

Alleviation.

SOMETIMES there comes a sense of cradled peace

When the whole world is dark and life is set

With sore perplexities ; and we forget

All these in that sweet moment of release.

Our head seems pillowed on some arm unseen

That stretches far beyond, and holds the key

Of all the future's labyrinth that we

In vain have toiled to solve from morn to e'en.

This seems no hour of time's, but something
spared

From dim eternity's imagined calm :

A leaf of pity from the heavenly balm

To which in hope earth's hopeless wounds were
bared.

Or so the loneliest wanderer may prove,

In the black night without one guiding gleam,

The darkness and his weariness a dream

Of some vague sheltering home, some tender
love.

SARAH ROBERTSON MATHESON.

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

LIKE the editor of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES in relation to Dr. A. B. Davidson, I rarely differ from Dr. Hugh Macmillan, and have misgivings of after-
repentance when I do so. But on reading the above ingenious and finely-toned article, certain doubts were started, which I ask to be permitted summarily to state :—

a. Is it not too dogmatic to begin with this mere *ipse dixit*—'Mount Hermon is the true spot where the wonderful event happened'? I for one, on the contrary, accept the tradition that was accepted so early as by St. Jerome (specially as he is confirmed by Origen in his citation from the 'Gospel

to the Hebrews,' of the second century, in a paragraph that indubitably refers to the Transfiguration),—that Mount Tabor was its scene. There is no such early localisation on Mount Hermon.

β. Is it not, further, too dogmatic—having assumed Mount Hermon to be the scene—to ground the localisation there that 'it is the highest mountain in Palestine.' None of the evangelists states that the Transfiguration took place on 'the highest mountain in Palestine.' The records simply run, 'bringeth them up into an *high* mountain' (Matt. xvii. 1; Mark ix. 2). Not only so, but while Mount Tabor answers to 'an high mountain'—separate and distinctive—Mount Hermon does not, being a mountain-range that throws out innumerable bastions and spurs (as the term is).

γ. Is it not equally misleading and a misreading to accentuate 'the *top* is covered with snow, that never melts in the hottest summer'? There seems here (*meo iudicio*) a whole cluster of inaccuracies: (1) Nowhere is it said that the event took place on 'the *top*.' (More of this anon.) (2) It is not the case that the 'snow never melts.' I have stood on the '*top*,' and not only found oasis-like spots there, but perilous pools and rushing streams—as the mountain-side torrents evidence to even those who do not climb to the summit. But (3) it has to my mind an element of the grotesque to represent our Lord and His chosen three 'standing in the snow,' and with the 'snow all around them.' And this merely to find a 'water-mark' of realism. I must hold the whole thing to be artificial and baseless. Apply the same pseudo-realism to other scriptural mentionings of 'snow,' and the fantasticalness of this 'water-mark' will be seen.

δ. Is not the second 'water-mark' based on two inaccuracies? (1) 'No clouds rest upon Mount Tabor, for it is not sufficiently high.' As well say no 'clouds' rest on Calton Hill or Arthur's Seat, which are still less high. But I can testify that twice over in my explorations of Mount Tabor, our party was suddenly involved in a Scotch Highland-like mist, a drenching rain-cloud, or rather flock of clouds, that covered the entire mountain from summit to the bottom. (2) Surely it is to strangely miss the sublimity of the 'cloud' out of which God the Father gave His testimony to confuse it with an ordinary rain-cloud? I cannot take less out of

Pet. i. 17 than that the 'excellent glory' designated the Shekinah cloud of the glory, the recognised symbol of the Divine Presence; and so in the Ascension (Acts i. 9), and the Pentecost 'upper room' (Acts ii. 3). So vanishes (like the first) this second 'water-mark.'

ε. Is it not begging the question when in the third 'water-mark' the "booths" seen on the house-tops (flat) are limited to Cæsarea Philippi? I, too, saw them there; and everyone knows that the multiplication of scorpions and other venomous creatures banishes the inhabitants from the lower to the higher places. But the same holds true all over Palestine, while specially I saw in the valley that fronts Mount Tabor a kind of (annual) fair, with hundreds of 'booths.' This was at Dabû-riyeh, the Bible Daberath (Josh. xix. 12). So elsewhere, e.g. Haifa. Hence it is not allowable to argue for Mount Hermon from this. So once more disappears the third 'water-mark.'

ζ. The last 'water-mark' is an anachronism. The superstition of tying 'bits of clothing of any sick or ill' to certain trees had no place in Baal worship, it is an Arab and comparatively modern observance. Moreover, it is not peculiar to the bottom of Mount Hermon. I saw the same thing in the valley of Tabor and of Carmel; and elsewhere, e.g. in Egypt. There, demon-possession was something measurelessly greater than any sickness that the tree-ceremonial points at.

Whilst I must bring in the Scotch verdict of 'not proven' in relation to the whole of our able and beloved friend's water-marks, *i.e.* in so far as dogmatising on Mount Hermon *v.* Tabor is concerned, I venture to repeat what I have stated elsewhere: (1) That Mount Hermon is not accurately described by 'an high mountain,' whereas Tabor is, standing so isolated and distinctive. (2) That 'high mountain' is a relative phrase = not 'the highest, yet high'—much as Pendle in Lancashire is exaggeratedly spoken of by Lancashire folk. (3) It is not difficult to meet the two objections that have been urged against Tabor and in favour of Hermon—(a) the conversation (Matt. xvi. 21-28) which preceded the Transfiguration by six days took place at Cæsarea Philippi, *ergo* as Hermon rises above it, the Transfiguration must have taken place on Hermon. In answer, this way of putting it conveniently forgets that the conversation did precede the Transfiguration by (at least) six days. Further, it forgets that while the Lord had reasons

for shunning Galilee (xvi. 5), it yet is manifest that He must have returned thither in the interval, seeing that immediately after the Transfiguration the Lord and the three are found going from Galilee toward Capernaum, and not from Cæsarea Philippi (Mark ix. 14, 30, 33). (b) Dr. Robinson having shown that there was a fort or citadel on the summit of Mount Tabor at the period—and I certainly saw its bevelled-stone ruins—it has been argumentatively insisted on that the Transfiguration could not have taken place on that summit. Granted; but as I have anticipatively stated, there is no warrant for localising the event on the 'summit,' much less amongst 'the snow.' I spent most of a week on and around Mount Tabor (and on, up, and all along the long line of Mount Hermon), and I can attest that even on the 'summit,' and within stonethrows of present-day monastic buildings, there are ample choice of retired spots. But if the event be located—as I claim a right to do—not on the 'summit,' but on the mountain, the supposed difficulty disappears. The phrasing is, that Jesus took His disciples 'up into a high mountain' (the *highest*, be it remembered, in Galilee) *εἰς ὄρος*; and I can appeal to my good brother Dr. Macmillan whether there are not many dells and groves and solitudes all over Mount Tabor, in any one of which there could have been the utmost seclusion even with a fort and garrison on the summit. I think of like solitudes in the much more limited areas of Edinburgh and Stirling Castles in Scotland. I must, accordingly, discount these 'water-marks,' and affirm Mount Tabor as the scene of the Transfiguration. As I looked over to Nazareth from Mount Tabor, I could not help thinking of 'this mountain' as being visited over and over by our Lord as a boy, and even more touching to me is His choice of Mount Tabor in (so-to-say) the shadow of Nazareth for His Transfiguration, just as the true locality of Emmaus shows the risen Saviour to have revisited His native Bethlehem.

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