

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THERE are some passages in the Bible about which we seem destined if not doomed to be forever learning, and never coming to a knowledge of the truth. One of these has returned upon us, and is discussed by a scholar and able theologian in this issue. Another is the sentence about Baptism for the Dead, which, with manifest unconsciousness on the apostle's part, rises out of the great chapter about the Resurrection, a veritable stone of stumbling and rock of offence.

'Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead?' (1 Cor. xv. 29). In an article in the *Newbery House Magazine* for June 1889, the Rev. J. W. Horsley, M.A., introduced us to thirty-six different interpretations of the verse. And Dr. Plummer, who has considered them all and searched the subject through and through, thinks that number might easily be increased. He adds that it would not be wise to increase it. But the advice is given in vain. Until an acceptable interpretation is found, men will persist in making suggestions, and it is vain to think that the door may be shut in their face.

A little book has just been published by Mr. Elliot Stock which contains a new suggestion. The title of the book is *Some Scripture Problems and their Solutions*; and the first 'Scripture

Problem' solved (?) is the one before us. We are not sure that Mr. Archer Hind claims absolute originality for the solution, and it is most unlikely that it has never been offered before. But it stands so boldly apart from all those that have found favour amongst us, that it *seems* to be new, and deserves a passing notice.

According to Bishop Ellicott there are only two interpretations that deserve the least attention. The first is that of the Greek expositors. They take the words 'for the dead' as equivalent to 'for the resurrection from the dead.' Then the meaning is, 'If the dead rise not, what shall they do who are baptized just in order that they may rise again from the dead?' Baptism is a going down for the sake of a coming up; a death to sin for a resurrection to life eternal.

But that interpretation will not do. The words 'for the dead' (*ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν*) cannot possibly mean 'for the resurrection from the dead.' No such ellipsis is elsewhere discovered in the whole range of New Testament language, and indeed it is too intolerable to be found elsewhere or admitted here. The other interpretation is that of 'the great majority of modern interpreters,' including Bishop Ellicott himself. 'For the dead' means 'on behalf of dead persons'—persons, how-

ever, who are not physically but morally dead. That is to say, Christian believers are baptized instead of and for the sake of unbelieving relatives or friends. And the apostle asks, What is the use of that if the dead rise not? Why should they trouble undergoing that rite if death ends all?

But neither will that interpretation do. For there is no evidence that in St. Paul's day any such custom was dreamed of. That it existed later—in Tertullian's day—may easily be due to a misapprehension of this very passage. If some early bishop read it in the way of the 'great majority of modern interpreters,' he would have little difficulty in persuading his flock to adopt the practice for the sake of the interpretation. But if such a practice had been known in the apostle's day, St. Paul would have been the first and the most emphatic in condemning it—as Bishop Ellicott himself sees and says. Does he condemn the 'baptism for the dead, then?' By no means. He manifestly believes in it, whatever it was, and would count it a grievous hardship to have to give it up.

Thus the way is open. Let us admit Mr. Archer Hind.

Mr. Hind gives his mind to the article. Now, the definite article is either used in the New Testament quite capriciously, which no responsible grammarian now believes; or else the law of its use has not yet been applied to this passage. For there is no popular interpretation that explains or can explain why St. Paul says 'the dead' in this clause of his sentence—'What shall they do which are baptized for the dead?' and 'dead' without the article in the clause that immediately follows it—'if dead rise not at all.' Mr. Archer Hind gives attention to that. And he makes the bold suggestion that 'dead' (*νεκροί*) without the article means dead persons, body and soul included, while 'the dead' (*οἱ νεκροί*) means their dead bodies only.

Well, consider that. And, in the first place, does the Greek language admit of it? Does the New Testament use this word so? Does St. Paul so use it? Mr. Archer Hind admits that he cannot make this out in every instance of the use of the word 'dead' (*νεκρός*). But he holds that it may be made out in very many cases, and must be made out in some. We must seek the passages for ourselves, but one on each side may be given here. Matt. xxii. 32, 'God is not the God of dead persons (*νεκρῶν*), but of living persons'; and Luke xxiv. 5, 'Why seek ye the living among the dead?' (*τῶν νεκρῶν*).

But, secondly, what is the meaning that this new translation gives us? It is a meaning that is both beautiful in itself and altogether appropriate to the context. Some of the Corinthians had begun to say that there was no resurrection of the dead—no resurrection of dead persons at all. Against that heresy the apostle has two strong arguments. The first and strongest is that one dead Person, even Jesus, has actually been raised from the dead. The other is the universal Christian rite of baptism. The first proves that dead persons who are united to Christ will certainly rise from the dead, for He is the first-fruits of a very great harvest. The second proves that even their dead bodies will be raised again. For baptism is to the body what the Holy Spirit is to the soul. The one is the outward sign, the other is the inward seal of acceptance in the Beloved. And just as the Holy Spirit once given to the believer in Christ will never leave him nor forsake him, so is it with the outward sign of possession—the sacrament of baptism. It is not merely that soul upon whom the gift of the Holy Spirit has come that will be for ever with the Lord. That body also which has been washed in the laver of regeneration will be His for ever, and no man shall be able to pluck it out of His hand. It is a double argument; and in either case the apostle puts it not positively and directly, but negatively, and as it were to show the absurdity

of the opposite. If there is no resurrection of dead persons, then Christ has not been raised, and we have not a gospel to preach! If there be no resurrection of dead bodies, then baptism is a miserable unreality—the consecration of a body that is soon to be eaten up of worms and to pass away for ever.

Near the end of St. Mark's Gospel there is a verse which can scarcely be called a 'problem,' and scarcely needs so great a remedy as a 'solution,' yet Mr. Archer Hind is very wise to touch upon it in his little book of *Some Scripture Problems and their Solutions*. It is the words which occur in the story of St. Peter's fall: 'he began to curse and to swear' (Mark xiv. 71).

Do all the preachers who know the meaning of these words make sure that their hearers know their meaning? Have we not even heard some preachers say that St. Peter's fall was emphasized by a return to his old habit of profane swearing?—though where they discovered that he ever had such a habit, we have never heard them say.

St. Peter did begin to curse and to swear, but he returned to no habit, and he indulged in no exercise of 'profane swearing.' The two words used are *anathematizein* (ἀναθεματίζειν) and *omnunai* (ὀμνύναι). Now of these words the former means to declare a person or thing *anathema*. It is a solemn religious exercise, which need have no thought of profanity in it. The city of Jericho was anathematized when it was separated from all secular use, and given up to be destroyed by God. St. Paul was prepared to anathematize himself for the sake of his kinsmen according to the flesh. And as we know that in these acts there was no profanity, we have no encouragement to attribute vulgar profanity to St. Peter here.

The other word means to take an oath. It is, or at least was then, as solemn and as sacred a proceeding as the anathema. Hurtful as it became,

especially when men rashly or maliciously took an oath to do a thing which they never did, so hurtful that our Lord came at last and said emphatically, 'Swear not at all'; still, it was absolutely removed in itself from the degrading habit we call profane swearing. If the thing were so, as they 'who stood by' asserted, then Peter was ready to reckon himself anathema and take upon himself a solemn oath, and he sinned grievously in so doing, for the thing they asserted was very true; but he did not make the miserable exhibition of himself those fluent expositors degrade him to, when they tell us that he returned upon an old habit of profane swearing.

In the Epistle of St. James (if we may take one thing more from Mr. Archer Hind) there is a hexameter line of which no one has been able to discover the source; and, worse calamity, which no one has been able to translate correctly. The line is James i. 17—

Πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημά τέλειον.

Its translation according to the Authorized Version is: 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.' Now it is open to argument that our unknown Greek poet, from whom St. James makes the quotation, was not so skilful in the choice of words as a modern Poet Laureate, and meant no difference by the two different words he uses for 'gift,' or even by the two different adjectives he sends along with them. Still, the words are there, and they are different, and it is our business to give them a different rendering if we can. The Authorized Version does not do so. It translates two different words by 'gift'; and then it gives an inadequate rendering of one of the adjectives that define it.

The Revised Version does better. But it does not very well. It gives us, 'Every good gift and every perfect boon.' But the first word does not mean gift, and the second does not mean boon. The first word means the act of giving, the second the gift that is given. Moreover, the word rendered perfect (τέλειον) is only 'perfect' in the sense that

it has come to its inheritance or attained its full fruition,—in short, that it is *complete*. Hence Mr. Archer Hind would translate the hexameter—

Every good act of giving and every gift complete,
whereby he not only behaves well to the apostle's language, but makes a distinction which is really a difference, and adds to our knowledge of the apostle's thought.

On the 11th of March the *Guardian* contained an article by Canon Driver on the Campaign of Chedorlaomer narrated in the fourteenth chapter of Genesis. It was the first of a series of articles with which Dr. Driver proposes to answer Professor Sayce's accusation that the Higher Critics disregard archæology, and to refute his claim that 'the Monuments are continually yielding fresh evidence of the baselessness of their conclusions.' But the article rose above all temporary or party occasion. It was a complete, and you may rely upon it, an accurate account of all that is at present known, from the Monuments or elsewhere, touching the Campaign in question, and the chapter in which its story is told.

The second article of the series has now appeared. At least, we doubt not, it will have appeared by the time these Notes are being read; for we have just received from the Editor of the *Guardian* a slip copy ready for the press. The second article deals with Melchizedek. Its purpose is as immediate and temporary as the first; it rises as securely above all temporary or party occasion.

Now there are few characters in literature, few even in the Bible itself, that are so interesting to us as 'this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him.' And the interest, from the days of the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews even until now, has been largely due to our ignorance of his history. 'Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life'—

unknown, in short, in all respects, except that he had two titles and did one deed, the prophet of this epistle, following the prophet of an earlier time, found him 'made like unto the Son of God,' and invested him with a mystery and an interest which abides as continually upon him as he himself abides a priest continually.

Once only were we threatened with the departure of our ignorance. In the year 1887 some fellahin were digging at a spot about a hundred miles south of Cairo, once the famous capital of King Amenophis IV. of the Eighteenth Dynasty, but now the yet more famous Tel el-Amarna. And as they went on digging they found three hundred sun-baked tablets, written in the cuneiform script of Babylonia. The tablets were speedily scattered abroad. A hundred and eighty went to Berlin, eighty-two to the British Museum, fifty-six to the Museum of Gizeh, and the rest into the hands of private individuals. These tablets, upon examination, turned out to be a part of the official archives of Amenophis III. and Amenophis IV., and to consist of letters and reports addressed to these Egyptian kings by their officials, and by Eastern rulers here and there who had official relations with Egypt. And among the letters were five, insignificant then but most important now of all the series, written by Ebed-tob the governor of Jerusalem.

The letters of Ebed-tob are important, because as translated by Professor Sayce they are understood to bear immediately upon our ignorance of Melchizedek. Not all the five letters have this bearing, nor the whole of any one of them. Indeed, the parts that are of interest to us are so few and short that they may be quoted here in full.

First, from Tablet 105, take lines 9 to 15—

9. Behold, neither my father
10. nor my mother has exalted me
11. in this place;
12. the prophecy of the mighty king
13. has caused me to enter the house of my father.

14. Why should I have committed
15. a sin against the king, my lord?

Next take Tablet 103, lines 25 to 28—

25. Behold: this country of the city of Jerusalem
26. neither my father nor my mother
27. has given it me; it (was) an oracle [of the
mighty king]
28. that gave (it) to me, even to me.

Finally, the same statement, almost in the same words, is repeated in Tablet 104, and with them our present concern comes to an end.

The foregoing is Professor Sayce's translation. The following is his interpretation:—

'Ebed-tob,' he says, 'had been appointed, or confirmed in his post, not by the Pharaoh, but by the oracle and power of "the great King," the God, that is to say, whose sanctuary stood on the summit of Moriah. It was not from his "father or from his mother" that he had inherited his dignity; he was king of Jerusalem because he was priest of its God. In all this,' Professor Sayce continues, 'we have an explanation of the language used by Melchizedek. Melchizedek, too, was "without father, without mother," and, like Ebed-tob, he was at once priest and king. It was in virtue of his priesthood that Abraham the Hebrew paid tithes to him after his defeat of the foreign invader. Up to the closing days of the Eighteenth Egyptian Dynasty, if not later, Jerusalem was governed by a royal priest.'

There, then, is the text, and there is the interpretation. And we are bound to say that while there is ingenuity in the interpretation, there is nothing either impossible or absurd. If Professor Sayce, or any other, would interpret some Scripture passages that puzzle us with the same pertinence and felicity, we should accept the result with thanksgiving. For a moment the mystery seems to vanish from the face of Melchizedek, like mists from an Alpine summit. 'Without father, without mother'—we seem to see the meaning of these phrases now; 'King of Salem, priest of God Most

High'—we seem to reach at last the double dignity, at once its source and its explanation.

But if we accept the interpretation, we must also accept the translation on which it is founded. And that, says Canon Driver, it is scarcely possible for us to do. For Professor Sayce's translation has been accepted '(so far as I am aware) by no other Assyriologist who has written upon the Tel el-Amarna tablets.' Not that other Assyriologists differ greatly in their translations. They differ, in fact, in only one phrase of the passages that have been quoted. But it is the most important phrase in them, it is the phrase upon which the whole pertinency of the passages turns, and the rendering which they give is so different that it sweeps all reference to Melchizedek away.

For both Halévy and Zimmern say, and Professor Jastrow of Philadelphia agrees with them, that 'the prophecy (or oracle) of the mighty King' is 'the *arm* of the mighty King,' and the king is not the Most High God, nor any god at all, but simply the king of Egypt. Thus Professor Jastrow says: 'There is no question whatever of an "oracle," the word so interpreted being the simple word "arm" (*zuru'u*) explained by a gloss as the "hand" (*katu*), and the "mighty King" having reference not to any God Most High of Melchizedek, or to a god Salim, but to Amenophis, whom Abdicheba [as these Assyriologists spell Ebed-tob] speaks of in these terms.' Professor Sayce is aware of these objections. His answer is that in these inscriptions the king of Egypt is never called 'the mighty king' (*sarru dannu*), but 'the great king' (*sarru rabu*), and therefore the mighty King can mean none other than the Mighty God. But the reply is made that if not in these inscriptions, certainly in many others, the phrase, 'the mighty King,' is freely used of human monarchs, and why should it not be so used here?

So, then, we cannot say, even with the Tel el-Amarna tablets, that we know much more of

Melchizedek than the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews knew. It is true that in Tablet No. 106 there is a sentence, not yet touched upon, in which Professor Sayce finds an additional ray of light. 'And now, at this moment,' says Ebed-tob, 'the city of the mountain of Jerusalem, the city of the temple of the God Ninip, (whose) name (there is) Salim, the city of the King, is gone over to the side of the men of the city of Keilah.' But, unfortunately, 'the other Assyriologists' differ yet more seriously here than before in their rendering of that sentence into English. Halévy gives it thus: 'And now, moreover, the city of the country, called Jerusalem, city of the temple of Ninip, the Royal city, is taken, and is become (?) the possession (?) of the men of Kelti.' And Zimmern is even shorter and more divergent. It is at least not established, therefore, that in these tablets there is any reference to a god *Salim*. And if there is no reference to a god *Salim*, which Professor Sayce himself in his latest volume acknowledges to be an open question, then there is no reference to Melchizedek as 'King of Salem, which is King of Peace.'

Now Canon Driver's purpose in all this exposition is to show that, as far as the Monuments go, the way is open to the Higher Critics to say of Melchizedek what they will. They do not all say the same thing. It is evident that he does not approve of the things which some of them say. But as far as the Monuments serve, they are all at liberty to say whatever they please.

The Higher Critics do not all say the same thing. Not to go further back, in 1884 Ed. Meyer in his *History of Antiquity*, observing that the Elamite supremacy implied in Gen. xiv. 4 was confirmed by the inscription of Kudurmabuk, supposed that the author of the narrative, a Jewish exile in Babylonia, had found there particulars respecting an ancient invasion of Canaan by the four kings from the East, which he had utilised for the purpose of magnifying the figure of Abraham. This view was accepted not only by Stade,

Wellhausen, Cornill, and Holzinger, but also by the Assyriologist Winckler, and even by the author of what the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol has justly termed 'the truly great work,' *The Dawn of Civilization*, Professor Maspero. But there are other critics besides these. There is Kittel in his *History of the Hebrews*, there is König in his *Einleitung*, and above all, there is Dillmann, the greatest of all modern commentators on the Old Testament, in the various editions of his *Commentary on Genesis*. These, and especially Dillmann, though they are Higher Critics with a will, find nothing incredible in the narrative that surrounds Melchizedek, nor even in the mysterious person of Melchizedek himself. The details of the story 'may not be above suspicion; nevertheless,' says Dillmann, 'the objections which have been raised against them are little to the point. The line of march followed by the four kings is not, as has been alleged, improbable or absurd. Of a "battle of nations" in the valley of Siddim there is not a word. That nothing is said of hostilities with the Canaanites proper is no ground for surprise, as explanations of their relation to the kings from the East formed no part of the narrator's plan. Even the statement that Abraham, with his own followers and those of his allies, rescued some of the captives and booty from the rear of the returning host is not in itself incredible. It is nowhere said that he defeated the entire army in open fight; still less is it the aim of the narrator to glorify him as a powerful warrior. His success is described without a word of ostentation. The narrative culminates in his self-sacrificing friendship for Lot, and the recovery of the captives, not in idle military glory. The entire campaign is narrated not on its own account, but only in so far as is necessary for Abraham's act of rescue to be understood. No claim is made to completeness. . . . The passage relating to Melchizedek will most probably have been introduced by the last Redactor; but in any case there will have been some support in tradition even for this figure; nothing obliges us to assume that it was the free creation of the author.'