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than a complete reconstruction of all human ideals, and ultimately an entire enrichment of all ethical and social conditions of earthly life. To what purpose, it has been asked,[1] would have been the ethical teaching of Jesus, if the end of all things was to come at once? It would have been, as one has said, a futile waste of labour. What would have been the use of propounding an absolute and universal ethic, adapted to the character and conditions of the whole world, and intended, for all men of all time and every race, if the moral principles and truths He proclaimed had admittedly only a temporary application, and were not fraught with ultimate and eternal values? We have misread the New Testament if we do not rise from its perusal with the conviction that the Redeemer came as a living man into a weary and distraught world, and by inculcating a living message of the Fatherhood of God and His Divine purpose for all mankind, gave a new inspiration and a spiritual elevation to the dreams and aspirations not only of those who were devoutly waiting for the consolation of Israel, but to His own and every succeeding age. To interpret the Kingdom of God from a narrow Apocalyptic point of view, and to depict our Lord as the propounder of a merely temporary ethic, is surely to miss the spiritual insight, the originality and breadth of our Saviour's life and teaching.

If we sum up the meaning of the Kingdom of God as presented in the Gospels, three conceptions, not entirely separate from one another, but blending together, may be regarded as its essential elements. The first is the Kingdom, as a principle of life and conduct in men's hearts. As such it is not something which is to come in outward show, but something which is already here. The second is what is sometimes called the Christian Church, but is better described as Christianity, looked upon as a mighty progressive force in the world. The third is the Kingdom as the final consummation of all things. The Kingdom may thus be regarded in three aspects: as Present, Progressive, and Future—as a *Gift* immediately bestowed by Jesus; as a *Task* to be worked out in the history of the world; as a *Hope* to be consummated in the heavenly life.

[1] See *The Life and Teaching of Jesus, the Christ*, by A. C. Headlam, D.D., Bishop of Gloucester, 1923, p. 264.

The Historical Method and the Preacher.

By Professor John E. McFadyen, D.D., Glasgow.

II.

Homiletics and History.

Theophanies.

Another aspect of this problem for the preacher is created by the presence of theophanies and miracles in the narratives with which he deals, and by the existence of parallels revealed by the study of comparative folk-lore. As an illustration of this last source of perplexity may be mentioned the account of the birth of Sargon, king of Accad. 'My mother'—the inscription runs—'who was poor, conceived me and secretly gave birth to me; she placed me in a basket of reeds, she shut up the mouth of it with pitch, she abandoned me to the river, which did not overwhelm me. The river bore me away, and brought me to Akki, the drawer of water, who received me in the goodness of his heart,' etc. No one can read this tale without wondering whether it has in any way affected the story of the birth of Moses. Again, in the earlier historical books of the Old Testament God or His angel frequently appears bodily upon the scene, speaking to men face to face as a man to his friends. Abraham in Gn 18 is visited by three supernatural wayfarers, one of whom is Jehovah Himself, and he entertains them hospitably. Their feet are washed, and they partake of 'the butter and milk, and the calf which Abraham had dressed.' Did these things happen as they are recorded or did they not? If they did, we shall have to revise pretty drastically our conception of God and to deny what reason and Scripture unite in affirming, that 'no man hath seen God at any time.' If they did not, then in what sense, if in any, is the preacher still free to use the narratives which record them?

Miracles.

These tales may be taken as the primitive expression of the fellowship that may subsist between God and mortal men. But far more perplexing to the preacher is the use he may make of narratives involving the miraculous within periods that are definitely historical. A crucial instance would be the great cycles recording the deeds of Elijah and Elisha. Both, especially the Elisha cycle, abound in incidents which will seem to many educated men to be legendary rather than historical in the strict sense of the word. Did contact with Elisha's body really bring back a child from the dead? Still more may we ask, Did a dead man revive and stand upon his feet from simple contact with the dead prophet's bones? Did the Phœnician woman's jar of meal waste not and her cruse of oil not fail? Did fire descend from heaven and consume the sacrifice upon Elijah's altar? There are critical scholars, like Kittel, who accept the last incident at any rate as sober fact. If, however, a preacher has come to believe that an atmosphere of legend lies about these cycles, charged as they are with so much literary beauty and religious insight, must he then, however sorrowfully, abandon the right to use them? It would appear that he must, if he accepts the dictum, that preaching from a historical narrative is illegitimate, if its history be not real history. His natural hesitation to treat miracle as history will be increased if he observes, as he may both in Old and New Testament, the tendency to enhance the miraculous. This tendency is demonstrable in the story of the retreating shadow on the sun-dial—compare Is $38^{7f.}$ with 2 K $20^{9f.}$—and in the story of the daughter of Jairus, who in Mk 5^{23} is at the point of death when her father summons Jesus (cf. Lk 8^{42}), while in Mt 9^{18} she is already dead.

The Patriarchal Stories.

What, again, is the preacher to do with the patriarchal stories, if his studies have led him to believe that these describe the movements and experiences of tribes rather than the careers of individual men?—if, for example, Shechem's violation of Jacob's daughter and the retaliation upon Shechem by Jacob's sons in Gn 34 are to be interpreted in the light of the amalgamation and the struggle of Israelites and Shechemites as recorded in Jg 9? Or again, if the days of Abraham, assuming him to have existed, seem too distant for tradition to have preserved any genuine reminiscence of his career, the moving story of the all but consummated sacrifice of Isaac (Gn 22) will evaporate into a late prophetic protest against child sacrifice—valuable indeed as a noble indictment of a horrible practice, but not as an incident in Abraham's career, or as an illustration of his sublime faith and submission to what he believed to be the will of God. On the tribal treatment of the patriarchal stories all the personal quality which has endeared these tales to fourscore generations vanishes and leaves the preacher with a sense of irreparable loss. Many will think that Stade treats this matter too lightly when he remarks [1] that for the use of these tales in religious instruction it is a matter of indifference whether the record is historically true, if only it has an inward truth and can be used for moral and religious education.

But the problem created for the preacher by these stories cannot be ultimately separated from that of the earlier chapters of Genesis, which record the story of the temptation and fall of 'our first parents.' He would indeed be a bold man who to-day would regard it as a literal history of the first human pair. Here surely, if anywhere, we are within the prehistoric period, of which, in the nature of the case, we have no authentic literary memorial, and of which we may be truly said to know nothing except by inference. Yet every man who knows his own heart knows that the story is true: it is the story of his own fall; and no sensible man will quarrel with the primitive and mythical form in which its searching thoughts are clothed. Adam (אדם) is man, and his story is ours. The writer treats him, and doubtless regards him, as the first individual man, but that does not invalidate the power of the story over our own hearts and consciences. Similarly, it is very probable that the Hebrew historians regarded, as they certainly treated, the patriarchs as individuals. The chequered careers of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph are portrayed by historians who, one can hardly doubt, accepted them as historical personalities, through whom the Divine purpose for Israel and the world was gradually evolving, and the preacher, in so accepting them, but follows in their footsteps; if he errs, he errs in good company. So we are brought back to recognize the essential justice of Stade's contention that the narratives, whether literal history or not, have an inner truth which peculiarly qualifies them to be vehicles of edification.

[1] *Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments*, vol. i. p. 66.

The Christian Faith and the Christian Facts.

This argument, however, is not without its peril to a faith like Christianity, which professes to rest upon history, for it could readily issue in a depreciation of the importance of the Christian facts. Schmiedel, for example, thus confesses his independence of them: 'My innermost religious possession would be in no way injured, if I were obliged to-day to reach the conviction that Jesus never lived. I would, of course, miss being able to look back and up to Him as a real person; but I would know that the measure of piety which has long been mine could not be lost again simply through my inability to derive it any longer from Him?' In the same strain G. Lowes Dickinson maintains that the inspiration of the recorded life and sayings of Jesus 'would be the same, whether he regarded the record of the Gospels as myth or fact, and would depend, not on the existence of Christ in the past or in the present, but on the conception of life embodied in His story.' Whether this attitude will commend itself to us or not is largely a question of intellectual temperament. Probably, however, for most people the power of the gospel story would be incalculably diminished, if its central Figure were suspected to be a creature of the imagination, or even if—short of this—its leading incidents were felt to be fiction rather than fact. They would agree with Mardon in disputing Mark Rutherford's contention that 'what the four evangelists recorded was eternally true, and the Christ-idea was true whether it was ever incarnated or not in a being bearing His name. "Pardon me," said Mardon, "but it does very much matter. It is all the matter whether we are dealing with a dream or with reality. I can dream about a man's dying on the cross in homage to what he believed, but I would not perhaps die there myself; and when I suffer from hesitation whether I ought to sacrifice myself for the truth, it is of immense assistance to me to know that a greater sacrifice has been made before me—that a greater sacrifice is possible."' Believers in the significance of history for faith may reassure themselves by remembering that whereas, in the patriarchal stories, centuries separate the record from the fact, the story of Jesus was written between one and two generations after His death, and much of it must have the value of practically contemporary evidence.

The Historian and the Preacher.

Within the Old Testament, however, we ought carefully to distinguish between the task that the record presents to the modern historian and the preacher respectively. The writer of the history of the Hebrew people, if he is persuaded that the patriarchal stories preserve in the main reminiscences of tribal or national experiences, or that legend has mingled with the story of Moses and the wilderness wanderings, is obviously not free to treat the patriarchs as the fathers of the Hebrew people, or the Book of Exodus as if it had the value of a contemporary record. He may not feel that he has the solid ground of properly authenticated history beneath his feet till he reaches the days of Deborah, and his sketch of the period before her may have to be drawn in the vague, broad lines suggested by tradition and supplemented by inferences derived from the subsequent history. But the preacher is under no such constraint. He places himself at the point of view of the writers who gave the narrative its present form and whose motive in writing was unquestionably not so much to instruct as to edify their contemporaries. One might roundly say, indeed, that the whole Bible is inspired by this aim. In the preface to the Book of Judges (2^{11}–3^{6}) even the unpractised ear can detect the earnest voice of the preacher, warning his contemporaries against the perilous folly of idolatry and urging upon them his passionate plea for the whole-hearted service of Jahweh. This religious aim runs through the Bible like a thread of gold (cf. Jn 20^{31}); and the historical books come home to us with a vividness immeasurably enhanced, when we learn to summon before our imagination the readers to whom they were first addressed. When we remember, for example, that Gn 22^{12} was written not long before Mic 6^{7}, we begin to see that the real importance of the story in Genesis lies not in any biographical information it furnishes about Abraham, but in its emphatic repudiation of child-sacrifice as a custom abhorrent to the God of Israel. The historian and the prophet are engaged in the same task: each is in his own way striking at a cruel custom which was not only practised by his contemporaries, but which persisted for over a century later (Jer 7^{31}).

In reading a historical passage three considerations have always to be kept in mind: (i) the facts. What are the facts? This is a question for the historian. (ii) The spirit in which the facts are treated—the spirit that makes for edification. It is with this that the preacher is concerned. (iii) The Jewish readers and the impression the narrative would make upon them. Let us illustrate this by the narrative in Jos 1. (i) In the Divine summons to Joshua the modern historian would discount the

injunction to remember the Law, because he does not believe that this book was in existence till centuries after Joshua's time. (ii) But this is obviously a point precious to the narrator; *he* wishes to urge upon his readers the careful observance of the Law. And (iii) the readers, whose presence is palpably felt in this allusion, are plainly in view throughout the chapter; when they reach the words in v.[15] that promise rest and the possession of the land, they feel that in *their* present possession of the land the promise has been fulfilled. The whole passage thus becomes alive with the experience of every successive generation of readers. But all this is to say that the voice is the voice of the preacher rather than of the historian; his aim is, like that of the prophets, to bring his people back to God and good. The Biblical historians are indeed nearer in spirit to the modern preacher than to the modern historian, and the preacher who concentrates on the religious teaching of a passage whose historicity is unauthenticated or even dubious is acting on the principle enunciated by Thomas à Kempis, that 'each part of the Scripture is to be read with the same spirit wherewith it was written'—a counsel equally valuable, whether we spell 'spirit' with a small or a capital S.

The Preacher's Use of Prophecy.

In prophecy the case is not dissimilar. Frequently, as we have seen, it is impossible to determine the background with any certainty: in that case, what can the preacher do but confine himself to the religious truth of the passage, when that is clear beyond cavil? In this connexion Sir George Adam Smith's recent revision of his exposition of Isaiah, published forty years ago, is highly instructive. No expositor was ever at greater pains to ascertain the historical background, but occasionally he has to confess himself baffled. That does not prevent him, however, from exploring and exploiting the religious implications even of those sections whose background is doubtful. The progress of critical opinion during the period between the original edition and the revision has thrown doubt upon the date and authorship assumed for certain sections of the prophecy in the original edition, but in most cases this has not led to any modification in the homiletic treatment of them. The earlier treatment of 10^{5-34}, for example, rested on the assumption of its unity and authenticity. 'But,' Dr. Smith goes on to say, 'whether the passage be composed of oracles delivered by Isaiah at different times, or parts of it be not from Isaiah, are questions which do not affect its religious teaching as expounded and applied above.'[1] Similarly, of the oracle on Tyre in ch. 23, on whose unity, date, and authorship, critical opinion is divergent, he writes: 'Whatever its date or dates may be, it represents the attitude of Hebrew prophecy to ancient commerce and the Phœnician chiefs of this. I therefore allow the following paragraphs to stand pretty much as I first wrote them.'[2] On any view of the date it remains the classic 'criticism of the temper of commerce from the standpoint of the religion of the God of righteousness.' In the prefatory comment on ch. 24 in both editions occur the words, 'Criticism affords little help. It cannot clearly identify the chapter with any historical situation.'[3] Nevertheless the exposition and application are as vivid and effective as any in the book. 'Perhaps,' he adds—and these are very significant words—'the moral truths are all the more impressive that the reader is not distracted by temporary or local references.' The relative unimportance, in certain circumstances, of an ascertainable historical background, could not be more plainly asserted than here.

The widest difference of opinion prevails with regard to the oracle in Is 2^{2-5}, which has its parallel in Mic 4^{1-4}. Micah may have borrowed it from Isaiah, or Isaiah from Micah, or both from an older prophecy, or the passage may in both books be a later insertion: it has been variously assigned to the eighth century, the seventh, the sixth, and even to the Greek period. But its vision of a world whose hatred of war has led it to settle international disputes by arbitration makes its perennial appeal, to the persuasiveness of which no knowledge of its historical background could really add one jot or tittle. Indeed, the great passages of the Bible, such as Ps 23, Lk 15, 1 Co 13, speak home to the universal heart, just because they are so little encumbered by the things that are local and temporary. The three quotations of our Lord from Deuteronomy in the hour of His temptation belong to a world which is not affected by questions of chronology. The view that the Song of Songs is a miniature drama has been recently replaced by the view that it is a Hebrew adaptation of a Tammuz-Ishtar liturgy, and other views are possible; but whatever its ultimate origin, its lovely music wakes an echo in every heart that has known anything of that love which many waters cannot quench nor floods drown. Thus alike in the historical, the prophetical, and the poetical books the

[1] Vol. i. p. 171. [2] Vol. i. p. 296.
[3] Revision, vol. i. pp. 437 f.

preacher's quest is for the eternal things. He will rejoice in every historical background he can discover, for in it he will feel again the throb of that ancient life through which the Divine message was originally mediated, but it is with the message rather than the facts that he is concerned. One of the reasons for the unwithering vitality of the psalms is that their writers confine themselves to essential things. They drop most of whatever is adventitious; they express the universal quality inherent in their particular situation, and other men of later times and distant places can thus make those ancient words their own. 'Enquire not,' says Thomas à Kempis, 'who spoke this or that, but mark what is spoken.' To men in such a mood exact historical origins matter very little.

The Historical Method Indispensable.

The peril of this attitude is, however, both obvious and real. The preacher, if he be temperamentally indolent, will be only too likely to welcome an argument which seems to relieve him of much irksome and apparently unprofitable toil: he will be tempted to snap at the obvious, to prefer intuition to an investigation which often seems to lead nowhere; he will gladly eschew a process which tends, he feels, to confuse rather than clarify his understanding of a passage and to cripple his power of dealing with it effectively.

But to this and to every contention which would depreciate the value of the historical method there is a twofold answer. First, the method has already rendered incalculable service in the interpretation of the Bible by recovering the historical realities among which the ancestors of our faith lived and moved and had their being, and by bringing the personalities of the Bible out of the shadow-land in which dullness and indolence have hidden them, into the world of light, where we can look upon their earnest faces and share their fears and hopes, their doubt and struggle and faith. It is very possible to exaggerate the limitations of the method. Much remains obscure and uncertain, but much, very much, is now plain. If the problems on which meantime certainty is unattainable are neither few nor unimportant, the area which we may now tread with confidence is very spacious. From the sections of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, whose authenticity is undisputed, we can derive a clear and vivid picture of the social and religious life of the latter half of the eighth century B.C., and we mark with astonishment how like, in things essential, that age is to our own. Sir George Adam Smith, who has so frankly confessed the limitations of the historical method in its application to some of our existing data, has, by the use of the same method, laid bare a wealth of homiletic treasure hitherto undreamt of by the average preacher and kindled him to prophetic utterance. If the Bible, on the side of its humanism, is vastly more alive and appealing to our own age than it has ever been before, it is the historical method we have to thank.

But again, no honest effort to determine the historical background is ever altogether fruitless. If it does not always achieve results, it achieves an atmosphere, and for the business of the preacher this is nearly as important as the other. The effort involves a fine exercise of the historical imagination, and, though we may be quite unable to define the situation with precision, there rises subtly within our minds the assurance that we are in genuine contact with phenomenal as well as spiritual reality, and we proceed to direct the energy of our imagination upon the commanding and essential features of the situation, which are often clear enough, even when the period within which it falls is obscure. Every sincere attempt to piece the scattered hints together will carry us deeper into the living history behind them and into the writer's heart.

Never again can men who have breathed the atmosphere of free inquiry build their interpretations of Scripture upon the shifting sands of allegory or typology. Doubtless spiritual things are spiritually discerned, but these things have been mediated through historical experience; and, so long as the preacher confesses his debt to the past by using as his text-book an ancient literature, so long does he lie under the obligation to acquaint himself, in every way open to him, with the life reflected in that literature. That is the historical method. By it we must interpret, for it is the only method we have.