

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE Bishop of Durham has become an advocate of prayer for the dead. The War has done some wonderful things for us. This is one of the most wonderful.

Dr. MOULE has written 'Words for Hearts in Trouble,' publishing them with the title of *Christus Consolator* (S.P.C.K.; 1s. 6d. net). In one of these 'Words' he considers the case of 'Passing Souls.'

It is a difficult subject. Dr. MOULE knows its difficulty. With as keen a sense of responsibility as man can feel, he considers the case of him who is called to face death suddenly and to find it. Was he ready?

The Bishop of Durham would not for himself or for us in our normal hour, 'dare, ever so little, to trifle with the mercy of God.' 'Nothing,' he says, 'is more evident in the Bible than its insistent, its *anxious*, appeal to come, and come now, to the open arms of the Lord; to "choose life"; to "make your calling sure"; to "fly for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

But there is another side. The Bishop of Durham is bold enough to appeal to the majesty of God. Who are you that would 'limit the mercy of the Merciful,' or that would 'prescribe to

Him the precise methods in which He shall be pleased to bring the passing soul and the sacrifice of Calvary together?' Then with an eager application of

God's children cannot wander beyond reach
Of the sweep of His white raiment,

'assuredly,' he says, 'the hem of the garment of His Son has long fringes.'

He is bold enough to appeal to human experience. Human experience, he says, gives us one far-reaching suggestion as to the possible action of the mercy of the Merciful in the very article of death. The verse is well known:

Betwixt the stirrup and the ground
Mercy I sought, mercy I found.

And he adds this incident; it was told him by the vicar of the parish in Essex where it occurred. 'A woman of some sixty years died there in his time. She was well known to pastor and people as a loving Christian soul, true in life and death. In youth she had been violently passionate. One day, half demented with anger, she ran from the cottage, and threw herself down the open well—that familiar thing in East Anglian gardens. Almost dead, she was drawn up, and slowly recovered her senses. Her first words were, "If I had died in the well I know I should have been

saved; as I was falling down, I remembered all mother taught me, and I believed it with all my heart." Forty years, lived "in newness of life," were the sequel of those moments.'

Then come the words which express his assurance. 'Let us be sure, across all mysteries, that the Merciful will not have *less* mercy than His wont when the passing soul, more or less consciously, is giving itself in the agony of battle for the lives and homes of others.'

Now it is surprising that the Bishop of Durham did not stop there. Is there more that needs to be said? Is there more that can be said? He seems to think there is. He seems, quite unexpectedly, unable to let go his human hold. When the sheaf is gathered home, ripe and ready, there is no need for anything but praise. But Dr. MOULE cannot quite get over the question, 'Was he ready?' He was caught in the trenches, or the lust of battle was on him as he rushed forward. It came to him in a moment. Was he ready?

If he was not, if we cannot be quite assured that he was, what then? Well, first of all, 'with a trembling but holy hope looking to the Crucified and Risen, we would commit the soul, and commit our hearts, to the hands, infinitely kind, of "a faithful Creator."' And almost ere he is aware of it, Dr. MOULE has stretched his own hands into the unseen and prayed for the dead.

It is not prayer for deliverance from gloom and pain. Misgivings about such a prayer 'are wholly justified.' It is no more than 'a breath of loving aspiration sent after the spirit into its abode of light, asking, as a certainty may be asked for, for the perpetual growth in the emancipated being of the graces and the bliss of the heavenly rest, and its holy progress and education in the knowledge of its Lord.'

And he offers us such a prayer to pray. 'It lies before me, composed for private use. It is

beautiful in its restraint and tenderness: "Grant that his life may unfold itself in Thy sight, and find a sweet employment in the spacious fields of eternity. . . . Tell him, gracious Lord, if it may be, how much I love him . . . and long to see him again; and, if there be ways in which he may come, . . . grant me a sense of his presence, in such a degree as Thy laws permit. . . . Pardon, O gracious Lord and Father, whatever is amiss in this my prayer, and let Thy will be done; for my will is blind and erring, but Thine is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."'

To Dr. A. H. M'NEILE, in his *Commentary on St. Matthew*, recently issued, the Transfiguration of our Lord signified the passing of the Law and the Prophets. Another study of the Transfiguration has appeared. It occupies a whole volume, the title being simply *The Transfiguration of Jesus* (Kelly; 1s. net). The author is a scholarly Wesleyan, the Rev. William Ernest BEET, M.A., D.Lit.

What was the purpose of the Transfiguration? As Dr. M'NEILE, so also Dr. BEET finds the deepest significance of it in the presence of Moses and Elijah. But not to the doing away of the Law and the Prophets.

Not that Dr. BEET denies that purpose in the Transfiguration. Moses and Elijah must always represent the Law and the Prophets. In them the Old Covenant is as it were incarnate. And now they take a subordinate place in the presence of the Messiah. 'Bowing for a moment in the presence of One mightier and grander far than they, then vanishing away into the unseen, leaving that One alone in view, they form an impressive symbol of the splendid truth, of which the world at large is, unhappily, as yet all unconscious, that old things are passed away and all things become new.'

But that is not the chief meaning of the Trans-

figuration. Moses and Elijah represent the *already accomplished result* of the death of Jesus on the Cross. For trouble had possession of Him as He reached the Mount. Even then His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death. It was not the fear of death. It was not the fear of physical death, cruel beyond all human invention as that death was to be. It was not the fear of social death, bitter as it was to know that they whom He loved would forsake Him and flee, while one of them would betray Him. It was not even, in Dr. BEET'S belief, the dread of spiritual death, a projection thus far of the awful cry, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' It was the fear that all would be in vain; that, when the death in all its forms was undergone, nothing should come of it.

Therefore it was that Moses and Elijah appeared in glory. What is glory? It is the visible manifestation of goodness. It is that goodness, seen and recognized, which no man can attain to by his own effort, but which is the result of the redemption wrought by Christ. If Moses and Elijah had symbolized merely the passing of the Law and the Prophets, there was no occasion for their appearing in glory. It would have been more appropriate if they had appeared in their familiar form of lawgiver and prophet, as they were known on earth. They appeared in glory to signify that *through the death of Christ* they had already become perfect as their Father in heaven is perfect.

That was as the balm of Gilead to the harassed soul of Jesus. 'It requires no great exercise of imagination,' says Dr. BEET, 'to enable us to understand how, thus seeing in actual visible form before His eyes the noble result of that sacrifice yet to be made, and of those sufferings still to be endured, the Saviour would be not a little strengthened by the ministry of Moses and Elijah to tread that *Via Dolorosa* which lay before Him, the dark and painful way of the cross. If it were possible that such an experience should be our

own, under similar circumstances, we too should derive comfort and encouragement therefrom. Let us suppose, for a moment, that we stand face to face with some hard and painful duty, some God-appointed task, against the doing of which all our natural feelings and inclinations rise in revolt, the results of which, nevertheless, once it were done, will be exceeding great; could we but see that great result already accomplished to our hand, while the burden still rests heavy upon us, and before its pressure upon our spirit has reached its most intolerable climax—how should we thereby be nerved and strengthened to be steadfast to the end! This is precisely what our Lord experienced, and just the sort of help and encouragement that He received from the ministry of saints redeemed.'

But why call upon Moses and Elijah to fulfil a purpose such as this? The reason is twofold. First, it is necessary that they who are to show the full effect of the death of Jesus should have passed within the veil. And next, it is for Jesus the fulness of comfort that in Moses and Elijah He sees not only those who are to come after Him on earth redeemed with His precious blood, but those also who have gone before Him. Do we ask what of the Saints who finished their course on earth before the Incarnation? Did Jesus ask? This is the answer. They without Christ cannot be made perfect. The merit of His death is reckoned forward to them. Already, even before the death is accomplished at Jerusalem, Moses and Elijah come to Him in the glory of the redeemed. And as He looks upon them He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied.

'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth' (Ac 8³²). Thus read the Treasurer of Queen Candace. And when Philip joined himself to the chariot, Of whom speaketh the prophet this? he asked. Whereupon Philip, beginning from this scripture, preached unto him Jesus.

Philip knew nothing of the controversy about the Suffering Servant of the Lord. But he knew Jesus. He knew that, only a few years before, Jesus had stood His trial, first before the Jewish high priest, next before the Roman procurator, and then before the tetrarch of Galilee; and that at each trial, standing as a lamb before His shearer, He opened not His mouth. So he began from this scripture. He felt, no doubt, that a more appropriate scripture from which to preach Jesus could scarcely have been given into his hands.

Jesus 'opened not his mouth.' First He was tried by Caiaphas and the Jewish Sanhedrin. And when the witnesses bore false witness against Him, 'the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace and answered nothing.'

Then they brought Him before Pilate. The Roman governor was perplexed; and when the Jews persisted, saying, 'We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God,' Pilate became alarmed. He 'entered into the palace again, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer.'

Last of all, Pilate sent Him to Herod. For he had discovered that Jesus was from Galilee, over which Herod was tetrarch, and he was glad to shift this responsibility to the shoulders of another. And 'when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was of a long time desirous to see him, because he had heard concerning him; and he hoped to see some miracle done by him. And he questioned him in many words; but he answered him nothing.'

Three separate trials, before three distinct judges, and each time He 'opened not his mouth.' No doubt Philip would say that He was fulfilling Scripture. But He was doing more than that. He was judging men. He was judging His judges.

If He opened not His mouth when Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod asked Him their questions, it was because there was something in these men which made it impossible for Him to answer.

Take Pilate first.

Pilate was an irreligious man. He was irreligious before he was sent to govern Judæa, and it is not probable that anything which he saw in Jerusalem inclined him towards religion. Still it was not contempt for the particular religion professed by his turbulent subjects that made him slay the Galileans in the Temple, till their blood mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. Only an absolutely and glaringly irreligious man could have done that.

He had not always been irreligious. He had remembered his Creator in the days of his youth, as every Roman did. But then the evil days came. Hiding himself from God in self-indulgence, he found that God had hidden His face from him. Pursuing truth which he had no purpose of practising, truth had escaped his grasp. And when the day of decision came, that most unexpected day of decision upon which the Jews brought Jesus before him to be condemned, Pilate was unequal to the test. 'Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice,' said Jesus. 'Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?' And when he had said it, he passed out to speak to the Jews, unconscious that the opportunity of his life had been lost.

But when religion is thrust out at the door, superstition comes in by the window. Pilate was irreligious, and just on that account he was very superstitious. As he sat there on the judgment-seat, 'his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.' What a scene! The Roman Procurator in his robes of office is sitting on the judgment-seat, trying a prisoner on the capital

charge, and a message comes from his wife, that she has had a dream! As if the dream of a woman would influence a judge in the discharge of his duty! But Pilate's wife knew Pilate. The men who looked on observed the face grow white and the hand shake, and wondered what the message was.

The chief priests knew Pilate also. 'This man ought to die, they cried, because he made himself the Son of God.' The Son of God! Who ever heard of a Son of God? Who believes now that there *is* a God? And yet, 'when Pilate heard this saying, he was the more afraid; and he entered into the palace again, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer.'

Take Caiaphas next.

Unlike Pilate, Caiaphas was a religious man. He was the head of the grandest religion that the world had ever known. On his forehead he bore the plate of gold with its legend, 'Holiness to the Lord.' On his breast he carried the ephod with the mysterious Urim and Thummim, by which to discover the will of God. Once a year he entered the Most Holy Place, passing within the veil, beyond which no foot but his could go, no eye but his penetrate.

But in the religion of Caiaphas there was no reality. He was a formalist. He professed that which he did not practise; he practised that which he did not dare to profess. His religion was a cover for his covetousness; its glory was the goal of his selfish ambition.

One day news was brought to him that in a village a few miles from Jerusalem a man had been raised from the dead. Caiaphas called together the Council. He did not deny the fact of the man's resurrection from the dead. As a Sadducee he ought to have denied it; but the evidence was too strong. He called the Council together because he believed it. What was to be

done? If Jesus began to raise people from the dead, at the very gates of the City, there would be no keeping the people from taking Him and making Him their King. Then the Romans would be down upon them, and Caiaphas would certainly lose the high-priesthood which he had worked so hard to win and which it was the determination of his life to hold for many years to come. What was to be done?

The members of the Sanhedrin did not know what was to be done. Then Caiaphas rose. Where his own interests were concerned, this man always knew his mind. 'Ye know nothing at all,' he said, 'nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.' 'It is expedient for *you*,' he said. Some early transcriber of the Gospels wrote 'it is expedient for us.' That is what Caiaphas meant, of course. But he was too adroit to say it. So 'from that day forth they took counsel that they might put him to death.'

Jesus knew that they had taken counsel to put Him to death. When the trial came He knew that He was condemned already. They might bring forward witnesses, and the witnesses might agree or disagree, it made no difference. Therefore, when Caiaphas rose and said, 'Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee? He held His peace, and answered nothing.'

Take Herod last.

Unlike Pilate, Herod was a religious man; and, unlike Caiaphas, he was a really religious man. In a sense the Herods were all religious. They could not have held their place among the Jews if they had not been religious. It never was forgotten that they were of the hated race of Edom; but it was overlooked because of the things they did for the Jews' religion.

No doubt the religion of the Herods was some-

what primitive, not to say savage, being conversant with not a little meanness, cruelty, and lust. Still, Herod Antipas was religious. How otherwise should he send for John the Baptist as soon as he knew that he was in the neighbourhood, give him a place in the palace-fortress of Machaerus to preach in, go often to hear him, hear him gladly, and do many things which John bade him do?

There was one thing, however, which Herod would not do. He was living at the time with his brother Philip's wife. John told him to send her back to her husband. 'It is not lawful for thee to have her,' he said. Herod would not do that. And because he would not do it he lost all the reality and all the joy of his religious life.

It was a gross, an abominable sin that Herod was guilty of. But it does not take an abominable sin to slay a man's religious life. A very insignificant sin will do that, if it is persisted in. Herod heard John gladly, and did many things. But this one thing he would not do. And the day came when he had to send an executioner into the prison where John was now confined, and receive the preacher's bleeding head on a plate.

Some time after, Herod went up to Jerusalem to the Passover. And it so happened that Jesus also went up to that Passover feast. Now when Jesus had been brought before Pilate, the Roman governor, and when the Jews insisted that He should be condemned to death, though Pilate could find no fault in Him, the governor was greatly perplexed. Then some one happened to mention that Jesus belonged to Galilee. Why, that was part of Herod's territory, and Herod was at that very moment in Jerusalem. Thankful to get rid of a difficult duty, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod.

When Herod saw Jesus, He was 'exceeding glad.' He had never seen Him till now, though he had heard about Him. Once, after the death

of John the Baptist, some one brought him the intelligence that another prophet had appeared, and that the people were crowding to hear Him. Herod said an extraordinary thing. He said, It is not another; 'it is John whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead.' Herod wondered many a day how he could ever have committed such an egregious blunder. But when a man's conscience is outraged, it has a way of turning upon him and causing him to make a fool of himself.

But that day is long gone by. Now Jesus is coming to him. He will see Him. He will hear Him. Perhaps he will have the joy of seeing some miracle done by Him. And he questioned Him in many words. But Jesus answered him nothing.

How *could* He answer these men?

Take Pilate first. What would it have meant to Pilate if He had told him that He was the Son of God? What contact could the Son of God have with the Godless? How can two walk together except they be agreed? The unbeliever asks you to give him a demonstration of the existence of God. But he that cometh to God must *believe* that He is.

Take Caiaphas next. Caiaphas was deeper than Pilate, and his case is more difficult. Certainly nothing could seem simpler than the request that Jesus would tell them whether or not He had said, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' But He spoke of the temple of His body, and what would Caiaphas think if He told him that? He will tell him something, in a little, which he will be able to understand. For it is not that Jesus hopes or wants to escape condemnation. But the resurrection on the third day—that is not for Caiaphas. That is reserved for the true followers. And so when He did rise from the dead on the third day He appeared not to Caiaphas but to chosen witnesses, to those who could say, 'My Lord and my God!' to those who

were ready then to go into all the world and tell it to every creature. _____

Take Herod. Herod, we are told, hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Was it mere curiosity? Perhaps it was. Perhaps it was not. There was one miracle which would have done for Herod all that his heart desired. For he had never forgotten John the Baptist and the joy with which he heard him. What if Jesus can work such a miracle as will bring back the thrill of those days again—*although Herod keeps his sin*? So he questioned Him in many words. But Jesus answered him nothing. For well spake Isaiah, 'Cease to do evil, learn to do well; come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.' _____

There is yet another. Jesus could not answer those. There is another whom He could have answered but would not. And the expression of His refusal is the most emphatic of all. _____

It is the case of the woman of Canaan. 'And Jesus went out thence, and withdrew into the parts of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanitish woman came out from those borders, and cried, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word.' _____

He could have answered her, we say, but He would not. He could not answer Pilate or Caiaphas or Herod. There was a moral barrier between them which He could not pass. There was no moral barrier between Him and the Syro-Phoenician woman. And if there was no moral barrier there was no barrier at all. For that is the only impossibility with God. Why did He not answer her? _____

He did answer her, but He did not answer her yet. He meant to give her what she asked, but

He wished to give her more than she was asking yet. The healing of her daughter? Yes, He will give her that. But He will give her the healing of her own soul also. And that her soul may be healed she must be disregarded at the first, that her faith may have its opportunity. Is that it? _____

Yes, that is it. But that is not it all. One of the things in Jesus which we do not understand yet, which we are only dimly groping towards, is His reluctance to enter upon His work of redemption. We do not ask at present why He did not come to earth sooner. But when He did come, and when at the marriage in Cana of Galilee His mother gave Him the opportunity of glorifying Himself—as He did glorify Himself when He took it, for we are told that 'this beginning of miracles did Jesus, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him'—why was He so reluctant to begin? Why did He say, 'Mine hour is not yet come'? And what did He mean by it? _____

Again, after He began His work among the Jews, why was He so reluctant to begin among the Gentiles? Clearly this was the matter here. 'I was not sent,' He said, 'but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' Why not? We really cannot tell. _____

Nor can we tell why His soul was so greatly troubled when Philip and Andrew brought the Greeks into His presence. It is easy to say that He did not know that His gospel would burst the bonds of Judaism. But it is as incredible as it is easy. Paul knew better than that, and Paul knew nothing but what His Master taught him. Why did He turn a deaf ear to the bitter cry of the woman who came out of the region of Tyre and Sidon? We do not know. But this we know, that what He can He always will. When she would not be put to silence or to shame, He answered and said unto her, 'O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.'