

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

It is a rare experience with us now to feel surprise. With the early disciples it was frequent, and must have been extremely pleasant. It is to the surprises of his life that St. Paul refers when he uses the word 'mystery.'

A mystery is with him something that was unknown till Christ came. Then it flashed upon men's minds with irresistible clearness and all the joy of a discovery. It is usually either the discovery of some excellence in Christ Himself, or else the certainty of some excellence yet to be discovered in His followers. In the Epistle to the Colossians (1²⁷) there is an admirable example of the latter use. The Apostle speaks, with evident surprise, and as evident pleasure, of 'this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.'

He is writing to Gentiles, and he addresses them directly. The mystery, he says, the discovery about the Gentiles which has just been made, the surprising thing about you Gentiles which has been suddenly brought to light, is that Christ in you is your hope of glory.

Now there is no great word of which we have lost the use so entirely as this word 'glory.' We never employ it in conversation, we seem to have no occasion to employ it. We never come across

it in our reading, unless it be in a rare poetical phrase, such as the glory of the sunset. We do not hear it even from the pulpit except in the quotation of some text of the Bible.

And yet it is a very great word. In the Bible it is used with remarkable frequency and apparently in a vast variety of meanings. 'Nevertheless,' as the author of the article in the *DICTIONARY OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPELS* says, 'the underlying thought is simpler than would appear.' And he adds, 'The glory of God is His essential and unchanging Godhead as revealed to man.' It is not the glory of God that we have to do with at present, it is the glory of man; but that definition gives us an excellent opening. When we understand the glory of God, we shall understand the glory of man.

Now mark the words 'as revealed' in the definition of glory which has just been quoted. The glory of God is His nature *when it is seen*. Our Lord speaks of 'the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory' (Mt 24³⁰). When He was upon the earth His essential nature was not known. He greatly desired that it should be known, for in that lay all the hope for men. And so He prayed the Father, and said, 'Glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the

world was.' And He knew that the day was coming when it would be known—when, as He said, He would come on the clouds with power and great glory.

What is the character of God? It is goodness. We must not hesitate to use that word. We have not altogether lost the use of it yet, as we have lost the use of 'glory.' And we must not lose it. It is the very word that God Himself used when He spoke to Moses. Moses said, 'Shew me, I pray thee, thy glory.' And God answered, 'I will make all my goodness pass before thee' (Ex 33^{18, 19}). His goodness is His essential nature, and when His goodness is *seen*, that is His glory.

We may see His goodness in many ways. We may see it in the earth, if we have eyes to see. When Isaiah had his vision of God's holiness, he was told that it does not require a supernatural event to see the holiness, which is another name for the goodness, of God. The Seraphim sang their song of adoration, and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the fulness of the whole earth is his glory.' Our English versions translate the words of the Seraphim, 'The whole earth is full of his glory,' which is quite true, but not an accurate translation. And the accurate translation is better: 'The fulness of the whole earth is his glory.' For this earth of ours is a world on which He has lavished the riches of His nature. It is a full earth. At the return of every season we scatter a few seeds on the soil of it, and it brings forth 'some an hundred fold.' Test its inexhaustibleness, He seems to say. It is full of the goodness of God. And when you see how full it is, you see the glory of God. Its fulness is His glory.

Do you remember the very first occasion on which the glory of the Lord is spoken of in the Bible? It is when the Israelites, on their way through that great and terrible wilderness, complained that they had not food enough. 'And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of

Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: and in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord' (Ex 16⁶). Well, what happened in the morning? In the morning the people rose betimes, and looked out, and behold upon the face of the wilderness lay a small round thing, small as the hoar frost on the ground. It was the manna.

Where had it come from? Some say it came from a small creeping plant that maintains a precarious existence in that very wilderness, or did so once, and that there was no miracle about it. But what do they mean by a miracle? If it was 'an edible lichen,' and if the same edible lichen is found in Arabia to this day, what then? The fulness of the whole earth is His glory. On that morning, and not before, the Israelites saw how possible it was for God, and how easy, to say to the earth, Give forth some of thy fulness that they may see how good I am. And the earth gave forth of its fulness in the form of 'a small edible lichen,' till all the Israelites ate and were filled.

And one day a great company of the descendants of those Israelites were gathered in another desert place, listening to the wonderful words of the Son of God. The day wore away as they listened and wondered. When evening was at hand His disciples would have sent them away that they might go into the villages and buy themselves bread, 'for we are here in a desert place.' But He said, 'Give ye them to eat.' And very soon they were all satisfying themselves with bread, five hundred of them, besides women and children, as they sat in batches, like beds of flowers, among the green grass. Where had the bread come from? It came from 'the fulness of the earth.' The five loaves which they had were capable in His hands of being turned into as many loaves as were needed, to the great joy and satisfaction of that astonished multitude, just as the 'precious seed' which the sower goes forth with in the spring-time becomes in the autumn great sheaves of joy and thankfulness. And they who had eyes to see said afterwards,

'We beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father.'

But the fulness of the whole earth covers other things besides loaves of bread. When God promised to make all His goodness pass before Moses, and thus show him His glory, He added, 'And I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.' Grace and mercy belong to God's goodness, and when we come upon Him in the exercise of them we see His glory.

Now we come upon God in the exercise of grace and mercy best of all in the Cross of Jesus Christ. For that Cross is His mercy and His grace in active evident exercise. Or, to take mercy and grace and express them in one word, we find in the Cross of Christ the activity of God's self-sacrificing love. We do not reach the height of the glory of God till we have reached the love of God. Is not this His nature? 'God is love.' Let us not drop goodness, but let us see to it that goodness takes exercise to keep itself warm. Let us say that the goodness of God is the love of God; and when we find the loving goodness of God going forth to men in the Cross of Christ, let us say, with the joyful surprise of the early disciples, 'We beheld his glory.'

We have taken all this time to discover the meaning of St. Paul's word 'glory.' We have gone to some passages of the Bible to see what is meant by the glory of God. But it is not of the glory of God that the Apostle is speaking when he writes to the Colossians and says, 'This mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.' It is of the glory of the Colossians themselves.

For the Apostle Paul is not afraid to speak of the glory of the Colossians. He is not afraid to call them 'saints,' and why should he be afraid to speak of their glory? What he tells them is that their goodness is so manifest—or will yet be so

manifest—that it will be spoken of as their glory, just as the goodness of God, when it is seen, is called the glory of God.

It is true he only says, 'Christ in you, the *hope* of glory.' But what does St. Paul mean by hope? Does he mean what we mean when we say, 'I hope so'? He speaks of hope—or if it is not he, it is another speaking very like him, and he would certainly agree—the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of hope as 'an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast.' Is that 'I hope so'? Ask a fisherman as he lets down the anchor if it will hold. Does he answer, 'I hope so'? He knows it will hold, if there is anything for it to hold by. Now there is something to hold by here, something that never failed, as we shall see in a moment. And so the same writer speaks also of 'the full assurance of hope.'

The truth is, that the hope of the New Testament is as sure as faith or love. The only difference is that it looks towards the future. 'He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself.' What worth for purifying has 'I hope so'? St. Paul tells the Colossians that their goodness will yet be so real and so visible that it will assuredly be their glory.

He may well be surprised, and so may the Colossians, or any other Gentiles. As a Jew he had formerly had no opinion of Gentiles like the Colossians. And he had reason. It was not Jewish exclusiveness entirely. It was also Gentile badness. The Colossians and other Gentiles were scarcely any better than they were called. This very man gives us a list of their vices, and it is most unpleasant reading. Yet he does not hesitate to say that they will give up these vices and take on virtues in their place—and so heartily that their glory, the visible evidence of their goodness, is perfectly certain. It is so certain that he calls them saints already.

Now there never was a man less likely to in-

dulge in flattery than the Apostle Paul. He was an experimental preacher. He searched the heart and conscience—first his own and then his hearers'. If he has the certainty of attaining to a goodness which can be called glory, if he says that these Colossians have it, he has good reason for his confidence. What reason has he?

His reason is 'Christ in you.' Is it not enough? It is everything. And because it is everything, or out of it everything comes, he bows his knees unto the God and Father of his Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of the Colossians and the Ephesians and all other Gentiles everywhere, that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith. For without that they are Gentiles tossed to and fro, without God and without hope in the world. With that they are 'fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.'

He was an experimental preacher. He preached out of his own experience. Telling the story of his first great surprise, as he was very fond of doing, he says, 'It pleased God to reveal his Son in me.' It was not that he learned all about Christ's life on earth. It was not that he had the resurrection on the third day proved to his mental satisfaction. You cannot prove a resurrection *in* one. It was that his heart was touched; his inner life was awakened. He saw the glory of God in the stricken face of Jesus Christ. And receiving Christ into his heart by faith, he knew that he, the chief of sinners, would yet gain a goodness that would be seen and read of all men and that would deserve to be spoken of as the glory of Paul, just as men speak of the glory of God.

What is a miracle? Not a year passes without some change taking place, not merely in our method of defending the miracles of the Bible, but in our very conception of what a miracle is. The latest defence and the latest definition will be found in the Moorhouse Lectures for 1914, delivered in Melbourne by the Rev. Arthur C. HEADLAM, D.D.,

and now published by Mr. Murray under the title of *The Miracles of the New Testament* (6s. net).

What is a miracle? A miracle, says Dr. HEADLAM, is 'the supremacy of the spiritual forces of the world to an extraordinarily marked degree over the mere material.'

For there are spiritual forces in the world and there are material forces; and when the spiritual forces get the upperhand of the material forces 'to an extraordinarily marked degree,' the result is a miracle. Take the human personality. It is partly spiritual and partly material. For 'there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.' And there is the material body. When the spiritual nature of man is so strengthened and inspired by God's Spirit as to make its powers more effective and enable it to overcome the natural weakness of the body or cure its ills—that is a miracle.

Now the Spirit of God works in the world just as the spirit of man works over his own body. It is therefore reasonable, Dr. HEADLAM holds, to expect that miracles should take place in nature as they take place in man. If there are healing miracles, there are likely to be also nature miracles. And, if few persons have much difficulty now in believing that the Spirit of God as incarnate in Jesus Christ could miraculously heal the body, few ought to find difficulty in believing that the same Spirit could walk on the water or turn water into wine.

It may be easier to conceive of the miraculous healing of a man born blind than of the miraculous feeding of five thousand men in a wilderness. But what right have we to confine the operation of the Spirit of God within the bounds of our imagination? Do you find it hard to believe in the Virgin Birth? Well, do not believe in it, is Dr. HEADLAM's advice, till you are able to believe in it. There is no reason why a man should be compelled to believe any miracle until he sees his way.

But do not deny a miracle which is credible to other men. Suspend your judgment. The time may come when, with the education of the imagination, or the study of the circumstances, you also will be able to believe it.

The time may come. And it may not. For it is very difficult in our day to believe in the turning of water into wine, or in any other of the nature miracles of the New Testament.

It must have been difficult always to those who really put their minds into the matter. For the material is very present, and the imagination that can even conceive of the spiritual, far less conceive of its taking the material and using it as a servant, has always been somewhat rare. But the difficulty has become much greater since the rise of physical science. There is the necessity of giving one's mind entirely to the study of material things if one would make any contribution to that science. It must be confessed that not many scientific men after the flesh believe in the Virgin Birth.

The more honour to those who do. The more honour to those men who, having given themselves to some department of physical research, have kept the material in its place. The more honour to those who, having become distinguished as men of science, are not less distinguished as men of God.

Seven of them have testified to their faith. Their testimony is contained in a little book entitled *Science and Religion* (Hammond; 1s. net). They came one after another to Browning Hall in London during 'Science Week' in 1914, and declared their belief that the spiritual is greater than the material, and that only in the recognition of its superiority can salvation be found by man or nation. One of them was Dr. SIMS WOODHEAD, Professor of Pathology in the University of Cambridge.

Professor SIMS WOODHEAD began at once by declaring that the cause of the European War was

just the forgetfulness of this fact. 'Some of us,' he said, 'who have come into contact in recent years with some of the intellectual giants of Germany were beginning to be afraid that Germany's science has very little soul in it. But I think none of us realized the lack of morality that characterized, I will not say the nation, but certainly a great part of the mind of the nation. We none of us expected to find that the Germany which promised to become one of the great forces in civilization, and in advancing knowledge, science, culture, should so far have allowed itself to fall back, as it were, from the spiritual side of man's nature, from the soul of man. They seem, somehow or other, to have been so engrossed with the casquet that they have paid very little attention to its contents. They seem to have been so occupied with the machinery, that they have left the driving power out of account. And when one thinks of the men who have been taking part in and with the advancement of Science in this country, one is glad to realize that many of our scientific men—there are many in Germany too—have realized that the physics and chemistry of men, and the machinery of the mere material aspect of men, are not everything. One cannot help feeling that in this great war we have an example of what materialism will lead men to. We have the head of a great State looking merely at the schemes of aggrandisement and materialism, evolved from many fertile brains, but which seem to end in nothing but agnosticism, or a lack of the sense of the true proportion between man as we know him and man's influence in this world.'

We see, then, that it is not a matter of no moment whether we believe in the Virgin Birth or not. If we do not believe in it, we must not be asked to say that we believe in it. But we must be asked to think. There is not one of the nature miracles of the New Testament that is incredible. We must set our minds in the right relation to God and the world. We must consider that the world is the instrument of the mind of God, and that it is not for us to limit Him in the use of

that instrument, so long as the use that He makes of it is in accordance with His own nature.

Before leaving the subject Dr. HEADLAM quotes four sentences from an article which was contributed to the *Church Quarterly Review* for April 1910 by the Rev. Robert VAUGHAN—'a theologian whose work is less known than it should be.' We quote the sentences after him: 'Miracle is a revelation of the latent possibility of things—of what they can become by divine activity within them. The whole of nature is by its creation so constituted that it can, according to its very *nature*, become what it is not in itself. It has a capacity to receive what it does not contain, and the isolated miracles, of Christ in particular, are to reveal this capacity. Such changes are not from the thing as it is in itself—and therefore not properly products of "nature," nor are they contradictions of the natural—for things of nature are created with a fitness for such transformation and evolution; but they are supra-natural by virtue of a communication to their nature of a fresh activity from their source.'

'If you would have a lesson in spiritual diagnosis, and probe deep into the subtleties of human nature, I counsel you to make a study of the obstacles Paul encountered in his passionate quest for the human soul; and if you would revive your faith in the supremacy of the Spirit and the divine aptitude of the Gospel of Jesus for the work it professes to do, you have but to follow Paul, in one of his numerous ventures, to carry Christ's saving grace within the citadel of a human life.'

What has St. Paul to encounter? Who are the enemies that hold the citadel? 'Imaginations,' he tells us. Not that these are the first to be encountered. The outworks of the human soul are held either by the frivolous or by the stolid. It is true that every preacher of the Gospel has before him 'spirits as responsive, as a frank and quick

apprehension allows, to any truth he brings.' 'In every gathering of people there are some elect souls who thrill to a touch, some whom sorrow has chastened or joy purified, and these are the great sustainers of the preacher's message. If he attains any summit of mental or spiritual exultation, they are beside him, perhaps far beyond him, at his very best. If ever he stumbles on the deep things of God, they are certain to precede him with sure step, for they have long since faced the innermost mystery.'

But there are also before him, and probably in greater measure, the somewhat frivolous and the distressingly stolid. Before he comes to the imaginations of the imaginative, he has to meet those who face life with 'a vacuous flippancy that has never corrected itself by one searching glance into the realities of life'; and he has to meet those who are stolidly insensible, 'the people who hardly ever know a quickening pulse, the pull at the heart, the tense silence of the inner world, through which notes of destiny come clanging when deep calleth unto deep and God draws near.'

But when the frivolity or the stupidity of the hearer of the Gospel has been penetrated, what then? Then the preacher comes to the imaginations. He finds himself occupied with the not less difficult task of 'casting down imaginations' (2 Co 10⁵).

It is the Rev. Alexander CONNELL, B.D., who has made that discovery. He has made it, no doubt, out of his own experience as a preacher. For in the volume of sermons which he has published under the title of *The Endless Quest* (Hodder & Stoughton; 6s.) he speaks so fervently of the difficulty of the task, and so intimately of the variety of the imaginations that have to be cast down, that we cannot doubt he is matching St. Paul's experience with his own.

No sooner has a man's frivolity been suspended by the seriousness of the word, or his stolidity

pierced by its sharpness, than he instinctively sets himself on guard against the fateful obligations now clamouring in his conscience. There rise 'in his very track a cloud of reasonings, imaginings, speculations, sophistries, many of them in good faith, but all of them diverting attention from the crucial issue and postponing moral decisions. These are the "imaginings" of the text.'

'It is certain,' says Mr. CONNELL, using his surprising gift of vivid speech in its fulness, 'it is certain,' he says, 'that the Gospel has to fight every inch of ground until it come right within our heart with its mastery and healing, crooning over us, like a mother over a sick child, words of comfort and peace. And it is also certain that often our last defence against our better self and against the inflow of a tidal life is found in these imaginings which must be cast down.'

One form which the imaginings take is this. A man has passed through a process of disillusionment. The things that once had authority over him have it no more, and he has lost some of the things which he once held sacred. He has passed, 'not without a touch of self-complacency,' from the narrower and more mechanical views of his fathers to a larger and more tolerant attitude to life and God and the Bible. It is disconcerting to discover that the Gospel can reach him still, and can touch his conscience. But he remembers that the modern view, which he shares, has left a man free to say yes or no as he pleases, and almost to whatsoever he pleases. He has not gone beyond the hearing of the Gospel, however, and this preacher speaks directly to him. 'If,' he says, 'you imagine in entire good faith, that because some points of view have changed therefore the central things of religion are on their trial, and that you must await the issue of that trial, I believe you are profoundly mistaken and unreasonable in the last degree.'

A common and sometimes very keenly felt form which the imaginings take is doubt of the super-

natural. There are those who deny it out and out, the fact of it and the possibility of it. There are more who hold their minds in suspense. They see how much hangs upon it. That Christianity is 'built upon an empty tomb' they do not deny. But even the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is much enveloped in mystery and difficult to establish as an historical fact.

Mr. CONNELL admits both the mystery and the difficulty. He admits the mystery that surrounds resurrection from the dead. But the world is full of mystery. 'If mystery and a vast ignorance are going to place an arrest on us, it is hard to see in what direction we shall not find our faculties paralysed. If you are inclined to doubt, when the miraculous appears in the Gospel, then the doubt may be limitless.'

He admits the difficulty. To prove the fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is as great a difficulty as the historian or apologete has to undertake. But historical facts are not the only facts with which we have to do. The hunger for external fact is not the only hunger of the soul. 'You are anxious,' says Mr. CONNELL, 'to answer the craving of one faculty instead of satisfying the hunger of all faculties. And it cannot be done. For our great hunger is not for theories to be established, but for facts to be felt. And I cannot but believe that if a man but feel his godlessness as well as his limitation, and ventures everything on Christ, he will stumble into a light above the brightness of the sun.'

And let us not forget that while we, on our side, are doing our best to be morally direct and sincere, in casting down 'imaginings,' Christ is working from the other side. 'His Gospel will flame like the rising sun through the mists of unreasonable misunderstanding and mistimed speculation. And when His day dawns on us, we shall find that not our heart only, but our intellect also, has passed into a new climate, where Christian service can be what it ever ought to be—intelligent and devout.'