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STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

III. CALVARY AND GOOD FRIDAY.

Text.—“Obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross” (Phil. ii. 8, R.V.).

[Book of the Month: DR. PLUMMER'S COMMENTARY ON PHILIPPIANS¹ = P. Other refs.: David Smith's Art., “Crucifixion” in *Hastings' Dict. Christ and Gospels* = DCG. Stalker's *Trial and Death of Christ* = S. Hutton's *On Accepting Ourselves* = H. Denney's *Death of Christ* = D. Lightfoot's *Philippians* = L.]

“The more one dwells in the New Testament, and tries to find the point of view from which to reduce it to unity, the more is he convinced that the Atonement is the key to Christianity as a whole” (D. 333). So Passiontide finds us thinking of the Cross of Christ. St. Paul, in the Philippian Epistle, is impressed with the significance of it, as marking the depth to which Christ was willing to descend for love of us and obedience to His Father. It “*included, went as far as, death*” (Phil. ii. 8), and see also Heb. xii. 4, 2 Macc. xiii. 14. (P. 47).

“*And not merely death.*” “This is implied in the ‘yea.’ The prayers in Gethsemane may be in St. Paul's mind. Crucifixion was a death of extreme suffering and shame; being nailed to a tree like vermin. Christ had assumed the nature of a slave to God; and crucifixion was the death of a slave to man (Gal. v. 11; Heb. xii. 2), a death excruciating and accursed (Gal. iii. 13). The Apostle may be suggesting that, willing as he was to share his Master's sufferings and death, yet as a Roman citizen he could not be crucified, and members of the Roman colony at Philippi would appreciate this privilege and privation. Cicero, *Pro Rabirio*, v. 10, points out how impossible such a death was for a Roman” (P. 47). So let us think of—

I. THE NATURE OF CHRIST. The theology of the passage is

¹ Published by Robert Scott, 7s. 6d. net. Sane, strong, fresh, like all Dr. Plummer's work. Companion volume to two on Thessalonians previously noticed in this column.

very important. St. Paul is in no doubt as to the true Deity of Christ. In ch. i. 2 he has made this plain by implication. Jesus is "Lord." This marks "the transfer of the Greek equivalent of the ineffable 'Jehovah' to Jesus Christ as His usual title. St. Paul rarely uses it of the Father, but constantly of the Messiah. In these four chapters it is thus used fourteen times" (P. 6).

Then in vers. 6, 7, 8, the phrases "*form of God*," "*form of a bond-servant*," "*fashion as a man*" "imply respectively the true divine nature of our Lord, the true human nature, and the externals of the human nature" (L. 133). "Attempts to explain the union of Godhead and Manhood are inevitably failures" (P. 44). But we welcome the facts, without attempting to explain them.

II. THE HUMILIATION OF CHRIST. We note, without commenting on, the accumulation of statements in vers. 6, 7, 8. There is not space here to deal with them, and even so, "the exact meaning is beyond us" (P. 44). But He "*became obedient*," that is "*obedient to God*. '*To God*' is implied in verse 9. He became so by a life of absolutely perfect obedience in all things (Heb. v. 8), '*Obedient unto death*' (A. V.) is misleading, as if the obedience was rendered to Death. And He *became* obedient by *learning* to be so through the things which He suffered (Heb. v. 8)" (P. 47). And His obedience flinched not at death. It went further, it embraced shame as well as death. Crucifixion was by the "Romans reserved for slaves (whence it was called *servile supplicium*), the worst sort of criminals such as *robbers* (Sen. Ep. vii. Cf. Matt. xxvii. 38), and provincials" (DCG. 397). "Cicero, who was well acquainted with it, says: 'It was the most cruel and shameful of all punishments.' 'Let it never,' he adds, 'come near the body of a Roman citizen; nay, not even near his thoughts or eyes or ears.' It was the punishment reserved for slaves and revolutionaries, whose end was intended to be marked by special infamy" (S. 156). "It identified Him utterly with sinners, making Him a sharer in the worst extremity of their condition" (DCG. 398). It reminds them also of their share in bringing it about. Sin crucified Christ once, but it crucifies Him often. "Face to face with the actual physical sufferings of Jesus, God, I doubt not, intends us to see that the sins which we commit, the careless lives we lead, the things we do and say and think in any spirit except in love, all these things go out from us and infect the world. They mass and congregate into

principalities and powers of evil, into living centres of cruel or malicious influence, to smite and wound and scoff at and outrage and slay God's innocent ones still in this great world" (H. 169-70).

III. THE VICTORY OF CHRIST. What took place in the unseen is not here expressed. But there is first implied the victory of "His resurrection which reversed every doom of every kind of death, and thus annulled the hopelessness which must settle down on every one who thinks out seriously what is involved in the universal empire of death. It was by the faith in the Resurrection that mankind was enabled to renew its youth" (P. 74-5).

"*'Therefore' in consequence of His humiliation.* The 'also' of verse 9 implies that God *on His side responds*, in accordance with the principle that he who humbles himself is exalted; Mt. xxiii. 12; Lk. xiv. 11, xviii. 14; cf. Jas. iv. 6; 1 Pet. v. 5" (P. 47). "*'Him'* is emphatic by position, as is natural in a statement of reciprocity; he emptied *Himself*, and God exalted *Him*" (P. 48). "*Supremely exalted him.*" An instance of "St. Paul's fondness for words compounded with *hyper*" (P. 48). The Resurrection finds its true culmination in the Ascension, as the Crucifixion finds its compensation. "*This more than cancels the emptying and humiliating*" (P. 48).

And so God "*conferred*" (P. 48) upon Him "*the Name*, which is probably '*Lord*' as the equivalent of '*Jehovah*' in O.T." (P. 48); in order that "in the Name of Jesus—every knee should bow." "*The Name which belongs to Jesus*" is the meaning" (P. 48). And "*The Name*" does not probably mean "*Jesus*," but "*Lord*," because in verse 10 it "must mean the same as in verse 9" (P. 48), and Jesus is a human and not a supreme name: "*many persons have been called Jesus*" (P. 48). "*The passage is often strangely misunderstood, as ordering the custom of bowing the head when the name of Jesus is mentioned*" (P. 48). "*The meaning is that every being should pay the utmost respect to the majesty of the incarnate and glorified Son*" (P. 48-9). And further that they should "*freely confess*, or '*joyfully proclaim*.' All that confess of necessity means is '*openly declare*'; but LXX usage gives the verb the notion of praise or thanksgiving, and that idea is very appropriate here" (P. 49).

Jesus Christ "*is Lord*": "*Emphatic by position*" (P. 49). "*He is winning in the world, because he is crowned there in Heaven.*

"Crucifixion was an extremely common form of punishment in the ancient world ; but 'the cross of the God-Man has put an end to the punishment of the cross'" (S. 156).

IV. HIS COMMISSION. (a) *This must be preached, and taught, as a message.* Even "leaving out of account its importance to the sinner, the supreme interest of the doctrine of the Atonement is, of course, its interest for the evangelist ; without a firm grasp of it he can do nothing whatever, in his vocation. But what is central in religion must be central also in all reflection upon it, and the theologian no less than the evangelist must give this great truth its proper place in his mind" (D. 312).

(b) *This must be grasped and lived as an experience.* See Phil. iii. 10, where "St. Paul is giving his own spiritual experiences, and hence the order of the clauses. Christ's sufferings preceded His resurrection ; but St. Paul recognized the risen Christ before he participated in His sufferings" (P. 75). See "Acts ix. 16. The fellowship includes the internal conflict with temptation as well as the external conflict with persecutors" (P. 75).

And Mr. Chesterton's "King Alfred" challenging the hordes of heathen Danes sings of the unfailing confidence in the Victory of the Cross even in moments of seeming defeat :—

"That on you is fallen the shadow,
And not upon the Name ;
That though we scatter and though we fly,
And you hang over us like the sky,
You are more tired of victory,
Than we are tired of shame."

LECTURES ON THE INCARNATION.

THE INCARNATION OF GOD. By the Rev. E. L. Strong, M.A., Priest of the Oxford Mission Brotherhood of the Epiphany, Calcutta. London : Longmans, Green & Co. 5s. net.

These lectures, seven in number, were delivered to the Oxford Mission Sisterhood of the Epiphany, at Barisal, E. Bengal, during the last few years, and are printed at the urgent request of those who heard them. The writer deals with the great verities of the Christian faith which have the Incarnation for centre. The volume suggests the idea that the writer has attempted a task beyond his powers ; the lectures are scrappy and thin, the style "chatty," and the bias strongly "Catholic"—and a perusal of it makes the reader think that the good "sisters" of the Epiphany, by their importunity, have not greatly added to the valuable literature upon this important subject.