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Church began its career in the 'Conversion of Peter.' It is well to be reminded of this in these days, in view of the claim so often made that it was Paul who actually founded the Christian Church. That bold resounding sentence to which Peter gave utterance on the Day of Pentecost—'Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ'—is the veritable foundation-rock on which the Christian Church was built.

'The Mind of the Master on Immortality' is the next study. It is a study characteristic of the author, and perhaps we find him here at his best. He offers us a very suggestive exposition of the Synoptic passage in which Jesus apparently touches upon the religious argument for immortality ('I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'), and adumbrates briefly, but also suggestively, his views on the moral conditions and implications of the fact of immortality.

The penultimate study is in the 'Authority of Scripture.' A rapid historical survey of this subject is followed by a constructive view of it, starting from the two principles, that the Word of God is not the letter of Scripture, but is contained in Scripture, and that the judge of what constitutes

the Word of God in Scripture is, as the Reformers expressed it, 'the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.' Here is how Dr. ROBERTSON expresses the dependence of the Christian revelation upon the revelation of God in the Israelitish and Jewish religion: 'Without the mountain-mass of Old Testament monotheism, could the stainless peak of New Testament revelation have risen up into the full blaze of God's sunlight?'

The concluding study of 'The Spirit of God, and the New Testament Experience,' was the inaugural lecture delivered by Dr. ROBERTSON on assuming the duties of his chair. Here he would recall us to the New Testament experience if we would revitalize our theology. For the New Testament experience was 'the most vitalising moment of history.' Upon it, as he has recaptured it for himself, he would base his confession of the Faith.

'I believe in God, through Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. I give myself to God, who was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. I share the assurance that the living Christ is present now and always in the fellowship of the faithful, labouring for the coming of His Kingdom among men. And, finally, I am persuaded that all the redeemed shall live for ever with Him and reign with Him in a perfected and unshakable Kingdom.'

The Words from the Cross.

II. The Penitent Thief (Lk. xxiii. 39-43).

BY PRINCIPAL W. M. MACGREGOR, D.D., GLASGOW.

THIS episode is not even hinted at by Mark, nor by Matthew, who, at this point, closely follows him; on the contrary, they bluntly record that both the brigands joined in the general reviling of Jesus. So it is not surprising that many serious students should treat it as not belonging to the earliest tradition; it is, says Montefiore, 'a special Lucan embroidery,' 'a dramatic incident which can lay no claim to be historical.' According to Holtz-

mann's view, the penitent thief is designed to represent the Gentile in his appeal and the welcome which Jesus is ready to give. The story is not history, it is argued: it is midrash or edifying teaching. But however plausibly such a view may be presented it must be pronounced hasty and precarious. Luke's account of the Passion is rich in independent material; his account of the night following the arrest in Gethsemane is far

more vivid in its detail than Mark's, and he alone describes the appearance of Jesus before Herod, which closely joins on to other incidents in the common record. No doubt, as in his account of the Supper, he sometimes betrays the later influence of Paul, but this is not enough to warrant us in dismissing what is peculiar to him as unhistorical. He seems to have been in Paul's company during his detention at Cæsarea, and thus would have opportunity for meeting eye-witnesses of the Passion. It is possible, as J. H. Moulton insists, that Paul himself was one of these, and that the centurion in charge of the execution, who was so deeply moved at the end, was another; certainly the women who stood by were accessible with their recollections. Jerome hints at the danger of 'an interpretation flattering the ears of the public, but none the truer for that,' and in recent times we have had more than enough of a romantic and sentimental handling of the gospel records; yet the richness of Luke's separate sources of information forbids any dogmatic rejection of this narrative. In so early a document as the Gospel of Peter (which Dr. M. R. James dates before 150), we read that 'one of these malefactors reproached the executioners, saying, We have thus suffered for the evil we have done, but this Man who has become the Saviour of men, wherein has He injured you? And they were angry with him and commanded that his legs should not be broken that so he might die in torment.' The thieves appear with a wealth of legendary detail in the later Apocryphal writings; names are assigned to them, and of the penitent it is told that he was one of a party which captured Joseph and Mary and the Child on their way to Egypt, that at his urgent pleading they were released, and the Child foretold the destiny of His deliverer, and that thus on the Cross he could appeal to the Lord, and say—Remember me! But this is pure story-spinning, whereas the passage in the Gospel of Peter, in its form, stands out sufficiently clear from Luke's narrative to encourage the belief that in quarters which Mark had not explored there lingered the tradition of a dramatic confession from this dying robber of the character of his strangely matched Companion in death.

These men are called malefactors and robbers, but the words give little information as to their offence. Mark (15⁷) refers to other rioters imprisoned with Barabbas, who, presumably, had been the leader in some rising (Mt 27¹⁶), so it is natural to set these two in that connexion. They were not thieves so much as brigands, with at least

some show of patriotism, whose immediate quarrel was with Rome. Such wild men, impatient of any government which has stood strictly for order, have seldom for long been unknown in the hills and hiding-places of Judæa; and if they had been able to read, the inscription above the head of Jesus might have moved them with peculiar exasperation. For this Man was there called—King of the Jews! that helpless, lacerated Figure! No wonder if at first they joined in the taunts of the crowd. They had struck at the authority of Rome, and were hanging now like trapped wolves, who had shown no pity and had asked for none. And death was at their throat.

The first queer sign of grace which Luke reports was the sudden exclamation of the one man to his fellow: 'Are you not afraid of God, now that we are up against it?' The mask of patriotism had fallen off, the lust of adventure and fight and the open air had died down, and nakedly he saw his life as it had been—pillage, murder, outrage in long succession; and it must all be answered for. Dr. Plummer pleads that 'there is no reason for supposing that the robber felt the need of obtaining forgiveness, since for the Jew death is an expiation for sin'; but perhaps this poor lad did not know much about theology, for certainly death was approaching as the King of Terrors. The Man whom they had derided, though He was in the same condemnation, had at least a better chance than they, for He had done nothing amiss; but they, with their black record, were drifting out to meet God. And he was afraid.

The larger part of most of the gospel stories is not told. In describing the call of Andrew and Peter, Mark says nothing of any previous acquaintance with Jesus, and yet there must have been such (e.g. Jn 1³⁵⁻⁴²), or they would not so promptly have followed at His word. Luke tells of a notorious woman falling at Jesus' feet, but he tells nothing of the revolutionary experience which had brought her there. And in the same way he has nothing to report of the wandering rumours which had reached this lad's ears of the kindness and the power of Jesus; but the land was full of voices, and 'these things were not done in a corner.' He may actually have seen Jesus at work and heard Him speaking of the Kingdom He had come to establish and of His catholic call to enter it. If the tale is true (and there is no sufficient reason for doubting it), something of this kind there must have been; and so, with only a blind guess at what Jesus had to offer, he broke away from the invading terrors and, like a drowning man, he

clutched at hope. Certainly Jesus did not look like winning through; yet He had spoken of His own triumph as certain and had fired the minds of many, so this lad was bold to cry: 'Lord, when thou comest to reign, remember me!' It may well be that doubts lurked in the background and that, in the recesses of his nature, it was rather 'if thou comest' than 'when thou comest'; but he gave himself the benefit of the doubt, for he had a desperate 'will to believe.'

What could the Lord Jesus find to say to such a man in such a mood? Paul, as a preacher, had great faith in the worth of utter defeat as a preparation for welcoming Christ. No one, he felt, had ever tried harder than he to attain to the friendship of God by a process of doing everything that the Law required; with all his volcanic energy he had laboured in that direction, and he had failed so abjectly that he writes of 'what the Law could not do.' But he went about everywhere telling men how in the black night of his defeat, when he was left utterly without resource, Jesus came to him, and it seemed as if a new day had dawned. In another place (1 Co 1²¹) he speaks of men's long-continued frustration in their intellectual seeking of God: 'with all its wisdom the world had not come to know God.' Patiently men had searched and striven—and they had failed. And that was the chance for the seeming 'foolishness of preaching.' Man's extremity is God's opportunity, we say, and this dying lad, dashed like a swimmer against a sheer cliff, with life shattered and all his plans and hopes defeated, caught at Christ.

His prayer, in the form of it, was vague enough: 'when thou comest to reign—in some perhaps remote to-morrow—do not forget me!' But the answer comes definite and spacious: '*uberior est gratia quam petitio*,' says Ambrose, grace is wealthier than any petition, for God is able to do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think; yet even in the vague petition I think there was a notable flash of insight into the inner disposition of Jesus. When the prophet depicts the day when Christ comes to reign (Rev 6¹⁶) he describes men as then calling on mountains and rocks to fall and hide them from His face; in such a day of sheer dread and cataclysm is it likely that He will have an eye for the broken earthenware, the waste and rubbish of the world? But this man somehow guessed more worthily at the heart of Jesus. At the outset of the ministry, Jesus had declared it as His business to preach good news to poor people, to proclaim sight to the blind, and release to captives and the

crushed; He compared Himself to a shepherd not content if even one of those entrusted to him is lost, but seeking until he finds the one. Such was His way throughout these crowded years, and when He comes to reign will He be different? A Hebrew poet (Ps 72^{12, 14}), singing of the King who will some day appear, asserts as His peculiarity that 'He will deliver the needy when they cry . . . and precious will their blood be in his sight'; and this dying brigand, in like fashion, appealed not to the power so much as to the pitifulness of the Lord Jesus, who took note of every obscure and despicable thing.

When we consider the actual reply of Jesus we find ourselves embarrassed by the tendency of scholars to give a certain dogmatic and almost geographical fixity to words which were consoling and heartening because they were imaginative. This wild, terror-hunted creature had no concern with doctrinal distinctions, about which he knew nothing. But 'with Me'—that meant something real; and 'to-day'—that had comfort in it; and 'in Paradise'—in God's garden, in which He walks and from which Adam was banished, that was good to hear. But such imaginative and emotional understandings, though they might suit a dying man, are far too simple for the technical theologian, so he strikes in with his distracting and really irrelevant questions—What and where is Paradise? how promptly is it attained? and so on. Is it the Heaven of consummation, where men at length shall see God face to face? or is it the happy side of the underworld—the *refrigerium* or resting-place, as some of the Fathers called it, where the souls of good men abide in peace until the day of resurrection? Irenæus reports the opinion that Paradise is a kind of secondary heaven, and that whilst those who have borne fruit a hundredfold pass to the highest, those who have borne but sixty attain only to Paradise. Did Paul in 2 Co 12^{2, 4} mean his readers to understand that 'the third heaven' (v.²) and 'Paradise' (v.⁴) are the same? or that, passing beyond the third heaven, he was caught up into Paradise (as a higher level) and heard unutterable things? And so it goes—a whirl of fantastic and inconsistent and unprofitable speculation. In the New Testament the word is sparingly used—only three times; and as in two of these passages (2 Co 12⁴, Rev 2⁷) it plainly means the Heaven of God, it is natural to give it the same meaning here. But then it is objected by the precise that Jesus did not pass to that high Heaven until after the Ascension: He went and preached to the disobedient spirits in prison, says

Peter, and His dwelling for a time must have been with the disembodied who await the Resurrection and the fulness of their glory. Thus the mind is invaded by entangling questions of the topography of the unseen world, as if it were a wide region with frontiers and barricades, within which each soul according to its deserts is confined. Jesus, it is argued, could not have meant that the dying man would that day be with Him in the Heaven of God, because He Himself would not yet be there and the thief would not be ready. Accordingly, on the one side, the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy represents Jesus as saying that the thief would go *before* Him into Paradise—a doubtful comfort to a man who, in every fibre of his being, knew his unfitness to enter there unless Jesus took him. And on the other side, Dr. Zahn, with equal excess of prose, alters the punctuation, and makes Jesus say: 'To-day I tell you, that you shall be with me (some-time) in Paradise.' That kills the promise, for it would drive the poor wretch back into the vagueness of a remote 'some day.' Throughout His ministry Jesus made much of the floodtides of emotion in those He met. Men came to Him protesting their desire to follow Him, only there was this or that to be attended to first: 'I must go home to my father till he dies, and then I will come,' said one, and got the answer, 'Come now, or you will never come!' For the tide runs back, and there will be no depth of water to carry you over the bar. The outburst of the sinful woman at His feet might easily have been suspected as hysterical, but Jesus took her at the flood and steered her out on to the wide ocean of God's peace. To displace the word 'to-day,' as Zahn does, in the interest of a theory about the life in the unseen, is to misunderstand Christ's way with human souls and to rob His promise to this desperate believer of its noble aptness and its power.

These discussions and distinctions had a certain interest for old-fashioned scholastic theologians, and in altered forms they appeal to many of the

moderns. John Weiss suggests that the originator of this story could not have had clearly in his mind the narrative of the Resurrection and Ascension, as it implies that for a time Christ was not in Paradise. Such argumentation seems to me to suffer from a twofold irrelevance: it is irrelevant to any worthy conception of Christ and God, and it is supremely irrelevant to the human situation exhibited in the story. Are we really to suppose that because He was preaching to the spirits in prison, Christ could not be in the very presence of the King? The universe in which He lives is not broken up by frontier walls, so that when He is here He must necessarily be absent from other regions. 'It is not by journeying that one comes to God,' says Augustine, 'it is by loving,' and these prosaic topographical distinctions are merely obscuring. Still more glaring is the irrelevance to the human situation described. Here is a desperate creature who has never had a life in thought, on whom anything evasive or subtle must be thrown away, and to him Jesus is bound to speak in the language he can apprehend. Wellhausen does justice to the plainness of the promise, but hesitates about extending it from this one individual to any of our race: others may have longer roads to travel, but for this man the way home must be straight. I doubt if even this distinction is required, for the promise is—'Thou shalt be *with me*.' '*Ubi Christus*,' says Ambrose, '*ibi vita, ibi regnum*'—where Christ is there is life, and there is the Kingdom. 'The kingdom cometh not with outward show,' said Jesus (Lk 17^{21, 22}), 'and men shall not say, Lo, here it is! or Lo, there! for the kingdom of God is in your midst'; and He said again to all who follow Him—Where I am, there shall also My servant be.

Old-fashioned evangelical preachers were fond of the saying: 'One dying thief was saved that no man should despair, but only one that no man should presume.' And at this we may leave the matter.

Natural Law and Miracles.

BY THE REVEREND J. H. MORRISON, M.A., BUCKSBURN, ABERDEEN.

THE controversy about miracles and natural law is, in its acute form, of modern origin. Men in former times were untroubled by it. To them the world was a place of mystery whose wonders were unexplored. There was, therefore, ample room for

the unprecedented, and when it occurred it might excite wonder but not incredulity. It was readily accepted as part of the mystery of things. There were practically no limits to belief.

Modern science, however, has bred a very