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THE GOSPEL FOR PENITENTS; AND CHRIST
WRITING ON THE GROUND.

ST. JOHN vii. 53—viii. 11.

THERE is not a line of the narrative of the Woman taken in Adultery, which is not full of the deepest interest, both historical and moral; and the condition in which we find the narrative in the Original, not only gives room for the most delicate exercise of the critical faculty, but also involves questions of the utmost importance in the appreciation of textual criticism. It is not my object, in the present paper, to re-open the many questions which the narrative suggests, but chiefly to touch upon a single feature of it. In my "Life of Christ"¹ I have endeavoured to set forth the inestimable moral value of the story, and have ventured to express my conviction that, whatever conclusion may be formed on the authenticity and canonical value of the passage, it bears upon its very face unmistakable proof that it preserves for us a true and most precious account of a very memorable incident in our Saviour's history.

The genuineness of the passage — the *pericope adulterae*, as it is technically called — is elaborately examined in many editions of the Gospel of St. John; as, for instance, in Lampe, Lücke, Meyer, Alford, and Wordsworth; and is more or less fully handled by Bishop Ellicott,² Professor Milligan,³ Scrivener,⁴ and McClellan.⁵ The entire tendency of modern criticism has been to abandon the Johannine authorship of the

¹ Vol. ii. pp. 61-73.

² "Historical Lectures," p. 253.

³ "Words of the New Testament," p. 207.

⁴ "Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament," p. 439.

⁵ "The New Testament," p. 719.

passage, and even to remove it from its present place in the Received Text. Calvin, Beza, Grotius, Wetstein, all rejected it; as also do Lachmann, Tregelles, Tischendorf, Lücke, Meyer, Alford, Keim, and Scrivener; and there can be no more decisive proof of the strength of the *diplomatic* evidence against it, than that Bishop Wordsworth, with all his intensely conservative spirit in these matters, says "that it is not to be called a part of canonical Scripture, as the rest of St. John's Gospel is canonical Scripture," although he considers that it may have come *orally* from St. John, and so have been written in the margin, from whence it crept gradually into the text.

But as the latest writer on the subject — Mr. McClellan — has stoutly maintained the genuineness, authenticity, and canonical authority of the passage, perhaps some of our readers, who do not possess the books to which I have referred, may be glad of a simple and rapid summary of the elements on which the question must be decided, before we draw their attention to the special incident of Christ's writing on the ground.

The sources from which the true text of the Greek Testament can alone be derived — for conjectural emendation, except, perhaps, in one single passage,¹ is out of the question—are (1) the Manuscripts, (2) the Ancient Versions, and (3) the early Fathers.

1. Manuscripts are of two classes, *uncial* and *cur-sive*. Uncials are so called from being written in disconnected letters, since regarded as capitals. They

¹ Col. iii. 18, where *κενεμβατεύων*, which has occurred to Dr. Lightfoot and others, is at once suggested by the Homœoteleuton, and has much in its favour. Most attempts at conjectural alteration of the text—*e.g.*, Bentley's suggestion of *πορκείας*, "swine's flesh," for *πορνείας*, in Acts xv. 20—are very unhappy.

range from the fourth to the ninth or tenth century.¹ At this period begin the *cursives*, so called from being written in current hand, with the letters joined together, with spaces between the words, and with the use of punctuation. It might therefore be assumed that the evidence of a cursive manuscript, being so late, could have no value in comparison with that of an uncial. This, however, is not always certain. Some, at least, of the cursives have been copied from manuscripts perhaps as ancient and as valuable as any that we possess, and one or two of them at least are so good and so valuable, that their evidence cannot be entirely rejected.²

2. The most important Ancient Versions are the Peshito-Syriac and the old Latin Version, usually known as the *Vetus Itala*. After these in value, as evidence of the original text, are the Curetonian Syriac, Egyptian, Vulgate, Gothic, Armenian, and Æthiopic.

3. Quotations in the Fathers, though of course liable to the possibilities of variation from the mere accident that the quotations were so often made from memory, are yet important as a proof of all *salient features* in any passage, and are specially important to decide the existence or non-existence of certain passages in the authorized manuscripts of early centuries.

1. Now, if we went by this evidence alone, the simplest reader may see that the genuineness of John vii. 53-viii. 11 could hardly be defended.

For (a) out of the seventeen uncials it is omitted

¹ "Derived from *uncia*, an inch, as though the letters were an inch long. The term seems to be derived from Jer. Præf. in Job, *Uncialibus, ut vulgo aiunt, literis*; but the reading here may be *initialibus*."—Scrivener, "Criticism of New Testament," p. 25. ² For instance, the cursives numbered 1. 33. 69. 71.

by eight, namely, the *Codex Sinaiticus* (α), the *Vaticanus* (B), and by T. X. It is omitted, as proved by a calculation of lines, by the *Codex Alexandrinus* (A) and *Codex Ephraemi* (C); and, with small gaps, to shew the omission, by L, Δ; and it is marked with stars and daggers, to shew its dubiousness, by E, M, S, A.

(β) In fifty-three *cursives* it is omitted, or placed at the end of the Gospel; and of these the important Codex 1 says that "it is absent in the greatest number of copies," and Codex 237, that "it is not found in the more accurate copies."

2. Of the Versions, it is omitted by the *Vetus Itala*, the Gothic, the oldest copies of *both* the Egyptian (Memphitic and Sahidic), the Peshito-Syriac, and the Armenian.

3. Of the ancient Fathers, it is not mentioned or commented on by the Greek Fathers, Origen, Theodore of Mopsuestia, or Cyril of Alexandria, nor by the Latin Fathers, Tertullian and Cyprian.

1. At first sight this evidence looks overwhelmingly unfavourable. But this is by no means all. For though the passage is found in seven uncials and three hundred cursives, and in the Æthiopic Version, and is quoted by the "Apostolic Constitutions," and by Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, yet the actual text is almost hopelessly uncertain, because the manuscripts vary in almost every word.

2. Even *this* is not all.

(1) Without going so far as to say that "the passage gratuitously interrupts the narrative," it can hardly, I think, be denied that it coheres somewhat loosely with it, coming, as it does, as an isolated incident in

the midst of long and solemn discourses.¹ This may perhaps be one of the reasons why, in some ten *cursorives*, the *pericope* is placed at the end of St. John's Gospel; and in four it is singularly transferred to Luke xxi. 38, as though dependent on the statement that, on each night of Passion week, Jesus "went to the Mount of Olives."

3. Further: no fair critic can possibly deny that the evidence in favour of its Johannine authorship is greatly weakened by the fact that, in the short space of eleven verses, it contains *expressions* and *idioms* not elsewhere found in St. John; and that a critic like Alford, who had a lifelong familiarity with the Greek text of the Gospels, pronounces "the whole cast and character of the passage to be alien from the manner of St. John." It is not only that such words as *without sin* (*ἀναμάρτητος*), and *in the very act* (*ἐπαντοφώρῳ*), and *caught* (*κατειλημένην*), and *stooping down* (*κύψας*), are found here only; and *drawn* (*ἄρθρος*), and *remain* (*ἐπιμένειν*), and *to be left behind* (*καταλείπεσθαι*), and *went unto* (*πορεύομαι εἰς*), and *came into* (*παραγίνομαι εἰς*). If this were all, it might be fairly said that it may be due to the nature of the narratives, just as ten *hapax legomena* (*i.e.*, absolutely unique expressions) occur in John xi. 31-44. Again, it may be purely accidental that the *Mount of Olives* is nowhere else mentioned in the Fourth Gospel; and its introduction without an explanation is less important than Alford supposed.² But it is

¹ Attempts have been made to shew that it bears on, or is illustrative of, those discourses; but the supposed points of connection are so verbal and arbitrary, that by the same method almost any passage could be proved to be appropriate. Who, for instance, will agree with Mr. McClellan in thinking that the appropriateness of the passage in this place is shewn by the connection of "I am the light of the world" (Verse 12) with "the produced effect of spiritual light in the heart of the believer"? There is more to be said for its connection with Verse 15.

² See John xviii. 1.

much more damaging to the genuineness of the passage that such common expressions as *the Scribes* (οἱ Γραμματεῖς), and *all the people* (πᾶς ὁ λαός), in the sense of "multitude," and *sitting down He began to teach them* (καθίσας ἐδίδασκεν αὐτούς), are found here alone in this Gospel; and still more so that *and* (δὲ) is found no less than eleven times in these eleven verses, and not once in the next forty-eight, though in those verses *then* or *therefore* (οὖν), which is St. John's usual connecting particle in narrations, occurs no less than thirteen times. Mr. McClellan sweeps this consideration aside, with several notes of admiration, as "flimsy argument;" but his reply does not fairly meet the force of the objection, for most assuredly he would find no other similar narrative passage in the whole Gospel where δὲ occurs so often, and in which οὖν occurs but once.

4. It may be asked, then, why the passage is still to be retained, in spite of evidence both external and internal, both *diplomatic* and *paradiplomatic*, which seems much stronger than that which is regarded as entirely decisive against other readings, verses, and passages?

The answer is plain. It is to be retained because, supposing it to be spurious, there is no possibility of accounting for its insertion; and, supposing it to be genuine, there is every reason to explain its rejection. Further than this, it bears on the face of it so divine an impress; it shews in the conduct of our Saviour so unapproachable a wisdom, so consummate a tenderness, so profound an insight into the heart of man, that it is not at all too much to say that there was no writer of the first four centuries who had the heart to conceive,

or the head to express, such an incident, if it had not really occurred in the life of Christ.

II. Its exclusion from the Church lectionaries, and so in part from the text, gives us a sad glimpse into the early degeneracy of the Church from its original purity and wisdom. The passage was passed over on the principle of "*economy*," because it was regarded as *dangerous*; and it was thought dangerous because it ran counter to the ascetic and semi-gnosticizing tendencies which, even in the lifetime of the apostles, began to infect the Church.

It was thought "dangerous" in two respects.

a. It is probable, though there is no direct trace of this motive, that the early Christians, assailed by infamous calumnies as to the character of their meetings, wished to cut away all possibility of the remarks of impious pagan readers upon the text, which said that "Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."¹ Nay, more, to all Judæo-Christians, and to all who to any extent inherited their traditional conceptions, that passage would be displeasing. When Jesus talked with the Woman of Samaria under the broad noon, beside the well, his disciples " marvelled that he was talking with *a woman*" (μετὰ γυναῖκος). An ordinary Rabbi would have regarded such conduct as inexcusably lax. Rabban Gamaliel II. subjected himself to the severest censure for remarking that a woman was beautiful; and even when the defence was put forth on his behalf that he had only expressed abstract admiration, exactly as if he had made the same remark of a cow or a camel, the Talmudists are obliged to

¹ "Probabile est a sanctulis quibusdam abjectam esse, qui nescio quam ignominiam Servatoris affricari putarunt, quando legitur ipsum solum cum adulterâ solâ relictum fuisse."—Schöttgen, *Hor. Hebr.* p. 365.

furnish fresh excuses for the mere accident of his meeting and looking at a woman on the public road at all. Much more, then, might some readers have been foolishly and ignorantly offended by the notion that Jesus was left alone with a convicted sinner. They missed, in their narrowness, the sublime emblem of that scene in which Mercy and Misery stood in God's Temple face to face.

β. This consideration was, however, in any case, entirely subordinate. The chief reason why the narrative was regarded as "dangerous," was its supposed tendency to support too ready a condonation of guilt, and therefore to furnish an incentive to sin. This motive is not only charged by St. Augustine on those who omitted the narrative, but its liability to perversion is distinctly urged by others as a reason for not reading the section in the public service. Thus St. Ambrose¹ says that the reading of the passage might suggest serious difficulties to the unlearned. "For certainly, if any one received it with idle ears, he meets an incentive to error when he reads of the adultery of a saint (David) and the pardon of an adulteress." Similarly, St. Augustine says that the passage so far revolts the feelings of the faithless, "that some of small faith, or, rather, foes of true faith," fearing lest an impunity of sinning should be conceded to their wives, removed the passage from their manuscripts, "as though forsooth *He* granted a permission to sin who said, 'Go and sin no more.'" Lastly, Nikon, the Armenian abbot, says that the story had been deliberately expunged from manuscripts of the Armenian Version by some who said "that the hearing of such a passage was baleful to the many."

¹ *Apol. David.* ii. 1.

We see, then, at once that the passage was too merciful—in other words, too divine—for vast multitudes of Christians in the early Church. Accustomed to repress adultery, or at least to attempt its repression, by penances of the most intense and long-continued severity, they fancied that they could be wiser than their Saviour. They could hardly have been so presumptuous as to imagine that they had a deeper hatred for sin than He, or that they understood better than He did the means of repressing it; and yet they acted on the principle that terror was a more effectual method for the check of uncleanness, than compassion and forgiveness. Had they studied the narrative with a more humble reverence, they would have learnt lessons respecting sin and punishment far deeper and more sacred than any which were dreamt of in their philosophy.

III. But if this dogmatic preconception led to the suppression or misplacement of the passage, it accounts also for the omission of some of the Fathers to comment on, or allude to it. Some of them were avowedly actuated by the principle of *æconomy*; that is, they believed that truth required to be *administered*, and, I had almost said *manipulated*, in certain ways. They regarded some doctrines as purely esoteric. Certain facts of Christianity were true, but they held them to be unsuited to the multitude, as liable to be perverted and abused, and therefore best fitted to be kept in the background for the private illumination of a favoured few. This is no place to enter into a full examination of this principle of *æconomy*. Whatever may be said in its favour, it is quite clear that, while it professed to obviate abuses, it is itself liable to flagrant abuse, and opens a “dangerous” door to

dishonesty and subterfuge. We see how dangerous it is when we find Tertullian admitting that a book is apocryphal, and yet arguing that its canonicity should be defended because it is useful against heretics; and, again, when we find that Origen and others believed it to be the teaching of Scripture that the door of God's mercy was not necessarily closed at death, and yet recommended that this truth should not be preached to the people, lest they should make it an excuse for sin. Now, such a mode of action is utterly alien from the principles of Scripture and of Christianity. Such *œconomy* was not the principle of St. Paul, who fully and faithfully preached the truths entrusted to him, though he knew that they were grossly distorted by the ignorant, and misrepresented by the unjust. It was not the principle of St. Peter, who spoke of the wisdom and inspiration of St. Paul, though he said that "those who were unlearned and unstable" wrested some of his writings, as they did also the other Scriptures, "to their own destruction." It was not the principle of St. Gregory the Great, when he said, "It is better that an offence should arise, than that truth should be suppressed." It was not the principle of the Church of England, when she stated her view of Predestination, though well aware that, for "curious and carnal persons," it might prove to be "a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation, or into wretchedness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation." But what need have we of earthly witnesses? It was not the principle of Christ. He spoke to all, and to all alike. He had no truth more esoteric for the learned Pharisee at midnight, than for the lonely, ignorant, sinful woman

by the noonday well ; and He did many a deed which men have misinterpreted, and uttered many a word which they have distorted into a plea for wrong and error, because He was true, and the Truth, and because, "Yea, let God be true, and every man a liar."

To sum up, then : we see what principles were working at a very early age, to cause the exclusion of this section from the Church lessons at public worship ;¹ and we can see at once why its absence from the lectionaries would tend first to its relegation to the end of the Gospel, and then to its total disappearance from many Manuscripts and many Versions. The silence of many of the Fathers is similarly accounted for, however unwise that silence was. Origen was avowedly influenced by the principle of *œconomy*. Cyril, patriarch of such a city as Alexandria, and Chrysostom of Byzantium, were only too likely to dread any teaching which they most erroneously supposed would tend to greater laxity among populations so depraved. Such motives would be still more likely to work with St. Cyprian, accustomed as he was to a Church discipline against adultery of inexorable sternness ; and with such a writer as Tertullian, severe by temperament, and full of gloomy Montanism and exaggerated fancies as to the superior glory of the virgin life. It is to the credit of St. Jerome that, hermit as he was, he did not yield to these seductive influences ; and the Church owes to him, to St. Ambrose, and to St. Augustine, a debt of gratitude for what Mr. McClellan rightly calls their "greater courage and faithfulness" in reasserting the authority of the passage

¹ Part of it, however (viii. 3-11), called the "Gospel for Penitents," was used in the Greek Church at such festivals as that of St. Pelagia.

against the insidious and disintegrating effects of dogmatic prejudice.

IV. But while these considerations, and others of a minuter character, into which we have no space to enter, *entirely break down* the apparent array of evidence against the passage, and strengthen the force of the evidence which may be adduced in its favour, they are entirely ineffectual to explain its divergence from the style of St. John, its immense varieties of reading, or its disruptive effect on the continuity of the narrative. These circumstances can never be explained except conjecturally. Eusebius,¹ among other "testimonies" from the weak and credulous Papias, says that "he has put forth also another history of a woman accused² before the Lord of many sins, which the Gospel of the Hebrews contains." This may, or may not, be an allusion to the incident of the section; but since the Gospel of the Hebrews was known to some of the Fathers, and was even translated by St. Jerome, it seems *most* improbable that any interpolation from its pages could have found its way into the Sacred Text. The variations of reading are, indeed, reducible to the existence of *three* main recensions; but why should there have been these three? This question cannot be answered. It is now believed by many critics that St. John here incorporated into his Gospel a fragment of oral tradition, without altering any of its phraseology.³ However this may be, there is good

¹ *H. E.* iii. 39.

² διαβληθείσης. Mr. McClellan ("The New Testament," pp. 231, 722) seems to fail entirely to prove that this means "*secretly* accused." Both in classical and later Greek it means in general "*falsely* accused." It only occurs in Luke xvi. 1.

³ This would also account for the apparent misplacement of the story in chronological order; for though I have given reasons for rejecting the conjecture of

reason to believe that the "Gospel for Penitents" was a *very early* marginal addition to St. John's narrative in the place where we now find it, and one which, whether sanctioned by the Apostle himself or not, yet most providentially preserves for us a fact inestimably precious in the life of our blessed Lord.

V. Now one of the many characteristic touches of this golden *pericope* is the personal bearing of Christ under the odious circumstances of this malignant accusation. I will not attempt to reproduce the scene, or the motives of the actors, on which I have spoken fully in my "Life of Christ."¹ But since no action of our Lord is unimportant, least of all at such a moment, it will, I think, be interesting to examine further the reasons for his stooping down and writing on the ground.

1. I set aside as impossible and irrelevant the inquiry as to *what* Jesus wrote. A very early conjecture on the subject may be found in the Uncial Manuscript U, which adds to the Received Text that "He wrote on the earth the sins of each one of them;"² and it is just possible that this, which is adopted by St. Jerome, may be inferred from Jeremiah xvii. 13, "O Lord, they

Hitzig, that it properly belongs to Mark xii. ("Life of Christ," ii. 61, 233), yet undoubtedly it would seem, from viii. 1, to belong to the narrative of Passion Week.

¹ I take this opportunity of saying that those who have charged me with an unwarrantable use of the imagination in my "Life of Christ" have done me an injustice. If they will find me a single unwarrantable detail, or touch which is introduced solely for the sake of vivid portraiture or graphic reproduction, I should at once be willing to run my pen through it. It is easier to make than to substantiate these sweeping and careless criticisms. I scrupulously avoided every colour and every detail which was not distinctly suggested by, or involved in, the certain surroundings of the text, the minute touches of which are often obliterated in our English Version, or are lost sight of by mere familiarity with the particular form of words.

² Ἐγραφεὺν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἐνὸς ἑκάστου αὐτῶν τὰς ἁμαρτίας. The picturesque imperfect ἔγραφεὺν is an incidental mark of genuineness. For other strange conjectures, see Lampe and Fabricius, *Cod. Apoc.*

that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and *they that depart from me shall be written in the earth.*" Bengel, referring to this same Verse, thinks that He may have written down *the names of the accusers*, or that He wrote down, 'Ο ἀναμαρτητος ὑμῶν (Verse 7)¹—a tradition adopted in the well-known picture. That He actually wrote words, and did not merely, as some suggest, go through the mere *semblance* of writing, may, I think, be assumed from the phrase employed; and we may remark in passing that it is the only passage from which we learn that our Lord knew the art of writing. "Once," says Bengel, "in the Old Testament, God wrote the Decalogue; once, in the New Testament, Christ wrote. But He wrote with his finger, and on the earth, not on the air or on a tablet."

2. But though we can never know *what* He wrote, is it possible to know *why* He wrote?

The conjectures are many and various.

(a) St. Ambrose² says that it was to remind us that, when we judge of another's sins, we ought to remember our own. "You Scribes write judgments upon others: I, too, can write them against you."³

(b) St. Augustine⁴ sees in it an emblem that the law of God, to which the Scribes were making their appeal, had been written on earthly and stony hearts: "He gave unto Moses two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."⁵

(c) Bengel, among various other surmises, sees in the action a partial reminiscence of the ordeal of jealousy, in which dust was given in water to the suspected woman.⁶

¹ So, too, Fabricius, *Cod. Apoc.* 315.

² *De Spir. Sanct.* iii. 3.

³ Bengel.

⁴ *De Cons. Evang.* iv. 10.

⁵ Exod. xxxi. 18.

⁶ Num. v. 14-29.

(d) Michaelis thinks that He meant to imply the answer, "What is written in your Law?"

(e) Bold, ingenious, and eminently original is the view of the author of "Ecce Homo." After describing the intolerable shamelessness and malice of the accusers, he continues:¹ "The effect upon Jesus was such as might have been produced upon many since, but perhaps hardly on any man that ever lived before. He was seized with an intolerable sense of shame. In the burning embarrassment and confusion, He stooped down, so as to hide his face, and began writing with his finger on the ground. His tormentors continued their clamour until He raised his head for a moment, and said, 'He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her;' and then instantly returned to his former attitude. They had a glimpse, perhaps, of the glowing blush upon his face, and awoke suddenly, with astonishment, to a new sense of their condition and conduct. The older men naturally felt it first, and slunk away; the younger followed their example. The crowd dissolved, and left Christ alone with the woman. Not till then could He bear to stand upright; and when He had lifted Himself up, consistently with his principle, He dismissed the woman, as having no commission to interfere with the office of the civil judge. But the mighty power of living purity had done its work. He had refused to judge a woman, but He had judged a crowd. He had awakened the slumbering conscience in many hardened hearts, given them a new delicacy, a new ideal, a new view and reading of the Mosaic law."

(f) I would not exclude this hypothesis, because, if

¹ P. 98.

He who knew the human sigh and the human tear knew also the human glow of noble shame, then, if ever, this was an occasion on which such a glow of pure and divine indignation might have mantled "that face on which the angels desire to look." But this does not exclude the yet more probable suggestion that He stooped and wrote to avoid importunity, to express his determination not to interfere in this affair. Thus we are told by an ancient gloss that He stooped and wrote, *μὴ προσποιούμενος*, intimating his non-attention to them, a reading found in E, G, K, and most of the cursives. "Those," says Euthymius, "are accustomed to act thus who do not choose to answer persons who put to them inopportune or unworthy questions. For, recognizing their plot, He made believe to write on the ground, and not to attend to the things they said." They would doubtless draw their own lessons from his conduct, but his primary object was to imply an "intentional inattention"¹ — *tamquam in aliam rem intentus* (says Melancthon), *prorsus a se rejiciens hanc questionem*.

Thus interpreted, the action finds its parallels both in Rabbinic and classic literature. "Without uttering a syllable," says Plutarch, "by merely raising the eyebrows, or stooping down, or fixing the eyes upon the ground, you may baffle unreasonable importunities; for silence is an answer to wise men."² That a similar custom was recognized by the Jews appears in the Talmudic story that, on one occasion, R. Ukba sent to

¹ "As though He did not, or would not, hear them."—"Life of Christ," ii. 66.

² Cf. Athen. ii. 59. E. *κίψαντες χρόνον οὐκ ὀλιγον διεφρόντιζον*. Aristoph. *Ach.* 31. *ἀπορῶ, γραφῶ, . . . λογιζομαι* (*ibid* Schol. *ταῦτα ποιῶνσιν οἱ . . . τὸν χρόνον δαπανῶντες εἰς ἀπορίαν*). Schol. ad Eur. *Orest.* 631 (Wetstein).

R. Eleazar, to tell him that he had some deadly enemies, whom, if he chose, he could denounce to the civil government, and to ask what he should do. R. Eleazar, without saying a word, simply took a piece of vellum, and leisurely wrote down Psalm xxxix. 2, to imply the duty of forgiveness. When R. Ukba sent him a yet more urgent message as to the malice of these enemies, Eleazar again said not a word, but wrote down Psalm xxxvii. 7, to imply the duty of leaving our wrongs in the hand of God.¹

(g) In this explanation we might fairly acquiesce, though we may well suppose that, in the divine and many-sided wisdom of our Lord's slightest acts, what He did might find many solemn and diverse interpretations in the consciences of those who witnessed it, just as, in Jewish legend, all the nations who heard the ten words at Sinai interpreted them into their own language. We would not, for instance, at all exclude such secondary objects as that also mentioned by Euthymius, namely, that He stooped "in order that the Scribes might not be ashamed by his eye being fixed upon them, being thus more easily convicted (by their own consciences); and that, as though He were occupied in writing, they might retire before receiving a more open condemnation. For *them too He spared*, because of the abundance of his kindness."

(h) I add a single illustration, which, so far as I am aware, has never before been made public, but which, if it receives confirmation, throws a new light on the narrative, and contains a fresh proof of its authenticity. "The venerable M. Charpiot," writes a correspondent to me, "pastor in the Hautes Alpes, once related to

¹ Schöttgen, *Hor. Heb. in loc.*

me that, whilst living in Algeria, he was witness of a scene which brought before him in living reality the story of the Woman taken in Adultery. He was going out of Algiers, when, not far from the gate, his attention was arrested by a group of Arabs, who were discussing together. He approached, and saw that one of them had bent down, and *was writing with his finger in the dust*. The debate continued, when again there was a moment's pause, and the Arab, effacing what he had just written, wrote again. M. Charpiot hastened to ask an explanation of this conduct, which had so greatly impressed him. It seems that a discussion had been going on. The Arab who had stooped down had written on the sand the first point on which the discussion had turned. After a few moments, since all were agreed on this point, he had effaced what he had first written, in order to write down the new subject of debate."

My unknown correspondent therefore thinks that this may be some immemorial Eastern custom, and that, when the Scribes and Pharisees brought the woman, to ask what should be done with her, reminding our Lord of the Mosaic law, he raised no opposition to their statement of the law, but agrees with them to adopt it, and stoops to write it down. But since they continue to press Him with questions, He in turn suggests the next step of the discussion as to what is to be done, by saying, "Let him that is without sin among you first cast the stone at her." Then again He stoops down to write this new point of agreement; but while He is doing so, the accusers, convicted of their own guilt, abashed by the silent working of their own consciences, slink away from the admitted con-

sequences of the very premises on which, in order to entrap and hamper Him, they had so unblushingly persisted.

On this point readers must form their own judgment, but it seemed not undesirable to preserve the record of so remarkable a custom. Assuming that it has been correctly reported, it furnishes a new and unexpected illustration of this interesting incident; which the Church of God has long learnt to see in its true light, as one of the brightest proofs of the healing tenderness of the Sinless towards the sinful.

F. W. FARRAR.

THE NINETEENTH PSALM:

READ IN THE LIGHT OF ANCIENT NATURE-WORSHIP.

IT is now ascertained that the ancient religions of Nature did not after all differ so widely among themselves as they appear to do. Most of us make our first acquaintance with heathenism under the classical dress which it wore during the later days of Greece and Rome. These gods of Olympus, with the confused and contradictory tales regarding them, are scarcely to be recognized for the same thing with the earlier and simpler mythologies of Syria, Egypt, or Chaldæa. Yet they were as surely a development, or a corruption, of those more primitive beliefs, as Greek art was the offspring of an older Asiatic art. The better we get to know the ancient faiths of the world and their history, the more plainly does it appear that at their root they possessed a common origin, and that similar ruling ideas ran through them all.

Perhaps the chief fact concerning them which modern