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Entre Nous.

The Baptism of Jesus.

'From the statement of Mk 1^5 that those who went out to John the Baptist were baptized of him in Jordan confessing their sins, it is safe to presume that some confession may have been asked of Jesus. We have the express assertion of the Baptist in Jn 1^{31} that "he knew him not," while from Mark's account we understand that the sign of the Dove was not observed until He came up out of the water. Nevertheless, according to Matthew (3^{14}), John sought to forbid the baptism of Jesus, saying, "I have need to be baptized of thee." The nature of Christ's confession might explain how John began to be convinced that he was in the presence of some one altogether holy. A purely innocent record would not have brought that conviction so readily as one in which a vicarious penitence was offered for the sins of all the world. Moreover, such a confession would best explain the significant words with which the Baptist presented Jesus to his followers.'

This view the Rev. W. W. D. Gardiner, D.Litt., of New Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh, develops in verse, putting the account of what happened into John's lips:

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

My pulsing heart is mad with awful hope.
Joy like a fever sets my blood on fire,
Yet, back of all my glad wild ecstasy,
Stays a numb pain, a great dull bruise, like shame,
Stabbed sharply through with pangs of poignant grief,
A pain like sin itself, not mine or thine
But all the sin of men, in one great wound
Scarred on one heart—for such a heart I've seen.

I stood by Jordan and there came a man,—
I knew him not, for I know no one,—nay,
Not mine own kin. This desert is my home.
He came to seek my baptism, but I winced
Whenas I bade him to confess himself.
Somehow I felt that bitterly I'd hear
The sins of such as he. He seemed so pure.
His flaxen clustered hair shone in the light
As of the sun's own colour, and his brow
Was noble (Julius the Roman Lord,
Whom the blind Gentiles worship as a God,
Had not a nobler mien), and this man too
Was kind and tender. In his gentle gaze
A child could read a mercy infinite.

It pained to feel this sweetness all might pass,
The vision fade, and as he spake, I'd glimpse
Some stain beneath. Aye, for full oft I've groaned,
Groaned and despaired, as child-like sweet-shaped lips
And teeth like pearl have oped on blackest tale,
And eyes all-seeming pure have wept blood-tears
Of guilt so vile, they should have left them blind.
But this man! If this man proved vile, I knew
My heart would break. Silent he mused awhile.
Then I did comfort me, 'He knows no sin.'
When he had mused, he sighed, and then began.
Oh, sorrow upon sorrow! Sin on sin!
My spirit quailed to hear this stranger speak,
For, not as other penitents, said he,
'This did I do and that,' but all man's heart,
Man's selfish, godless heart, he laid stark bare
Before me in its ugliness, its shame,
The cruel failure of a plan divine.

'My son, my son!' I cried, 'Thou dost confess
'The sins of all mankind. I asked thine own.
Not thine own soul is this thou barest to me.
Thine own, from a clear sunlit mountain-peak,
Looks down, as on a mist-wrapt fen on this,
The soul, bemired, of the essential man.
Thy heart is clean, and so nought hinders thee
To be baptized. Leave other men their faults.'

A keen reproach lit up his loving orbs.
'John! John!' he said, 'Does Satan speak through thee?
I am a man, and shall I pass men by?
Nay, God forbid that I should pass them by.
They are my brothers, let me bear their shame.
Shall I make boast of cleanness leaving them
All stained and helpless? John, thou too hast wept.
Thou too hast borne the sins of others here
Grieving by Jordan for our guilty race.
So let me bear earth's burden to her God.'

He finished his confession while I sat
Rebuked and sad, and when the tale was done
The sun was veiled and the cold twilight air

Stirred in the trees which, like dark giants, hung
Above the water. Silent, I mused aghast.
So great, so black the world's disease now seemed,
So feeble seemed my water-washing now
To cleanse these stains. 'Rise thou and baptize me,'
I cried at length, 'Baptize the world and me,
With fire or with some holy breath, O Christ';
And at his feet I knelt.

For it was He.
Later I saw the sign, the promised dove.
Next morn I gave my witness. 'See,' I cried,
'The Lamb of God who bears the whole world's sins.'
Who knew of all who crowded round me then,
Yea, who, but God, shall ever rightly know,
All that these words conceal, and all He bears,
The Lamb of God, who bears the whole world's sin?

The Truth of Errors.

Mr. Kennedy Williamson has followed his book of essays 'The Uncarven Timbers,' published last year, with another volume just as good, as fresh, as stimulating. He calls it *The Shining Traffic* (Hodder & Stoughton; 6s. net). Mr. Williamson touches on many subjects—the titles of the essays alone are a whet to the appetite—and always interestingly and with as much profit as pleasure to the reader. A characteristic essay (or, perhaps, in this case sermon) is that entitled 'On the Truth of Errors.' The preacher who announced his text as taken from 'the Epistle of Paul the Colossal to the Apossians' spoke better than he knew. 'Paul the Colossal!' Why, of course he was! Mr. Williamson finds four examples of the truth of errors in the Scriptures. First, there is the manifesto of Caiaphas, 'It is expedient that one man die for the nation.' Secondly, there is the inscription upon the Cross, 'This is Jesus the King of the Jews.' Thirdly, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save.' What is the fourth? It is Mary's mistake on the morning of the Resurrection when she took Him to be the gardener. 'Fantastic error indeed, which only tear-dimmed eyes could have committed! But when the damask roses are in bloom and the hedgerows are a-riot with eglantine, I know that Mary was right in her wild hazard. The glory of the garden is from His tilth and tending.'

The Cinema.

'The little folk who still live in the golden age and have not yet won the lack-lustre wisdom of the Olympians, are sometimes the greatest, albeit unwitting, philosophers. With their lisping malapropisms and their botched quotations, they often hit the mark with a plump accuracy in the very moment of their wildest errancy. . . .

'It was thus that a trenchant judgment was delivered, all naïvely, on the subject of the cinema. The power of a film for good or ill is far greater than that which its author could ever wield himself. . . . Many films are ambassadors of truth and beauty, and lift the minds of men clear of the slough that engulfs them. But when the cinema turns its powers to exploiting prurience, men who have ideals for the world's moral cleanliness must swear war to the death. In fact, little Jack put the matter in a nutshell when he innocently misquoted, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against picture-palaces and powers."

'I am not, however, so cynical or so ungallant as to set my seal of approval upon Jack's answer on another occasion when in the course of his catechism he was asked: "What is the Holy Estate of Matrimony?" Yet when one gets a glimpse now and then into some of the joyless partnerships that pass for wedlock, one feels that in the muddlement into which the youthful catechumen slipped, he really stumbled upon something all too true. "The Holy Estate of Matrimony," he replied, "is an estate of sin and misery in which we are prepared for another and better world."'[1]

A Great Headmaster.

Much of the tone of Westminster School was due to the personality of its Headmaster, Dr. James Gow. The secret of his influence is shown in the following selected addresses which has been published by Messrs. Macmillan, with the title *Dr. James Gow, Litt.D.* (8s. 6d. net). The book contains also a short memoir by R. M. Barrington-Ward. Dr. Gow went to Westminster in 1901—after being Headmaster of Nottingham High School for some years—and he remained at Westminster until 1919, when, worn out by the strain of the war years, he retired.

What was his secret? The addresses show an all-engrossing care for the welfare of the boys, a deep piety, a simplicity which fails to hide much learning and a breadth of outlook which does not often accompany these. Here is Dr. Gow on the sense of humour: 'It is,' he says, 'really a sense of incongruity . . . which continually compares two things that happen to be side by side with one another and observes a certain absurdity that there may be in that juxtaposition. And it is our sense of humour that Dr. Gow blames for the pleasure which is taken in stories which are indecent. For 'there is no incongruity in life so great as that between the spiritual and intellectual powers of

[1] K. Williamson, *The Shining Traffic*, 83 ff.

man and his gross bodily needs and habits. Humour is only too apt to seize on this absurdity and to laugh at it over and over again.'

The paragraph which follows is Dr. Gow's treatment of the phrase 'Redeeming the Time.'

'Redeeming the time.'

'St. Paul was a prisoner at Rome, with plenty of time for meditation, and the phrase "redeeming the time" evidently haunted his mind as expressing exactly the duty of Christians amidst a hostile society. But what does it mean? It is a proverbial expression with us, and yet it has been completely misunderstood. The ordinary man, seeing that the phrase has some moral intention, takes the first meaning that seems appropriate and thinks that to "redeem the time" must be to make good use of it, to make the most of it, not to waste it.

'And if you turn to the Revised Version, you will see that the learned editors, although both in Ephesians and in Colossians they retain the old translation "redeeming the time," yet put in the margin at both places a note that the Greek words literally mean "buying up the opportunity." The note comes from Bishop Lightfoot, who paraphrased it as meaning, "letting no opportunity slip you of saying and doing what may foster the cause of God." That is nearly the same thing as the popular explanation and is good doctrine too, but I think, for once, Bishop Lightfoot was wrong. The Greek words did not mean *that* to St. Paul. They may have had that meaning in the time of Demosthenes and the classical Greek writers four hundred years before St. Paul, but the language changed much in those four hundred years, as languages always do.

'The fact is that "redeeming the time" is the exact equivalent of the Greek; and the explanation of the English words is also the explanation of the Greek words. About the word "redeem" there is no ambiguity. It means to rescue at a price, *i.e.* from slavery, from punishment. The real ambiguity lies in the words "the time." Most people take this to mean clock-time,—that which brings events and opportunities. But there is another meaning of "the time" both in Greek and in English. When Hamlet says:

> The time is out of joint, O cursèd spite
> That ever I was born to set it right,

he does not mean the clock-time, but the habits, opinions, and actions of his fellow-men. If the translators of the New Testament had used the words "redeeming the time," the sense would have been exactly given and no difficulty could have arisen. For that is what St. Paul meant. He was counselling the Christians in Ephesus to redeem the times.'

Be Interesting.

'We must try to be interesting. Whatever else we may possess, without that we fail, precisely as Spenser, for all his genius, cannot carry us through the glory of the "Faerie Queene," because, as Macaulay has it, with all its splendour of massed successes, it has one fault—tediousness, and that one makes the cloyed mind turn back. It is a very little and a very weary company that plods on to the very end. And that is often where the pulpit stumbles. Bunyan gives us a passing glimpse of an unfortunate being, "a young woman, whose name was Dull." Ah! poor soul, can't you see her, flat-faced, flat-footed, a mere vacant lump of a thing? Too many preachers spring from her family, and are her full brothers—they, too, are dull.

And, being dull, why should folk listen to us? Don't you remember how Johnson, meeting Fox in the club, the latter started speaking about Catiline's conspiracy, of all prosaic subjects. "So," says Johnson calmly, "I withdrew my attention, and thought about Tom Thumb." And quite right too. When in the pew I, too, have had occasion to withdraw my attention: and one wonders sometimes when preaching whether, attentive and absorbed though all the faces seem, the minds are really following, or have reverted to some other object, some Tom Thumb! They give us our chance. If we cannot hold them, it is our own fault. We must be interesting.'[1]

Genesis and Science.

'So far as the details of science are concerned, the Bible stands aloof. Supposing, for instance, the first chapter in Genesis had, by some miracle, addressed its earliest readers in the language of the theory of evolution. It would not have lived two generations. De Quincey even argued that, if the Bible had taught man any of the arts or sciences, "capital doubts" would have arisen in our minds regarding its authority. It would have been abandoning a Divine mission for a human. Moreover, may it not be asked, what science should we expect the Bible to teach? The science of the nineteenth century, or of the twentieth, or of a thousand years hence?'[2]

[1] A. J. Gossip, *In Christ's Stead*, 227.
[2] T. Mark, *The Appeal of the Bible To-day*, 4.

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