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17. Bishop Alexander's Commentary on the Epistles of St. John in *Expositor's Bible* series, pp. 241-253. "The Witness of Men applied to the Resurrection."
18. Marcus Dods' Commentary on First Epistle to the Corinthians in *Expositor's Bible* series, chs. xxi.-xxiv.
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II. THE ASCENSION.

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2. Body's The Activities of the Ascended Lord. Notes by S. F. L. S., from Addresses by Canon Body.
3. Westcott's Revelation of the Risen Lord. Chs. x., xi.
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5. Pearson's Exposition of the Creed. Art. vi.

The Parables of Zechariah.

BY THE REV. JAMES STALKER, D.D., GLASGOW.

IV.

THE PARABLE OF THE WALL OF FIRE (CHAP. ii.).

THE two former visions dealt with the external relations of the new Jerusalem, proving that the divine vigilance and protection could secure its safety in spite of the numerous and powerful enemies by whom it was surrounded. In this third vision the prophet turns to the internal condition of the incipient state.

His first word of comfort relates to the discouragement felt by the returned exiles on account of the smallness of their numbers. It will be remembered that those who had come back from Babylon did not as yet number more than fifty thousand—a figure no larger than the population of a good provincial town. No wonder that they felt

oppressed with the weight of their destiny, as the heirs of so great a past and the pioneers of so great a future. All that his fellow-countrymen were feeling was felt with concentrated poignancy by the young prophet; but along with this human feeling there mingled in his mind sentiments and convictions derived from a higher source; and these elements together shaped themselves into the imaginative message of this third vision.

I. In his dream Zechariah saw a young man with a measuring line in his hand; and when, accosting him, he asked whither he was going, the young man replied, "To measure Jerusalem, to see

what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof."

Some suppose that by this young man an angel is meant, as in Scripture the angels sometimes appear in this guise. But angels employ themselves in the service of God; and it was not in God's work that this young man was engaged; on the contrary, he had to be reproved by the angel of the Lord, and told to desist from his intention. Others understand him as a personification of rashness and precipitancy, the characteristics of youth; and certainly the work in which he was engaged was premature and uncalled-for. Perhaps, however, we may best look upon him as representing the young community, to which the prophet was addressing his message. At all events, that which the young man was doing was the very thing which Zechariah was sent to reprehend in his countrymen.

He was going to measure Jerusalem, to see what was the breadth and what the length of it. This describes the tendency of the returned exiles to brood upon the smallness of their numbers and the feebleness of the beginnings of their enterprise. They were doing the very opposite of what David did when he numbered the people; yet their sin was substantially the same. He was so puffed up with the large numbers of the population as to forget his dependence upon God; they, on the contrary, were too depressed by the smallness of their numbers, and had on this account fallen into unbelief. Some think that the young man's answer should run thus: "To measure Jerusalem, to see what the breadth thereof is to be, and what the length thereof." That is to say, they were making their present numbers the measure by which to estimate the final dimensions of the city, without provision for subsequent additions to the population. This mistake would be all the more misleading if, as others suppose, what the young man had in view was the determination of the line of the city-wall, which had yet to be built.

Whatever be the exact interpretation of the young man's words, the drift of the prophet is plain enough. He was sent to reprove his countrymen for dwelling too despondently on the slenderness of their numbers and equipments, and for entertaining so little confidence in what Jehovah was yet to do for them. They lacked faith; they did not rise to the divine view of their condition;

they were fixing boundaries and thinking that the end had come, when God had only begun to act.

It is a fault for which the people of God have constantly to be reproved in both their private experience and their public work. One of the commonest mistakes in religion is to be satisfied with the beginnings, when God wishes us to go on to perfection. There are good people in whose inner history there is only one epoch—that of their conversion. When they bear their testimony, the experiences which they relate are always the same; and they are very old. They have never had but a single experience; yet God intended that they should have many. He does not wish us to live on old grace, but gives grace for grace. In Christian work, too, there are many who commence well; but there are few who abide true throughout life to the enthusiasms of youth, with their sphere ever widening, their services multiplying and their gifts increasing. In knowledge, we make progress for a time; but soon our opinions are made up and our minds sealed against what is new; though God has ampler revelations for us all the way, if only we retain the passion for truth. Salvation is belittled in our narrow minds; and we need to see ourselves in the mirror of the large and generous purposes of God.

In a hundred ways the same thing is true of God's work on the larger scale of the Church and the world. We are ready to stop when God has hardly begun; we draw lines and fix boundaries where He wishes to have none. The Old Testament Church hardly ever rose to the divine conception of its mission, as it was expressed even as early as Abraham,—to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth,—and the scribes and Pharisees fenced religion round with so many commandments and prohibitions that to those outside it presented the appearance of a hedge of thorns. The modern Church has been very slow in taking to heart the Lord's command to evangelise all nations; and even yet it has only a faint sense of the charity of Christ. Christianity tends always to become a comfortable fold for those who are within, and to lose the character of a mission to those who are without. But only when the Church is able to look away from custom and opinion to the image of what she ought to be, as this is seen in the mind of Christ, do there flow into her heart pity for the

fallen, sympathy with the doubting, and love for the unevangelised.

II. The young man, having told what he was going to do, went on. But then another figure appeared on the field of the prophet's vision: "the angel that talked with me went forth," or came upon the stage. This angel who talks with the prophet in his visions is the spirit of inspiration, as we have learned in an earlier parable; and his appearance on the scene denotes the rising in the prophet's consciousness of a different view of the situation from that with which his contemporaries were satisfied. The young man, who had gone away to measure Jerusalem, represented public opinion and the mood of depression prevalent on every side; but in the mind of Zechariah a different mood had begun to stir, and a different view of the situation to take shape. At least he was feeling for a conception more worthy of God. And, as he thus sought, God met his rising spirit with the presence and the touch of His own Spirit. This is denoted by saying that, when the angel who talked with him went forth, another angel came out to meet him, and put a message into his mouth.¹ This new angel is undoubtedly the angel of the Lord. He holds the same relation to Jehovah as he who is called "the angel that talked with me" does to the prophet. The one is the organ of God in giving a revelation; the other represents the inspired state in which the prophet received it.²

The message on this occasion was, to run after the young man who had gone to measure the city and tell him to desist; because Jerusalem was in the future to be "inhabited as towns without walls for the multitude of the men and cattle therein." Villages in ancient times had no walls, their importance not being sufficient for so costly a defence. But there might be an opposite reason for having no wall: instead of the population being too small for walls, it might be too large; or it might be growing at such a rate that no wall, however generously planned, could long contain it. Such was to be the case with Jerusalem.

But how, then, was it to be defended? "I, saith

¹ The critical point in this parable is ver. 4. Several interpreters, by putting the words into the mouth of "the angel that talked with me," instead of the angel of the Lord, confuse all that follows.

² This admirable remark I owe to Marti (*Der Prophet Sacharja*): he makes it on the first vision, but fails in this third one to make use of his own wisdom.

the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her." The idea of a wall of fire may have been suggested by the watchfires surrounding an encampment by night, or more probably by the pillar of fire which went before Israel in the wilderness; but, whatever its origin, it is one of singular sublimity. What could be more terrible to enemies without than a wall of fire, or what could afford such perfect security to those within?

Not only, however, was God thus to be the circumference, but He was at the same time to be the centre—"the glory in the midst of her"—not only the true wall, but the true temple—the focus round which the entire life of the community would be concentrated. This idea, though placed last, is really the first; because the root and guarantee of all prosperity, whether in the Church, in the State, in the home, or in the life of the individual, is God at the centre—a great truth transferred to modern literature, in words borrowed from Zechariah, by the poet of "The Cotter's Saturday Night."

III. At this point the vision proper ends, but the inspiration of these great ideas is sweeping through the soul of the prophet with too great force to permit him at once to be silent. So the revealing voice still continues to speak, not, however, in the peculiar parabolic style of Zechariah, but in the ordinary form of prophetic exhortation.³

This exhortation is twofold. It is addressed first to the Jews left in Babylon, and secondly to those living in Jerusalem.

When the fifty thousand among whom Zechariah was working returned from the Exile to their own land, many more remained behind in the foreign country. Some of them may have been too poor to come away; but others were too rich. With the wonderful adaptability and commercial instinct of their race, they had prospered even in the Exile, building homes for themselves and acquiring possessions; and their roots had struck too deep to be easily pulled up. Accordingly, they had allowed the returning caravan to go away without

³ Vers. 6-13. Wellhausen translates 6, 7: "I will gather you" (so LXX.) "from the four winds of heaven, saith the Lord. Oh flee to Zion" (accusative of direction), "ye that dwell in Babylon." "Daughter" has arisen from the repetition of the last two letters of the preceding word. In ver. 8 he deletes "After the glory hath He sent me"; but this is too arbitrary.

them. They intended, perhaps, to follow later; but they lingered, and every day the hold of the world became more difficult to shake off. To these the prophet addresses an earnest appeal to come and join their brethren in the new community. He recalls how, for the glory of His own name, God had done an unexampled thing in opening the gates of the strong city to allow them to escape. Were they going to turn His purpose to shame? Besides, there were calamities impending over Babylon, in which they would be involved if they remained.

The other half of the exhortation is addressed to those in Jerusalem. They are exhorted to cast off entirely the mood of depression, and to break forth into joy and singing. They had no need to envy the prosperity of those left behind in Babylon, or to wish themselves back among the fleshpots of this new Egypt. God was on the point of returning again to Zion; He would again choose Jerusalem, and "inherit Judah His portion in the holy land."¹ And the result of His presence there would be such an era of glory, that many people would come and seek to join themselves to the people of the Lord. So certain is the prophet that all this is on the point of coming to pass, that he closes with a sharp summons to prepare for the approaching theophany, "Be silent, oh all flesh, before the Lord; for He is waked up out of His holy habitation."

But did He come? Did He come immediately, as Zechariah anticipated? Did Jerusalem become the overflowing city of the prophet's dream? Did the community attain the pitch of glory here predicted, and serve as the point of attraction for all aspiring neighbours?

When we follow the course of history from this date onwards, with Zechariah's predictions in our ears, it is certainly with a sense of disappointment. The community long continued small; and even after it had risen to some consideration in the world, it succumbed to conqueror after conqueror, and was seldom for any length of time entirely free. Nor did it ever correspond internally with the anticipations of the prophet: instead of a righteous people, it produced the self-righteous sects of Judaism.

Herein, indeed, lies the explanation of the

¹ The only time that this name for the country, now so familiar, occurs in Scripture.

failure. The conditions were never fulfilled. God's promised presence at the centre of the State, with the ensuing prosperity, presupposed obedience and love on the part of the population; but these were at all times present in only miserably insufficient quantity.

Yet Zechariah's vision was not a dream and nothing more. It was an ideal; and, though an ideal may not be altogether realised, it draws on those before whose eyes it hovers; it keeps them in the right path; and they attain much which without it they could not have reached. Zechariah's prophesying actually built the temple—its immediate object; out of a handful of dispirited men and women it raised up a State which lasted for centuries; and, whilst this was being done, it kept appreciative souls in the right attitude, with their eyes turned towards God, waiting for new manifestations of His mercy and His power.

It may have appeared inconsistent with Zechariah's prediction in this passage when Nehemiah, seventy years afterwards, actually built the wall of Jerusalem. But Nehemiah was in direct succession to Zechariah, and a man of the same spirit. For him the ideal Jerusalem of Zechariah still floated over the actual Jerusalem; and his work was a means to the end which Zechariah had in view. Limitation for the present may be the necessary preparation for the ultimate removal of limitations, as the scaffolding is necessary for the building. Thus we see our various Christian denominations at present, with the strength and concentration due to their peculiarities,—which, however, are limitations,—founding in China and Africa churches which may not permanently retain their forms of creed and organisation.

But in the end Zechariah's predictions were realised, and they are at this day being fulfilled, though not in the forms of his imagination. He predicted the future in the only forms in which in his age it could be foreseen. But the fashion of the world changes, and God fulfils Himself in many ways. Christianity—the worship of God in spirit and in truth—is a far more splendid fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy than any which he could himself have conceived. Yet he and the faithful souls who received his message were right to conceive the kingdom of God as they were able, and to work for its realisation in the forms then available. Perhaps unconsciously we are

doing the same. Perhaps the future form of the kingdom of God may be very different from anything which we are able to conceive. But this should not discourage us from either thinking of it or organising it in the forms into which we are able to throw our own energies, and which appeal to the minds of those with whom we have to deal, if only we bear in mind that God and His truth are greater than we. The entire system of our creeds and organisations may be only a kind of artificial dome, beneath which we live, move, and have our being. Sometimes we wish to escape from under it, or even to break it in pieces. But, on the

whole, it is the condition of our existence, and serves as a comfort and defence. Yet it matters a great deal whether it is a cast-iron hemisphere of metal, under which we grope and mutter in the dark, hearing only the echo of our own voices and not so much as suspecting that there is a universe beyond, or, on the contrary, a hemisphere of translucent crystal, on the surface of which the heavenly radiances glance and play, and within the circumference of which, as in a gigantic shell, the vague and wandering murmurs from the immeasurable spaces gather and articulate themselves into sounds which whisper of the Infinite.

The Books of the Month.

PART I.

ADVERSARIA CRITICA SACRA. BY F. H. A. SCRIVENER, M.A., D.C.L., LL.D. (Cambridge: *At the University Press*. 8vo, pp. ci, 170.) These are the books for which we thank the great University Presses. Publishers will not publish them. Yet they must be published. Our scholars could not work, our unlettered evangelists could not preach, unless these books were published. For it is this book and the like of it that give us the Bible we use, and we cannot preach without a reliable Bible. The volume needs not criticism or comment, nothing but the simple record of its contents, and the renewed appeal to all textual students to neglect it not. These are its contents: - (1) A Description of the Codices collated; (2) A Short Account of the Early Editions collated; (3) Collation of Cod. Ev. 556; (4) Collation of Gospels in Codd. b c d e f j, and leading Editions; (5) Collation of Apocalypse in Codd. e f δ; (6) Palimpsest of the LXX. from Cod. B.-C. iii. 46.

THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHER'S BIBLE MANUAL. BY REV. ROBERT HUNTER, M.A., LL.D., F.G.S. (*Cassell*. Post 8vo, pp. 764.) Sunday-school teachers have had nothing to work upon for many a year and day but Sir William Smith's smaller *Bible Dictionary*. Now five "Smaller Bible Dictionaries" have been issued all at once. Dr. Hunter's is the largest of the five, that much by way of comparison is inevitable and easy. Whether it is the best depends upon

the Sunday-school teacher. But it is the work of a scholar, and very carefully compiled. No teacher will be wrong with it. That also it is easy to say. The publishers have got it up well, producing some good maps, including one large pocket map of the Holy Land, and they have issued it at a most reasonable price.

THE GOOD-NEWS AFTER MARCUS' TELLING. BY THE REV. H. C. LEONARD, M.A. (*James Clarke & Co.*. Fcap. 8vo, pp. xi, 95.) *The Good-News after Marcus'-Telling* is not so familiar as *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, but it ought to be more intelligible. For its words are our own, and need no translation, mental or spoken. And as is the title, so is the whole book. It is a literal translation of the Anglo-Saxon version of St. Mark's Gospel. Its uses are many. First it tells us what our fathers read as this Gospel nigh on five centuries. Next it suggests new meanings in the old gospel even to us. And finally it makes the gospel homelier, gathers it closer round the hearthstone for us. "No man seweth a new patch on an old robe, else he taketh away the new patch from the old robe, and there is more slitting," is a sentence as it came. This is the second edition of the book, and it is still more Saxon in its English than the first.

A MODERN HERETIC. (*James Clarke & Co.* Crown 8vo, pp. 335.) It is "a novel