

'Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter days some will separate themselves from the *Roman Faith*.' This edition has archiepiscopal approval. I Cor. iii-15 runs as follows, 'He himself shall be saved, yet in all cases as by the *fire of purgatory*.' I think we need not go further for 'some pretence of evidence' that the Bible is manipulated.

THE ASCENSION.

By Prof. G. H. S. Walpole, D.D., in the May number of the *American Church Sunday School Magazine*.

St. Luke xxiv.: 49-53; Acts i.: 9-11.

We shall consider (1) The fact itself; (2) The significance to the Church; (3) Its significance to us.

I. The fact itself.

It has seemed strange to some that so important a fact as that of the Ascension should be narrated by only one evangelist—St. Luke—for the account in St. Mark's Gospel is found in a passage, the authorship of which many are not quite certain about. Why does St. Matthew say nothing about it, and why is St. John silent? The answer to these questions lies in the true idea of the gospels. As we have seen before, they were not intended to be biographies, to tell everything that Jesus did or said, but rather to bring out a certain aspect of our Lord's life. If then the Ascension was a part of that aspect, it would be narrated, but not otherwise. St. Matthew's object was to show that our Lord fulfilled every conception of the Messianic King, and he naturally concludes with that splendid picture of our Lord standing on the mount with five hundred disciples gathered around, giving them commission to go and baptize the whole world and bring it to His feet. St. John's object was to show that our Lord was the everlasting word incarnate, and to point out how we were led to believe in Him or disbelieve in Him—how faith and unbelief reached this climax in His presence. How could his story of the growth of faith find a more fitting conclusion than the glowing confession of St. Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" (It should be noted that St. John's Gospel properly concludes with Chap. 20.) In both these cases then, the narration of the Ascension would have spoiled the completeness of the Gospel. And both St. Matthew and St. John would have been amazed had they supposed that their omission of the fact was constructed into ignorance of it. The first would have asked, "Did I not show the Divine Master, clothed with all power in heaven and earth, worshipped by His Church and promising His Presence to it throughout all the days—what other fact but the Ascension could complete His earthly manifestations?" And St. John would ask whether the words of the Master, which he had recorded (St. John 6: 62), "what, and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?" were not conclusive as to the fact of the Ascension. St. Luke is the only evangelist from whom we should expect an account, for he alone proposes to "set forth, in order, a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us." As the Ascension was one of those things we should have been surprised had he not given us an account of it, we see then, there is no good reason for being surprised that St. Luke only narrates its circumstances. Note next the strangely simple account of the fact as given by St. Luke. It is like the parting of a father with his children, rather than the triumphant return of a king to his throne. "He led them out" through the

gates of the city, across the Kedron, up the Mount of Olives and then in some spot "over against" the place where His body had been "anointed for the burying," He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass while He blessed them, He parted from them, and was carried up into heaven." How impossible not to believe that it happened just as it is recorded. How could anyone invent so severely simple a tale? How natural to describe the last words, the aspect of the Saviour, the sudden manifestation of chorus of angels, the adoration of the disciples, the majestic ascent—and yet nothing of this. How different this from the departure of Elijah! We find all that we need, but nothing more.

II. Significance of the fact to the Church.

What was its meaning? Why did our Lord manifest Himself once more to give this solemn farewell? First, that His Church might know that the period of manifestations was over. Before that time He might come at any time and in any place, but now He would depart not to appear till He should come again in like manner as they saw Him go into heaven. It is true that He appeared to St. Paul on the road to Damascus, in the temple at Jerusalem—and again to St. John in Patmos, who felt the pressure of His hand (Rev. 1: 17), but not in the same way. These later manifestations were more of the nature of visions, as is apparent by the circumstances under which they were given.

Secondly. That the Church might realize through all the difficulties and storms which were to come on her, that our Lord's attitude to her was one of "everlasting benediction." She might be oppressed and apparently defeated, but the gates of hell should never prevail against her, for she was the subject of His blessing. His hands are ever over her, strengthening, inspiring and encouraging. So it is, that the apostles returned to Jerusalem on that first Holy Thursday, not with the tears of those who have bidden a last farewell to their best Friend, but with great joy (St. Luke 24: 52), a joy that expressed itself in a perpetual blessing and praising of God. The Ascension of Christ was to them a sign of ultimate triumph. They, as He did, must face difficulty, trial and death, but these were not defeats, but marks of victory. Their King, though invisible, was dwelling in the centre of everlasting might, and though the regeneration of humanity might be long in coming, it was certain.

Thirdly. To assure them of His return. In one of His previous manifestations had He spoken about returning, but now, in the last, they had a definite assurance through the angels, that He would come back, and these words must have recalled all His teaching about His return, how He had bidden them watch for it, work with it in sight. It was evidently no time for "gazing into heaven." They must be up and doing, making the earth ready for His return, as He is making the heavenly mansions ready for us.

III. Its Significance for us.

That blessing which He gives to the Church, as a whole, He gives to all her members. This each one should remember when He hears the words of the eucharistic blessing. It is strange unbelief to leave the Church without receiving that, as some do. Again, each one should look for that blessing in his daily duties, ask for it, expect to find it. The words of the old grace before meals, "Bless, O Lord, these Thy gifts to our use, and us to Thy service," should be used for all God's gifts—the holiday, the excursion, the pleasant book, the magazine and newspaper, and nothing should be used unless we can feel that it has His blessing—"Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin." Rom. 14: 23.

The sense of His return to us, individually, at death, as to the world on the great day,

ought to be strong within us. "The night cometh when no man can work." Read our Lord's serious warning against those who think that He is delaying His coming (St. Luke 12: 45). Our position is to be that of those who wait for their Lord; that of virgins who are not content with having just enough grace for the day, but who accumulate grace, fill their vessels as well as their lamps (St. Matt. 25: 1-13.)

MOVEMENTS IN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.

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THOSE of us who can carry our present recollections so far back as the last forty or fifty years must recognize that great changes, even if we do not regard them as advances, have taken place within that period. Opinion about the date we speak of, say in the "Forties," was crystallized; there was no movement; controversy centered round such topics as Calvinistic Predestination, Baptismal Regeneration was not then even on the theological horizon; questions about the Real Presence were not at all entertained or dreamt of. Unfulfilled prophecy, however, had a large place; it formed the principal arsenal from which weapons were drawn to fight the Roman foe. It had its advantages; for example it spoke whatever the interpreter wished, and who could contradict him? from the pages of Daniel and the Apocalypse he filled his quiver with arrows against the Papacy. Dr. Cumming and other writers of the prophetic school waxed bold and confident, fixing the year 1867 as that of the doom of Papal Babylon. But 1867 came and went, and their interpretations of prophecy were not fulfilled. By-and-bye a movement of religious thought began to stir in Irish religious circles; we do not mean to speak at any length of its influence in the Broad Church direction; but both Broad and High rebelled against and threw off the terrible Calvinistic conception of God and His dealings. Predestination gradually ceased to be discussed; it had become practically dead and buried in the course of time. "That most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort," Baptismal Regeneration, teaching as it does and truly teaching that God mercifully receives every infant at its Baptism, afforded an immense relief from the gloomy and crushing Calvinism of the time to thoughtful minds. Gradually Church doctrine founded on Bible truth began to emerge from the darkness under which it had lain so long. More beneficent and true conceptions of God began to find a place; also truer and juster views of man, His creature, formed in His image and likeness. By degrees the world beyond the grave began to appear in a new light, which yet was also old. The Puritanical spirit in its fear and horror of Purgatory had abolished Paradise; in a way, at once contrary to both reason and revelation, it had denied all growth or advance in the future life, and fixed all the departed at the moment of death at once and for ever as perfected in holiness and happiness, or in sin and torment, according as they died in faith or in the absence of it. Some cast the dead into a profound sleep which was to endure from death until the Judgment, and this contradicted the teaching of the Holy Scripture and the Creeds. Of late we have, thank God, begun to know what is meant by the words, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints." Oh, how much blessed truth this Article carries with it, whether we look at it in the light of the present life, or in the light of the life of the world to come!—the feeling of safety and privilege of being placed in God's own kingdom from the very first, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, and being fed and guarded in it through all the changing scenes and chances of this mortal life, if we will