

been my practice to select five or six short passages from different books.

2. *The Method of Combination.*—In this case I have chosen one lesson to illustrate the sermon, and the other purely from the didactic point of view. For example, I have chosen on consecutive Sundays to read, as the O.T. lesson, the Life of Joseph, or of Elijah; or on other occasions to read selections from one book (generally a little-known one) of the O.T.; or a similar plan has been adopted with regard to an Epistle. On other occasions I have read a book of the Psalter, at the rate of one, two, or three psalms a day, with very brief introductory notes to each, giving the probable origin of the psalm.

3. *The Lectionary Method.*—In this case lessons have been chosen either from some existing lectionary or on a principle devised by myself. In this case the sermon has occasionally been chosen from the lesson. This practice is very valuable as an occasional one—say for one year, as a variety, and then let the minister return to his ordinary method.

Whatever method is adopted, it seems to me essential that much more care should be devoted to the preparation of lessons to be read in public worship. For myself, I always felt ashamed if I had not first read the passage in the original, and mastered, at least, its main difficulties. Only then did I feel that I had a right to decide which

version to read, or was I able to make any alterations that were necessary to make the sense more clear. Congregations greatly appreciate and value care devoted to this matter.

## VIII.

*By the Rev. Professor Robert Mackintosh, D.D.,  
Lancashire Independent College, Manchester.*

In a community that know the Bible well and study it lovingly, there can, I think, be no doubt that lessons carefully chosen from their appropriateness to the preacher's subject are superior to any doctrine. In the ages before the printing-press, or even later, in the days before popular education, fixed lessons was a necessity; and now I fear all Christian Churches will be driven back to them, because our people do not so love the Bible as to work at its study. If they are to know it, they must hear it in public worship. But will they endure serious, adequate selection? This people hunger for 'bright services, endless developments of music, smart phrases in the sermon.' It may be possible to rearrange the order of service—which has no sacred sanction—so that once on a Sunday there shall be continuous Bible study. Or possibly the Bible must continue to be neglected, and drop more and more out of knowledge, till some great misery sends us back to God.

## The Recognition of Signs.

BY THE REV. A. ALLEN BROCKINGTON, M.A., TAUNTON.

WE recognize that 'conscience is more than a contraction of the diaphragm which somehow helps in the struggle for existence.' But some of us feel that the saying, 'The voice of conscience is the voice of God,' needs large qualification. 'Is not the root of the low standard of feeling and conduct on practical matters with which so many men are content (asks Dr. Rashdall) traceable precisely to this—that they trust too much to their consciences? Their religion consists, they will tell you, simply in this—in not doing what their conscience (conscience unsolicited, untrained, unenlightened) tells them to be wrong.' The great

need is the education of the conscience. A noble life results from submission to the voice of a rightly trained conscience. The training of the conscience is in response to the appeal of higher influences. So that in the long-run we can only trust our consciences when we have satisfactorily answered the question, 'What think ye of Christ?'

The Athanasian Creed expresses the same principle: 'He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.' We must form right conceptions of the character of God, as revealed historically in Jesus Christ, and we must correspond

to that character, if we would realize our Divine destiny.

God has manifested Himself in certain miracles or signs. Our recognition of those signs depends upon the conception we have formed of God's character. 'The same power which enables us in the first instance to recognize God enables us to recognize further manifestations of His nature and will.'<sup>1</sup> Of course a man's conception of God influences him to accept or reject miracles altogether. If one says that he rejects miracles as 'inherently incredible,' it means that he has ideas of God's governance or non-governance of the world that are incompatible with the occurrence of miracles. But the recognition of God's signs is more than the recognition that miracles are possible or even credible. There are 'signs and wonders' that are not of God. The enlightened conscience must tell us which they are. 'If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and he give thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or unto that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul' (Dt 13<sup>1-3</sup>).

How would a man or woman of Israel, whose heart was sound in God's covenant, answer such a false prophet, presenting his 'sign and wonder,' even though it came to pass? These are the words that Frederick Denison Maurice<sup>2</sup> puts into the Israelite's mouth: 'There may be a famine, there may be plenty of corn or wine, there may be a defeat, there may be a triumph—anyhow, *you* are a deceiver; you would lead me into wrong or falsehood, if you have ever so much knowledge of what is going to take place in the world. Begone with your dreams and prophecies, your signs and wonders; I am not afraid of them, but I am afraid of you and of myself, because you are come speaking out of that which is evil in you to that which is evil in me. I know what it is in my heart which answers to *your* language. It is that which does *not* answer to God's language, it is that which makes me unwilling and unable to hear that and obey it.'

<sup>1</sup> Westcott, *Gospel of the Resurrection*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Old Testament*.

The recognition of signs is not really affected by modern scientific discovery, nor by the growing knowledge and enlarged experience, which, we are told, make it impossible for us any longer to credit the things that our forefathers believed to have happened. It is affected by our conceptions of God's nature and will. In a word, the condition of recognition is *moral*. 'Then if any man shall say, Lo, here is Christ, or there: believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; so as to lead astray, *if it were possible*, even the elect' (Mt 24<sup>23</sup>). But it is not possible. The elect are not necessarily intellectually gifted, or expert in criticism, but they are of necessity enlightened in conscience. And these it is not possible to lead astray. The same truth is apparent from Jn 12<sup>37</sup>.—the reason men believed not on Him, did not recognize the signs that He had done before them, was because 'He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart.'

This principle applies not only to the signs of the New Testament. It applies to the Old Testament signs. For the Old Testament signs in their measure, and with their restricted reference, teach the same truths as the New Testament signs. 'I am the Bread of Life' is taught as clearly by the Manna in the wilderness as by the Feeding of the Five Thousand. In a wonderful sentence our Lord corrected the Jews and revealed the *timeless* working of God: 'It was not Moses that gave you the bread out of heaven; but my Father *giveth* you the true bread out of heaven.' So with the Pillar of Fire. The symbol that pointed the Jew's mind back to the Divine leading through the wilderness, and forward to the Messiah, was the Candlestick in the Court of the Women at the Feast of Tabernacles. This Messianic symbol Christ applied to Himself, when He said, 'I am the Light of the world.' The Pillar was the sign of God, the Light of Israel. The sign of Christ, the Light of the world, was the Healing of the Man born Blind (Jn 9).

Those who find an adequate reason for the occurrence of these signs of the Manna and the Pillar of Fire in the great truths they teach are not generally disposed to accept another Old Testament sign—the sign of Balaam's Ass. May it not be that the failure to recognize this sign also depends upon a misconception of the nature and will of God? The Rev. James Adderley in his

'open letter' to Dr. Torrey, the American missionary, exhorts him not to ask the Doctors' of Divinity who come trembling to his study 'whether they believe that Balaam's donkey spoke,' as if it should be judged a thing incredible with Doctors of Divinity that Balaam's donkey should speak. And Dr. Rashdall, writing of revelation and historical infallibility, also treats with a measure of contempt the belief that Balaam's ass spoke. But in 2 P 2<sup>16</sup> it is referred to as a real historical event: 'The dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet.'

Granted that the dumb ass did speak, her words are beautifully natural: 'What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? . . . Am I not thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden all thy life long unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?' The ass says nothing about the angel.

God's purpose was 'to rebuke the madness of the prophet.' God employs certain instruments and agents in carrying out His purposes. As far as our observation goes He usually employs men. But if those usual instruments fail or are wanting, are we to think that the purposes of God will be frustrated? God, we learn from Christ, has, at any rate, an *interest* in animal life, in the life that we are justified, perhaps, in designating the 'infra-human.' Is it not fitting that God should use an animal as His instrument for rebuking the madness of the prophet, even by causing her to speak with man's voice? Once the ass turned out of the way; then she crushed Balaam's foot against the

wall; then she lay down under Balaam. The only result was that Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with his staff. Then, because God's purpose must not be frustrated, and these means had failed to warn the prophet, 'the Lord opened the mouth of the ass.'

The rebuking of a prophet may be considered a work of less importance than the singing of God's praise and glory. An ass upon which one has ridden for many years is certainly higher in the scale of being and nearer to man than a stone. That God should cause an ass to speak in order to rebuke the madness of a prophet is thought a thing incredible with some of us, but that He should cause even stones to cry out in order to praise His Holy Name was not a thing incredible with Christ. 'And as he was now drawing nigh, even at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works which they had seen; saying, Blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. And some of the Pharisees from the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones will cry out' (Lk 19<sup>37ff.</sup>).<sup>1</sup>

It is only in submission to the revelation of Christ that we are able to understand the Scriptures.

<sup>1</sup> Even if the language of our Lord be regarded as 'figurative,' it is clear that He contemplates an unusual agent.

## Recent Foreign Theology.

### The Russian Sects.<sup>1</sup>

PRIVATDOZENT GRASS continues his account of the Khlisti. We have more descriptions of the *radenie* or dancing, and we are told of the initiatory rites

<sup>1</sup> 'Die Russischen Sekten,' von *Mag. Theol.* Karl Konrad Grass, Privatdozent in Dorpat. 1 Bd. iii, Lieferung. *Kultus und Organisation der Gottesleute oder Chlūsten.* Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung.

(*privod*) which make a man a *Khlist*. The details of the celebration of the Eucharist and the sexual element in their ritual, called the *sválnü grekh*, savour of barbarism, and destroy some of the more agreeable features of the lives of these enthusiasts. At the conclusion of this third *lieferung* the various names are given which the members of the sect take. Abundant material is furnished by the compiler.

W. R. MORFILL.