

strengthen them in this arduous pursuit, they are assured in the passage we have been considering, when it is properly translated, of the power of the Spirit within them to subdue remaining depravity,—"that ye *may not* do the things that ye would."

I shall only notice at present one other passage in which the very slight change made in the Revised Version seems productive of much gain. The passage has not certainly either the practical or doctrinal bearing which belongs to that one which has just engaged our attention. Its interest is simply historical, but is not on that account to be overlooked. I refer to 2 Peter i. 14, where we read in Authorised Version—"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me." The

verse stands in the Revised Version as follows—"Knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me." And who can read the passage, as thus amended, without being reminded of the scene so graphically described in St. John xxi. 15-19? The mere rendering of the Aorist (ἐδήλωσεν) by its proper English equivalent gives a historic colouring to the verse, and naturally transports the mind to the lake of Galilee. It may be added that the existence of such a subtle *nexus* between the two passages, when brought out as it is in the Revised Version, seems far beyond the power of any one personating the Apostle, and thus tends to strengthen our belief in the authenticity of the epistle.

## The International Lessons.

### I.

December 6.—John xix. 17-30.

#### CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

THERE are a few points which may be explained as the lesson is read.

1. "Golgotha." The same word in its Latin form is Calvary. It means "a skull," and the name seems to have been given to a hillock from its shape. But where the hillock was, we do not know. For the last twenty years it has been located near the Damascus gate, just outside the (supposed) old wall of Jerusalem. But there are signs of a return to the traditional site, where the Church of the Sepulchre stands. See *Murray's Magazine* for November 1891. All we know for certain is that it was then outside the city (Heb. xiii. 12), and yet "nigh to the city" (John xix. 20).

2. "Four parts, to every soldier a part" (ver. 23), so that there were four soldiers. But some writers think that there were four to each cross, twelve in all.

3. "His mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene" (ver. 25). Were there three or four women near the cross? It is impossible to say. The punctuation given here would make four, placing a comma after "sister." But there is no punctuation in the Greek MSS. The reading "His mother's sister Mary the

wife of Cleophas," would make only three, but the objection to it is that thus His mother and His mother's sister would have the same name, Mary. Probably, then, there were four, the unnamed being Salome, the mother of John.

4. "The disciple whom He loved" (ver. 26). John never names himself; and perhaps it was the same modesty that prevented him naming his mother above.

Now for the explanation of the lesson. We must look upon John's narrative always as supplementing that of the other Evangelists. But to make his story complete, he briefly relates the same incidents, especially at the end of Jesus' life. So that here we have a short account, though with some additional touches, of what is more fully related in the previous Gospels.

The procession started. In front went a man with a white board, on which was written the supposed crimes for which Jesus and the other two had been condemned. Then came the three, each carrying his own cross, and the soldiers following close. Usually they proceeded through the most crowded streets of the city, but perhaps, this being a feast day, they did not do so this morning. It was nine o'clock. They had not gone far when Jesus began to faint. At that moment a Jew of Cyrene met them as he returned to Jerusalem from the country. He was seized by

the unceremonious Romans, and Jesus' cross was put upon his shoulders. Perhaps Simon had shown some pity for the sufferer. Perhaps he was already even a disciple. We see that his sons, Alexander and Rufus, were well known in the Christian Church some short time after (Mark xv. 21).

Having reached Calvary, the upright part of the cross was stuck into the ground; the sufferer was fastened to the transverse piece, nails being driven through his hands, and it was lifted with its human load and fastened to the upright post, the feet being now pierced with iron as the hands had been.

Then the title, or accusation, was nailed to each cross where it might be seen and read by every passer by. In the case of Jesus, Pilate had written simply: "This is the King of the Jews." It was no proper accusation, but perhaps that was part of Pilate's purpose, that the priests might remember *he* had found no fault in the Man. It was enough, however, that thereby he gave himself the satisfaction of once more insulting the hated rulers of the people.

Thus "lifted up from the earth," though His feet may not have been more than eighteen inches off it, the Saviour hung. Is it not true that just there, as lifted up on the cross, He has drawn all men unto Him?

John hastens to the end. The four soldiers divide His clothes among them, the head-dress, mantle, girdle, and sandals, and cast lots for the seamless under garment. For even they, says the Evangelist, are in the hands of God, and every act is a fulfilment of the Scriptures. Beside the soldiers, unafraid of themselves, and only half conscious of their unthinking brutality, stand the three Maries, and perhaps Salome also. And He who has already forgotten Himself in the prayer, "Father, forgive them," now turns to the pierced mother, and commends her to the care of the beloved disciple. All things were now accomplished. "That the Scripture might be fulfilled"—a pregnant phrase—Jesus said, "I thirst." Then came the most majestic word ever uttered by man—how magnificent a claim it is on the lips of a sufferer dying between two robbers, Himself numbered with the transgressors!—"It is finished," He said: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.

We can easily see how "Christ crucified" was "a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to

the Greeks." But how has it become to Paul and to us "the power and the wisdom of God"? The secret lies in this: It was a *willing* sacrifice. "Let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe Him," was the taunt they hurled as He hung. Well, He could have done it—for He was the Son of God, and had the very angels in their legions at His command. But He *would* not do it. That is the power and the wisdom of it. He endured the cross for the joy set before Him. And now He joins with the angels in heaven—who so well as He?—in their joy over every sinner that repenteth.

## II.

December 13.—John xx. 1-18.

### CHRIST RISEN.

IN the first part of the lesson, which describes the hurried visit of Peter and John to the tomb, there is nothing that needs explanation. But if the teacher will read it to the scholars in the following accurate translation by Principal Moule (from the *Churchman*, November 1891), he will certainly give them a clearer impression than even from the Revised Version, of how lively and natural the original Greek is. Let them simply listen without looking on their Bibles, while it is read.

"Now on the first day of the week Mary of Magdala comes early, while it was still dusk, to the tomb, and sees the stone taken out of the tomb. So she runs and comes to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and says to them, They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have put Him. So they went out, Peter and the other disciple, and set out for the tomb. So they were running, the two together; and now the other disciple ran forward, quicker than Peter, and came first to the tomb; and, stooping from the side, he sees lying the linen cloths. He did not go in, however. So Simon Peter comes, following him, and went into the tomb, and views the linen cloths lying, and the napkin that was over His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but apart, rolled up and put in a separate place. So the other disciple, who came first to the tomb, then went in, and he saw, and believed. For not as yet did they know the Scripture, that of necessity He would rise from the dead."

In the second part of the lesson there is one difficulty; only one, but it is exceeding difficult.

What is the meaning of our Lord's words to Mary of Magdala, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father"? Explanations are nearly as numerous as commentators. It is certain that "touch" is not the same as "handle," for a different word is used when He said to Thomas, "Handle me, and see" (Luke xxiv. 39). It means the touch of affection, the touch that would lay hold and keep for one's own. Jesus will submit to "handling" during these forty days, if by handling Him their belief in His resurrection can be made sure. But no touch that would retain Him here may be laid upon Him. He has really left them so far as His earthly life is concerned. "I go my way," He had said, and the moment of death was the moment of departure. He had also said, however, "I come again." Then He might be touched with the touch that loves to possess and keep as one's own for ever. For, then, He comes to be with us always to the end of the world. But this is in the Spirit, and cannot begin till after the Ascension. "Touch me not, with fond clinging touch; for I am gone from the earthly touch, and I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go tell my brethren that I do ascend to my Father, whence I will come in the Spirit and abide with you for ever."

There is little else to explain. Let it be quite distinctly understood that all we know of Mary Magdalene is that she had been possessed with seven devils, and Jesus had healed her. No one now believes that she and "the woman who was a sinner" are one and the same. (See Professor Bruce in *THE EXPOSITORY TIMES*, vol. i. p. 280.)

THEN comes the point of the whole story, upon which the teacher may speak at will, for it is as simple as it is beautiful. It is what Principal Moule calls "the collocation and contrast, so startling yet so deeply truth-like, between the total *failure of their faith* and the *survival of their love*." There is no part of the Gospels that has been so much assailed by unbelief as this, and there *are* difficulties in harmonising with the other Evangelists. But there is no part in which will be found so many natural touches, which disprove all notions of mere invention. To take only one, says Godet, "Mary answers the question of the angels as simply as if she had been conversing with human beings, so thoroughly is she pre-occupied with a single idea: to recover her Master. Who could have invented a touch like this?"

And just like this is the point of the whole narrative. Who could have invented the idea that not one of them, after all He had told them, was ready for His resurrection? And who could have added to it this further thought, that not one of them had lost their love for Him, notwithstanding the *mistake*, as they must have called it—the long and terrible mistake under which they had lived with Him? "They expected that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel" out of all her troubles. And instead of that He had gone to death like a common evil-doer! So their confidence went. But their love remained.

For they knew how good He had been, how true in thought and word and action, how kind to them, how lovable in all His life. Their love remained, because they knew what He had done for them. Mary Magdalene—had He not sent the devils away! And Peter in His presence had been less impatient and self-confident, and John less revengful. They could not but love Him, for He had taken them out of themselves and made them better.

How clearly will even the youngest child see the force of this! How do you know that your father is good? Because when I am near him I am good myself. How do we know Jesus is lovable? Because when we are nearest to Him we are most lovable ourselves.

### III.

December 20.—John xxi. 1-14.

#### THE RISEN CHRIST AND HIS DISCIPLES.

Let us notice these points first:—

1. "Jesus showed Himself" (ver. 1). "Manifested Himself" is better. It is almost "made Himself visible." The word is very appropriate to this time between the Resurrection and Ascension.

2. "The Sea of Tiberias" (ver. 1). The Sea of Galilee is called the Sea of Tiberias by St. John alone.

3. "The sons of Zebedee"—James and John. The Evangelist does not name his brother or himself, and he even gives them the last place in the list, except the two unnamed, who may not have been any of the Eleven.

4. "For he was naked" (ver. 7), that is, He had off his outer garment.

5. "Two hundred cubits" (ver. 8). About one hundred yards.

6. "The third time" (ver. 14). It was the third manifestation to the disciples *as a whole*.

THIS INCIDENT, says Edersheim, "sparkles like a gem in its own setting. It is of green Galilee, and of the blue lake, and recalls the early days and scenes of this history." Jesus had told the disciples to go into Galilee, and He would meet them there. They had gone, and while they waited (and some still doubted), they very naturally fell to their old employment again. Said Simon Peter, one evening, "I go a-fishing." The other six who were at hand joined him. But they had a long and fruitless night of toil. Then came Jesus—already at hand "in every time of need." They did not know Him. Mary Magdalene at the tomb did not know Him at first—we know not why. He was the same, and yet not the same. But when the fish were found, and found so plentifully at His word, John looked again, and his keen, loving perception first knew "the Lord." John first perceived, but Peter first acted,—true touches, as all the history declares.

It is generally believed that this chapter was added by St. John to his Gospel sometime after the rest had been written, perhaps in order to disprove a story that had got abroad that Jesus had said he (John) would not die, but be there when Christ came again. Be that as it may, it is not easy to doubt that it is a true chapter. The little things (they are *all* little things) that mark the eye-witness and the loving memory are very numerous. It would be a healthful exercise were the children to find them out.

Among the rest there is that striking scene as they breakfasted together. See how they know Him, and yet how they would like to ask Him, "Is it Thou?" And, again, how they feel they durst not ask him! How love and awe mingle! And they are silent. And Jesus seems to have left them to think, for there is not a word recorded till the breakfast was over, and surely it would have been recorded had He spoken at all. It is very cunning, if invented; we have no such cunning writers now.

## Point and Illustration.

### The Life of Christ.

*The Theological Monthly.*

LAVATER once said to Herder, "Why do you not write the life of Christ?" "I write the life of Christ?" was his reply. "I? Never! The Evangelists have done that as it ought to be done. Let us not *write* it, but *live* it."

### Sinless Anger.

*The United Presbyterian Magazine.*

I HEARTILY sympathise with Adam Smith, who said, as a man who had made excuses for a bad character left the company, "I can breathe more freely now. I cannot bear that man; he has no moral indignation in him." The mind of Christ is far too seldom followed in the conduct of our social relations.

### It Takes Time.

*The Modern Church.*

CANON SCOTT HOLLAND in a recent sermon told a capital story of Mr. Ruskin and one of his pupils. "Ah! Mr. Ruskin," said one of his too eager disciples, "the first moment that I entered the Gallery at Florence, I saw at once what you meant in asserting the supremacy of Botticelli." "Did you, in a moment? Dear me," rejoined the master; "it took me twenty years to find it out."

### The Gospel for To-day.

By the Rev. Alexander M'Laren, D.D.

*The Baptist Magazine.*

WE are all one in the recognition of the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ does not reach its final triumph when it simply deals with individual life, but is intended to leaven, to sweeten, to ennoble, I was going to say, to deify—and the word would be literally correct—human society by having previously performed the same processes on the individuals who compose it. The lesson for this day for us is, as it seems to me, to deepen and intensify our own efforts for—and I use the good old-fashioned word with all the meaning that our fathers gave to it—the conversion of individual men, and then to seek the regeneration of society.

### "All Things in Order."

*The Day of Days.*

IN the old days of the South, a negro slave and preacher had an infidel master. The master said to the slave one day, "You are a preacher, Sam?" "Well, I tells about Jesus some, massa." "Well, if you are a preacher you ought to understand the Bible. Now tell me what does this mean?"—and he opened the Bible and read—"And whom He did foreknow, them He did predestinate,"—words that have puzzled wiser heads than the poor slave. "Well," said the slave, "massa, where is it?" "It's in Romans," said the master. "Oh, my dear massa! I f'"