

## JONAH.

THERE is probably no story in the Old Testament that is more frequently spoken of with mocking incredulity than the story of Jonah and the whale. But I think it likely that of those who make merry with the story, there are very many who have never read the book which contains it; and further, that of those who have read the book, a very small proportion have thought seriously enough about it to discover its wonderful meaning. For the Book of Jonah is one of the most wonderful books of the Old Testament. It is a book which no Jew would ever have written except under the teaching of the Spirit of God.

### I.

First: let us consider to what description of literature the book belongs. It is placed among the books of the prophets, but we see at the first glance that it is very unlike Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah and the rest of the books of the same class. It is a history, not a prophecy; it is the story of a passage in the life of a prophet, not a collection of the messages which a prophet delivered in God's name to the Jewish people.

It is a history, I say, not a prophecy; but it is not placed among the historical books. Nor is it a poetical book like Job; with the exception of the Psalm in the second chapter it is a prose composition. To what class then does it belong?

Shall we say that it is a fragment of history, but mis-

placed, and that it ought to have been put with the Books of Kings and Chronicles, Nehemiah and Ezra ?

I think not. It does not read like plain history.

I suppose that when we were children and read the *Pilgrim's Progress*, we all thought that somewhere in the world there was a certain City of Destruction, and that Christian with his wife and children lived in a plain house in one of its streets. The Slough of Despond and the Wicket-gate and By-path meadow, and the Interpreter's house—we thought that they were like the ditches and the paths and the gates and the farm-houses that we had seen in our country walks. As we grew older we learnt that the form of the wonderful story was imaginative ; but this did not destroy its truth. To many of us Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is far truer to-day, and truer in a deeper sense, than when we imagined that the City of Destruction was like Paris or Hamburg and ought to be found in a map.

I have long thought that this Book of Jonah is a book of the same kind as Bunyan's great allegory, although unlike the *Pilgrim's Progress* there are some historical facts at the root of it. It is an imaginative creation, as the Book of Job, though based, I suppose, upon the misfortunes which really happened to a wealthy man, is an imaginative creation ; but the Book of Job is a poem ; the Book of Jonah, like the *Pilgrim's Progress*, is prose.

If you asked me why I have come to this conclusion, I should answer : Very much in the same way in which *you* have come to the conclusion that the *Pilgrim's Progress* is a work of the imagination. When we know what real life is, Bunyan's story does not look to us like a story of real life. And so quite apart from the story of the great fish which swallowed Jonah, and which after three days discharged him alive on the dry land, this book does not look to me like a plain story of events which really happened. I

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receive without the shadow of a doubt many miraculous stories as being stories of actual facts, but this book on the whole looks to me unlike a story of actual facts. It is, like the *Pilgrim's Progress* which charmed our childhood, a statement of certain great truths in an imaginative form. So much for the literary character of the book.

## II.

But though the book seems to me an imaginative creation, there was really a prophet named Jonah, the son of Amittai, who prophesied in Israel in the reign of Jeroboam. This is what the Book of Kings says of him: "*He [Jeroboam] restored the border of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which He 'spake by the hand of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai the prophet, which was of Gath-hepher*" (2 Kings xiv. 25).

Jeroboam began to reign 825 B.C., and reigned for forty-one years. As Jonah prophesied that he would recover the territory which Syria had taken from Israel, Jonah could hardly have lived late in the king's reign; so that we may place Jonah about 800 years before Christ. He was the contemporary of Amos and Hosea, and lived long before Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and all the rest of the prophets whose books are collected in the Old Testament. And beyond the brief notice of him in the Book of Kings there is not a word about him in any of the Old Testament books, except that which bears his name.

Now there may have been—I think there was—a tradition that Jonah was charged by God to warn Nineveh of its doom; there may perhaps have been a tradition that Jonah refused to fulfil the charge. I hardly think that a writer with such fine and generous feeling as the

author of this book must have had would have condemned Jonah to perpetual dishonour by making him the hero of the story, unless there had been some foundation for the story in fact. I therefore think it likely that Jonah was really charged by God to warn Nineveh of its doom and refused to do it. How much more of the story was literal fact, I cannot tell. But if the remarkable events recorded in this book had actually happened—if Jonah had been swallowed by the fish and had been miraculously kept alive in the fish's belly and then cast out on to the shore—and if his preaching had produced so immense an effect on the inhabitants of the capital of Assyria—I think that we should have been certain to have found some reference to these extraordinary facts in the writings of the prophets who followed him. But his name is never mentioned in any of them.

The first mention of him is in the book of Tobit, one of the apocryphal books, written perhaps about 350 B.C., perhaps later. But take 350 B.C.—that was 450 years after Jonah's days—and 450 years is a long time. It is about 450 years in round figures since the insurrection of Jack Cade and the beginning of the Wars of the Roses. And what is curious is that while the writer of the Book of Tobit seems to have heard that Jonah was charged to denounce the judgment of God against Nineveh, he says nothing about the repentance of Nineveh. So that even then—350 B.C.—it is probable that this Book of Jonah was not written ; it may not have been written till some time afterwards.

I regard the book, then, as an imaginative creation, based on the tradition that Jonah—an old prophet of Israel who lived 450 or 500 years before it was written—was charged to warn Nineveh of coming judgments, and that he refused to do it.

## III.

Before passing to the story itself, let us look at the historical framework of it. In Jonah's time, 800 years before Christ, the great empire of Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital, was gradually extending its power westwards. It had reached Damascus, and broken the strength of the kingdom of Syria. One of the first results of this is narrated in the Book of Kings. Damascus had taken some of the territory of the northern kingdom, the kingdom of Israel; Jonah prophesied that this territory would be recovered; and when Damascus was enfeebled by Assyria, Jeroboam recovered it. Assyria, therefore, seemed for a time to be, under God, the instrument of good for Israel. But any clear-sighted statesman might see that the great empire which had crushed Damascus and Syria would soon reach Samaria and Israel. Even before Jeroboam's death the king of Israel seems to have paid tribute to the Assyrian king; and Hosea, who was a contemporary of Jonah, but a little younger, prophesied that Israel would be carried captive to Assyria. This happened sixty or eighty years later.

That is the historical framework of the story. The writer of it takes as his hero a prophet who lived eighty years before the people of Israel became captives in Assyria. As yet that great empire was only a menace to the Jewish people; but to a wise statesman, and much more to a prophet, it was a serious menace. The dark shadow of the storm was moving westwards. It had reached Damascus—sooner or later it would reach Samaria. Just then a Jewish prophet is commissioned to go to the capital of Assyria and warn it that unless it repents of its sin it will be destroyed.

## IV.

Observe, Jonah is not commissioned to console the Jews by prophesying the downfall of Nineveh, as Isaiah pro-

phesied the downfall of many of the surrounding nations. Jonah would not have refused to do *that*. He would have done it with exultation and pride. To predict the ruin of the great heathen kingdoms which threatened or had actually assailed the independence of the Jewish people,—this was the common work of the prophets; such predictions were the solace and support of the Jewish nation in its distresses.

But Jonah is sent to preach to Nineveh itself. The Divine intention is clear. God desires the people of Nineveh to repent of their sin, to forsake it, and so to escape their doom. Jonah, as Dean Stanley puts it in one of his most felicitous phrases, is “the first Apostle to the Gentiles”—the first great missionary to heathen men, warning them to escape from coming wrath. The Jewish race supposed that they and they alone were regarded with pity and compassion by God; but the story of Jonah is so told by the writer of this book as to make it clear that God cares for the heathen as well as for the Jew; that His pity and His grace extend to all mankind; that it is His will that all men should repent, should forsake sin, and should know and obey the living and true God. That is the central idea of the book. Think of the glory of it, the height and the majesty of its conception of God; and yet the book in which this great truth is so nobly illustrated is assailed incessantly with mockery and contempt.

It was a hard commission for Jonah. To have been sent as a prophet to *any* heathen nation would have been hard enough. Why should the heathen be warned to repent of their sin? Why should they not be left to perish in their idolatry? But to be sent to Nineveh, the capital of the empire which was threatening the kingdom of Israel with extinction, which had crushed Israel’s nearest neighbour, Damascus, and was perhaps already receiving tribute from Samaria—to be sent to Nineveh, that Nineveh might

repent and escape the judgments of God, this was intolerable. Let the judgments descend on the haughty heathen city, let the empire of which it was the capital receive a mortal wound—a wound in its very heart, and then Israel will be safe.

In Jonah, as set forth in the story, the Jewish people might see an illustration of their own temper and spirit. The original thought and purpose of God had been that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed; but the Jews had regarded the great revelations of God which had come to them, not as a trust for all mankind, but as the constituent elements of their own power and glory; the heathen might be damned if the Jews continued to enjoy the favour of heaven. Jonah determines that he will not go to Nineveh; he will leave his commission to the heathen undischarged. That was precisely what the Jews had been doing throughout their history. In the guilt of the prophet, and in his punishment, the Jewish nation might see its own guilt and its own punishment.

## V.

Instead of going to Nineveh Jonah goes down to Joppa, and there he finds a ship—one of the Phœnician vessels, I suppose, which in those days carried on a great part of the Mediterranean trade—bound for Tarshish, a Phœnician settlement on the south coast of Spain. He had received the Divine command to go to Nineveh, which was in the remote east; he attempted to go to the remote west.

A storm rises, and the vessel in which the fugitive prophet is sailing is in great danger. The sailors believe that the storm is sent by some offended god; they pray to their own deities, and still the storm rages; then they rouse the passenger who is sleeping below deck and entreat him to take part in their devotions and to call on his

God. They cast lots, in order to discover the guilty man whose presence has drawn upon the ship the Divine anger, and the lot falls on Jonah. When he is questioned as to his country and his occupation, he declares that he is a Hebrew, that he worships the Creator of the sea and the dry land, but that he has fled from God's presence; and he tells them that if they cast him into the sea the storm will cease. But notice the fine feeling attributed to these heathen sailors. They are unwilling to sacrifice Jonah in order to save themselves. They row hard to get back to land, and when all their labour is defeated, and the storm becomes still more violent, observe their appeal to God—protesting their unwillingness that Jonah should perish. They cry to the God of the Hebrew stranger, "We beseech Thee, O Lord, we beseech Thee let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood; for Thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased Thee." They meant that they only submitted to the Divine will in casting Jonah into the sea, that they did it reluctantly, that God had resolved that Jonah should perish, and that whatever they did or refused to do, Jonah would not be saved; and yet they shrank from being the instruments of his punishment; they felt as if his blood was upon them. What a striking contrast this is with Jonah's impatience and resentment in the latter part of the book because the Divine menace against Nineveh was *not* fulfilled. These heathen men imperilled their own lives to save Jonah from the wrath of his God; Jonah was angry because the wrath of his God did not descend upon a great city which had repented of its sin.

As soon as Jonah was cast into the sea the tempest ceased, and the heathen sailors offer a sacrifice to the true God.

## VI.

A great fish receives Jonah, and Jonah remains in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights. While he is there he is represented as offering prayer to God, or rather thanksgivings, which are a selection of passages from the Psalms. The idea of the writer of the book seems to have been that Jonah, while still in the belly of the fish, expressed his confidence in God; since he was still alive, he was sure that he would be delivered.

It is not unreasonable, I think, to suggest that in this part of the story the writer was thinking of those dreary years when Israel and Judah were in exile in Assyria and Babylon. The nation was swallowed up by great heathen powers for its criminal want of fidelity to the trust it had received from God; but during that desperate time it was still surrounded by the Divine protection, and at last was brought back to its own country that it might have another chance of fulfilling its commission. Josephus, when he is telling the story of the Garden of Eden as given in Genesis, says, "Here Moses allegorizes"; and we may say, Here the writer of this book allegorizes.

## VII.

When Jonah escapes from the fish, the word of the Lord comes to him a second time, and now he obeys it. He reaches Nineveh and warns it of its coming destruction: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." This is the message which the Hebrew stranger delivers time after time as he passes through the streets of the great city. It is in this manner that remarkable religious teachers have been accustomed to preach in eastern lands: they have gone into the streets and declared in brief, impressive, startling words the duty, the guilt, or the doom of the city or the nation to which they believed they had been sent by the gods.

The most amazing thing in the book is, not the story of the fish, but the story of the impression which was at once produced by Jonah's warning on men of all ranks in Nineveh, from the king to the humblest of his subjects. The message filled the great city, which had a population of many hundred thousands of people, with fear; they fasted, and they prayed for mercy to the God who had sent His prophet to warn them. Nor were they satisfied with prayer and fasting. In the king's proclamation there are these great words: "Let them turn every one from his evil way and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knoweth whether God will not turn and repent and turn away from His fierce anger that we perish not." And the story goes on to say that God saw their works that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil which He said He would do them, and He did it not.

### VIII.

And now the dramatic and religious interest of the wonderful book deepens. Jonah learns that the storm of Divine anger which was gathering over Nineveh is drifting away; the black clouds are disappearing, the clear sky is seen once more. Is he filled with joy and thanksgiving? Does he bless God that the city is saved? Ah, no. "He was angry, and He prayed to the Lord and said, I pray Thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hastened to flee unto Tarshish: for I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repentest Thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live."

How are we to explain this extraordinary outburst of passion?

Something must be attributed to the wounded self-

esteem of the prophet. He had been charged to warn Nineveh that in forty days it would be destroyed; but he knew that neither the promises, nor the threatenings of God were absolute, and that God's threatenings against the wicked might be averted by repentance, and God's promises to the righteous lost by unfaithfulness. He always thought that it was possible that his word—though God had given it to him—would not be actually fulfilled. But might not his self-esteem have been more than gratified by the immense moral impression produced by his preaching? It appears not. And I think we can understand the reason.

Imagine what would have been his position if Nineveh had not repented and if the destruction had come. The greatness and the power of the city were known throughout the east; and if by some awful catastrophe it had perished, the report of the warnings of the Hebrew prophet would have travelled everywhere with the report of the calamity. When Jonah returned to his own country, he would have been received with exultation and reverence as a prophet whose word had been confirmed by the terrible judgments of the Most High. He would have been pointed at as the man who had been the messenger of the Divine wrath against Assyria.

But the report of a moral reformation in Nineveh would not produce a similar impression. The reality of the reformation—for it was only temporary—would be questioned. Jonah's part in producing it, therefore, would win him no glory. The self-esteem of the prophet was wounded.

The book has a special power for preachers. It should lead us to search our hearts to discover whether we care more for our own honour and reputation than for the glory of God and the salvation of men. In Jonah this terrible sin is so exhibited as to create terror and indignation; but the same sin may exist in other and less tragic forms, and wherever it exists it involves a man in awful guilt.

It was not his personal pride alone that was wounded, but his patriotism. Nineveh was the capital of a mighty heathen empire, from which Israel had reason to dread great evil. If—if it had only perished, one great danger which threatened the elect race would have passed away.

And yet it is clear that according to the writer of the book *Jonah* ought to have rejoiced that by its penitence and reformation Nineveh—for the time—escaped destruction. The story is an anticipation of the great words of Christ: "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father who is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."

#### IX.

The story is not yet ended. *Jonah* has learnt that the Divine vengeance—provoked by the sins of Nineveh—is drawing off now that Nineveh has repented, but he will wait and see whether, after all, the doom does not descend. He has finished his preaching. The king and the people who have been so deeply impressed by his warning treat him simply as a messenger from his God: they have heard his message; they have profited by it; but the messenger is a person of no importance; they show him no personal honour; they leave him to himself. And so he goes out to the east of the city where there is some rising ground, and there he sits in the heat to watch the great city which stretches, with the fields and gardens enclosed within its walls, over a great extent of country. He breaks off branches from the trees to make a booth—a summer-house—for himself while he sits there. As soon as the branches are broken off the leaves begin to wither in the burning sun and the heat beats down on the prophet and makes him faint. Then God is represented as causing a gourd—a plant of rapid growth and with large leaves—to

spring up and cover the booth so as to give Jonah an effective shade; and Jonah is exceeding glad because of the gourd.

But the relief soon passes. The next morning a worm begins to feed on the gourd, and it withers; and then came that terrible hot wind from the east, which all travellers in Syria and its neighbourhood remember—a wind like the fierce rush of heat from the mouth of an oven, and Jonah fainted, and entreated that he might die; it was better for him to die than to live.

This is followed by the most subtle touch in the whole story—a touch full of warning to all of us. God said to Jonah, “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?” And Jonah said, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.” And the Lord said, “Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I have pity on *Nineveh*?”

“*Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?!* I do well to be angry even unto death.” But was Jonah really angry for the gourd? Was it the gourd that he was pitying? He was willing to believe it; he accepted this interpretation of his anger as soon as it was suggested.

But it was his own physical misery, following his disappointment that Nineveh had not perished, that really made him angry. He was in a most villainous temper, a temper showing the basest selfishness. Yet he was quite ready to attribute it to a beautiful feeling of pity for the gourd! Have you never caught yourself in an act of self-deception like that? Ascribing mere personal resentment, wounded vanity, impatience, pique, envy, to the highest and purest motives? Have you never caught yourself covering an outbreak of temper with the plea that you were zealous for righteousness?—personal ambition with the fair colours of a desire for the glory of God?

Ah, the windings and deceits of the human heart fill

one with fear! "Who can discern his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

## X.

The book closes with a passage in which irony is blended with a most noble and pathetic representation of God's relation to His creatures. God is represented as saying to Jonah, "*Thou hast had pity on the gourd; the claim shall not be contested; it was an unselfish compassion for the death of an unconscious plant that provoked thine anger. Let it be so; should not I have pity on Nineveh?*"

And notice the contrasts which are suggested between the gourd and Nineveh. The gourd came up in a night and perished in a night. Nineveh was an ancient city, the growth of many centuries. The gourd was only one of millions of similar plants; its growth had been unobserved except by Jonah, and its disappearance would be unobserved. Nineveh was a great city, its destruction would be a vast catastrophe, and would be followed by immense results extending over a large part of the world. "*Thou hast had pity on the gourd . . . Should not I have pity on Nineveh?*"

Still more impressive is another element of the contrast: "*Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it to grow. Should not I have pity on Nineveh?*" suggesting that the great city had been the object of the Divine thought and care—had not grown up of itself or under the friendly protection of the false gods whose images were worshipped in its temples, but under the guidance and defence of the living God, who had revealed Himself to Abraham and his descendants. That was a startling truth to affirm in an ancient Jewish book. It gave a conception of God's relations to the human race of a widely different character from that to which the Jewish people had passionately clung.

The unknown author of this wonderful book teaches his fellow-countrymen that it was not the Jewish commonwealth alone that had been built up by the providence of God, but that a great heathen city like Nineveh and the empire of which it was the capital, had their place and their value in the Divine order of the world. Nineveh was a plant for which God had laboured, and which He had made to grow. He had the kind of care for it which men have for the trees and the plants on which they have spent their thought and their strength, and whose growth they have watched with interest and delight. Having laboured for Nineveh and made it great, God could not let it perish without a feeling of sorrow and a sense of loss. Is not that, I say, a wonderful passage to be found in an ancient Jewish book? Have we ourselves learnt the truth that it reveals? Have we thought of France and Germany and Spain and Russia, yes, and of states like Turkey, as plants for which God has laboured and which God has caused to grow? Have we thought of them as powers for which He has a use, and which He has gradually prepared—by a discipline extending over many centuries—for the service to which they were destined. Have we thought of the famous statesmen and the famous soldiers to whom they have owed their greatness as men who received their genius from God for the express purpose of giving to these nations their strength and their glory? When we have read of the oppressions and crimes of which great States have been guilty, and which have been followed by the wasting away of their life and power, have we thought of the Divine disappointment? When we have read of the calamities which have come upon them, have we remembered that God, who had laboured for them and made them grow, was troubled and pained by their destruction?—that by their destruction He had in a way lost His labour? It seems to me that the book at which

men have been accustomed to mock as the legendary creation of a race delighting in grotesque and impossible wonders contains truths so lofty that we ourselves have as yet hardly grasped them.

## XI.

The closing words touch one of the darkest and most perplexing aspects of the order of the world. "*Should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand?*" There were a hundred and twenty thousand children in Nineveh less than five or six years of age; the grown people might be guilty of great sin, and deserve to suffer heavy punishment, but the children,—they have committed no fault; and yet if Nineveh perishes, they must perish too. It is as if God were thinking with agitation and distress of what necessarily happens when the punishment of great crimes comes upon cities and nations. The innocent suffer with the guilty; it must be so. The whole order of human life rests on the principle that, for good or evil, men share each other's fortunes; and on the whole, the solidarity of human life is favourable both to virtue and happiness. But sometimes the law seems to work cruelly. God Himself, according to this book, does not look upon the calamities which descend upon the innocent unmoved. He will hold back His judgments on national iniquity as long as He can. He will accept, shall I say, any excuse for delay. "*Should not I have pity on Nineveh, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left?*"

"*And also much cattle!*" Yes—God pities the cattle too. He shrinks from inflicting on Nineveh the disasters which would justly punish the crimes of its people, because the cattle, which have not shared the crimes, would share the

suffering. *The tender mercies of God are over all His works.* God Himself is sensible of the confusions of the world. How it is, why it is, that so much apparent injustice is permitted to exist; that so much pain is permitted to come not only upon innocent children, but upon innocent cattle,—upon horses, sheep, oxen,—we cannot tell. Whether there is some divinely appointed compensation for their suffering, we cannot tell. As yet we see only a single act in the great drama of Providence, and we cannot foresee how the tragedy is to close. But to the writer of this book it had become certain that the sufferings of cattle as well as of men touched the Divine heart; and the cattle that were in Nineveh made a mute appeal to God to have pity upon the city that *they* might not suffer the horrors of fire, famine, or siege. There the book closes. God's pity for cattle is the last word of the unknown writer.

I have gone over the story rapidly. There are many passages in the book which almost clamoured for fuller exposition, but I wanted to give a fair impression of it as a whole.

While there is very much besides in it that is profoundly interesting, its supreme interest lies in the fact which Dean Stanley has emphasized in the phrase I have already quoted—Jonah is the first Apostle to the Gentiles. But he was a reluctant apostle. In how striking a contrast he stands to Paul, who exclaimed, "To me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ"! Jonah's fall is a warning to ourselves, who are entrusted, as he was, with a great word from God to heathen men. Jonah shrank from his mission, and declined to discharge it, and there came upon him the terrors of the Divine anger. His punishment is perhaps the symbolical representation of the ruinous storms which broke

upon the Jewish nation because they were unfaithful to their trust, and of their captivity to that heathen empire to whose people they had refused to make known the true and the living God. Over us, too, as Churches, over England as a nation to which God has given unprecedented resources for evangelizing the world, similar judgments may be impending unless, with new energy and zeal, we endeavour at last to discharge our duties to mankind. It may be that the hour is at hand when repentance will be too late; but as yet the supreme opportunity has not passed by; by grasping it, we may both save ourselves and save mankind from destruction.

*Birmingham.*

R. W. DALE.

### *THE FIRST MIRACULOUS DRAUGHT OF FISH.*

LUKE v. 2-11.

THIS miracle, like that of the healing of the nobleman's son, suggests the question whether there is confusion between the narrative and another, namely, that which is found in Matthew iv. 18 and Mark i. 16.

In this case the affirmative answer is given by great commentators and doctors of the Church. But the weight of opinion in its favour is seriously exaggerated when a recent valuable work declares that "the only commentator of note who insists that this is not the case is Alford." St. Augustine, Greswell, Stier with his usual vehemence, apparently Olshausen, and with hesitation Plumptre, must be added to the list.

But the question is not one of authority. We have to ask, What do the narratives assert? and what reason is there for supposing that they give us inadequate or confused reports? Evidently the answer to this latter question turns upon another, namely, how far does it appear that