

Dr. Hovey versus Dr. Burton.

DEAR EDITOR: In a recent article in MESSENGER AND VISITOR Bro. Waring, in quoting extensively from Prof. E. DeWitt Burton, spoke of him as "a Baptist scholar and exegete of whom we as Baptists are all proud." As one of the "all," thus claimed, I feel it duty to express emphatic dissent. In common with many others I admire his scholarly ability, but deplore his partially heretical teachings. This does not necessarily at all implicate his character. As A. J. Gordon's Christian character and spirit were, during his entire earthly life, unimpeached, and he stands today not less high. Yet, within especially the circle of those who studied with him during his theological course and thus knew him most intimately, Bro. Gordon was not regarded as a very logical or accurate Biblical exegete. Had he possessed a more discriminating mind his very valuable life might have been even more valuable. His sweet Christian spirit and eminent character were, however, not questioned.

Not a few deplore some of Prof. Burton's views on Biblical inspiration and interpretation, regarding them as "misleading and harmful." Take a sample case or two. Only a few summers ago a Nova Scotia student on returning from Newton and Dr. Burton's class, expressed to me substantially his disbelief of the divine inspiration of a large part of the Book of Ecclesiastes, remarking that, with the exception perhaps of some introductory words and a few closing sentences, the teaching of the Book is practically useless and often misleading. Our own brother, D. H. Simpson, in preparing some comments a few years ago on a Sabbath School lesson in Ecclesiastes, said: "Ecclesiastes is a book that must be taken as a whole, if we would profit by it. It is evidently written by one who had proved the vanity and hollowness of sinful pleasure. The writer concludes by pointing out that the secret of a true life is that a man should consecrate the vigor of his youth to God." Bro. Simpson's judgment of the book accords with that of the great majority of Bible readers.

Again, Dr. Burton seems to make frequent use in his classes of a few stock passages to prove the apparent—and in his judgment real—historical discrepancy and errancy of the Old Testament. To a recent class he cited the same passage or passages as those to which he had called the attention of his class some dozen years previously,—the citations being by no means conclusive evidences of real scriptural contradiction.

While on this point I may as well quote the comprehensive yet definite statement of the late Rev. Alvah Hovey, D. D. D. D., a man of vastly wider and higher reputation as a Biblical interpreter and sound theologian than Prof. Burton, D. D. Says Dr. Hovey in his "Outlines of Theology": "On the supposed historical errors of the Bible, we remark: They relate for the most part to matters of chronology, genealogy, numbers, etc. Transcribers are especially liable to mistakes in copying numbers, names, etc. Different names for the same person, and different terms for the same period, are frequent. Round numbers are often employed for exactness. Making proper allowance for these facts, we deny that historical errors are found in the Bible."

Dr. Hovey makes equally satisfactory statements respecting other supposed errors in the Bible.

If a "clear-cut assertion and definition of Biblical inspiration be desired, let me here submit the Scriptural definition and follow it by one well worth pondering, from Dr. Hovey's "Outlines of Christian Theology,"—1 Pet. 1: 21: "Moved by the Holy Spirit men spoke from God." (Tim. 3: 16.) All Scripture is inspired by God, and profitable.

Says Dr. Hovey: "The sacred writers were moved and assisted by the Holy Spirit to put on record all which the Bible, apart from errors in the text, now contain."

AUGUST CHESMAN.

The Character of Jesus Christ our Lord

For they said, he is beside himself.

Lecture delivered in St. George's United Free Church, Edinburgh.

BY REV. ALEXANDER WHYTE, D. D.

This painful expression, to be beside one's self, is simply old English for insanity. When we say that a man is beside himself we mean that his mind has lost its natural and its proper balance. We mean that his reason is disordered and deranged till the unhappy man is not any more master of himself. This sad visitation has many stages and many degrees of manifestation. A man is first seen to be odd, as we say, and unusual, and peculiar in his ways. He is seen to be eccentric and unbridled in his ways. A monomania takes possession of him. An infatuation takes possession of him. And from that his distress sometimes deepens till absolute and hopeless insanity takes complete possession of the reason bereft wreck. But, on the other hand, it is not unusual with us to apply this painful language to cases the very opposite to those of insanity. We sometimes commit the outrage of going about and saying that a man is gone beside himself when he is far sorer and far

wiser than we are ourselves. We say that such and such a man is gone beside himself because he looks at things with far other eyes than ours. And because he values things by far other standards than ours. He puts things first and foremost in his estimation that we put no esteem upon at all. He spends himself, and all that he possesses, on things on which we never spent one farthing. When any man's whole judgment of things, and his whole principle of action; when his mind and his heart and his conscience are all at opposite poles to our own; then, to defend ourselves, and to oppose, and to assail, and to discredit him, we say that he is gone beside himself, and has lost his sober senses. When we so speak about a man, it is clear proof that either he is beside himself, or that we are.

Now, it cannot but both greatly instruct us, and deeply impress us, to examine reverently and with holy fear into some of the times and some of the occasions, when our Lord was said by those about him to be beside himself. For, again and again, both his friends and his enemies said that so distressing thing about our Saviour. So far as we read in the Four Gospels, the first time that this was said in as many words about our Lord was soon after that time when he went up into a mountain and continued all night in prayer to God. That so extraordinary act of his; and then the extraordinary things that followed that so extraordinary act of his, all taken together make his kinsmen and friends decide, at last, to go out and lay hold on him. The whole country was ablaze with his extraordinary and unaccountable actions, till his kinsfolk could not sit still any longer under the scandal and the shame of it all. This was not the first of many times they have felt uneasy, and unhappy and at their wits' ends, about him; and his ways, but this was the first time they openly took this distressing step. What made our Lord spend that livelong night in that way was this.—The next day he was to take one of the most momentous steps of his whole earthly life. For the very next day he was to choose his twelve disciples. A step that would have the most momentous consequences, both to himself and to them, and to the whole of this world, and to the world to come. He knew all that, he foresaw all that, and he felt all that in all its fulness. So transcendently important did he feel that intended step of his to be that the night before he took it he never closed his eyes. It so weighed upon his mind that he could not sleep, nor could he spend the night in any other way but in the most anxious thought and the most secret prayer. And thus it was that he went up into a mountain at one, and spread out the name of the twelve all that night before God. And it was that so extraordinary act of his, taken along with those extraordinary acts of his that followed it, which brought to a head the smouldering uneasiness, and insecurity, and anxiety of his friends at home, till they decided to take the strong step recorded in the text. Now, if he so spent that critical and epoch-making night what must he have thought and said of you and me on our epoch-making nights? When he sees us taking the most momentous and irrevocable steps in life under no better guidance than our own impulses and passions, what can he say of us? He sees us making choices of people and of things that will decide our destiny, not only for this world but for the world to come, and we never once go to our knees about it. We make the most fatal choices with a light heart, and with a heart wholly without God. His friends were quite right in what they said, either he was beside himself on that midnight mountain top, or we are many a midnight of our lives. If he sees now how well it was that he spent that whole night as he did spend it, what must he think and say of us spending our nights as we do spend them before the great deciding day of our life? If any man lacks wisdom, says James the brother of our Lord, let him ask of God. Now, if God is what he is and we are what we are, and if prayer is what it is, then there is no other word for it—We are all beside ourselves.

Say we not well, said the enraged Jews of Jerusalem on another occasion, say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil, and art mad? That was their only answer to our Lord when he read their hearts down to the bottom, and told them, in true and terrible words, what he read in their hearts. And you will find the same thing repeated all down the history of heart-searching preaching to this day. Till sinful men are taught of God to read their own evil hearts; till they begin by the grace of God to them to know the plague of their own evil hearts, there is nothing that exasperates them like the preaching that searches their hearts and tries their reins. No preacher has ever come to close quarters with the wicked heart of man, from Jesus Christ down to our day, without having had bad names hurled at him. For this is the sure mark of all true preaching, that it always begins by being quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and of spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. What can a man say in reply to that but the reply of the reprobate Jews to our Lord's heart-searching preaching—he hath a devil, and is mad. Why hear ye him? But, then, there were other Jews who said—These are not the words of one that hath a devil.

But a day was fast approaching our great Substitute, or a night and a morning rather, when he was to be beside

himself indeed. If his greatest enemy had been in Gethsemane that night of our redemption there, he would have been satisfied. He would have been said at last in the most insulting things he had ever said about our Saviour. For your sin and mine, in all its hideousness, and all its hatefulness, and its hell-deservingness, was that night laid upon the Lamb of God, till the Holy Ghost himself could not find awful enough words to describe Gethsemane and its agony. All that awful night, and all next morning, our Redeemer went through such experiences of sin, and through such experiences of the wages of sin; he who knew no sin was so made sin that awful night that the chief of sinners has ever since had in Christ a great High Priest. The most sin-laden man among us is now able to fall down before his Redeemer with such strong cries and tears as these:—"By thy bloody sweat in the garden; by thy sinless soul in its agony; by thy head crowned with thorns; by thine eyes blinded with tears; by thine ears full of the insults of thine enemies; by thy face defiled with the spitting of men and devils; by thy neck bowed to the earth under the burden of the cross; by thy pierced hands and feet; by thine heart stabbed with the spear; by thy body broken, and thy blood poured out; by all thy known and unknown sufferings, O Lamb of God, forgive us all our iniquity, and subdue in us all our sin. For the sake of thine atoning death, grant us thy salvation, O Lamb of God, and make us partakers of thy holiness."

Very few of you are able to bear such things, and I will not lead you into any more temptation of the kind tonight. But all the deeper students of divine things, know the awful sermon entitled, "The Mental Sufferings of our Lord in His Passion," and they will go home and will read it again. And they will be beside themselves for some watches of the night after again reading it, and laying it to heart. Now, it so happens; it has been so ordered, that just as I am putting these words on paper, a letter comes into my hands signed by the mother of a family. An able, well-read, well-written, scholarly-minded woman; a woman destined yet to be a mother in Israel. It is a letter such that it takes even me all my might to read it. For, in the terrible words of the text, the writer is beside herself. She is in her Gethsemane. Her ink-horn is filled with her heart's blood. And yet you may sit beside her at dinner some of these evenings and never once guess that your affable companion is my correspondent. She is such a lady-like, such a polished, such a winning, and every way delightful woman to meet. Beside herself with her sin, she is like Paul; for if she is beside herself, it is to God and to her minister alone. What could I say in answer to her but the simple truth:—"My dear lady," I said, "you could comfort me. I am as you are, and you are as I am. Be like me. The first thing every morning, and the last thing every night with me is this:—O Lamb of God I come. Just as I am and waiting not, O Lamb of God, I come." And I had no sooner answered her letter than I chanced upon this in an old book that always lies at my elbow. "How now good fellow, whither away in this burdened manner? 'A burdened manner indeed, as ever I think poor creature had.' 'Hast thou a wife and children?' 'Yes but I am so laden with this burden, that I cannot take that pleasure in them as formerly; methinks, I am as if I had none.' 'How comest thou by thy burden at first?' 'By reading this book in my hand.' 'I thought so; and it has happened to thee as to other weak men, who meddling with things too high for them, do suddenly fall into thy distractions; which distractions do not only unman men, but they run them upon desperate ventures, to obtain they know what not.' 'I know what I would obtain; it is ease for my heavy burden.' and so on in a book that Spurgeon read a hundred times and which I have read myself almost as often.

And, having been led up to mention Spurgeon's honored name, I am old enough to remember the ribaldry with which his name and his work were treated even by the best of the London newspapers, when he first began to turn London upside down. But it was enough for the servant to be treated like his Master and the servant as his Lord. The genius and the spiritual sensibility of Spurgeon's rare mind were such; and the holy law of God and the free grace of God had so entered that young man's heart, that he preached both the law and the Gospel like a man gone beside himself. Till it was not to be wondered at that he was treated in the scandalous way he was treated. O that all our pulpits in town and country were filled with such demented men! O that Richard Baxter's dying man to dying men were to be seen and heard in all our pulpits!

"Lo! this man's brow like to a title leaf,
Foretells the nature of a tragic volume!
He trembles and the whiteness in his cheek
Is apter than his tongue to tell his errand!
Even such a man
Drew Priam's curtain at the dead of night."

—British Weekly.

Sin and Sickness.

The emphases which is now, in certain quarters, laid upon sickness in connection with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, has no warrant whatever in the New Testament. Christ did indeed "bear the burden of our diseases" and "assumed our weaknesses," and "sympath