

ÆSCHYLUS AND THE BIBLE.

THE remarks of the Bishop of Durham on "the relation in which Æschylus stands to the Bible" add to recent qualifying indications that there are men among contemporary teachers of our Christian religion who take a more logical, not to say a more scriptural, view of Pagan writers than has been the custom of divines for nearly all the centuries which have passed away since the Apostles went to sleep. The modern use of the word "pagan" and "heathen" implies self-conceit to a far greater and more dangerous extent than did the word "barbarian" when applied by the Greeks to all that was outside Hellenic civilization, and subsequently by the imitative Romans to all outside what they considered Rome, and when applied by way of disparagement to Greek and Latin writers as compared with Hebrew and Christian overlays a godless fallacy. The God whom Christ preached as His Father and "your Father" must have exercised a providence over Greeks and Romans as surely as over Jews, and either His providence has no existence or it is as watchful over a Kaffir as over the pious lady dressed in the fashion of the hour, who, prayer book in hand, goes to hear a sermon on behalf of African missions, and swells the collection by the tenth of the value of her bonnet. Save that Æschylus believes in a hierarchy of gods, his plays might be appropriately bound up with Job—in the same volume as Isaiah. He teaches morality—the exceeding bitter fruits of iniquity, "the ineradicable taint of sin," as powerfully as most of the sacred writers; with Titanic power he preaches religion in all its great relations. Grant that God made man in His own image, that His watchful eye is over all His works, that we live and move and have our being in Him, and must not all come from Him? Must not the Greek sense of form and the Roman capacity for law and government be traced to Him? Is it not atheistical to look askance at what is called "human learning"? Nay, has not infinite harm been done by turning away men's eyes from a noble part of the revelation of Himself He has given and is giving us every hour? Short of the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul and Isaiah, I know no writing more calculated to raise a man, to bring heart and mind in closer touch with the Divine than the plays, especially the Agamemnon of Æschylus, nor is there a scene in literature, "sacred" or "profane," so full of terror as that before the palace, a scene which seems to tear away the veil between the material and the spiritual world. Its peer is not in Shakespeare. "The voice of law," says the Bishop, "addresses us even from Athens." Here we have the tone of disparagement towards the "heathen" writers which has always characterized, and as I think degraded, the pulpit. If God is God, must not His voice address us on every hand, from a star to a daisy, from man to an ant, above all in that city where the grandeur of the human intellect was made manifest as it was never made manifest, and has never been manifested elsewhere, save in Judea, when our Lord preached to a people who were too low intellectually and morally to appreciate Him, and who treated Him with the same ingratitude, persecution and murder which have been the wages paid in all times by the people to their benefactors. Witness Rome, witness Greece, witness Carthage, witness all the European nations. But only one other man that I remember was grand enough to close his career in the spirit of the words: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do"—words which take us to an altitude above that to which the greatest hardly dare hope to be able to lift their eyes. Who can know God? "The God of the Bible" must be different—as conceived by different men. His nature is past our finding out—the way He is guessed at—conceived—is ruled and limited by the moral and intellectual character of the worshipper. Now there is plenty of evidence that the old Greeks had a very high conception of their Supreme God—a conception which sometimes differs from that of the old Hebrew for the better. Homer is a painter of manners and a theologian, who degraded the old religion, as well as a poet, yet, reading him, we cannot doubt that the Hellenes attributed to Zeus hatred of cruel deeds, providence, love for justice and righteousness, omnipotence—"for he can do all things"; readiness to answer prayer. It is not in a Socrates only that we find faith—the female slave in the Odyssey prays with confidence to "Father Zeus," first addressing him as "universal ruler," just as we hear a minister in his Sunday prayer do, then, showing faith in his providence and pity, begs of him to fulfil her prayer. Hesiod teaches the omnipresence and omniscience of Zeus, whose eye "sees all and knows all." He is for the Greeks "the Lord of Hosts," and Diomedes has confidence in his aid in battle just as the old judges in Israel had faith in Jehovah. The Bible tells us God makes His rain to fall on the just and unjust, the evil and the good, and Nausikaa, addressing a much afflicted man, says: "Zeus distributes happiness to the good and the bad, to everyone as he pleases, and to thee also he probably has sent this, and you ought by all means to bear it." Have we not here faith in a divine supreme Power? What can it matter whether the name is Zeus or Jehovah? There can be no two supremes. St. Augustine, though his writings breathe the same spirit of disparagement of Greek civilization in its religious aspect, has yet the breadth and liberality to say that there might be no harm in the multiplicity of divine names. The substance is everything—the name, the sign—what can this signify? And even in the Jewish Scriptures are there not different names for the same divine substance?

It is remarkable that this tone of disparagement was

not caught from the Apostles, but is the outgrowth, as is so much that has distorted Christianity of the wretched conceit of little minds—projecting their vast egoism over the heaven of heavens itself. The Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, and especially in one of his sermons in the Acts, indicates that the Greeks were not left without divine guidance, and that their highest minds—the great singers—taught divine truths, Kleantes and Aratus preaching the same truth that Christ preached that we are God's offspring. But equally striking and significant expressions may be found in other writers. Æschylus stands first and apart as an exponent of the religious yearning of the old Greek heart as well as the religious views of Athens at its highest. In the chorus of the Agamemnon we have the following prayer addressed surely to the same God as an enlightened Christian worships to-day:—

"Zeus—power unknown, whom, since to be called is thine own pleasure—I by that name address. When I ponder upon all things I can conjecture naught but Zeus to fit the need of the burden of vanity is in very truth to be cast from the soul. . . And Zeus it is who leadeth men to understanding under this law that they learn a truth by the smart thereof. The wound where it lies dormant will bleed, and its aching keep before the mind the memory of the hurt, so that wisdom comes to them without their will. And it is perhaps a mercy from a power who came by struggle to his majestic seat." Is not this the same as the teaching of the Apostle centuries afterwards that suffering at the time is grievous but afterwards bears the peaceable fruits of righteousness?

"Courage, courage, my child! there is still in heaven the great Zeus who watches over all things and rules. Commit thy exceeding bitter grief to him and be not too angry against thine enemies, nor forget them."

The faith thus expressed in the Chorus of the Electra is above what many a regular church-goer can attain to to-day.

I have often thought what immeasurable good will be done by the first preacher who will take divine truth wherever he finds it. Suppose a preacher to go into a pulpit one morning with a volume of Æschylus in his hand and explain to his congregation the Agamemnon, pick out the most striking divine truths in it, and show how God worked in the heart of the sublimest of Greek poets, what a new breath of power would be felt and how the lustre of all that is special and peculiar in the inspiration of the Hebrew books would be brought out. By means of comparison the mind of the congregation would see the value of Christianity.

Paul can be no bad model for a preacher. What does he do at Athens? He did not, to begin with, tell them they were too superstitious in all things. He was far too good an orator for that. It is the same Paul who, in the twenty-second chapter, addresses those who wanted to kill him and had been beating him a few minutes before (Acts xxi. 31) as "men, brethren, fathers," for no doubt he saw leading Jews among the crowd; the same Paul who, seeing that the council was composed in part of Sadducees and Pharisees, cried out he was a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee, "of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question"; the same who addresses Felix in conciliatory terms (Acts xxiv. 10); who addresses Agrippa so courteously (Acts xxvi. 2); who, when rudely interrupted by Festus, addresses him as "most noble Festus," and here it may be said in passing that Paul's Greek must have been such as a well-educated man of that time would have spoken, or Festus would never have said "much learning," much reading had made him mad. Is it likely that this great man, who made himself all things to all men, standing in a strange city, in the university city of the then cultivated world of that day, would fall into the bad manners and gross rhetorical blunder of telling the most fastidious, the most cultivated, popular audience that at that period or since has ever been addressed by a public speaker, and this in the opening sentence, that they were "too superstitious"? What he did say to them was, that they were "somewhat too religious." This is the truer rendering of the phrase, but it is the only one the reason of the case and the context will support. If he wished to use an expression which would have more truly expressed his own idea, but which might have sounded offensively, he had it in the word in the sixteenth verse, properly translated "wholly given up to idolatry"; perhaps the very word used by Paul when speaking his feelings to his companion. Again in the twenty-third verse the word translated "devotions" is an honourable word. Perhaps the best translation of the twenty-third verse would be: "For as I passed by and beheld your sacred things" or "the objects of your reverence." But how would this consort with the previous sentence, if the phrase, *hos deisidaimonesterous* conveyed to his hearers the idea that they were "too superstitious." But this is by the way. What, however, was Paul's "text"? What his references? His text is what he saw on one of their altars, "To the unknown God"; his references to Greek poets who had proclaimed a great truth to which he now wished to call back their minds. Nor does he say: "whom therefore ye ignorantly worship," but "whom therefore not knowing ye worship." If he had said "ignorantly," they would probably not have listened to another word, for, though Paul was a highly educated man, we may be sure his Greek did not sound faultless to an Athenian ear, and that he spoke with an accent at once provincial and Jewish. But note how much is lost by the use of the word "ignorantly." He says he found an altar to the unknown God, and proceeds to tell

them they worship this unknown God ignorantly. This might mean they worshipped the God properly styled unknown in an ignorant manner, only for the word "therefore," which suggests the true meaning to be attached to ignorantly. But how much better if what he said is properly rendered:—

"Men of Athens"—*Andres Athenaiotai*—the very words their fathers had heard from Demosthenes, the words they were accustomed to hear from any orators who then, in the days of their national degradation, might speak to them in the same tongue with which he fulminated over Greece, and fought single-handed a great king battling for the national cause. "Men of Athens—I perceive that in all things ye are overmuch religious. And indeed, as I passed by and beheld the objects of your reverence, I found also (amongst that is many others) an altar to God unknown. Whom, therefore, not knowing ye worship; Him declare I unto you."

This altar Paul recognizes as erected to the true God—to that great Power of whom Æschylus speaks in the passage above quoted—the God whom reverent souls have worshipped in all times and all countries.

I will return to this subject again when I need recreation—the being taken outside and away from the depressing duties of the hour. NICHOLAS FLOOD DAVIN.

HUNT, KEATS AND SHELLEY.

IN THE WEEK some time ago the Rambler calls attention to sonnets written by Leigh Hunt and Keats on the grasshopper and the cricket, and he well points out the superiority of Leigh Hunt's work. There is, however, another occasion where the poets contended in friendly rivalry, with Shelley also in the lists. "The Wednesday before last," wrote Keats to his brothers, Feb. 16, 1818, "Shelley, Hunt and I wrote each a sonnet on the river Nile: some day you shall read them all." Lord Houghton quotes these words in his "Life of Keats" (1848), and gives "Ozymandias" as Shelley's composition on this occasion; but in the Aldine edition of Keats (1876) he rejects this sonnet and substitutes an entirely different one, with the following explanation: "Up to the discovery of this sonnet among Shelley's MSS., the sonnet entitled 'Ozymandias' was believed to be that written in competition with Keats." Readers who desire to investigate the subject further may consult the Notes in Main's "Treasury of English Sonnets." Evidence may compel us to substitute the other sonnet in place of "Ozymandias," but the latter is incomparably finer in every respect. Both are given here:—

TO THE NILE.

Son of the old moon-mountains African!
Stream of the Pyramid and crocodile!
We call thee fruitful, and that very while
A desert fills our seeing's inward span:
Nurse of swart nations since the world began,
Art thou so fruitful? or dost thou beguile
Those men to honour thee, who, worn with toil,
Rest them a space 'twixt Cairo and Decan?
O may dark fancies err! They surely do;
'Tis ignorance that makes a barren waste
Of all beyond itself. Thou dost bedew
Green rushes like our rivers, and dost taste
The pleasant sun-rise. Green isles hast thou too,
And to the sea as happily dost haste.—Keats.

THE NILE.

It flows through old hushed Egypt and its sands,
Like some grave mighty thought threading a dream,
And times and things, as in that vision, seem
Keeping along it their eternal stands,—
Caves, pillars, pyramids, the shepherd bands
That roamed through the young world, the glory extreme
Of high Sesostrius, and that southern beam,
The laughing queen that caught the world's great hands.
Then comes a mightier silence, stern and strong,
As of a world left empty of its throng,
And the void weighs on us; and then we wake,
And hear the fruitful stream lapsing along
'Twixt villages, and think how we shall take
Our own calm journey on for human sake.—Leigh Hunt.

TO THE NILE.

Month after month the gathered rains descend
Drenching yon secret Ethiopian dells,
And from the desert's ice-girt pinnacles
Where Frost and Heat in strange embraces blend
On Atlas, fields of moist snow half depend,
Girt there with blasts and meteors Tempest dwells
By Nile's aerial urn, with rapid spells
Urging those waters to their mighty end,
O'er Egypt's land of Memory floods are level
And they are thine, O Nile—and well thou knowest
That soul-sustaining airs and blasts of evil
And fruits and poisons spring where'er thou flowest.
Beware O man—for knowledge must to thee
Like the great flood to Egypt ever be.—Shelley.

OZYMANDIAS.

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown
And wrinkled lip and sneer of cold command
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.—Shelley.

A comparison of these sonnets makes us regret that Leigh Hunt did not write more poetry. He is here brought into competition with two acknowledged masters of English verse and expression, and he easily holds his own. I am glad that you have referred to him in THE