

(Book of the month : " FOLKLORE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT " ¹ = FL. Ref. to *Expositor*, May, 1918 = E. article by T. H. Darlow.)

" Mizpah " in popular devotion is a misused reference. It was here a watchword of suspicion between two crafty men who could not trust one another's word. Laban and Jacob were " diamond cut diamond." But their appeal to religious safeguards is instructive. They erected a pillar ; they built a cairn ; they made a covenant by sacrifice ; they ate part of the sacrifice (xxx. 45, 46, 51, 52, 54). Peoples who habitually used such ritual had a long way to go before arriving at the simple sincerity of the Sermon on the Mount.

I. THE RITUAL (vv. 45, 46).

A. *The Stones*. " A large stone as a pillar, with a cairn of smaller stones about it, to mark the boundary neither should pass ; a monument of mutual suspicion ; a deed in stone to which each of contracting parties set his hand ; a watchful eye to hold them " (FL. 2, 401). Canon Tristram says such monuments are still used by Arab herdsmen as watching-stations over their flocks (FL. 2, 402) : illustration of God's watching. Cf. oath made on black stones by St. Columba's tomb in Iona was decisive (FL. 2, 405). Jacob swears by the Fear (God in His awesome aspect) of Isaac ; Laban by Abraham and Nahor (as an old marginal note says, " their respective ancestors," xxx. 53).

B. v. 54. Cf. Genesis xv. 10-18. *The Covenant by sacrifice*. The victim was cut in two. Hebrew, Latin and Greek all say, " to cut a covenant." i. Symbolic of retribution to overtake man who breaks covenant (FL. 1, 399). ii. Symbolic of union. The contracting parties passed between the pieces (Cf. Jer. xxxiv. 18) ; thought to be thereby united with each other by bond of common blood (FL. 1, 392, 393, 412, 425. Greeks did this before Trojan war). See also Herodotus iii. 8, an illustration from Arabs (quoted in E. 353). iii. They made a feast of the sacrifice, sitting on the stones (xxx. 46, A.V., 54). " Intended to ratify the covenant, by common meal, strengthened by absorbing the solidity of the stones " (FL. 2, 408).

¹ By Sir J. G. Frazer (Macmillan & Co., 3 vols.). *Studies in Comparative Religion*. Its facts should often be judged apart from its inferences. Many points illuminate the Bible ; it needs discrimination in study for the Christian preacher. Immense industry, as always with this author.

To break all this was to break the law embodied in third commandment, directed not against profanity popularly understood, but against breaking treaties and promises ratified by swearing (E. 353). Over all this the cairn was God's silent sentry.

II. THE MESSAGE FOR US.

A. God spoke of old in curious ways to the infant consciences of men (Heb. i. 1). By pictures and signs He came to men who groped in the dark (Acts xvii. 27), if they acted honestly (Acts x. 35). Even stones and dismembered carcasses had their message.

B. These symbolisms are true in spiritual fact. There is a divine sentry between covenant-makers, there is in Calvary a blood link which makes men one, and does bring retribution to those who carelessly trample it under feet. There is a heavenly feeding by which members of the body are strengthened in fellowship. See Psalm xv. 4, RVM. and PBV. Ephesians ii. 13, 14. Hebrews x. 29. I Corinthians x. 16-17, RVM.

C. But the Gospel of Christ has elevated our conceptions. "In the morning of the world men ratified their covenants by invoking the awful name of God. To "take that name in vain" (as the third commandment calls it), meant to tear up the covenant which the name had consecrated (E. 354). But, after all, this is the device of untrustworthiness. Even God's accommodation to men's distrust of Him (Heb. vi. 13-18), must be a temporary expression outgrown when "Littlefaith" attains spiritual manhood (Heb. v. 12; vi. 1). In Christ, God's word is known to be faithful without any oath (2 Cor. i. 20-22), and men who are fellow-members of Christ have only to say a thing to have it believed without any cairns or covenant sacrifices (St. Matt. v. 33-37). The superfluity of these other things arises out of the intrusion of evil (cf. St. Matt. v. 37). In the Mother-City (Gal. iv. 26) of Christ's New Kingdom no lie can live (Rev. xxi. 27), and truth is unembarrassed by sentinels: the river flows clear as crystal down the street of its daily life (xxii. 1, 2, RVM).

