

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

'Worship' and 'Obeisance' in the Bible.

EVERY resident in the East, I presume, is perfectly familiar with the sight of one native prostrating himself before another, either in begging a favour, or doing homage, or from some such cause. Also, there is the common sight of a native prostrating himself before an image in some heathen temple. Now the prostration of, say, a very low caste man before a native chief is precisely similar in appearance to the prostration before an image. Indeed, even in the vernacular tongue, the same verb may be used of both actions. And so in English. In Ceylon, we always refer to the act of prostration as 'worshipping.' Thus, I have often been 'worshipped,' especially in the interior villages. For the past three or four years I have been struck by the inaptness of the term 'worship,' when applied to homage paid by an inferior to a superior, and where there is no thought of divinity. This led me to look up both 'worship' and 'obeisance' in the Concordance. The results, though somewhat meagre, were interesting. The word 'obeisance' appears to occur nine times in the O.T., but nowhere in the N.T. In each case it is a translation of שָׁחָה, which might be rendered 'bow oneself down,' or 'prostrate oneself.' In each of the above cases, the action expressed is that of homage done by an inferior to a superior, and therefore the use of the word 'obeisance' seems to accord perfectly with Oriental custom, and to give the correct sense.

On looking up the word 'worship,' I found that שָׁחָה was translated by that word ninety-six times. In each case, it was a matter of prostration before a deity, and therefore, it would seem, quite correct.

But in Dn 2⁴⁶ 'worship' is used to render the meaning of סָבַד. Is this the best translation possible? I submit that 'obeisance' would have been far better. Not only is it manifest to an Oriental that 'obeisance' is the action intended, but it would seem to be the necessary result of comparing Dn 2⁴⁶ with the nine places where 'obeisance' is the translation of שָׁחָה [Gn 37^{7, 9} 43²⁸, Ex 18⁷, 2 S 1² 14⁴ 15⁵, 1 K 1¹⁶, 2 Ch 24¹⁷], Surely, if the subject does only 'obeisance' to the king, the king is hardly likely to 'worship' the subject, even though a prophet.

Turning to the N.T., the Concordance refers to fifty-seven places where προσκυνέω is rendered 'worship.' προσκυνέω, like שָׁחָה, may refer either to homage paid by an inferior to a superior, or to worship offered by man to deity. It seemed to me that, including some cases which might be queried, there were forty-eight instances of προσκυνέω being used in reference to divinity, and therefore rightly translated 'worship.' But it seemed no less certain that there were nine instances (some few of which perhaps might be queried) where no worship was intended, but merely homage. Such were Mt 2² 8. 11 8² 9¹⁸ 15²⁵ 18²⁶ 20²⁰, and Mk 15¹⁹. I would suggest that if such be the case, the word 'obeisance' should be substituted for what appears to be a misleading term—'worship.'

I should be very grateful, if some reader, much more qualified to judge than I, and, of course, familiar with Oriental customs, would pass an opinion on the translation of Dn 2¹⁶, and the nine cases in the N.T. quoted above. It certainly seems to me that 'obeisance' would give a far truer idea of the *intention* of the 'worshipper.'

A. M. WALMSLEY.

Cotta, Ceylon.

Entre Nous.

New Poetry.

Michael Field.

Michael Field's new book is called *Mystic Trees* (Eveleigh Nash; 5s. net). It is the book of a good-hearted Roman Catholic. Mary is much remembered. It is also the book of a human-hearted poet. God is remembered, and Jesus Christ, and the sins of men. Michael Field's 'sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought,' but the sadness is always touched with sympathy. Take this, one of the shortest in the new book—

ARIDITY.

O soul, canst thou not understand
Thou are not left alone,
As a dog to howl and moan
His master's absence? Thou art as a book,
A book of His dear choice,
That quiet waiteth for His Hand,
That quiet waiteth for His Eye,
That quiet waiteth for His Voice.

Alice Meynell.

Poems, by Alice Meynell (Burns & Oates; 5s. net)—that is the title-page. They are all here, all

she has written. They are here in all the beauty of thick white paper and pale blue binding, a book outwardly almost as artistic as the poems contained in it.

But *are* Alice Meynell's poems artistic? The surprise is so frequent that art seems the only explanation. And yet they *come*, without effort, without will, without work. We hear of a whole silent winter and then one little poem, its late and solitary product. So the subtlety of the thought, the surprise of its penetration and its pleasure, may all be due to the gift. This, for instance: is it the exposition of the baptism of Jesus and His atonement in one? He who knew no sin, was He so identified with us that He could be forgiven?

VENI CREATOR.

So humble things Thou hast borne for us, O God,
Left'st Thou a path of lowliness untrod?
Yes, one, till now; another Olive-Garden.
For we endure the tender pain of pardon,—
One with another we forbear. Give heed,
Look at the mournful world Thou hast decreed.
The time has come. At last we hapless men
Know all our haplessness all through. Come,
then,

Endure undreamed humility: Lord of Heaven,
Come to our ignorant hearts and be forgiven.

Wilfrid Meynell.

There is a volume of poems this month by the husband of Alice Meynell. It is called *Verses and Reverses* (Herbert & Daniel; 1s. net). It contains a poem on Christina Rossetti, which ends in this way:

There's one who shall beside you shine,
By right of song, that's right divine—
Your singing sister, wife of mine.
So I this kinship dare to draw,
And register in courts above—
That I your brother am in law
Who more than brother am in love.

There is playfulness in many of the poems, and even punning in some. There is always poetry. Here is one. The story is that Mendelssohn wrote from Rome to his brothers and sisters at home begging them to be considerate with their father. He said that after much irritation, he himself had found that he might speak a great deal of truth and yet avoid the particular truth obnoxious to his father, and then all went well.

The happy Maestro Mendelssohn
One Harmony essayed,
Of all his works the least that's known,
Yet loveliest to be played!

His Songs, and Songs that have no words,
His Night Dream's Overture,
The gentle melody of the Lord's
Elijah,—these endure:

Men worship him for such:
But I—I, rather,
That he, with filial touch,
Composed—his Father!

Roger Heath.

Beginnings, by Roger Heath (Blackwell; 1s. net). The chief attraction is the command of rhythm. The ear is daring sometimes but does not miss. There is also thought, even earnest longing for light that sometimes comes very near to anguish. Take one of the sonnets:

Thus said Theognis:—'There are thoughts that dwell

Within us, thoughts with many-coloured wings,
That make lament for life and human things.'
That surely was a heavenly grain that fell
Among the seed of perishable rhyme;
And many men of after years who light
Upon that starry saying, glittering bright
Across the arid wilderness of time,
Shall clean forget the hard old oligarch,
His bitter words and galling poverty,
And the long reaches of the years that roll
Between his life and ours: and only see
A gleam of beauty kindled in the dark,
The sudden flicker of a kindred soul.

John Spencer Muirhead.

The most memorable poem in Mr. John Spencer Muirhead's volume, *The Quiet Spirit* (Blackwell; 2s. 6d. net), is not 'The Quiet Spirit' itself, which is the last in the book, but the one before that which is entitled 'Pilate.' It is, however, far too long to quote, and for sample this must serve:

'Jealous and loving troubled ways
Our God is,' the old writer says:
And when men's eyes do waken me
This thought broods through my narrow days:

But when I walk alone and see
 The rich earth's gracious symmetry—
 Like happy scholar in whose gaze
 Blossoms the subtly-tempered phrase—
 I know that all in each degree
 Worketh one beautiful decree,
 That cold of Marches, rain of Mays
 Must travail ere the Summers be.

Gilbert Thomas.

The Wayside Altar, by Gilbert Thomas (Chapman & Hall; 2s. 6d. net), is not an easily quoted book of verse. And yet if it were, it would serve our purpose better than most; for the verse is often poetry, and it is always spiritually in earnest. One is short and fairly representative. It is called

WATER AND WINE.

Fear not to drink the bitter cup
 Life offers to thy lips;
 For he who bravely takes it up
 Shall find that, while he sips,
 The God who made blind eyes to burn
 With light, in olden days,
 Affliction's water still shall turn
 Into the wine of praise.

W. G. Tarrant.

The Rev. W. G. Tarrant has gathered his occasional verses together and published them under the title of *Songs Devout* (Lindsey Press; 2s. net). They are mostly hymns, the sentiment presiding over the lyric art. Often, however, breadth of thought is equally wedded to charm of expression. Let us quote the last poem in the book:

RESTING.

Now to him who knoweth best
 Bring we all our cares and rest;
 From our wanderings gathered in,
 From the world, the strife, the sin,
 Sweet it is to rest awhile
 Safe beneath our Father's smile.

Unto him who guardeth best
 Bring we all our fears and rest;
 All around us and above
 Watcheth his eternal Love,
 Love that perfect vigil keeps,
 Never slumbers, never sleeps.

So to him who loveth best
 Bring we all our hopes and rest;
 Greater joys hath he in store
 Than our hearts have known before;
 Rest we then in peace and faith
 Safe with him in life and death.

The Great Text Commentary.

The best illustration this month has been found by

Illustrations of the Great Text for August must be received by the 1st of July. The text is Ps 31¹⁵.

The Great Text for September is Ac 11²⁴—'For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.' A copy of Sanday's *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, or of any volume of the 'Scholar as Preacher' series, will be given for the best illustration sent.

The Great Text for October is Lk 14¹⁸—'And they all with one consent began to make excuse.' A copy of Strahan's *The Book of Job*, or of any volume of the Great Texts of the Bible, will be given for the best illustration sent.

The Great Text for November is Ph 4¹³—'I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.' A copy of Dean's *Visions and Revelations*, or of Coats's *Types of English Piety*, or of Clifford's *Gospel of Gladness*, will be given for the best illustration sent.

The Great Text for December is Ro 11³³—'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past tracing out!' A copy of Strahan's *The Book of Job Interpreted*, or Burkitt's *Gospel History and its Transmission*, will be given for the best illustration sent.

Those who send illustrations should at the same time name the books they wish sent them if successful. More than one illustration may be sent by one person for the same text. Illustrations to be sent to the Editor, Kings Gate, Aberdeen, Scotland.

Printed by MORRISON & GIBB LIMITED, Tanfield Works, and Published by T. & T. CLARK, 38 George Street, Edinburgh. It is requested that all literary communications be addressed to THE EDITOR, Kings Gate, Aberdeen, Scotland.