

Nothing corresponding with the name of Nimrod has yet been found in the cuneiform texts, but the correctness of the spelling (making allowance for a possible interchange of *d* and *r*) is certified by its occurrence in Micah.

9. The saying was current among the West Semites, whose deity Yahweh (Yahum) was; see 9²⁰. Perhaps the expression implies that Nimrod hunted in that part of Babylonia in which the West Semites were settled.¹

10. The foundation of sovereignty was naturally connected with Babylon when that city under Khammu-rabi became the capital of Babylon and absorbed the traditions of the other cities of the kingdom. Moreover, Babylon was close to Kis. That Babylon should head the list of Babylonian cities shows that the passage belongs to an age subsequent to the rise of Khammu-rabi's empire. On the other hand the mention of Akkad refers us to the age of Sargon and Naram-Sin when that city was the capital of a powerful empire. It was at that period that it gave its name to the whole of

¹ It is possibly worth noting that 'the god NI of Kis,' mentioned in the Babylonian inscriptions, may be 'the god Yau of Kis,' since the ideograph NI is explained by *Yau* as well as *i/i*, 'god,' in S^a i. 18, 20.

Northern Babylonia. At an earlier date it had no existence, at all events as a city of importance, and at a later period it became a suburb of Sippara. Erech (Bab. Uruk) was one of the earliest seats of Semitic influence in Babylonia; it was the centre of the cult of Istar, and the capital of a dynasty. Its wall was said to have been built by Gilgames, whose history was closely associated with it. Calneh—Khalannê in the Septuagint—would seem to correspond with the Babylonian city Kul-unu, the Semitic name of which was Kullab. In the Talmud, however, it is identified with Nippur, now Niffer, where stood the chief and oldest sanctuary of Northern Babylonia. It is said to be 'in Shinar' in order to distinguish it from another Calneh,—the Kullâni or Kullania of the Assyrian inscriptions, which was in Northern Syria (Is 10⁹; cf. Ezk 27²³). Shinar is the Sankhar of the letters from the kings of Alasiya and Mitanni (Aram Naharaim) in the Tel el-Amarna correspondence, and is written Sangar in the geographical list of Seti I. The origin of the name is unknown, since it is not found in the Assyro-Babylonian texts, but the Tel el-Amarna tablets show that it was used by the nations who bordered on the Hittites in the Mosaic age.

The Bookshelf by the Fire.

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V.

John Donne.

Who or what was John Donne, it may be asked, that he should be given a place in this elect company? The question is not an easy one to answer. Not that I have any doubt it can be answered, but the fascination of Donne, though so real to all who have felt it, is yet so subtle and elusive, so defiant of definition, that it is very difficult to justify to the uninitiated even a very moderate enthusiasm. Donne was, it is true, an intimate friend and, in a sense, the master both of George Herbert and Izaak Walton; and on the principle of 'friends of a friend should themselves be friends,' it is hardly possible to be much in the

company of these two good men without desiring to know more of their friend. But this, though it may lead to an introduction and a nodding acquaintance, is obviously insufficient for admission to the closer fellowship of our bookshelf by the fire. What more, then, is there to be said?

I.

In the first place, few as are his readers to-day, during the first quarter of the seventeenth century, in an age famous for its great men, John Donne, letter-writer, preacher, and poet, was one of the most famous of the subjects of James I. Indeed,

Mr. Edmund Gosse, with his unrivalled knowledge of Jacobean life and literature, does not hesitate to speak of him as 'perhaps the most brilliantly equipped mind in His Majesty's dominions,'¹ and this at a time when Shakespeare, Bacon, and Bishop Andrewes were still living.

Donne's contemporary fame rested mainly on his preaching. Dr. Jessopp from the side of divinity,² and Mr. Gosse from the side of letters, agree in naming him the greatest preacher of his age. Izaak Walton's account of his preaching, based of course on his own recollections, is perhaps too well known to need repetition here. I may quote instead Mr. Gosse's admirable estimate: 'The popularity of Donne as a preacher rose to its zenith in 1626, and remained there until his death in 1631. During those years he was, without a rival, the most illustrious and the most admired religious orator in England. Lancelot Andrewes died in September of the former year. He had enjoyed a marvellous reputation; he had been called *stella predicantium*. But the celebrity of Donne surpassed that of Andrewes, and was unapproached until Jeremy Taylor came. Age gave to the fiery and yet sombre Dean of St. Paul's an ever-increasing majesty of prestige. His hearers borne along upon the flow of his sinuous melody, now soft and winning, now vehement in storm, now piercing like a clarion, now rolling in the meditative music of an organ, felt themselves lifted up to heaven itself. In these early days of Charles I. a sermon delivered by the Dean of St. Paul's was the most brilliant public entertainment which London had to offer.'³

This is lofty praise indeed; yet we are assured that, long before Donne had made for himself a reputation as a theologian and preacher, he had come to be regarded as one of the great letter-writers of his time. Such indeed was his reputation that, twenty years after his death, his son issued a quarto volume containing a hundred and twenty-nine of his father's letters, the first collection of private letters, it is said, ever published in England.

It is, however, his poems rather than his letters or sermons by which Donne retains his secure if not considerable place in English literature. Here

¹ *Life and Letters of John Donne*, vol. ii. p. 3.

² See his *John Donne*, in the 'Leaders of Religion' Series, p. 152.

³ *Life and Letters*, vol. ii. p. 234.

again his contemporary reputation was immense; and this is the more remarkable since, with a few exceptions, his poems were not given to the world till after his death. During the eighteenth century they were almost entirely lost sight of. In the following century interest both in the man and in his work revived again. Samuel Taylor Coleridge included him among the 'English Divines,' whose works he enriched with his own annotations; Henry (afterwards Dean) Alford issued his *Works* in six volumes;⁴ George MacDonald gave him a chapter to himself in his *England's Antiphon*; Bishop Lightfoot lectured on him as one of the 'Classic Preachers of the English Church';⁵ Dr. Jessopp, lifelong admirer and disciple, wrote of him in the 'Leaders of Religion' series; Mr. E. K. Chambers brought out a critical edition of his poems in two volumes; and, finally, in the last year of the century Mr. Edmund Gosse produced his exhaustive and critical biography.

And yet, when all is said, it must be freely admitted that neither as poet, preacher, nor letter-writer is Donne ever likely to gain the suffrage of more than the few. The long, learned, and brilliant sermons which all London crowded to listen to in old St. Paul's are to-day but a handful of dry dust. The letters which have never been reprinted until our own day are now, thanks to the industry and genius of Mr. Gosse, dusted, sorted, and annotated for the benefit of the modern reader. Yet when even an enthusiast like Dr. Jessopp is constrained to admit that as a letter-writer Donne can be attractive *at first reading* only to the few, one cannot help wondering how many, even Mr. Gosse, will succeed in luring back to the necessary second reading. Of Donne as a poet it is less easy to speak. His deep and abiding influence is known to every student of our literature. He was the founder of the school whose most distinguished representatives are Herbert and Crashaw. Two or three of his sacred poems—especially the 'Hymn to God the Father,' beginning 'Wilt Thou forgive that sin where I begun'—have secured a place in our modern anthologies. Dr. Saintsbury declares that were he to undertake the perilous

⁴ Of this, the only edition of the Works of Donne which has ever been attempted, Mr. Gosse has not one good word to say; 'it is,' he declares, 'no better than so much paper wasted.'

⁵ The lecture is now reprinted in Lightfoot's *Historical Essays* (Macmillan's Eversley Series).

task of singling out the finest line in English sacred poetry he should give his vote for Donne's—

so long
As till God's great *Venite* change the song.

As a sample of Donne at his best I may quote the lines of which George MacDonald was so fond,¹ written during the poet's last illness :

Since I am coming to that holy room,
Where, with Thy choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made Thy music ; as I come
I tune the instrument here at the door,
And what I must do then, think here before.

Yet here, too, the word of qualification and even of condemnation cannot be omitted. In saying this I am not thinking so much of the obscurities, the roughnesses, the grotesque conceits, the studied eccentricities that mar so much of Donne's poetry—what Mr. Gosse truly calls his 'irremediable imperfection as an artist.' In matters of this sort every age has its own standards, and it is useless to complain because those of the seventeenth century were not as ours. But Donne's offence lies deeper. To speak plainly, there are extant poems of his which are fit only for the dunghill. And if any one naturally loth to verify the statement for himself is disposed to think it the harsh verdict of a lean and sour puritanism, he may perhaps be satisfied when he finds even so seasoned a man of letters as Dr. Saintsbury driven to declare that Donne is at times 'simply and inexcusably nasty,' 'almost impudently licentious in thought and imagery.'² Again it is necessary to keep in mind our altered standards. Literary indecencies which public opinion to-day would not tolerate for a moment passed without comment in the days of James I. But when all is said the unhappy fact remains that across some of his poems Donne's shame is written in letters of fire.

If, then, these things are so, why, my imaginary questioner may ask again, and this time with heightened emphasis, why give to John Donne a place among our fireside favourites ?

II.

The answer to the question is to be found not so much in anything that Donne wrote as in the man himself, in the strange fascination of his

¹ See *England's Antiphon*, p. 116.

² See his *Elizabethan Literature*, p. 146, and Introduction to Mr. Chambers' edition of Donne's *Poems*.

complex and mysterious personality. Yet his secret who can tell? There is about him a splendid obscurity as baffling as it is attractive. Of scarcely any of his illustrious contemporaries do we know so much as we know of him, and yet he eludes us. 'No one,' Mr. Gosse truly says, 'is so difficult to realise, so impossible to measure, in the vast curves of his extraordinary and contradictory features.' Nevertheless, we may seek by the aid of a few rough notes to obtain some conception of this truly remarkable man.

And at once we are impressed by the large place which Donne filled in the lives of many of the most distinguished men of his time. He was, we may be sure, no ordinary man who could meet on terms of intellectual equality such men as Ben Jonson, Francis Bacon, Sir Henry Wotton, John Selden, Bishop Hall, Bishop Montague, Bishop Andrewes, George Herbert, and Izaak Walton. Women, too, of the highest rank and culture, delighted equally in his society. Royalty itself condescended to press upon him the duty of offering himself to the service of the Church. And yet for all this familiar intercourse with the great and learned, we note in Donne throughout a certain intellectual aloofness and isolation. In religion, for example, he was brought up a strict Roman Catholic, and his mother, who outlived him, died in the same faith ; but Donne himself in early manhood espoused and for the rest of his life loyally adhered to the Anglican Church. His independence of the prevailing fashions in the literary world was still more pronounced. He was a man of five-and-twenty when Spenser died, and over forty at the time of Shakespeare's death ; but he never appears to have betrayed the smallest interest in either. He had an intimate knowledge of the literature of Spain, but concerning the literature of his native land he observes for the most part only an 'austere and contemptuous silence.' 'It seems,' says Mr. Gosse, 'as though the poetry inspired by the Renaissance passion for beauty, the poetry written by Spenser and Shakespeare, and continued by a hundred tuneful spirits down to Shirley and Herrick, was to Donne as meat offered to idols.' It is easy, of course, to dismiss all this as a kind of intellectual near-sightedness, very pitiful to behold ; in Donne it was rather a natural stubbornness of mind which must see things for itself, which refused to admire merely what it was bidden to admire, which would

be as clay in no man's hands, which knew both how to choose and how to follow its own path.

But probably the main interest of Donne's life for most readers to-day lies in the strangely abrupt contrasts which it presents. His was, to borrow Bishop Lightfoot's phrase, a dislocated life. Now life may be dislocated in two ways: by a change of belief and by a change of character. There is the dislocation of the convert and the dislocation of the penitent, of a Luther and of a Bunyan. Donne's, as Lightfoot says, like St. Augustine's, was both the one and the other.

It is not easy for us to-day to realize with what fierce intensity the points in debate between the Roman and Anglican Churches were disputed in England during the first half of the seventeenth century. The issues involved were so immediate, so vast and far-reaching, that no serious man could be indifferent to them, least of all a thinker so restless and inquisitive as John Donne. As we have already seen, the controversy ended, so far as he was concerned, in his renouncing the Roman and embracing the Anglican faith. But the change was not due to 'any violent and sudden determination,' nor until he had, as he himself says, to the measure of his power and judgment, 'surveyed and digested the whole body of divinity, controverted between ours and the Roman Church.' It was not, Mr. Gosse thinks, until the year 1607, that is, when Donne was now a man of three-and-thirty, that he ended his wanderings in the No Man's land between the rival religious bodies, and definitely threw in his lot with the Church of England. And it was, if Mr. Gosse is right, this prolonged intellectual uncertainty, even more than moral scruples due to his wild and tempestuous youth, that postponed his ordination until his forty-second year.

But if by 1607 Donne was a convinced Anglican, he had still to experience the great spiritual change which made of him the man and the preacher he afterwards became. And in this connexion it is impossible to ignore the painful facts concerning Donne's early life which either ignorance or reverence led Walton to pass over so lightly in his beautiful but highly-idealized portrait of his master and friend. The simple truth is that behind the licentious poetry to which reference has already been made there lay a licentious life. There is no need to repeat the unsavoury details; they may be read in Mr. Gosse's biography. Once more the

comparison with St. Augustine comes to our minds. 'There was in Donne,' says Archbishop Trench, 'the same tumultuous youth, the same entanglements in youthful lusts, the same conflict with these, and the same final deliverance from them; and then the same passionate and personal grasp of the central truths of Christianity, linking itself, as this did, with all that he had suffered and all that he had sinned, and all through which, by God's grace, he had victoriously struggled.'¹ Victorious, yes, but—

Wounds of the soul though healed will ache,
The reddening scars remain
And make confession;
Lost innocence returns no more;
We are not what we were
Before transgression.

And so Donne found it. 'Thou hast set up,' he cries in an exquisite prayer 'which lies like an oasis in the rather sandy wastes of the *Essays in Divinity*,' 'Thou hast set up many candlesticks and kindled many lamps in me, but I have either blown them out, or carried them to guide me in and by forbidden ways. Thou hast given me a desire of knowledge, and some means to it, and some possession of it; and I have armed myself with Thy weapons against Thee. . . . But let me, in despite of me, be now of so much use to Thy glory, that by Thy mercy to my sin, other sinners may see how much sin Thou canst pardon.' And again, in his great 'Hymn to God the Father,' he prays:

Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I have won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallowed in a score?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.'

And once more when the sands of life were fast running out, as 'Paul the aged' rejoiced in that he had obtained mercy while yet he could not forget that once he had been 'a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious,' so in the heart of Donne memories both bitter and blessed strove together for the mastery: 'I cannot plead innocency of life, especially of my youth; but I am to be judged by a merciful God, who is not willing to see what I have done amiss.' Nor let it be supposed that this is merely the language of religious convention, the spurious piety which talks about its 'sin' but

¹ Quoted in Lightfoot's lecture referred to above.

forgets its 'sins.' The sob of the penitent is in it. It is the speech of a man who knows where and how and when he has done amiss, and with his finger on the ugly things of his own past cries aloud, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' And the grace of God which has so often made His heroes out of broken lives wrought mightily in Donne, transforming a 'magnificent rebel' not indeed into the 'crystal-hearted saint' of Walton's page, but into 'a still more brilliant and powerful servant.'

III.

Donne's 'abilities and industry in his profession,' writes Walton, 'were so eminent, and he so known and so beloved by persons of quality, that within the first year of his entry into sacred Orders, he had fourteen advowsons of several benefices presented to him: but they were in the country, and he could not leave his beloved London, to which place he had a natural inclination, having received both his birth and education in it, and there contracted a friendship with many, whose conversation multiplied the joys of his life.' There seems good reason for doubting the story of the 'fourteen advowsons,' but there is no mistake about Donne's attachment to London. A few facts will illustrate the intimacy of the great preacher's tie with the city of his birth and of his choice.

He was born in or near Bread Street, off Cheap-side—John Milton's Street—and within a stone's-cast of the famous Mermaid Tavern. The chief

scene of his ministry was old St. Paul's. In the modern cathedral, against the wall of the south choir aisle, stands his strange effigy, the sole memorial, it is said, of the old cathedral which perished in the Great Fire.¹ Still going west we come to the site, now occupied by the Congregational Memorial Hall, on which stood the old Fleet prison of which, for his indiscreet marriage with the daughter of Sir George More, Donne was for a time an inmate. At Lincoln's Inn he was preacher—or 'Divinity reader' as it was called—for five years, before becoming Dean of St. Paul's. Hard by is the church of St. Dunstan's-in-the-West, where Izaak Walton was vestryman and Donne for seven years vicar. A few yards still further west is the church of St. Clement Danes where lies his patient, weariful wife, the mother of his twelve children. And finally, to close without completing the list, on or near the site of the Olympic Theatre stood Drury House, in which, when his fortunes were at their lowest ebb, Donne received from its owner, Sir Robert Drury, hospitality and friendship.

¹ 'It is the long, gaunt, upright figure of a man, wrapped close in a shroud, which is knotted at the head and feet, and leaves only the face exposed—a face wan, worn, almost ghastly, with the eyes closed as in death. This figure is executed in white marble, and stands on an urn of the same, as if it had just arisen therefrom. The whole is placed in a black niche, which, by its contrast, enhances the death-like paleness of the shrouded figure. Above the canopy is an inscription recording that the man whose effigy stands beneath, though his ashes are mingled with western dust, looks toward Him whose name is the Orient' (Lightfoot).

In the Study.

The Seven Words.

V.

Christ the Human Sufferer.

'I thirst.'—Jn 19²⁸.

I. OUR Lord has been hanging six hours on the cross, and yet this is the first word which makes any reference to His bodily sufferings, the first which implies any sort of request for their alleviation. It is a single word—a short word of two syllables only—this fifth word which He utters. It may have been that He had no power to say more, that His tongue clave to the roof of His

mouth, and that His voice failed Him for thirst. The end is very close now, there is very little more that He has to do. He knows that all things are now finished, and soon He will say, 'It is finished.' Now, in order that the Scriptures might be accomplished, He saith, 'I thirst.'

The Scriptures referred to are no doubt the 22nd Psalm, as thus: 'My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws, and thou hast brought me into the dust of death'; and, again, the 69th Psalm, with its still more distinct outline of what actually came to pass at the Crucifixion: 'They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me