

THE CHURCHMAN

August, 1911.

The Month.

Miracles. A FEW weeks ago Professor Sanday preached a sermon before the University of Cambridge on the subject of miracles, and to that sermon he prefixed a most searching criticism of a recently-issued book on the subject by a member of his own University, the Rev. J. M. Thompson, Dean of Divinity at Magdalen. Professor Sanday is always kindly and considerate, and the strength of his language on this occasion was consequently all the more impressive. Professor Sanday has always shown gentleness to what has been called a reduced Christianity, but unless we wholly misunderstand Mr. Thompson's book, it is not the effort of a man who is feeling after a full faith, but of one who is definitely breaking away from that faith.

Mr. Thompson's Account of Them. Mr. Thompson does not deny the possibility of miracles; he accepts the dictionary definition of a miracle as "A marvellous event occurring within human experience, which cannot have been brought about by human power or by the operation of any natural agency." He then investigates the Gospel miracles, grouping them in three classes: visions, cures, and wonders. He finds no difficulty in the first two groups. 'They can be explained, or explained away, by religious psychology and by faith-healing. By wonders he means such miracles as The Changing of the Water into Wine or The Feeding of the Five Thousand. These events

are either true miracles or they never happened. The alternative that he chooses is that they never happened. The stories are either untrue, or they are parables materialized into history, or much simpler events exaggerated into wonders.

The Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. Mr. Thompson sees quite clearly—no one can help seeing—that the two greatest miracles must come into the discussion, the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection. If natural laws are strictly universal, these miracles must go with the rest. Mr. Thompson allows the Virgin Birth to go; he believes the evidence is not sufficient to warrant acceptance, and, moreover, as a miracle he examines it, and as a miracle he dismisses it. With regard to the Resurrection he has a greater difficulty, for he is anxious to retain his belief in the Divinity of Christ. If Christ did not rise, He is not Divine, and so, although he regards the evidence for the empty tomb as insufficient, although he does not believe that Christ's Body was raised from death, yet he does believe that Christ is alive, and appeared twice at least to His Apostles.

The Divinity of Christ. He goes further: he believes that our acceptance of miracles has been the chief bar to the right view and proper acceptance of the Divinity of Christ. But his notion of Divinity is curious: he believes that it was always part of God's nature that He should be made man, and that man was always incomplete until Christ came. "The Incarnation is the inevitable meeting of two natures meant for intercommunion. Without it both must remain comparatively unfruitful and unintelligible . . . the complete mediation of God by man is the essence of the Christian Incarnation. And it is only by the rejection of miracles that this doctrine can come to its full rights."

The Need for Reply. We are not quite sure that we understand Mr. Thompson, but we would venture to ask him to examine his position afresh; to consider first of all whether it be true, and, secondly, whether it be consistent

with the acceptance of the Christian Creed. We know that miracles have sometimes made difficulties because they have been regarded as unnatural. We know that it is not wise to use them as proofs of every theological position. But if we are assured, as apparently Mr. Thompson is, and we most certainly are, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Incarnate Son of God, then miracles are certainly not unnatural, they are not even strictly supernatural, but with Him they are entirely and fully natural.

We must not go further; the whole book must be read, and presently it must be answered at length. Professor Sanday has already supplied the line of the answer. But we do feel that we cannot allow the position which Mr. Thompson claims to take to pass without vigorous protest. We venture to print his final conclusion, the limiting clauses of which we emphatically decline to accept.

We may end by thus formulating the hypothesis to which we have been led: Though no miracles accompanied His entry into, or presence in, or departure from the world; though He did not think, or speak, or act otherwise than as a man; though He yields nothing to historical analysis but human elements, yet in Jesus Christ God is Incarnate, discovered and worshipped, as God alone can be, by the insight of faith.

At the recent meeting of the Upper House of
 Convocation two seriously important resolutions were
 agreed to; they were as follows:

The
 Ornaments
 Rubric.

1. "That this House, holding that in the present circumstances of the Church of England it is not desirable (1) that any alteration should be made in the terms of the Ornaments Rubric, or (2) that either of the two existing usages as regards the vesture of the Minister at the Holy Communion (other than the use of the Cope as ordered by Canon 24) should in all cases be excluded from the public worship of the Church, declares its opinion that, by whatsoever process may be hereafter recommended by this House, provision shall be made to authorize, under specified conditions and with due safeguards, a diversity of use."

2. "And it is hereby explicitly declared that by this resolution no sanction is intended to be given to any doctrine other than what is set forth in the Prayer-Book and Articles of the Church of England."

The second was agreed to without difficulty or hesitation. The first gave rise to considerable discussion, mainly due to the

fact that in the form first presented to Convocation the reference to the present rubric did not occur. The Bishop of Birmingham was evidently anxious that the resolution should not imply acceptance of the interpretation of that rubric declared by the highest available court to be the true one. The Archbishop of Canterbury was willing to vote for the resolution, but regarded the reference to the rubric as eminently unsatisfactory, only accepting it because of the apparent impossibility of framing a new one. Convocation has at last begun to see that Prayer-Book revision cannot be carried out by four independent committees, and an effort at co-operation is to be made. In all connections, especially in this particular one, we are glad of it. Admitting, simply for the sake of argument, that there is a doubt as to the illegality of vestments, there are still two important facts to face—firstly, that vestments have been declared illegal by the highest and best available tribunal ; secondly, that those who wear them almost universally combine with them other practices which are undoubtedly illegal and in themselves utterly objectionable. Speaking for ourselves, we believe in order and discipline and authority. If the first recommendation of the Royal Commission were immediately carried into effect, and the practices mentioned therein made to cease, and if the second resolution quoted above was universally and unequivocally accepted, we might be prepared to consider the Bishop's first resolution. But until then we shall feel bound, as Churchmen to whom our catholic and primitive heritage is inestimably precious, to oppose with all our strength the legalization of the vestments. Lord Halifax's recent speech has given to Evangelicals the not very polite hint that we are unwanted in the Church of England. Neither he nor his party will frighten us away. Our position and our rights are irrefragable. We shall remain in the Church of England, as the truest exponents of her faith and practice, and although it is our last wish that anyone should be compelled to depart, we will not barter away, in the interests of medievalism or of Rome, the heritage of our fathers.

The Study
of the Fourth
Gospel.

We note with thankfulness that our contemporary, the *Record*, is announcing a new Bible study class scheme for next winter. The subject chosen, "The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel," is timely and of first importance. There is abundance of material in the way of inexpensive books of reference for those who desire to enter upon a critical and devotional study of the Gospel. The result of such associated work throughout a parish will more than repay the cost involved in leadership. We heartily commend the project as an aid to those clergy who would fain see their people led into intelligent understanding and thoughtful use of the Bible. New life for many a Bible class is proffered in this scheme. Ample testimony has been borne as to the value—especially amongst men—of the parallel study of St. Mark's Gospel last winter. Preliminary papers will appear in the *Record* in September ; the issue of the weekly Outlines for study is announced to begin in the first week of October.

Holiday
Recreation.

The holiday month is in some senses the most important of the year. In it is cleared a space for things left out in daily life. Man in his corporate being is a unity, and needs to be "preserved entire." With most of us work tends to develop some sides of our nature unduly, at the cost of suppressing the rest. This our holiday should be framed to readjust. A body cramped by the comparative inaction of a sedentary life, or wearied by the toil of daily routine, may react towards strenuous exercise in rock-climb or on snow-peak ; it may brave the bracing solitude of a Scottish moor, contemplative days by an Irish trout-stream, competitive rounds on some breezy golf-links, or the peaceful relaxation of long hours on sandy beach, or in country garden or cornfield, shared by dear ones for whom working life leaves scanty time. Thus the body, through which we express our inmost being, is renewed. From September to July some of us unduly, though perhaps at times inevitably misuse it ; in

August it has a right to reverent and disciplined care. Many a parish suffers for a twelvemonth because the bodily aspect of his summer holiday escaped the vicar's thought.

Mental Recreation. The mental aspect of the holiday month is of equal importance. Most of us are driven for the greater part of the year by sheer necessity to use our minds within a very limited area. To read and think adequately on the lines of our actual work is an ideal of which we fall far short. Yet, did we even attain it, our minds would still lack the warmth which is generated by many sympathies, the breadth which comes from widened outlook, the freshness which permeates a mind set foursquare, open to all the varied winds of heaven. Still worse, we should miss our chance of making contacts with scores of men and women round us whose mental lines do not converge towards our own. Here the summer holiday gives space for things left out. The disciplined leisure allows a man opportunity for the other side of his mind—the development of dormant faculties, the expansion of cramped tastes, the release of imprisoned interests, in a word, for the healthiest of all equestrian exercise—that upon a mental “hobby” horse.

Spiritual Recreation. The best gain of a true holiday lies in the region of the spirit. The keeping of others' vineyards is apt to affect the keeping of our own. Through Nature and in solitude God is wont to draw near, as Light and as Life. At a distance from the stress and conflict of work true proportions appear. For eleven months, it may be, we have faced the shortcomings of others; in this twelfth month we face our own. But penitence for the shallow depth of our cisterns is merged in joy at the unfailing supply from the hills of God. We turn from the strenuous *giving* of daily service to a quiet *receiving* from His fresh springs. There is intake in preparation for the winter's outflow.

Holiday
Reading.

Holidays separate some men from their books. For others they offer access to a better library. For the latter we venture to suggest, if opportunity offers, a fresh study of the first Christian century. Notwithstanding the fragmentary nature of the ancient records, their period is unrivalled for wealth of incident, rapid development of thought, and agelong significance. It is a time when Jew and Greek and Roman are thrown into varying combination, when East and West are meeting in the great Ægean ports, when religions of the past are being merged in those of the present, and the Christ of God is rising as the One who fulfils and supersedes them all. During these pregnant years the Church is severed from the Jewish nation (marked by the murder of the Apostle James and the destruction of Jerusalem) and from the Roman world (marked by the Neronian persecutions); the New Testament grows to completion; Christian communities spread from Babylon and Parthia in the East to Gaul and Spain in the West. Books so fascinating as to fall well within the limits of holiday reading abound. Professor Gwatkin's "Early Church History" and Sir W. M. Ramsay's books may specially be named. A sectional study of extreme interest might centre round Ephesus, starting from its wide area of Biblical connection with the Acts, the Apocalypse, and several of the Epistles. This would involve a study of its history, its situation in relation to the great land area routes of the Roman Empire, its trade and commerce; and the tracing of its religious changes, illustrated by the little hill near the railway-station on which stand to-day the ruins of (1) an ancient sacred place of an Asiatic goddess, afterwards identified by the Greeks with their Artemis; (2) a Christian church built by Justinian, and dedicated to St. John the Divine; (3) an exquisite Moslem mosque between the two. All this illustrates the value of Ephesus as a centre in the early spread of Christianity, and by relating the New Testament Scriptures to their setting draws out the significance of their relationship to their own time, and by an easy sequence of thought to the needs and conditions of present-day life.

Such a holiday task would enrich the Bible classes and sermons of the winter.

Bible Study. For the man who makes holiday far from a library and can carry few books, we record the experience of a busy vicar two or three years ago. During a Swiss holiday he read the Bible right through, in historical grouping, noting in his pocket-book the broad impressions left on his mind. The sermon in which he embodied his "findings" made the Bible live again to some who heard. Another excellent suggestion is that the Revised Version New Testament with fuller references should be made a holiday companion this year. To work out carefully all the suggested textual connections of even one Gospel or Epistle would again enrich the winter's work. For those who desire a book which is new, scholarly, inspiring, inexpensive, and light to carry in pocket or knapsack, we cordially commend a book just issued by the Student Christian Movement (93, Chancery Lane), price 1s. 6d., called "Modern Discipleship and What it Means," by the Rev. E. S. Woods. Those who spend their holiday solitudes in meditating on these studies in Christian thought and service will learn to echo the quotation given from old Samuel Rutherford: "Verily, it is a king's life to follow the Lamb."

