

THE MONTH.

THE reports of the proceedings at the Diocesan Conferences are full of interest and encouragement. They exhibit a wonderful amount of earnestness and devotion, with a pleasing agreement between the lay and clerical representatives.

At York the President delivered a devotional address.¹ The Bishop of Hull (Dr. Blunt) read a paper on "Systematic Instruction in Church History and Doctrine"; and a Committee for the subject was appointed.

At Hove, Brighton, the Bishop of Chichester, who has entered on his ninetieth year, presided with his usual spirit and success.

At Durham the Bishop spoke on "Home Reunion."

At Liverpool, in an impressive address,² the Bishop referred to his recent illness, and the valuable help received from Bishop Royston.

In the Chester Conference Canon Blackburn proposed—not in vain—a scheme for inquiring into the attendance in rural parishes.

Bishop Barry (in charge of the Diocese of Exeter during the Bishop's visit to Japan) opened the Conference with an address.

The condition of affairs in regard to Uganda varies from month to month. An enthusiastic effort has been made, by friends of the C.M.S., to preserve British influence.

Dr. Paget is appointed to the Deanery of Christ Church, made vacant by the resignation of Dr. Liddell.

The Rev. Prebendary Eardley-Wilmot, Rector of Walcot, succeeds Dean Forrest in the Incumbency of St. Jude's, Kensington.

On the widow of Mr. W. H. Smith, as on the widow of Canning and the wife of Disraeli, has been conferred a peerage.

The lesson of the South Molton election—a decisive defeat to the Government candidate—whatever else may be said about it, is, as we have pointed out before, that agricultural labourers take comparatively little interest in the success of the Government policy in Ireland.

The Bishop of Worcester presided at the annual meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Birmingham.

The Archbishop of York has, through Canon McCormick, expressed a desire for more churches in Hull, and his Grace proposes to give £1,000 towards a £20,000 fund. The Archbishop has paid a visit to Sheffield, and is said to have been much pleased and gratified therewith.

¹ The *Guardian* says: "Grounding his remarks upon the concluding words of the Gospel for the day, St. Simon and St. Jude, 'He shall testify of Me,' the Archbishop enlarged upon the work of God the Holy Ghost in relation to Christ and the soul. The stillness of the assembly was an evidence of the impression which his Grace made by his earnest and solemn utterances."

² "Bishop Ryle's utterances," says the *Guardian*, "whether we agree with them or not, never fail in clearness and outspoken courage. If he thinks evil days are approaching, he says so without any attempt to pretend an optimism which he does not feel."

At a remarkable gathering, representative of all Sheffield, Arch-deacon Blakeney's portrait was presented to the Cutlers' Hall.

The Cork election ended, as was expected, in the thorough defeat of the Pannellite candidate. The victory is clearly the victory of the priests. While Mr. O'Brien and other members are the nominal leaders of the Separatist movement, Archbishops Walsh and Croke have decidedly the guiding power.

The Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol's Charge—in the best sense of the word, timely—is of singular importance. The remarkable passage on "the Appeal to Christ" is by far the most forcible reply to recent mischievous attempts to define and limit the Knowledge of our Lord. The Bishop said :

We now turn to an argument of a very different nature. Hitherto we have considered the details of opposing theories, and the facts on which the two modes of regarding the Old Testament claim respectively to be based. We now turn to a final Authority. We now make our appeal to the Great Teacher, and aver that the view which we have thus far shown to be the more probable of the two, on the merits of the case, can, with every appearance of probability, claim His approving authority, and that the traditional view of the Old Testament can, for its justification, appeal to the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But here, at the very outset, two of the gravest possible questions present themselves, and must, as far as we can do so, be answered in the present address.

The first question is this—Have we a right to make such an appeal? Is the subject of the composition and of the historical credibility of the books of the Old Testament a subject on which we can, with propriety, appeal to the teaching of our blessed Lord?

The second question is a more difficult one, and may be thus formulated: Does the doctrine of the two natures permit us to ascribe to our Lord in His human nature an intuitive and unerring knowledge in matters relating to the Old Testament which belong to the general domain of research and criticism? Or, to put this really momentous question in another form, was the limitation of our Lord's humanity, and the degree of what is technically called His *Kenosis*, of such a nature that His knowledge in regard of the authorship and composition of the books of the Old Testament was no greater than that of the masters of Israel of His own time?

Till these two questions, the one relating to the rightfulness of the appeal, the other to the validity of the appeal, in reference to the Old Testament, are fully answered, it is waste of time for us to investigate those individual passages which may appear likely to form a secure basis for our inferences as to the teaching of our Lord on the nature and authority of the Old Testament. Let us begin, then, with the first question—Is such an appeal proper and permissible?

1. At first sight it might seem unnecessary to enter into such a question

at all. Who could doubt that it is proper and permissible? When we pause for a moment to recall the plain fact that our blessed Lord either cites or refers to passages in the Old Testament Scriptures probably more than four hundred times, and when we further remember that in many of these He speaks of the Old Testament in a direct and definite manner, the question of St. Peter seems to rise to our lips, and we ask to whom can we go for guidance save to Him who has the words of eternal life, and who not only before His resurrection, but after it, in His holy risen Body, made the Old Testament and its relation to Himself the subject of His inspired teaching. When we call this to mind it does seem strange that we should have to pause and vindicate the rightfulness of such an appeal as that which we are now preparing to make.

If those that labour and are heavy laden are invited by Christ to come to Him, surely those who are in doubt and difficulty as to the nature of an integral portion of God's Holy Word may come to Him—nay, must come to Him, if they are to hope to find rest for their souls. I should hardly have dwelt on this had it not been stated by one of our Bishops to a body like that which I am now addressing that he objected on fundamental grounds to the argument that if our Lord Jesus Christ has virtually asserted a certain character for a certain writing, there is no appeal from His verdict. If the objection to the argument were really valid, then an appeal to the authority of our blessed Lord might be useless and out of place. But is not the argument objected to perfectly sound? Is it not certain that in the case supposed there *is* no appeal? Surely there can be no appeal, unless we are prepared to take up the startling position that virtual assertions of Christ are to be considered open to challenge. . . . What is meant by a virtual assertion? If it means that it is an assertion in an indirect rather than a direct form, then, in the case of Jesus Christ, it plainly cannot be challenged, unless we can bring ourselves to believe (which God forbid!) that the indirect assertions of Christ may involve fallibility owing to the limitation of His human nature. What *may* be challenged is whether, in what our Lord says, there is a virtual assertion at all. This, in any particular case, may be deemed fairly open to inquiry and investigation, and when we deal with particular cases, as we shall do in the two following addresses, then the utmost care will be taken not to claim as virtual assertions what the words, critically examined, may not distinctly evince to be such. But if, on critical investigation, it seems beyond reasonable controversy that a virtual assertion *is* made, then that assertion, if we have every reason to believe that the words are correctly reported—whether it relates to doctrine, ethics, or to questions relating to the authority or credibility of the Old Testament—is certainly to be deemed conclusive and incontrovertible.

We cannot, then, consider that the exception taken to the argument above alluded to can in any degree affect the confidence with which we may appeal to Christ in reference to the nature and authority of the Old Testament. Not only may we appeal, but we ought to appeal. What we especially need in these complicated questions, and in the discussion of the subtleties of argument involved in the analytical view, is the steadying element which a careful consideration of the tenor of our Lord's refer-

ences to the Old Testament will always be found to impart. It is not prejudgment that the appeal to Christ brings with it, but rather that wholesome reverence which it infuses in our investigations. It reminds us that the place we are entering is holy ground, and that we cannot treat the matter as a mere literary question, or leave it to be worked out by competent critics, and patiently wait for the result. We must go at once to Christ for guidance, and through the medium of His references to the Old Testament—references which one of our keenest opponents speaks of as “furnishing ample material for admiration”—prepare ourselves for making our final choice between the two views of the Scriptures of the Old Testament which we have analyzed in the preceding address.

II. But here we pass into the second and graver question : Can we rely absolutely and unconditionally on the results of this appeal? Can we ascribe to our Lord in His human nature such an unerring knowledge, in regard of the details of the subject-matter of the controversy, as may enable us without a hesitation or a doubt to accept the conclusions which equitable criticism may deduce from His words? Or, to put the question in another form, and partially in the words of a direct opponent, are we, or are we not, prepared to admit the possibility, on the part of our Lord, of exegetical mistakes? This is really the momentous question. It has received recent answers from contemporary writers of our own Church that are very far from reassuring. One writer has contended for the possibility of “intellectual fallibility” on the part of our Lord, but has afterwards had the loyalty and good sense to withdraw words which, we are forced to say, ought never to have been written. Another has used language with regard to the circumscription, as it were, of the Word by the human body which opens a wide door to inferences of a somewhat similar nature, and, to say the least, cannot be harmonised with the teaching of St. Athanasius. Another form of the same tendency to minimize the knowledge of our Lord in His human nature is to be recognised in the attempt to place on a parallel the Lord’s evincing of no more than the human knowledge of the time, in the realm of science, when He spoke of the sun “rising;” with His supposed evincing of no more than the same limited knowledge in the realm of history. The comparison, however, is hardly even plausible. In the one member of the comparison, the Lord spoke from what the eye beheld, and as we, who know fully that the sun does not rise, speak to this very hour; according to the other member, the Lord would have to be supposed to have placed limits on His historical knowledge which *we* claim to have overstepped—and, to use perfectly plain language, to be ignorant of that about which *we* use no conventional language, but distinctly assert that we know.

All these varied attempts practically to reduce the knowledge of the Lord, in reference to the actual facts connected with the history of the Old Testament, to the level of the knowledge of the times in which He vouchsafed to “dwell among us,” impose upon us the duty of attempting to return some definite answer to the general question we are now considering. We must face it humbly and reverently, but yet distinctly and without subterfuge, otherwise our appeal to Christ will be in vain; the counter-appeal from Christ’s words to Christ’s alleged ignorance will be

made, and we shall be reminded, as we have been reminded by one of the most able supporters of the analytical view, that "with regard to the revered Master must the right of criticism be maintained." In other words, the teaching of Him, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," must be subjected to the testing of the sin-clouded intellect of mortal man.

The confusion of thought on this subject is simply portentous. When, in this very passing year, a Bishop, preaching from a University pulpit, speaks in one portion of his sermon of the Lord's voluntarily leaving to His human nature its associated limitations, "its human weakness and ignorance"; and, in another, affirms "our Lord's human ignorance of natural science, historical criticism, and the-like," but does not deny "the possibility of the miraculous communication of such knowledge"; and when, still further, he concludes with asserting "the reality of our Lord's human limitation as well in knowledge as in moral energy," when we read such things, it does seem that the holy doctrine of the two natures does need reiteration and re-enforcement.

Let us then again hear old truths, and for a brief space again tread in the old pathways of Catholic thought.

We may begin with this simple but most vital question—On what does modern thought base its imputation of ignorance to our blessed Lord in subjects such as we are now considering—viz., the real nature, texture, and historical trustworthiness of the Scriptures of the Old Testament? The answer of modern thought is promptly returned—On the experiences of *our own* human nature. As *we* cannot by intuition arrive at a knowledge of the age, authorship, and composition of these ancient writings, but can only hope to do so by patient investigation and long-continued critical research, so also must it have been with Christ; otherwise the humanity He vouchsafed to assume would not have been a true humanity, the Incarnation would not have been that true emptying Himself of His Divine glories and prerogatives which is involved in the Apostle's significant term. In a word, the reasoning in this answer is from the characteristics of human nature, *as known to us by experience*, to the characteristics of the human nature of our Lord. If, to use the language of Athanasius, "ignorance is the property of man," so, it is contended, must it have been in the case of the human nature of Christ. But such reasoning is utterly inadmissible.

The Bishop, in concluding, adds :

This only do we unhesitatingly deny, that the Lord's general teaching as to the Old Testament, and those characteristics of His teaching on the subject which all reasonable interpreters would be willing to recognise, could by any possibility be attributed to any principle of accommodation, in the ordinary sense of the words. That He who was the Truth and Light, as well as the Way, could have systematically so taught in reference to God's Holy Word, out of deference to the prejudices or the ignorance of His hearers, is utterly inconceivable.

We have quoted from the *Guardian*. This noble Charge will soon, we hope, be published.