

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE first number of our enlarged series has met with a most generous reception. And we have the more pleasure in recording its success that it is due to the friendly offices of our own readers and the magnanimous words of the Editors. The latter have not failed to notice that our aim is to occupy a distinct place in current literature, and that we have striven to occupy it worthily. There is scarcely a periodical of any standing that has withheld its word of encouragement. But what shall we say of our readers? We know of many who never cease recommending us to their friends, believing that by giving freely they make their own share not less but more. There must be many of whom we do not know who are steadily acting upon the same principle.

To a recent issue of the *Evangelical Magazine* the Rev. G. S. Barrett, B.A., contributes a paper on "The Unpardonable Sin." The subject has an importance theologically, for it leads right into the heart of the great matter of future retribution. And if ever order is to come out of the chaos and confusion in which that doctrine at present lies, it will be by arranging one part of it at the time, and giving us a footing upon that, before proceeding further. For example, Why not keep strictly to the teaching of Scripture till we know, first of all, what that is? Or even let us ascertain, accurately and finally, what the Gospels themselves teach about it, before entering upon the doctrine

of the apostles. Or, more narrowly still, a single sentence may be taken from the Gospels, a single utterance of our Lord may be isolated, and its meaning, as a simple question of the interpretation of language, sought and found. We have heard much of late, and perhaps we cannot hear too much, about fashioning sweeping doctrines out of single texts. But we should rigidly avoid that. We should bear it unceasingly in mind that we are only gathering the materials for a doctrine. It being granted that you stand your pyramid on its apex if you build it out from a single text; nevertheless your base, let it be as broad as you will, is made of single texts, and all we should claim is the determination to *know* the single text before it is laid as a stone in the foundation. "Whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come." Surely modern scholars can tell us, unbiassed by any school of interpretation, what these words mean. If the English does not satisfy, let them go back to the Greek, or even behind it to the Aramaic if they will; but let them tell us what the meaning of them is, for our desire is strong to know.

But Mr. Barrett's article is about the Unpardonable Sin. He does not discuss eternal punishment. He takes it for granted that the words mean, what they certainly seem to mean, that the sin against the Holy Ghost, whatever it may be, is

not forgiven for ever. And the subject of his inquiry is this sin itself, what it is. And rightly enough does he say that the interest of these words is not purely theological. "How much distress they have caused to tender consciences, how often the heart has been driven almost to despair from the fear of having committed 'the unpardonable sin,' are facts sadly too familiar to us all."

Now, neither is "the unpardonable sin," nor even "the sin against the Holy Ghost," a scriptural expression; and it is a great pity that these phrases have become current among us. For not only are they unscriptural, but, as Mr. Barrett points out, they convey a fundamentally false conception of the sin in question. On the one side, they torture timid anxious souls with the fear that they may have committed the act which never knows forgiveness; and, on the other, they conceal the imminence of the danger from those who are in actual peril of it. Alas! the devil can not only quote Scripture to his purpose, but even make us believe our own foolish words are Scripture, though the meaning of them is the very opposite of the Scripture they resemble.

Whence the phrase, "the unpardonable sin," has arisen, it is hard to say. Not from the "eternal sin" of St. Mark's Gospel (iii. 29), for that expression, remarkable enough certainly to be for ever remembered, has been made ours only since the issue of the Revised Version. The difference between the two lies in this, that "the unpardonable sin" seems to speak of some single act of transgression which God has singled out, as He singled out the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden, and laid His mysterious ban upon it; whereas the "eternal sin" of St. Mark shews by the very terms of it that it cannot be a single deed. St. Mark's words, as we have them in the Greek, are even more decisive than the Revisers let us know. For, not to speak of the fact that there is, of course, no indefinite article, he represents our Lord as saying that we are "in the grip of (*ἐν ὄχῳ*) eternal sin,"

an expression which cannot be legitimately applied to a single act.

There are two sins between which Christ draws a sharp distinction. The one is blasphemy against the Son of Man, the other blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Of the former, he says: "Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man it shall be forgiven him." *Shall* be—it is well for Mr. Barrett to stop and point to the word. Not may be, can be; it is the simple direct future, and here at least there is no doubt about the reading. Of the latter, he says: "But whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven him," and he adds, "neither in this world, nor in that which is to come." Blasphemy, that is, speaking against. But thought is speech to God. "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter," says Keats. Heard blasphemy is bitter; is unheard blasphemy less bitter to the ear of the Holy One? And speech is deed. Therefore, "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit does not demand audible speech. At the very time Christ used this unparalleled language, He was replying to the inaudible speech of the Pharisees: "Knowing their *thoughts*, He said unto them." So the essential thing is not in the speech, but in the object of it. Blasphemy against the Son of Man shall be forgiven, but he that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness.

That is the eternal distinction which Jesus makes. It is no mechanical distinction. Says Mr. Barrett, "The Son of Man is the light without the soul, the Holy Spirit is the light within." But let us go further back. When St. Paul preached to the Gentiles of Lystra, he pointed to the evidences of the being and goodness of God around them. "Nevertheless," he said, "He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Did all the men of Lystra admit the force of this argument? We

may be sure they did not. Everywhere and always, there have been men who see no evidence, who seem honestly unable to see the evidence of a God of nature in natural things. I see it; I see no other way of explaining the rain and the fruitful seasons: I see that that does explain them. But my neighbour does not see it so. He says he does not; and though I may greatly wonder at it, I have no right to doubt his word. Thus in Lystra there may have been men who did not feel the force of the apostle's argument. But there is another argument, and of it all men feel the force. Openly or implicitly St. Paul used it always. It is the appeal to the sense of right and wrong within. Is it not settled now, that there is no tribe so savage and degraded but the men and the women there have the sense, *some* sense, of the right and the wrong? Well, the one is the outward light, and the other the light within. If the poor savage sees no God in nature except natural things themselves, and falls down before his stocks and stones—that sin is not the sin which will never know forgiveness. But if he resists the sense of right which God has never deprived him of, if he resists that, and persists in resisting it, then—we shall not dare to use the words, but it is otherwise with him then, it is manifestly otherwise.

And now we come to the Son of Man and the Holy Spirit of God. When Jesus came among men He claimed to be the promised Messiah. There were some who would not believe Him. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? Is not this the son of Joseph the carpenter? It was blasphemy so to say. And yet when they spoke deeper blasphemy than that, when they surged madly round Him with the awful cry of "Crucify Him," when they jeered Him as He staggered beneath the burden of the Cross, even then He turned and said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It was blasphemy against the Son of Man. They might have known Him, they ought to have known Him, without a question they were greatly guilty. But the Messiah they had been taught to expect was so different

from this. Outwardly the evidence was all against them, and they could not believe that this was He. It was otherwise with the Pharisees. Certainly this Messiah was no more looked for by them than by the people. But that was not the secret of their hatred of Jesus. Essentially their antipathy was moral. They hated Him because He exposed their evil hearts, their greed, their hypocrisy, their self-indulgence. There was a light within which told them He was from God; "for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him." One Pharisee said that, all might have said it. But they deliberately put out that light. "No man can do these miracles except God be with him"—that was the witness of the truth they knew. "He casteth out devils by Beelzebub the prince of the devils"—that was the lie to their own sense of right. And it was because of that deliberate lie against the light within them that Jesus told them of the sin that hath never forgiveness. Says St. Mark, "Who-soever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin: *because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.*"

One thing remains. Why is this deliberate sinning against the light within called the sin against the Holy Spirit? That opens up the doctrine of the Spirit. And the doctrine of the Spirit is not one of the first principles of the oracles of God to many of us. But let this much be plainly said. Since the departure of Jesus from the earth, the Holy Spirit has been to men the inner light. Magnificent gift! Momentous responsibility! *He* takes the place of *it* within us. We no longer obey *it*, resist *it*, quench *it*: we obey, resist, quench *Him*. He is the Advocate, come to plead the cause of right within us, the cause of righteousness and judgment against us. He convicts the *world* of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. Men still say that they cannot see the evidence of God in nature around them, and it may be that they cannot. Well, that shall be forgiven them. They tell us that they cannot see the Son of Man in this carpenter's son from

Nazareth; and we have learned, thank God, even we, to forgive, not a Matthew Arnold only, but even a Bradlaugh. For did not the early disciples forgive Saul of Tarsus, even when he was exceedingly mad against them? In so far as they do it ignorantly, we pity; but we dare not ban. We know that there are deeper, more enduring forms of disobedience than these. What of the evidences of sin and of righteousness and of judgment within? "Demas hath forsaken me"—Demas, who surely must have known the power of the truth within, the pleading Presence, the often resisted, often returning Holy Spirit of God. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present evil world." Did he do so deliberately and finally, making his choice between these two? Then Demas hath never forgiveness, neither in this world, nor in the world which is to come.

Professor Delitzsch's successor at Leipzig seems resolved that the University shall suffer as little as possible through the death of the great commentator. Franz P. W. Buhl, D.D., Ph.D., is a Dane, and though now but forty years of age, he had occupied the Chair of Hebrew in the University of Copenhagen for eight years before he was summoned to succeed Delitzsch at Leipzig. Though a Dane, both by birth and education, his mastery of the German language is thorough, and he is familiar with other European languages, including English. He has quite caught the ear of the German student. During the term just closed, over 150 students attended his lectures on Genesis. His books are not yet numerous, but they are marked by great ability and full of promise, his work on the *Text and Canon of the Old Testament* being accepted as the most authoritative on the subject.

Professor Buhl is not afraid to tread directly in his predecessor's footsteps. He gives a special welcome to the foreign students who visit Leipzig. He invites them to his house once a week, and in that formally informal way, which Delitzsch made

so popular, he discusses with them the theological questions of the day.

An American student at Leipzig sends to the Chicago *Standard* of August 27 an account of one of these discussions. The subject was the Inspiration of the Old Testament. "He discussed the question in a reverent, earnest, Christian spirit, in a way which left the impression that he has a deep conviction and belief in the truths of Christianity. Professor Buhl accepts the theories of the 'higher critics,' but he belongs to the conservative wing, and vigorously combats the extreme and radical positions and views which they hold." A statement of the views expressed on that occasion were written out by this student, and then submitted to Dr. Buhl, who corrected it and permitted its publication. He accordingly sends it to the *Standard*, and we shall record its essential features here.

1. Professor Buhl rejects the "dictation theory" of inspiration, that God dictated the very words which the writers used. 2. He believes there is evidence of interpolations, errors, and contradictions, and therefore he rejects also the "dynamic theory," that there was such a divine overruling and guidance of the Old Testament writers as to preclude the possibility of mistakes. 3. He holds that the inspiration is not in the written Word, but in the revelation which it records. God revealed Himself to Israel partly by instruction and partly by acts and deeds; the inspiration belongs to that instruction, and to those acts and deeds, not to the written account of them. "Sometimes the written record fully covers the revelation, and they are coextensive, and harmonise and agree." This chiefly in the prophets; "but in other parts of the Bible we have only recollections or traditions, and accounts or reports of the revelation."

Of the inspiration of the Old Testament, viewed in this light, Professor Buhl mentions two great unassailable proofs. (a) Throughout the whole

history, the demands of the revelation may be seen to run counter to the desires and passions of the people. The tendencies and impulses of the individual Israelite are always natural and sinful; the revelation steadily develops and grows in opposition to them. (b) What is true of the individual is true also of the nation. God's purpose for the nation, and the natural national life, are always in conflict; and where, following its natural life, every other nation has gone to destruction, just there the religious ideals of Israel were developed, and became richer and more perfect than ever before.

That is a somewhat bald presentation of Dr. Buhl's views, but it does him no other injustice. The strength of his position lies in the freedom it gives to all historical and critical investigation. But one can well understand that the correspondent of the (Chicago) *Standard* should feel it necessary to make clear, what he certainly does make clear, Dr. Buhl's abhorrence of all purely natural criticism and rationalistic investigation of the Old Testament.

Miss Isabel M. Angus sends a spirited plea to a recent issue of the *Sunday at Home* for "Lady's Greek." She appropriately calls it "Hidden Treasure." For, frankly confessing that her walks in the pastures of Greek classics lead her no further than the *Anabasis*, with an occasional salad from the *Phaedo*, "culled when I can secure assistance in the translation," she nevertheless does bring forth some choice treasures from her present journey into the Epistles of St. Paul, treasures that are quite hidden to the English reader.

It will be enough to refer to one of her finds. "In India, pilgrims to the shrine of some idol god are wont to render him praise by shouting, 'Hari Rám ki jai!' ('To Hari Rám victory!'), the first three words being pronounced by one of the party, and the rest joining in the last. But the formula has now been adopted and adapted by the Christians, and at many of the melás may be heard

instead the cry of 'Tisú Khrisht ki jai!' ('To Jesus Christ victory!'). A similar adaptation of an evil idea we have in *θριαμβεύω* (*thriambeuo*), 2 Cor. ii. 14. This is one of the recoined words. It is derived from *θρίαμβος* (*thriambos*), a hymn in honour of Bacchus, and refers first to the triumphal processions of that god, and then to any triumph. It may be taken to mean, as the Authorised Version runs, 'God, who causeth us to triumph,' or, more probably, 'who leadeth us in triumph,' i.e. 'who triumphs over us.'

We have just had a discussion in the *Contemporary Review* of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel; and the editor, first of all, must be thanked for the admirable way in which it has been conducted. To him is due the choice of writers, and he could not have chosen better. Professor Emil Schürer of Kiel, the distinguished author of *The Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, believes that St. John did not write the Fourth Gospel; and his article, which appears in the issue for September, is both able and fair-minded. To him Dr. Sanday replies in the issue for October.

Professor Schürer is fair and even conciliating. Yet you feel that all the while he is an advocate, and not a judge; he writes to gain a case, and not to settle a dispute. His concessions are therefore of the greater value. Not that they are extorted from him. On the contrary, he offers them with a frankness which is not altogether free from the appearance of generosity; as though it were well for us that we have so liberal an opponent to deal with.

The materials for deciding whether St. John wrote this Gospel are, as usual, of two kinds, external and internal. What do the early Christian (and anti-Christian) writings say about it, and what does the Gospel say for itself? Now, for the first time, we have it authoritatively admitted that the external evidence is as much in favour of the Johannine authorship as it is against it. Says Dr. Schürer: "The external evidence is evenly balanced *pro* and *con*." To which he adds, to be

sure, that "perhaps it is truer to say that it is more unfavourable than favourable to the authenticity," an after-thought which we may allow the advocate pleading his case. But the point to notice is, that it is only within quite recent years that such an one as he would have been found to approach such an admission. It is unquestionably due to the recent discoveries in early Christian literature. One more such discovery, and Dr. Schürer will admit that the dip of the external evidence is distinctly on the side of St. John.

But even in respect of the internal evidence, Professor Schürer makes a significant concession. It is a concession of a particularly interesting nature to English and American readers. For it cuts away the standing of the greater part of our popular and atheistic criticism of St. John's Gospel. We have heard much from that criticism of "the gross mistakes in this Gospel in regard to the most ordinary matters of geography and religious custom." We shall hear less in the future. Says Dr. Schürer: "Among the weighty questions which present themselves when a comparison is made between this Gospel and the Synoptics, *we scarcely need reckon the alleged ignorance of Palestinian and Jewish affairs*, from which Bretschneider and Baur inferred that the author was neither a Palestinian nor indeed a Jew." And then he gives a list of six of these supposed mistakes, and, with the doubtful exception of the last, brushes them all away. No; the author did not mistake Bethany for Bethabara (i. 28); Shechem is not called Sychar in error (iv. 5); and as for the remark that out of Galilee there has arisen no prophet (vii. 52), while Jonah and Nahum both sprang from Galilee, it is a mistake of the careless critic, since the best MSS. tell us that what the evangelist wrote was, "Out of Galilee *arisseth* (present tense) no prophet."

But how will the other side deal with these concessions? Is it possible that there is a touch of chivalry in them, and that a fair and open enemy will not be able to accept them? Or have they to be balanced by equally important admissions from

the advocates of the Johannine authorship? "Here I am afraid," says Professor Sanday, "that Dr. Schürer will think me rather grasping, for I must take all, or nearly all, the concessions which he gives me, and, with one exception, I have but little to offer him in return. That he should make these concessions speaks well for his disinterestedness and openness of mind. But they are such as must certainly be made, and that in still fuller measure; for truth cannot always lie hid, and it will assert itself in the long run."

"With one exception." What is this single concession which from his side Dr. Sanday is prepared to make? It is undoubtedly an important one, but it does not affect the question at issue. We dare not present it otherwise than in his own words:—"I will, however, meet him at the outset by saying that I am prepared to make one large concession—that concession which, as he rightly says, marks the chief advance which conservative critics have now in very many instances made towards their opponents. I make it not merely from a wish to conciliate them, or to rescue the genuineness of the Gospel, but in the interests of what I conceive to be historically probable and true. In this respect I have no change to make from the position which I took up twenty years ago. To say that the Gospel was written by St. John is not to say that it is necessarily in all points an exact representation of the facts. It was written by the apostle towards the end of a long life. But what should we expect under such circumstances? When an old man looks back over the past, one of the first things which he is apt to lose is the sense of perspective. End and beginning draw nearer together. The facts, which belong to an earlier stage of development, are seen in the light which is thrown upon them by a later stage, and this later interpretation affects the statement of them as history. I admit that St. John's narrative may have been influenced in this way. I am not prepared to say exactly how far it has been influenced, but some such influence seems to me to be in the nature of the case."