

# 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](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php)

pdfs are named: [Volume]\_[Issue]\_[1<sup>st</sup> page of article].pdf

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

---

## Notes of Recent Exposition.

WE move so rapidly that the controversy which arose over the alternative 'Jesus or Christ' is already forgotten. It came to nothing. And the reason why it came to nothing, and has already passed into oblivion, is that the disputants had no common ground to stand on.

To the one side the historical Jesus was a fact and the ecclesiastical Christ a fiction. To the other both were facts, but the historical Jesus was incomparably the lesser fact of the two. The one side found the man Jesus susceptible of scientific verification, the Christ of God was no more than a pious invention. To the other the Christ of God was the life of their life.

The two sides to the controversy could not come in sight of one another. Why could they not? Because 'no man can say Jesus is Lord but in the Holy Spirit.'

Is it possible to translate that sentence into modern thought? It does not stand alone. 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' Jesus Himself said that. And St. Paul said, 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them because they are spiritually dis-

cerned.' Such sayings as these are rarely disputed; but they are more rarely accepted. Is it possible so to explain their meaning that the modern man, even he who is wise and prudent and not a babe in Christ, may see their truth and the force of it?

The attempt has been made by two men in two books which have come into our hands together. One of these books—it is entitled *Paul and the Revolt against Him* (Griffith & Rowland; \$1 net)—has been written by an American author, William Cleaver WILKINSON. He is concerned with St. Paul. His desire is to rescue the Apostle from the hands of those who charge him with misapprehension of the gospel of Christ. This he seeks to do by showing that St. Paul had two different classes of persons to address. To the one he could speak only of the outward facts of the life of Christ. To the other he could make known the mystery of His gospel. And as he had to do chiefly with the latter class, it was inevitable that his teaching should seem more doctrinal and less historical than are the contents of the Gospels.

He had two classes to address, says Mr. WILKINSON. The one class had not yet come under the obedience of Christ. They were therefore capable of appreciating only facts of history. To them he spoke of 'Jesus and the resurrec-

tion.' The other class had 'obeyed the gospel.' To them therefore he could speak of the Atonement.

The doctrine of the Atonement is interwoven in the whole warp and woof of St. Paul's epistolary writing. Yet Mr. WILKINSON believes that it was a doctrine which the Apostle imparted to believers only. For 'it is a doctrine which cannot, by any ingenuity, or any eloquence, of presentation, be commended to the natural reason of men. There must first be the obedient heart, before a mystery of grace like the atonement can be with hope proposed to human acceptance. The resurrection of Christ, on the contrary, was an historical fact capable of being adequately attested. Paul accordingly at Athens preached Jesus *and the resurrection.*'

There is a difference in the very way in which St. Paul advocated the truths he preached. When the truth was one of external fact, such as the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, he established it by appeal to fact, and especially to the testimony of its witnesses. But when the truth was one of fellowship, when it could be apprehended only by those who had already accepted Jesus as Lord, he did not argue about it at all; he simply stated it, or at the most appealed to the Old Testament to confirm it.

Observe the word 'fellowship.' And with that word turn to the other book. It is the 'Fernley Lecture' for 1914. Its author is the Rev. William BRADFIELD, B.A. It is the work of a man of ability, and of that unconscious originality which gives the rarest charm to writing.

Now the title of Mr. BRADFIELD's lecture is *Personality and Fellowship* (Kelly; 3s. 6d.). And at one place in it he shows that facts of science and facts of fellowship are altogether different. So different are they that the knowledge of the one is different from the knowledge of the other. Two distinct kinds of knowledge are involved, the one a knowledge of things, which belongs to

science, the other a knowledge of persons, which belongs to art and philosophy and religion.

They are two distinct kinds of knowledge. You may possess the one and be utterly unconscious of the other. So unconscious of the other may you be that you will deny its existence. And yet those who possess that knowledge which belongs to art and philosophy and religion are far more certain of it than those who possess scientific knowledge. For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit; they are foolishness to him. It is the old text in a very modern and up-to-date translation.

The difference is between the knowledge of things and the knowledge of persons. Now any one with ordinary sense endowments can know things. He can know things as things and in their relation to other things. He can know sequences. He can know the facts of history. But if he is to know persons he must get into fellowship with them. And that involves self-denial, self-surrender, obedience in some form or other, with the result that the new knowledge is totally different from the old.

And if a man is to know God he must get into fellowship with Him. That is attained by faith, to use the old word. It is attained by obedience, to use a word with a rather more modern ring. Obedience is a good word. The faith that knows God is 'the obedience of faith.' It is the surrender of the human will—not its annihilation, or its mutilation, but its surrender; a willing act, and glad enough when made. It is an act which is recognized as the entrance into that 'large place' in which the whole personality has room at last to realize itself.

Now one striking thing about this knowledge of persons, and especially this knowledge of the personal God, is that it is surer far than is the knowledge of things. And that not at all because it is emotional. The discovery of a scientific fact

may be almost as emotional as the discovery of a person. But the things which science has to do with are purely passive. They make no response to their discoverer. They take everything and give nothing. The discovery of a person is a response, which in proportion as it gives again increases the confidence in the discovery. And when the return is at its highest, as in the discovery of God; when God, making response to the obedience of faith, gives Himself in the Spirit to the believer, the assurance is so great that the believer says, 'I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.'

---

An important volume of essays by Methodist scholars has just been published. Edited by Professor W. T. DAVISON of Richmond College, its contributors are Professors G. G. FINDLAY, Wilfrid MOULTON, and J. S. BANKS, of Headingley College; Professors W. W. HOLDSWORTH and Frederic PLATT, of Handsworth College; Professor Hope MOULTON of Didsbury; Professor H. BISSEKER, as well as the editor himself, of Richmond; and besides these tutors in the theological colleges, Dr. J. Scott LIDGETT, Principal Herbert B. WORKMAN, Dr. H. Maldwyn HUGHES, and Mr. F. L. WISEMAN.

---

The title of the book is *The Chief Corner-stone* (Kelly; 5s. net). And in accordance with that title every essay in it has to do directly with the Lord Jesus Christ. But it so happens that just at the present moment it is not the Person of Christ or His authority that is occupying our minds; it is not His revelation of the Fatherhood, or His atoning work; it is not even the evidential value of Christian experience; it is the significance of the supernatural. And to that essay, written by Professor Frederic PLATT, we wish to direct particular attention for a little.

---

For Professor SANDAY of Oxford has this way

with him—he has had it all his life—that when he publishes a new book or even a pamphlet, we lay aside all our other books to read it; and when we have read it, all other subjects of thought fall behind it in interest. Dr. SANDAY has been writing about the supernatural. Whatever has led him to his present position—as we have elsewhere said, it is not altogether the study of the Gospels but partly also the influence of that scientific outlook upon things which is so hard to escape in our day—whatever has led Dr. SANDAY to doubt or deny the miracles in the New Testament, he has compelled us at any rate to look once more into the fundamental matter of God's ways of working in the world, so that we may see whether we must after all come to Professor HUXLEY's conclusion that 'miracles do not occur.'

---

There is no issue more momentous, for it gives or takes away Christ. And there is none that touches us so pathetically. 'When we meditate upon the ways of Providence, are we touching a Father's guiding hand, or only studying the changeless perfection of a ceaseless mechanism of material forces? Do our prayers reach God, and move the Hand that moves the world, or do they only return to quiet our hearts into acquiescence with the reasonableness of "this dance of plastic circumstance" in which we are encircled?'

---

In his answer to the Bishop of Oxford, Dr. SANDAY distinguishes that which is contrary to nature from that which is above it. And Canon Scott HOLLAND replies 'Quite right!' But he does not see that there is any salvation in the distinction. Who would ask for anything against nature? The very idea of a miracle, to be of any argumentative value, depends on its being the effect of an adequate and reasonable cause. It has a 'nature' in accordance with which it has happened. Otherwise, he says, it would convey nothing to us. It would be a mere freak from which no conclusions of any kind could be drawn.

---

Whereupon we reach the central question at

once. What is nature? And that is the question to which Mr. PLATT addresses himself. If nature is a purely mechanical system, everything that disturbs that system is 'contrary' to it; and miracle of any kind is impossible. But if nature is the sphere of the immanent activity of God; if it is not a closed system; if its energies and laws are not ultimate realities, which bind the universe into a perfected causal nexus; if they are simply modes of the Divine activity, the form of God's self-expression—then there is nothing that is contrary to nature, unless it is also contrary to God. Now, with the arguable exception of the cursing of the figtree and the drowning of the swine, there is no miracle of all that are recorded in the Gospels that is out of keeping with the character of Christ, which is the character of God. There is therefore no miracle that is contrary to nature, and the distinction between contrary to and above nature falls to the ground.

That is why we say that the fundamental problem at present is the problem of the supernatural. And that is why we say that Professor PLATT's is the central essay in this altogether timely volume. Give us first of all a God. Give us next a God who is always with us, who, in the words of Jesus 'is at work even up till now.' Any event that is in accordance with the nature of God is then in accordance with the nature of things. And miracles happen every day.

They happen every day, and therefore inconspicuously. But give us, as last request, a Person so in touch with God as Jesus, so sincere in prayer, so surrendered in will, and wielding, through these things even if not otherwise, the power of God in the earth, and then we shall surely experience the unexpected, and say 'What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?'

Professor SANDAY's letter to Bishop GORE has called forth many comments. But there has been

nothing better than the notes which Canon Scott HOLLAND has written in *The Commonwealth*.

Of Dr. SANDAY he says the right things. 'He is the last man to accuse of rashness, or haste, or lack of feeling for others. Very slowly, very deliberately, very carefully, he has moved from point to point. And, then, his whole being is steeped in the Spirit. He lives very near to God. He is blessed with a most winning simplicity of soul, and a most tender humility. He is devout, gentle, saintly. He has served his Master so long and so loyally. He has consecrated all his gifts to this supreme service. He has won the honour and love of all who have the joy of knowing him.'

He says the right things also about the Resurrection. 'Christianity springs out of the Resurrection. It is unintelligible, unless its origin and momentum are found in the Risen Lord. The mere life failed to create a religion. It proved unable to establish a Faith that survived the death of Christ. It offered no final solution of the mystery of life. Rather, it deepened its trouble and its perplexity. The Christ had not entered on the life which makes Him our salvation until after the Cross and Passion—until Death had set His powers free—until He was seen and known as alive from the Dead.'

Then he comes to the evidence. For it is upon the evidence, or the lack of it, that Professor SANDAY relies. He may be more under the influence of philosophical theory or scientific dogma than he is aware of. We are all under these influences. We are more affected by them than we ever recognize. For they are the very tools with which our fellows work. And if men eminent in Science or Philosophy simply shut their mind to the entrance of anything that can in any sense be called miraculous, and do all their work without it, who can escape the infection?

Still Dr. SANDAY is moved by the evidence. It is on the Gospels themselves that he has done his

work. No man in our time has been more than Dr. SANDAY the ideal Gospel student. And it is because he finds the evidence on behalf of the miracles in the Gospels crumbling in his hands that he ranges himself beside the Modernists and doubts the fact of the Virgin Birth and even the bodily resurrection from the dead. So Canon Scott HOLLAND comes to the evidence.

And the moment he comes to a consideration of the evidence for the miracles in the Gospels we see how impossible it is to separate the historical evidence from our own selves. It cannot be taken by itself. It is there to be estimated by the mind, and the eye of the mind in one man is not the eye of the mind in another. Dr. SANDAY lays strong emphasis upon the ease with which myth and legend grow up round the name of one who has greatly impressed himself upon the imagination. Not only does a mythology easily attach itself to a powerful personality, but it grows round such a personality very rapidly. Dr. Scott HOLLAND admits it. But when he turns to the personalities of the Old Testament and the New, what he is struck with is the circumstance that in Israel this tendency was steadily and successfully held in check.

The very distinction of the Old Testament is that it moves away from myth and throws legend behind it. The religion of the Old Testament begins much as other religions begin. But 'its salient assertion is that God comes out in the act, that God is actually alive in history, that He really does things which abide, and that sheer and unmitigated fact is the material of revelation.' The prophets are entirely free from the legendary tendency. No myths gathered round the names of Isaiah or Jeremiah or Ezekiel. Yet these were the great teachers in Israel. Their lives were momentous enough. They touched the popular imagination.

And the New Testament itself contains the most striking example of all, 'There hath not

arisen a greater prophet' than John. He kindled the wonder of the people as no one born of woman had ever done before. He shook the heart of the nation to its depths, so that all men were doubting whether human spiritual power could ever go beyond his, and were musing in their hearts whether he were not indeed the consummation of the human race, the Christ. Yet 'John did no miracle.' He came and went without gathering round him any mythical tales or leaving behind him the record of a single miraculous act.

Jesus did many mighty works. The contrast is most pronounced. How is it to be explained, except by the fact? It is not to be overlooked that the miracles of Jesus are by no means made much of in the earliest Church. No stress whatever is laid upon wonders in the early chapters of the Acts, or in the first of the Epistles. We are continually being told that St. Paul knew nothing, and cared nothing, about the earthly life of the Master. 'He certainly never evokes its effect: or appeals to its evidence: or troubles his argument with it at all. He concentrates his whole attention on the Death and on what followed Death. Nothing is made, anywhere, of the mighty works as wonders: they only come in at all, as normal and natural and historical and obvious elements in the memory of what He actually was. They belong, simply, to the record of how He went about doing good. They are remembered, so far as they are recorded at all, just as they appear in the Gospel story, as the necessary expression of His presence, the immediate manifestation of His character, the result of His being what He was. So it was said of the supreme, essential miracle of all. He was raised, just because He, being what He was, sinless and pure, could not be holden of death.'

It seems to Dr. SANDAY that some of the miracles in the Gospels were suggested by certain prophecies in the Old Testament. To Professor Scott HOLLAND the evidence looks all the other

way. 'The more closely it is looked at, the more certain it becomes that it is not the prophecies which suggest the facts, but the facts which select and extract the prophecies.' Why was one prophecy taken and another left? And why especially were the obvious and well-known prophecies ignored while obscure out-of-the-way and forgotten prophecies were brought into the light? Professor Scott HOLLAND believes that there is no explanation of this strange circumstance but the explanation that the facts were there first. The believer was puzzled and disconcerted by them. Then a passage from the Old Testament flashed upon him, drawn forward by some curious analogy with the fact. He saw that what troubled him had been allowed for in the Divine foresight and his mind was relieved.

In this way Canon Scott HOLLAND would explain the use of prophecy in the early chapters of St. Matthew. He gives an example. What could have reminded the evangelist of the words in Hosea, 'Out of Egypt have I called my son'? It is not a prophecy at all. It looks back to the past. It has nothing to do with the Messiah to come. But if the real Messiah had gone down into Egypt, this might disturb the loyalty of a Jew, until he remembered that God of old had called up Israel out of that very place and had loved him when he was there in hiding.

Again, there is no explanation of such a saying as 'In Rama was a voice heard' being used of the massacre of the innocents if no such massacre occurred. How could the words suggest the deed? We can understand how the deed might recall the words. 'It is only conceivable that it should be brought in out of interest in a fact which had happened and which recalls something so entirely different as the event now remembered.'

Once more, and more remarkable still, there is the Virgin prophecy in Isaiah which by Dr. SANDAY and others is taken as the probable

source of the myth of the Virgin Birth. But the prophecy attracted no attention. It was never understood to be Messianic, or to have the least reference to the Messiah. The very word does not mean 'virgin,' but any young unmarried woman, any woman not yet married, but who, it was understood, would be married and bear a son. How could such a prophecy suggest the Virgin Birth? Again, says Canon Scott HOLLAND, 'it was not the prophecy which suggested the Virgin Birth, but the belief in the Virgin Birth which imposed its meaning on the prophecy.'

And when we pass from the Virgin Birth to the Resurrection, the argument is all the same way. The minds of Christ's disciples, we are told, were charged, by the tales of Enoch or of Elijah, with anticipations that would naturally take shape either in Resurrection or Ascension. But what are the facts? We have only the Gospels to go by, and the Gospels tell us unmistakably that the disciples had no anticipation whatever of a Resurrection or an Ascension. And even if they had had such an anticipation, how could the translation of Enoch or of Elijah have suggested it? Enoch simply vanished. 'He was not: for God took him.' Elijah passed out of sight, and with him 'all the fighting force of Israel' seemed to disappear. But the Gospel of the Ascension, says Canon Scott HOLLAND—and here at least his argument is unassailable—'the Gospel of the Ascension is the news of a great Arrival. Jesus goes only to come: to come as He had never come before: to come to take His power and reign: to come in all the fulness of His victory, to overcome the World, to possess the Earth, to build a City, to create a Body, a Church, the organ of the force of the Living God made operative here among men. The Ascension is not the End, but the Beginning. That is its whole vital value. There is not one single tale or picture, one phrase or syllable, from cover to cover of the Old Testament, that even remotely suggests such a conception as this. It is absolutely and utterly novel.'