THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THERE is a short article in *The Evangelical Magazine* for December, by the Rev. P. W. Darnton, B.A., which clearly brings out the force of a verse in Proverbs which has been scarcely hit by the Revisers, as it was entirely missed in the Authorised Version. The verse is Prov. xviii. 24. The Authorised Version has it thus: "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." The Revised Version gives the first clause: "He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction"—a very different meaning, certainly. The Revisers point out in their margin that the Hebrew of "He that maketh many friends" is simply "A man of friends"; and they further note that the word translated "friend" in the second clause of the verse is a different Hebrew word from that with the same rendering in the first, and they suggest for this second word "lover" instead of "friend."

Mr. Darnton's translation is this: "The man who has many acquaintances shall perish; but there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." The word in the first clause of the verse signifies, he says, a mere acquaintance, a casual companion; and the writer evidently means that there is danger in the habit of making "friends" of every one we meet, and confiding to mere casual acquaintances what should be given only to the close-sticking friend. And he points out that then the thought is parallel to a well-known utterance in the Son of Sirach: "Be at peace with many, but have only one counsellor of a thousand."

Abbé Fouard tells us that when he first planned his *Saint Peter and the First Years of Christianity*, a translation of which has just been issued in this country by Messrs. Longmans, he intended to associate the history of the beginnings of Christianity with the name of St. Paul. But as the work progressed, he found another countenance gradually revealing its well-marked features, and the place originally intended for the apostle of the Gentiles was taken by St. Peter.

The result is not surprising. The surprise is that Abbé Fouard ever expected it to be otherwise. For the estimate you form of the apostolic age depends upon the materials you use in forming it. Confine yourself to the canonical writings of the New Testament, and it will require no little ingenuity to deny the first place to St. Paul. But add to them the writings of the early centuries, make these writings the vehicles of facts and doctrines belonging to the apostolic age, but not found in the apostolic Scriptures, and then you will have no difficulty in assigning the supremacy to St. Peter. The difficulty will be in avoiding that, as honest Abbé Fouard has found.

Why did the early Church assign the supremacy to St. Peter? No answer has ever yet been given. To say that out of sheer caprice the Roman bishops chose to call themselves the successors of St. Peter, and not of the victorious St. Paul, is to turn history into primæval chaos, and deny common sense to a Church that its opponents have ever admitted to be exceeding wise in its own generation. We cannot explain it.

But the fact remains; and we have just received another and surprising evidence of it. Within the last few days there has been issued from the Cambridge Press a little book, under the title of *The Gospel according to Peter, and the Revelation of Peter*. It is the story of another find in early Christian literature. Six years ago a little parchment book was discovered in an ancient cemetery at Akhmîm (Panopolis), in Upper Egypt, and placed in the Gizeh Museum at Cairo. The discovery was due to the French Archæological Mission at Cairo. Its contents were speedily identified by the same Mission as threefold: fragments of the Book of Enoch, of the Gospel of Peter, and of the Apocalypse of Peter. But it is only a few weeks since they were made accessible to scholars, on the publication of the ninth volume of the *Memoirs of the Mission*. Three days after the "Memoirs," containing the text of these precious fragments, reached Cambridge, viz. on the 20th November, the Rev. J. Armitage Robinson, B.D., the well-known editor of *Texts and Studies*, delivered a lecture upon one of them to a surprised and delighted audience of scholars. Shortly afterwards, the Rev. M. R. James, M.A., gave a lecture on the Apocalypse of Peter. And now the little book before us (Cambridge, 2s. 6d.) contains these two lectures, the texts themselves, and sundry interesting notes upon them.

These fragments are new. And yet, as Mr. Robinson points out, they are not entire surprises. They were known to have existed once; they were suspected to be in hiding somewhere. But it *is* a surprise that they should have been called forth out of Egypt. When the great Tel el-Amarna find was made, expectation was raised very high as to what Egypt, that land of continual surprises, might some day yield. More recent discoveries have only raised that expectation higher, till Mr. Robinson can say in sober earnest that, now that we have entered upon a new field of exploration in the tombs of Egypt, there is nothing that we need despair of finding—be it the Expositions of Papias, or the Memoirs of Hegesippus, or the Chronicle of Julius Africanus.

Of the three fragments, the most important is the Gospel according to Peter. There has not yet been time to estimate its full significance. It may be that the first hurried estimate is faulty here and there. One difference of judgment has shown itself. Mr. Robinson confidently assigns the Gospel to the Docetic heresy. Mr. J. Hope Moulton, M.A., in an interesting paper in *The Methodist Recorder*, gives a different translation of the passages with that apparent tendency, and denies its visible presence. But some points of great importance are beyond dispute or question. Thus, whether Docetic or not, it is a "tendency-writing." It is a gospel plainly put into the mouth of Peter by some later writer, and that for a purpose. That purpose is mainly to rest the whole blame of the rejection and crucifixion of Christ on the Jews. Its hatred of the Jew is as deep set as that of a modern Russian. And here at once emerges a most important item of evidence. If there were in the early Church, as Baur and his followers maintained, two sharply-divided parties, the Pauline and the Petrine, and the one was inspired by Gentile freedom, while the other was animated by Jewish exclusiveness, how comes it that this early writing—for it seems certainly to belong to close upon the middle of the second century—puts the gospel of hatred to the Jew, not into the mouth of St. Paul, but into the mouth of St. Peter himself?

But there is a more welcome item of evidence than that. It has been abundantly and most con-

fidently asserted that our own Gospels are themselves tendency-writings, writings with a purpose; that facts are selected which tell for the evangelist's own peculiar doctrines, and facts suppressed which do not. Well, we can test that allegation now. Here we have a good example of a tendency-writing. There is no doubt that *this* Gospel was written for a purpose. "Old statements are suppressed or wilfully perverted and displaced; new statements are introduced which bear their condemnation in their faces. Nothing is left as it was before. Here is history as it should be, not as it is. "And no one who will take the pains to compare sentence by sentence, word by word, the new 'lines left out' with the old 'line upon line,' will fail to return to the four Gospels with a sense of relief at his escape from a stifling prison of prejudice into the transparent and the bracing atmosphere of pure simplicity and undesigning candour." These are Mr. Robinson's words.

And these are his words also, and they are more important still: "Lastly, the unmistakeable acquaintance of the author of this so-called Gospel according to Peter with our four evangelists deserves a special comment. He uses and misuses each in turn. To him they all stand on an equal footing. He lends no support to the attempt which has been made to place a gulf of separation between the Fourth Gospel and the rest, as regards the period or the area of their acceptance as canonical; nor, again, does he countenance the theory of the continued circulation in the second century of an *Urevangelium*, or such a præ-canonical gospel as we feel must lie behind our Synoptists. He uses our Greek Gospels; there is no proof (though the possibility, of course, is always open) that he knew of any gospel record other than these."

Let Mr. Halcombe note these things, and take courage.

If the evidence of *published* sermons may be accepted, the most popular text in all the Bible is Heb. xii. 1, 2: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," and so on. And a magnificent text it is, if you understand it aright. But it is by no means easy to understand. In the first verse alone there are two difficulties which have divided the ablest commentators from time immemorial, and do not appear to be settled yet,—the meaning of the great cloud of witnesses, and the nature of the sin that so easily besets us.

In the *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* for October,—an exceedingly rich number,—Professor William Alexander, D.D., of San Francisco, deals with the first of these difficulties. "What does the writer mean," he asks, "when he here speaks of our being compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses?" Three different answers have been made. One answer is that he means to say that the dead revisit this earth, and, as interested spectators, witness our conduct, sympathising with us in our trials, grieving over our falls, and rejoicing in our victories.

But Professor Alexander does not believe that answer is correct. He has several objections to it. One of them is of such a nature that it would act on some minds in the very opposite way that it seems to act on his. "There is," he says, "a slight *confessional* difficulty in the way of a Presbyterian minister or elder holding such a view as this." *The Confession of Faith*, chap. xxxii. sec. 1, says, "The souls of the righteous are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments, reserved to the judgment of the great day. *Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture achnowledgeth none.*" Practically, this is conclusive to Dr. Alexander, for he adds: "The notion, therefore, that the souls of the departed may be not in either of those places, but hovering around the world, flitting from place to place like spectres, is obviously not in harmony with our Confession, as we believe it also to be not in agreement with the Bible."

But there are other difficulties. Dr. Alexander has no love for the thought that possibly the departed dead may be hovering near us still. "It is not suggestive of very pleasant reflections. Most of us probably have nothing very wicked or shameful covered up in our lives, that we would not want these viewless spectators to behold; but very likely there are a great many who have been guilty of weak and foolish things which they would rather that no eye but God's had seen. Upon the whole, since the pious dead have departed this life, and are no longer visible to us, it is more comfortable to most of us to feel that we are free from the espionage even of the good, and secure against possible unwelcome intrusions; while the spirits of the departed are at home and happy in heaven, instead of wandering around the world as invisible spectators, and borne on the wings of the wind."

The fatal objection to this view, however, is that the word here translated witness is never found in the sense of spectator. If this is so,—and we must add that, confining ourselves to biblical Greek, we agree with Dr. Alexander in thinking it is so, even though Thayer's *Grimm* is against us. For the passages quoted in Thayer are evidently not to the point, being the usual expressions of the apostles, "we are witnesses of these things," so often found in the beginning of the Book of Acts, expressions which certainly do not mean that the apostles were merely *spectators* of these things. If this is so, then it is at once fatal, as Dr. Alexander says. For we have no right to take a well-known word away from its usual meaning to suit some special fancy of our own; and there is undoubtedly a little pious fancy mingling with the idea that we are always surrounded with a crowd of the "dear departed," invisible spectators of our race.

Come, then, to the second view. It is admirably expressed by Lünemann in *Meyer*. The witnesses of whom the writer speaks are the persons mentioned in the immediately preceding narrative; and when these are characterised as "a cloud of witnesses," the author does not intend to imply that these witnesses are present as *spectators* at the contest to be maintained by his readers, but he represents them as persons who have *borne testimony for the faith* which he demands of his readers, and who, consequently, have become models for imitation to the readers as regards this virtue. This view Professor Alexander accepts. It is the view of the Greek Fathers, and has many an honoured name upon its side down the whole roll of exegetical "witnesses," till we come to the latest in Dr. A. B. Davidson, who puts the matter in his usual felicitous way. "The notion of spectators," he says, "seems foreign to the connexion, the point of which is not that they behold us, but that we behold them. Undoubtedly they are conceived as in a sense present, for we are surrounded by them; they and we have been made perfect together. The point, however, is the stimulus which their example and presence should be to us, not that we are running under their eye and subject to their verdict, or that they are absorbed in the interest of our struggle. Even if this last idea were contained in the words, we should not be entitled to deduce from them the dry literal doctrine that the saints above are conversant with our life here, and fascinated by the interest of it. Even a writer of Scripture may be allowed to throw out a brilliant ideal conception, without our tying him down to having uttered a formal doctrine. A dear memory of our departed is more powerful to us than the example of the living. The heroes of the past are present with us in their spirit and example, and in the great deeds which they did. They surround us as a cloud, and we realise their presence, without supposing that they are conscious of us."

But there was a third view. The third view is disposed of easily and in a moment. It is an attempt to combine the two ideas of spectators and bearers of witness. And even though the great and honoured names of Delitzsch and Alford are quoted on its side, Lünemann's words are not too strong when he says that the attempt to blend the ideas of spectators and witnesses to the faith bears its

refutation upon the face of it. "For the combining of that which is logically irreconcilable is not exegesis."

Are there predictions in the prophets? Not many years ago the retort would have been made, Is there anything else? But we have travelled a long way in these few years. We have learned after much reiteration that prophecy is not a synonym for prediction. Then that prediction is an uncertain and unnecessary adjunct to true prophecy. And now we are driven to ask the question, Are there predictions in the Hebrew prophets at all?

Professor Driver's answer is that there are. He gives it with perfect candour and even with unwonted emphasis. But first of all, he says (we quote from his new volume of *Sermons on the Old Testament*, Methuen, 6s.):—"Prophecy subserved moral purposes; and its primary scope was the practical guidance, in life and thought, of those amongst whom the prophet lived. This fact affords us a criterion for estimating the temporal predictions of the prophets. The predictive element in the prophets is not so great as, perhaps, is sometimes supposed. Not only do the prophets deal with their actual present much more largely than is popularly imagined to be the case, but even in their announcements relative to the future, the amount of exact and minute prediction is less, probably, than might antecedently have been expected."

How is it, then, that in their announcements of the future the prophets seem to predict more than they actually do? First, says Dr. Driver, because they are artists. They have some great fact of the future to make known to their countrymen; they do not state it in its literal bareness and isolation, they surround it with all the accompaniments of scenery and circumstance. They construct a picture, of which the great fact of the future is only the central theme. For they must not only make it known to their countrymen as a fact of the future, they must also bring it home to them in its bearing upon their present life and conduct. To this end, the prophet's genius supplies him with images of surprising beauty and force. "But the imagery is merely the external dress in which the idea is clothed; and it is a vain and false literalism that would demand a place for its details in the fulfilment."

To take examples. "There has been no highway such as Isaiah pictured for the return of the banished Israelites from Assyria (Isa. xi. 16); no pillar or obelisk reminds the traveller entering Egypt that the country is devoted to the worship of the true God (Isa. xix. 19, 20); Sennacherib perished by the sword in his own land, and the vast funeral pyre which the same prophet conceived as prepared for him, and which he saw in imagination already being kindled by Jehovah's breath (Isa. xxx. 33), is but the form under which he depicts the completeness of the Assyrians' ruin. So, again, Isaiah's sense of the weakness of Egyptian nationality, and its inability to resist any determined assailant, finds expression in a prophecy in which he expands this thought, and with a keen appreciation of national characteristics, applies it over the entire area of Egyptian civilisation" (Isa. xix. 1–17).

But another reason why the prophets seem to predict more than they do, is that there are prophecies relating to the future which are rather solemn denunciations than predictions in the strict sense of the term. "They indicate the issue to which a policy or course of action may naturally be expected to lead, without claiming to announce it categorically as a prediction." Of this class of apparent predictions Dr. Driver gives no examples here, but passes at once to the last and most important class of all.

There are predictions which never find their fulfilment, because it is in the power of man to prevent it. These are not apparent predictions, but real, only they are uttered under a condition, and when the condition alters, God Himself

refuses to fulfil them. "At what instant," says a deep-searching passage in Jeremiah (xviii. 7–10), "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." For it is "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious." Jonah stumbled at this the noblest element in prophecy. And still, though it is the element that comes so close to the gospel itself, even we have scarcely learned to rejoice in it. We cry out against it as though we had been defrauded if some prediction does not find its literal and unbending fulfilment. We cry out, and we thrust forth our hand to steady God's good word of promise, lest the condition on which it rests should rock it to its fall.

"But when the necessary deductions have been made upon grounds such as these, there remain undoubted and remarkable examples of true predictions in the prophets." "One of the boldest," continues Professor Driver, "and also one of the clearest, is afforded by the Book of Isaiah. A year before the event, Isaiah predicted, not the siege merely of Jerusalem by the Assyrian armies (which, in our ignorance of the precise circumstances, we are unable to affirm might not conceivably have been reached by political calculation), but the termination of the siege by a sudden and unexpected disaster dispersing the attacking foes. 'Ah, Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped! add ye a year to the year, let the feasts run their round; then will I distress Ariel, and there shall be mourning and lamentation. And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a fort, and I will raise siege works against thee. But the multitude of thy foes shall be like small dust, and the multitude of the terrible ones as the chaff that passeth away; and it shall be at an instant, suddenly' (Isa. xxix. 1–3, 5)."

In the ninth verse Professor Driver reads a lively description of the blank astonishment and incredulity with which the people of Jerusalem (which Isaiah here calls Ariel, "the hearth of God") received the prophet's words: "Be startled and amazed, blind ourselves and be blind! They are drunken, yet not with wine; they stagger, yet not with strong drink." But Isaiah is confident, and does not shrink from repeating his assurances: "As birds flying, so will Jehovah of Hosts protect Jerusalem; He will protect and deliver it; He will pass over and preserve it. And the Assyrian shall fall with the sword, not of man; and the sword, not of man, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be set to task work" (Isa. xxxi. 5, 8). And, a little later; probably, Dr. Driver thinks, when the troops of Sennacherib were massing close at hand in the Philistine territory: "The nations rush like the rushing of many waters; but He shall rebuke them, and they shall flee afar off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like the whirling dust before the storm. At eventide behold confusion; before the morning he is not" (Isa. xvii. 13, 14). And, still later, when the last hope of escape seemed almost to have been cut off, and the fall of the city, to human eyes, must have appeared to be sealed: "At the noise of the tumult the peoples are fled; at the lifting up of Thyself the nations are scattered" (Isa. xxxiii. 3). "The varying imagery," says Dr. Driver, "which the prophet employs warns us that we must, as before, be on our guard against undue literalism in interpretation; but the fundamental thought which throughout underlies it, is in entire agreement with the event; and whether it was a pestilence, or some other agency, that caused the destruction of the Assyrian host, its occurrence at the time required for the salvation of the city, was a coincidence," he emphatically concludes, "beyond the reach of human prevision or calculation."