

it is so. I accept Thee as Son of God, my Lord and my God."—G. PENTECOST.

THE first sentence in John's preface is the last conclusion to which the place of Christ in his life leads him, but it is the only one in which his mind can rest. He who is the Omega must also be the Alpha; He who is the chief end of the world must also be the mediator through whom it came into being.—J. DENNEY.

'THE Word was God.' There is nothing doubtful in this language. No kind of exegesis can blot from this brief clause the truth of Christ's divinity. The Saviour into whose hands you have committed your life is the eternal God. In His humanity Christ is our own Brother, with tender sympathies and warm affections. Then, when we know that behind these qualities are the divine attributes, that He is very God, what glorious confidence it gives us!—J. R. MILLER.

CHRIST, the Father's Son eternal,  
Once was born, a Son of man;  
He who never knew beginning,  
Here on earth a life began.

Hear we then the grand old story,  
And in listening learn the love  
Flowing through it to the guilty  
From our pardoning God above.

H. BONAR.

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## Water-Marks in the Narratives of our Lord's Transfiguration.

BY THE REV. HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D., GREENOCK.

IN the Bible you have proofs of its truthfulness that may be compared to the water-marks in a sheet of white writing-paper, caused by the wire frame over which it passes in the state of pulp, and which tell the nature of the paper, and perhaps the date of its manufacture. You hold up some disputed text or incident to the light of careful study and research, and you see things in its correspondence of time or place which convince you, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that what the writer says is true. The story of the Transfiguration of Christ is said by some critics to be a mere dream or vision—that no such thing ever happened in the world of actual life. Well! let us look and see if there are any water-marks in the different narratives of the Evangelists.

The first thing that I ask you to notice is that St. Mark compares the clothes of Christ in whiteness to snow. This idea must have been

suggested by the actual sight of snow, for it is a comparatively rare phenomenon in Palestine, and is an object much more alien to the minds of the people than it is to us. This circumstance would of itself dispose at once of the old tradition that Mount Tabor was the scene of the Transfiguration. Mount Tabor is not a high mountain, as St. Mark tells us the scene of the Transfiguration was, but on the contrary a small hill, like a billow of the plain, rising little more than a thousand feet above it. But Mount Hermon, which is the true spot where this wonderful event happened, is the highest mountain in Palestine, being 10,000 feet above the level of the sea, and its top is covered with snow that never melts, even on the hottest summer day. Therefore it was natural in such a place for the Evangelist to say, that the raiment of Jesus was as white as the snow that was round about Him at the very time. And you know

what a severe test of its whiteness that was. You think at a distance, when there is no snow about, that a piece of cloth which you possess is as white as snow. But take the whitest piece of linen that you ever saw, and put it beside a newly-fallen heap of snow, and you will see the vast difference. It seems, by comparison with that shining radiance, of a dingy yellowish tint. But St. Peter, who was on the top of Hermon with Jesus, and told his kinsman Mark about it, who in turn is our informer, saw with his own eyes the spotless snow with which the mountain was covered, and Jesus standing on the snow, and the snow all around Him; and he saw to his astonishment that the clothes of Jesus were not eclipsed by that radiance—that they were exceeding white as snow, as no fuller on earth could white them; and he knew that that purity was not from the earth—but, like the snow itself, from the sky. That little water-mark in the story satisfies us regarding its truthfulness.

Now look at another one. No clouds rest upon Mount Tabor, for it is not sufficiently high. The blue sky soars high above it, and if there be any cloud in the sky at that place, it seems resting miles up in the depths of space. But St. Mark tells us, in the story of the Transfiguration, that a cloud overshadowed Christ and His disciples, and the heavenly visitors Moses and Elijah, who were with Him. Out of the cloud came the Divine voice saying, 'This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him'; and suddenly, as they looked round, they found that the cloud had lifted, and there was no one with them on the lonely mountain-top but Jesus Himself. The cloud had come very suddenly, and disappeared as suddenly. Have you ever been on the top of a high mountain? If so, you will know how quickly the mist gathers there, and how quickly it rolls off. Even in our own country, where the loftiest mountain-tops are little more than 4000 feet high, the clouds are quickly attracted to them, and come and go with wonderful swiftness. But on mountains that are 10,000 feet high, like Hermon, in warm climates, which have their tops covered with perpetual snow, the clouds collect with a rapidity such as we have no example of in Britain. The coldness and wetness of the snow attract the latent moisture out of the warm air, and condense it in mists and clouds with almost miraculous swiftness. At one moment you see the top of Hermon clear and shining, with a blue

sky over it, in which from end to end there does not seem to be a streak of cloud or a vestige of vapour, and the next moment a heavy mist comes out of the blue space you know not how, and rolls over the top, and hides it from your view by a pall of darkness. After a minute or two you look again, and the cloud has passed away, and the top is clear and bright as before against the blue heavens. Now, that was the case with Jesus and His disciples. One of the sudden clouds for which the summit of Hermon is remarkable overshadowed them. St. Matthew tells us that it was a bright cloud; and that itself was a proof of its suddenness, for the vapour had not time to become thick enough to blot out the sun that was shining through it. So swiftly did it come and so swiftly did it depart, that during all the time of its stay it was illuminated with a glint of sunshine. Now, that is another water-mark in the narrative proving its truthfulness.

Let me direct your attention to another one still. In the different accounts of our Lord's Transfiguration, we are told that it was while He was staying at Cæsarea Philippi He took His disciples with Him and climbed up a high mountain apart. This Cæsarea Philippi was the farthest north point which our Lord reached in His wanderings through the inheritance of Israel, and was on the very border of the Holy Land. It lay at the foot of Mount Hermon, from which it was easy to ascend the mountain. The place is now called Banias, and has a great many most interesting ruins of the ancient town in its neighbourhood. It is here that the principal source of the Jordan is; and it is one of the loveliest spots in the Holy Land. The Jordan comes out of a cave in the face of a huge limestone rock, and flows among a great many stones in its bed, a full river at once. Everywhere you hear the music of laughing waters, and see the bright green of poplars and oaks and mulberry trees glancing in the sunbeams, and casting pleasant shadows on the cool ground. It seems like a bit of Scotland in the dry and parched lands of the East. When passing through the village I saw a very curious sight. On the roof of every house there was a kind of booth made of leaves and branches woven together, and supported on long poles, like the canopy of a four-post bed. It looked like a large clumsy stork's nest more than a human erection. It was made mostly of oleander bushes—the willow of Scripture—for these grow in

the greatest abundance round about, and their leaves have this great advantage that they do not, when they wither, fall off the twigs, like the leaves of nearly all other trees when they are dead. During the summer months the heat inside the squalid mud-houses is unbearable; and the inhabitants take refuge in the airier dwellings upon the roof; and the thick screen of foliage above their heads protects them from the fierce rays of the sun by day and from the heavy dews at night, and prevents passers-by from seeing them. I found that it was the custom in other places in Palestine, besides Baniyas, to make these booths or sleeping-places on the roofs of the houses during the hotter months of the year. They might be called the 'country quarters' of the inhabitants.

Now, it was of such booths or tabernacles that St. Peter was thinking, when he said, at the top of Hermon, 'Let us build here three tabernacles.' He must have seen them on the tops of the houses of Cæsarea Philippi before he began to climb the mountain, as we see them at the present day on the tops of the houses of the village that occupies the old site. They seemed very delightful places to live in during the great summer heat; and we thought at the time that we would gladly exchange for their cool fragrant shadows the hot stuffy tents in which we dwelt. St. Peter felt that it was good for him to be up there, beholding the glorious spectacle, hearing the wonderful words, and breathing the fresh pure air of the snowy heights, with all the landscapes of the Holy Land unrolled like a panorama before him. And he thought how delightful it would be if for his Master and His holy visitants he could make booths of the fragrant oleander branches, in which they could stay a little while, and make for him a heaven on earth. He knew that they could not stop always there; that the booths would be like those which the people below were living in upon the housetops compared with their houses. They would have a short but a pleasant summer time in them. This, then, is another of the water-marks of the narrative.

There is still another on which I would like to say a word or two. When I was at Baniyas, I saw on the outskirts of the village a number of large oak trees, having attached to their branches and twigs bits of cloth of different colours—some old and some new, some woollen and others cotton or silk. These were not decorations, but what are

called votive offerings. The trees were sacred trees, and were worshipped by the inhabitants, who believed that if they tied a bit of the clothing of a person who was sick or ill with some disease to one of these trees, they made over to it the particular trouble; and the life and vigour of the tree would go into the patient, and he would be cured. This was a very old superstition, and existed less than a hundred years ago in our own country. It was a relic at Baniyas of the old calf or Baal-worship of Dan, and the Greek worship at a later time of the God Pan. There was no doctor in the village, and it was a pathetic sight to see these poor bits of rags taking the place of one. Our Lord might have seen the same sight when He was here, and He must have pitied these heathen idolaters who were as sheep without a shepherd. Their very superstition showed that they had a simple childlike faith; and therefore when our Lord came down from the mountain, and found in this place a boy who was tormented by an evil spirit, He said to the father who brought him, 'Believest thou that I can do this'; and the father at once replied, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.' Here was one who could do far more than the sacred trees around. He could cast out the evil spirit, and make the boy perfectly whole. By this wonderful miracle of grace these poor benighted idolaters were cured of their superstition, and taught to look to the living Saviour who alone could cure their sicknesses and diseases, because He Himself had borne them.

You thus see how every little incident and feature of the story of our Lord's Transfiguration have the exact colour of the locality. It is such a wonderful thing in itself that it is difficult of belief. It seems like a fairy story. But when it is set in the midst of circumstantial details which we know to be true, of which we can judge ourselves, and which no fairy story ever gives—it becomes much easier of belief. We feel like St. Peter when he was an old man, and looked back upon the wonderful time he had with Jesus on the Mount, and said to the Christian converts to whom he wrote his epistles: 'For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'