquered;
Grant me now my supplication,
'None of self, and all of Thee!'

The Faith of Jesus.

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THIS is a matter that I have often wished to see discussed more fully than has so far come under my notice. A year or two ago I remember searching such writers as I could reach who might be expected to handle the point, but without success. My greatest disappointment was my failure to find any allusion to it even in a book so thorough and so fertile as Schlatter's *Der Glaube*. And yet it lies very near the centre of things for us. If faith be the central exercise of religion, and Jesus be its central figure, a discussion seems imperative of the relation between faith in our case and whatever takes its place in the case of Jesus as His relation to God. At the present moment, when the nature of Christ's person is again in the forefront of Christian concern, and when the burning question is whether the religious problem was for Him just what it is for us,—at such a time it is singular that it should be so hard to find my theme discussed by first-rate authorities. At the same time my reading is so far

short of the encyclopædic range of a Sanday or a Moffatt that I speak with great misgiving.

I have, however, come upon one reference to the subject which seems to me suggestive, and which has set me on the writing of these lines. It is in Schlatter's new volume of *New Testament Theology*, p. 316.¹

Christ's love to the Father is a love of infinite trust—not to be mastered or lost even in death. And by death, of course, is not meant death in the egoist sense of individual arrest with its terror and gloom, but such death as alone could

¹ I remark in passing how I am struck with the moral and historic insight of this book in contrast with the intellectual acumen and fertility of combination of Holtzmann. It is all the difference between sympathetic interpretation and analytic construction. The one seems written from within, the other from without; the one with radiance, the other with brilliance; the one so steady, the other so illuminating; the one so grave, the other so keen; the one so full of grace, the other of truth.