BRIEF NOTES ON PASSAGES OF THE GOSPELS.

I. ON PURGING ALL MEATS.

(*St. Mark* vii. 19.)

THIS verse has long presented a serious difficulty, both grammatical and exegetical. I hope in this paper to establish and popularize the true reading and the true interpretation which, though they were familiar to the most learned of the Fathers, and were pointed out and elaborately defended nearly forty years ago by the Rev. F. Field,[1] have, up to this time, failed to attract the attention they deserve. The true reading, *καθαρίζων*, is indeed adopted by Tischendorf, Alford, &c.; but the most valuable solution of the difficulty caused by that reading has fallen into such complete neglect that there is not a single modern commentary on the New Testament in which I have been able to find the remotest allusion to it.[2] I have, indeed, myself referred to it as an excellent interpretation in a note to my "Life of Christ;"[3] but I had not then arrived at my present conviction, that it is not only a *tenable*, but, in all probability, *the only correct* interpretation, and one which elevates those particular words from a superfluous and unmeaning addition to a sense which gives them an almost unique importance in the history of Christian progress.

1. One of the many efforts of the Pharisees to discredit the ministry of Christ and to throw contempt on his disciples had been founded on an

[1] In his "S. Joannis Chrysostimi Homiliæ in Matthaeus," vol. iii. p. 112.

[2] It is not referred to in the "Critici Sacri," Bengel, Meyer, Alford, Wordsworth, Lange, &c.

[3] Vol. i. p. 449.

incident of which the special details are not recorded. On some occasion—probably at one of the many slight mid-day meals to which Jesus and his immediate followers were invited in the busy course of his Galilean work—the disciples, in the hurry and pressure of their duties, had neglected the tradition of the elders by sitting down "with profane, that is, with unwashed hands." Although the frequent and minute rules of ablution which occupy so large a part of the Sixth *Seder* of the Talmud have no foundation whatever in the Law of Moses, they were insisted upon with extreme urgency and endless regulations in the oral law. Instead, therefore, of answering the particular charge of these Pharisaic critics, Jesus went to the very heart of the matter under dispute by exposing the immorality, and utterly setting at nought the claims, of that tradition of the Scribes which, in myriads of external rules, had invaded the province and eaten away the very heart of true religion. If, as we have good reason to suppose, the unwritten law of that day was at all coincident in form and tendency with the precepts of the Mishnah, our Lord might have selected numberless other instances in which both the letter and the spirit of the Mosaic legislation were violated and abolished by the comments of the Scribes.[1] The instance which He did select was that of immoral vows—like the vow involved in the Corban—which enriched the Temple treasury at the expense of filial affection. It is very probable that this was not the

[1] For a few specimens of these, see the author's "Life of Christ," vol. i. p. 449, *seq*, and the Excursuses on the Talmud and on the Hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

only proof which He furnished of the hollowness and danger of the *Torah shebeal pîh*, or "law upon the lips;" but even if He instanced this alone, it was sufficient to discredit the whole system of the "tradition of the Elders" by shewing that rules which opposed the very letter of the Decalogue and obliterated the earliest obligations of moral duty, could not even be authoritative, much less divine. And He ended his indignant expostulation against these saintly spies from Jerusalem by applying to them the stern language of the prophet who, so many centuries before, had warned the Jewish nation against the danger of substituting formalism for spirituality, the honour of the lips for the devotion of the life.

2. And then, as though He deigned no further lesson to men whose motives were base and their whole system hypocritical, He called to him the multitude, and in solemn words bade them hearken to one brief principle which laid the axe at the root of that whole system which was to the Scribes and Pharisees of that day their very breath of life. No part of the Rabbinic teaching was more exclusive and universal, no set of regulations was more elaborate and more wide-reaching in their significance, than those which had exaggerated the simple Mosaic distinction between clean and unclean meats into hundreds of petty and minute directions, such as, to a Jew living out of Judea, made life a burden and entangled the simplest acts of daily routine in an iron network of intricate subtleties. The whole of this system, and all that it involved, our Lord at once swept away by the enunciation of the one

broad spiritual principle that man is defiled, not by the *external*, but by the *internal;* that *Levitical* uncleanness, when compared with *moral* uncleanness, was of infinitesimally small importance; that, in the nature of things, and apart from mere ceremonial and sanitary arrangements, it was of extremely little consequence whether or not a man swallowed an animalcule or ate of the flesh of some animal which did not quite divide the hoof; but that it *was* of divine and infinite importance whether his heart was "a sanctuary or a sewer,"—a sweet fountain of love and purity, or a black and turbid vent of sensuality, deceit, and hate.

3. The Pharisees were naturally offended that the multitude, over whom their authority had been hitherto supreme and unquestioned, should thus be bidden to give solemn heed to a truth which cleared away and flung to the winds in one sweep the cobwebs of oral tradition which they and their fathers had been spinning for ages between every line and letter of the written law. The Apostles, not yet by any means emancipated from the feeling of reverence which they, and all such "people of the earth," as their rulers called them, had ever paid to the learned and priestly class, told Jesus, not without anxiety, of the anger which his words had kindled. His answer was an appeal from the judgment of men to the judgment of God and a prophecy that the vaunted wisdom of an ignorance which gave itself the airs of knowledge and the vaunted power of guidance possessed by a blindness which pretended to be sight, would soon and suddenly end in shameful fall.

4. But so new and strange was the doctrine which He had uttered that Peter could only call it "a parable," and join his brethren in asking some further explanation of its bearing. With a gentle expression of surprise and sorrow at their want of spiritual perception, Jesus put in plainer words the truth which He had indicated: "Do ye not perceive, that everything which from without entereth into a man, *cannot* defile him; because it entereth not into the heart, but into his belly, and passeth out into the draught,—cleansing all meats? And he said, That which cometh out of a man, that defileth a man; for from within, from the heart of men, come forth evil thoughts"—evil thoughts, like the letting out of water, and then all that black dark catalogue of the sins that are foulest and vilest in the life of man. These are the only real defilements, and all these come from within.

5. The latter verse is clear, and the derivation of all iniquity from within, and the tracing of every form of moral corruption to evil thoughts, is full of the profoundest meaning. But it is with the former verse that we have to do; and, when its true purport is vindicated, we shall see that it is no mere illustration and amplification, but that it, too, has a deep historic significance.

It has generally been taken to be nothing more than a statement of the fact that what enters a man from without does but affect his material structure, and in no way touches his real being; and this, of course, is perfectly true. But, then, what is the meaning of the apparently dubious and superfluous words with which it concludes,—"because they do

not enter into the heart, but into the belly, and pass out into the draught, *cleansing all meats*" ?

6. First, what is the reading?

i. Many editors, driven by their perplexity into rebellion against clear MSS. authority, have accepted and argued in favour of the reading, *καθάριζον*, which they interpret to mean "*a process* which purges all food." The construction is then sufficiently harsh, though it may be paralleled by the Greek of 2 Tim. ii. 14, and by the occasional idiom which places a neuter participle in apposition to an entire sentence. But even when we have thus supported the construction, the passage gives at the best a very poor and questionable statement, and it is impossible not to feel that it would not have been worth while to add a remark which only confuses the true moral sense of a very memorable utterance by a piece of alien and disputable physiology.

ii. Besides all which, the reading is quite unquestionably *wrong*, for the *masculine* *καθαρίζων*, not the neuter, is the reading of every single uncial manuscript worth noticing, except the Codex Bezæ. It is found in ℵ.A.B.E.F.G.H., &c., *i.e.*, in the *Sinaiticus*, the *Alexandrine*, the *Vatican*, the *Codex Ephraemi*, the *Codex Augiensis*, &c., as well as in Origen and Chrysostom. It would require a reason overwhelmingly strong to set aside such "diplomatic" evidence as this, especially when by doing so we still have a difficult construction and a valueless sense. No editor who wishes to preserve his reputation for critical acumen ought ever again to admit *καθάριζον* into his text.

7. What, then, can the true reading, *καθαρίζων*, mean?

a. The only possible *construction* of the word, taking the ordinary punctuation, will be to make it agree with ἀφεδρών; and if this be adopted we shall again have a very hard and almost unparalleled instance of apposition, which leaves us still with a very dubious sense, only furnishing us with a remark which can hardly be said to be physically true, and which, even if it be physically true, is wholly otiose, and adds nothing whatever to the solemn subject of which the passage treats.

b. Moreover — and this is a point which I have not before seen noticed — this construction and this explanation require us to give to ἀφεδρών the sense of "duct," or "alimentary canal," which I do not believe it *can* have. In the LXX. the word does not occur at all, and therefore we are driven to classical Greek if we want to discover its meaning. Now in classical Greek the word is very rare, but is said positively to mean "drain," *cloaca*, *latrina*. If Suidas *also* gives it the meaning assigned to it in our English Version, he does so, in all probability, from a misapprehension of this very passage. Now if, as I believe, our Version has mistranslated the word ἀφεδρών, all possible ground for the only interpretation ever offered in modern times is cut away, and the argument in favour of the view which I proceed to give is greatly strengthened. For, indeed, if no *other* explanation were forthcoming, it is so certain that no word uttered by Him could be idle or valueless, that we could only suppose that the exact words of Christ had in this instance been incorrectly reported or inadequately understood.

c. How very different does the case become;—how rich and weighty is the meaning;—what a flood of light do the words throw on the relation of the Gospel to the Law;—how completely are they elevated into one of the most remarkable passages which the Gospels contain on the relation which the Mosaic system was to bear to Gentile Christianity;—how triumphant a vindication do they furnish of the doctrine of St. Paul against the early Judaizers,—when they are rightly read and interpreted! And the right interpretation is as follows,—"And he saith to them, Do ye not perceive that all which from without entereth into a man[1] cannot defile him, because it entereth not into his heart, but into his belly, and goeth out into the drain?"—(this He said), "MAKING ALL MEATS PURE."

d. It will be seen that, according to this view, which I now regard as certain, the last words *are not those uttered by Christ at all, but are the remark of the Evangelist;* of that Evangelist who was the "son" and "interpreter" of St. Peter; of that Evangelist who is believed to reflect the immediate narrative of the Apostle of the Circumcision; of that Evangelist who, before he penned the sacred record, must often have heard from the lips of Peter himself the memorable narrative of that vision on the roof-top at Joppa, when he saw the great sheet let down from heaven full of clean and unclean beasts, and, on being bidden to "slay and eat," had answered, "Not so, Lord, for never at any time did I eat anything common or unclean." And the voice again, the second time, said to him (using *the two*

[1] I take the article here to be generic.

very words which are most prominent in this passage, namely, κοινὸς and καθαρίζω), "What God *cleansed* (ἐκαθάρισε), call not thou common." I cannot feel the slightest remaining doubt that it was in the light of that vision that Peter first understood the richest and widest significance of these words; that not until hisn otions of the preponderant importance of Levitical distinctions had been divinely removed, was he able to inform St. Mark what was the real and full meaning of the "parable" of that which cometh from within and without,—of which the first does, and the second does not, defile. It seems to me that, but for the Voice of Joppa, Peter might never have *clearly* understood that this remark, which he had himself asked Jesus to explain, was the most significant of the few utterances in which his Lord had indicated the transitory nature of that Mosaic system which He only came to destroy in the sense that He came to furnish its final interpretation and to replace its shadow by the eternal substance.

8. It is only with the actual meaning of the words that I am here concerned, not with their immense importance. That meaning was rightly apprehended by Origen, the most learned, and by Chrysostom, the most eloquent, of the Fathers. The latter, in his homily on St. Matthew, observes: "But Mark says that he said these things (καθαρίζων τὰ βρώματα) *making* (*all*) *meats pure;*" and Dean Burgon, in his treatise on the last twelve verses of St. Mark (p. 179) adduces another passage to the same effect from Gregory Thaumaturgus, who has this remark: "And the *Saviour, who purifies all meats,* says," &c.

For these references I am indebted to a kind letter from Mr. Field, who also removes the stumbling-block to the adoption of this lofty interpretation, which I had pointed out in my "Life of Christ." That stumbling-block is *the order of the words*, since "purifying all meats" is inserted, as it were, parenthetically between the two clauses of our Lord's discourse. But, as Mr. Field points out to me, it is quite in St. Mark's manner to throw in an observation of his own upon something that had been said by Christ. There is a remarkable instance of this in Mark iii. 29, 30. There we have, "And calling them, he said to them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan?" Then follows a long speech consisting of three distinct propositions, and, after this interruption, the construction is resumed in verse 30, "because they said, He hath an unclean spirit." Here also — though it is not so necessary as in the verses which I have been examining — we might render (*this He said*), "because they said, He hath a devil."

What are the arguments with which Mr. Field, in his note on St. Chrysostom, supports this most valuable explanation—which is in reality that of the most learned ancient Expositors, and has only lain for so many centuries unnoticed because, in explaining a difficult passage of St. Mark, no one thought of consulting St. Chrysostom's commentary on St. Matthew — I do not know, because I have been unable to procure his book. I have, therefore, preferred to state what occurred to myself in its support; and I expect that what is here adduced will be as new as, I hope, it will be convincing to those who read it. When I alluded to this explana-

tion in my "Life of Christ," I did not mention, because I did not know, who had won the credit of originating or reviving it, having myself heard it suggested in conversation by a learned bishop. Mr. Field has removed the only objection I ever felt to admitting it, and I cannot but think that it will rank hereafter with the most certain and valuable results which modern has borrowed from ancient exegesis.

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NOTES ON COMMENTARIES.

2. JOB TO SOLOMON'S SONG.

IN the age of Solomon a new kind of literature sprang into being among the Hebrews, or at least rose to its highest excellence, noble specimens of which have come down to us in the books which they called collectively *Chokmah*, the literature of *Wisdom*. Poetic in form, it is ethical or didactic in spirit, and sets itself to depict, in various forms, the art of living rightly or well. Thus the Book of Job teaches men how to *suffer*, the Book of Psalms how to *pray*, the Book of Proverbs how to *act*, the Book Ecclesiastes how to *enjoy*, and the Song which is Solomon's how to *love*.

These books have been far more fortunate in their Commentators than the historical books; there is hardly one of them on which even the English school has not furnished a valuable, or even an invaluable, exposition. The very first of them is exceptionally fortunate. The Book of *Job* is probably the most sublime poem in the literature of the world. The questions it handles—as, *e.g.*, the capacity of man for a disinterested virtue, a genuine and unselfish piety; the origin, function, and end of evil—are of profound and perennial interest, and it raises and answers them in the noblest way. No wonder, therefore, that it has attracted to itself the best and ablest minds. In the foreign school Renan and Ewald, Dillmann and Merx, are among the Commentators who have laboured at it most successfully; among ourselves Professor A. B. Davidson and Canon Cook. Davidson's Commentary[1]—alas, that it should still be incomplete!—is indeed a quite unique bit of work. It combines philosophical breadth and spiritual in-

[1] A Commentary, Grammatical and Exegetical, on the Book of Job: with a Translation. By the Rev. A. B. Davidson, M.A. Vol. I. Williams and Norgate.