

For a poem is something made by words, and we are made by the Word of the living God. 'Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth,' says James. Moreover, it is a work of words that has a rhythmical flow, and follows the laws of harmony. So should the life of God's redeemed be. So it is His purpose that it shall be. They sing, as it were, a new song before the throne. They do not sing what they are not. They are, as it were, a new song. And even in this life they stand by God's grace in sharp anti-thesis to those who are drunk with wine wherein is excess; they are filled with the Spirit, and speak to themselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their heart to the Lord.

There is another place in the New Testament in which *poiēma* is used. It is Ro 1²⁰. And there, it is true, *poiēma* means God's work in nature. Our Versions render 'the things that are made.' But the same writer may use the same word now with the primary and with the secondary meaning predominant in his mind. And besides, God's work in nature was made by Him harmonious as a poem. To His eye it is a poem still; and, in spite

of man's marring, He can still say 'very good.' Especially so was man himself. As St. Chrysostom finely says, 'When man was made out of the dust of the earth, in his bodily form he was like a beautiful musical instrument, as yet silent; but the breath of God came forth, and stirred the strings, and all was harmony and gladness.' Man marred that harmony.

Disproportioned sin

Jarred against Nature's chime, and with harsh din
 Brake the fair music that all creatures made
 To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed.

And now it is the very purpose of the new making to restore the ancient harmony. Once again man is a poem, God's poem, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works.

In an earlier letter (2 Co 3³) St. Paul called the redeemed an epistle—'an epistle of Christ.' It is a searching epithet. To be known and read of all men! He calls them now a poem. The word of warning is gone. They may still be known and read, but now in the reading men will find beauty, sweetness, grace. 'In your concord and harmonious love,' writes Ignatius to these same Ephesians, 'Jesus Christ is sung.'

Thomas Boston of Ettrick.

BY THE REV. GEORGE MACKENZIE, M.A., B.D., MINISTER OF THE PARISH OF ETRICK.

THE well-informed and sympathetic sketch of Thomas Boston in a recent issue of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES is one more proof that the greater Ettrick Shepherd is coming to his rights again. Only it is with a difference. Our grandfathers were concerned to know his works: we are more concerned to know the man. No trumpet will ever call his treatises and sermons to resurrection. But the marvel of his life grips a larger audience every day. Indeed, it is no unlikely thing that some of the laurels surrendered by the *Fourfold State* may be won again by the *Memoirs*. And it is the greater book of the two.

It is no part of my purpose to say a second

time what Mr. Low has said already. Two biographies or appreciations of even such a man as Boston would be more, perhaps, than the hungriest reader of this magazine could have any appetite for, at least with only one month's fast coming in between. My humbler aim is merely to fill up a few chinks in the Ettrick period of Boston's ministry. Not that these additions matter very much in themselves. Still they are *new*, and not without interest to those who like to loiter in the byways of a strenuous career.

But a 'foreword' about Boston's name. Mr. Low quotes from certain Edinburgh University Registers two instances in which it appears as

Bouston, and adds that these are 'the only instances we know of variation from the ordinary spelling.' There are more. The title-deeds of the family tenement in Duns show that the father's name was John Bouston, and it is as Thomas Bouston, sometimes even Boustoun, that his son appears in the Presbytery Records all the way down to his call to the parish of Simprin. I quote one extract in illustration, if only because of its peculiar interest as making the first ecclesiastical mention of a name that was afterwards to shine so luminously in the annals of the Church:—

'CHIRNSYDE, *June 29th, 1694.*

'The whilk day Mr. John Cockburn, student, presented a petition for the bursary of Chirnsyde, and Mr. Thomas Bouston for the bursary of Dunss, both being vacant. The forsaid young men being born and bred for the most part in ye bounds of ye pbrie of Dunss, were well known to the pbrie, and otherwise qualified, had their petitions granted.'

Even after Boston had for some reason or other dropped the 'u' from his name, the original pronunciation must have been still kept up. For to this day the descendants of the men to whom the *Fourfold State* was preached, both in the Merse and the Forest, speak only of Tammas Bouston.

When he began his twenty-five years' ministry in Ettrick, he found the people 'burnt up with the fire of division, and drenched with fleshly abominations.' If the *Memoirs* prove the first count in the indictment, the Session Records abundantly prove the second. Kept for eight years by Boston himself, they simply reek with cases of discipline. It is noted of more than one 'scandalous and contumacious sinner' that he had to appear *twenty-six* separate times in the place of repentance before the congregation. We may judge what an Augean stable the young minister set himself to cleanse, from the single fact that one of his first tasks was to deal with a man who had been thrice found guilty of the grossest immorality, and *was still a ruling elder*.

No doubt the shepherdless condition of the parish for four years had something to do with the character of the sheep. Sheep? They were more like wolves—wild beasts of the sort that Paul did battle with at Ephesus. It took time and chastisement even to teach them decent

béaviour in church. What a flood of unpleasant light is thrown upon their attitude to divine things by this entry in the Session Records of date July 21, 1707:—

'The session finding there are several persons who unnecessarily go out and in, & up and down the kirkyard & about the kirk, in time of divine worship, on the Lord's day, & disturb others by their undecent carriage, Appointed that such be taken notice of for the time to come & censured.'

Four months later it was 'ordered that one of the elders go out each Lord's day in the time of publick worship, to observe if there be any disorderly carriage by men women or children at or about the kirk in time of divine worship.'

It is interesting to trace directly from the *Memoirs* and indirectly from the Records how Boston in time got the upper hand. If the ape and tiger never quite died out of his parishioners, they were certainly tamed into something like tolerable manners. 'Prayer and pains through faith in Jesus Christ' were bound to tell. And everybody knows how he preached. Where was there ever such preaching in a sequestered country parish? We do not wonder that it drew its audience from miles and miles beyond the confines of Ettrick. Fifteen ministers have occupied, without filling, Boston's place since he vacated it, but not one of them ever saw or dreamt of seeing such congregations gather even on the highest of high days.

His first Communion Roll, twice copied out in his own clear hand, is before me as I write. It contains 61 names—not 57, as the figure was put by himself, no doubt from memory, in his *Diary*, and has been put ever since: and it is characteristic of the man that every individual of the 61 was personally dealt with before admission to the Holy Table. At his last Communion, twenty-one years later, no fewer than 777 tokens were given out. But it is scarcely fair to set these two figures in juxtaposition, as though the Ettrick Communion Roll had increased twelvefold in the course of Boston's ministry. The 61 in 1710 were *bonâ fide* parishioners only: besides them, perhaps twice or thrice as many 'strangers' participated in the sacrament. It is that total of parishioners and strangers together that should be placed alongside the similar total of 777 communicants in 1731. The disparity is then seen to be not so very great as has been hitherto assumed.

This contention is borne out by the collections reported to the Session. On the Saturday, Sunday, and Monday of the 1710 Communion, they amounted to £25, 16s. 11d. in Scots money; on the similar days in 1731 they amounted to £77, 13s. 4d.

The number of 'new communicants' admitted in 1731 was seventeen. There had been twenty-six in the previous year, and among them Boston's youngest son, Thomas, who succeeded him in the ministry. The following were the questions 'proposed' to the candidates on that occasion—

'1. Do you belive the Doctrin of the Shorter Caticism of this Church so far as you understand the same, to be the true Doctrin, agreeable to the holy Scriptures, & Resolve through Grace to live and Die in the profession of the samin: 2. Do you consent to take God in Christ to be your God, the Father to be your father, the Son to be your Saviour, & the Holy Ghost your Sanctifier, And that Renouncing the Divil, the world and the flesh, you be the Lords for ever: 3. Do you consent to Receive Christ as he is offered in the Gospel for your prophet, priest, and king, giving up your self to him to be Lead and guided by his word and Spirit, Looking for Salvation only thro the obedience & death of jesus Christ, who was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem, promising in his strength to Endeavour to lead a holy life, to Forsake every known sin and to comply with every known duty: Lastly, Do you promise to subject your self to Exhortation, Admonition and Rebuke & the Discipline of the Church, in case (which God forbid) you fall into any Scandalous Sin.'

The last meeting of Session at which Boston presided was held on Monday, May 8, 1732. It seems to have been called for the special purpose of absolving and exhorting a penitent. On the Saturday of the following week Boston fell on sleep, not old in years, for he was only fifty-six, but worn with labour, and eager to be with Christ. It is usually stated that before his death 'only two, or at most three, Sundays passed without service.' As a matter of fact, the first Sunday of the year that passed without service was May 21, the day after his death. Boston died in harness. The sole reference to the event in the Session Records is this grim item in the 'Account of Collections and Disbursements'—

'for the Mortcloth for the Corps of the
Reverend Mr. Thomas Boston . . . 02 02 00.'

There is in the possession of Mr. John Cochrane, United Presbyterian College Buildings, an extraordinary MS. Autobiography, or 'Spotted Life,' of one Thomas Mitchell, who describes himself on the title-page as 'a horrid thief, the son of a thief, a born Beggar, the son of a Beggar, a Drunkard, a Lyar, a Backslider, a Vagabond, unclean, unbaptized, unholy, under a power of the Devil.' The MS., which has never yet seen the light of publication, seems to have been drawn up by its author after his conversion, and addressed to his minister, the younger Boston, then in Jedburgh. It contains what is, so far as I know, the only extant reference to the elder Boston's funeral by an actual eye-witness. With Mr. Cochrane's kind permission I quote it, as a hint or proof of the sorrow that Boston's death was even to the wasters of the community:—

'I Remember my Parents was at your worthy fathers Burial and Prophain as they were I heard y^m lamenting him much especaly my Father, but I had little thought about it, I was verry Bussy setting up Stons to get at a Sterlings nest that was under the Sclates of the Kirk.'

It is strange to think that for more than seventy years, Boston's grave was marked only by a very insignificant headstone, recording his own name on the one side, and (it is said) his wife's on the other. Not until 1806 was a more worthy monument erected to his memory. The moving spirit in the matter was the Rev. William (afterwards Dr.) Brown, minister of Eskdalemuir, who composed the not too laudatory inscription:—

'As a testimony of esteem for the Rev. Thomas Boston, senior, whose private character was highly respectable; whose public labours were blessed to many; and whose valuable writings have contributed much to promote the advancement of vital Christianity, this monument (by the permission of relatives) is erected by a religious and grateful public.'

The monument cost a little over £43 sterling, to which Boston's grandson, the Admiral, subscribed five guineas. Many a story has been told of the long procession of farmers' carts that brought the monument from Lochmaben half-way across Eskdalemuir, and were there met by carts from Ettrick, which carried it to its journey's end. But it is scarcely to the credit of the 'religious and grateful public' in 1806, that not a line was carved on the monument to show that it also

marks the resting-place of the faithful wife who had been for more than thirty years 'a crown' to her husband in his 'public station and appearances.'

Nearly 170 years have passed since the vanishing of the hand that penned the *Fourfold State*, and the stilling of the voice that preached it to trembling multitudes. Yet how the interval is bridged, when we remember that Hogg's mother was a child of two when Boston died, and Hogg's daughter is still alive! There may never come a

time when the Shepherd's songs will lose their sweetness, or his *Bonnie Kilmeny* cease to charm, as there may never come a time when the tremendous sermons to which his grandfather listened in Ettrick Kirk—if he did listen—will touch human hearts again. But who that has ever inhaled one deep breath from the first question in the Shorter Catechism will doubt that what, more than aught else, gives Ettrick a glory as everlasting as its own green hills, is the saintly life and apostolic ministry of Thomas Boston?

Israel's Restoration in the Persian Period.¹

BY THE REV. J. DICK FLEMING, M.A., B.D., TRANENT.

OF recent years a new theory of Israel's Restoration and Return from Captivity has made its way to the front, and promises to be no unimportant supplement to the earlier pentateuchal criticism. It has encountered considerable opposition not only from those who regard all critical theories with repugnance, but also from advanced critics like Wellhausen. Though accepted in the main by such men as Oort of Leyden, Wildeboer, Matthes, and Cheyne, and incorporated in the 'American Series of Historical Text-Books for Bible Students,' by Professor Kent of Brown University, in a volume conspicuous for its compactness and thoroughness, it must be confessed that the newer criticism would have stood its ground better, and been more readily received in our country, if it had not taken us so much by surprise. Dr. Cheyne's recent book was a bolt shot from the blue: it presented the theory summed up dogmatically, the conclusions without the proofs and premises. For those who were not previously initiated in the studies that formed the critical basis, it was inevitable that this new reconstruction of Jewish history should be judged arbitrary and fantastic. The ordinary student is already aware that Ezra-Nehemiah (originally one book) is a compilation containing memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, which have been supplemented and edited in the same spirit, and probably by the

same hand, as the Books of Chronicles; that there is room for criticism in details, and that some chronological rearrangement is inevitable. But when he hears it stated without proof that there was *no Return from the Captivity till the time of Ezra*, that the temple was rebuilt by the people of Judah, and that the walls and gates of Jerusalem were already completed before Ezra and the returning exiles set foot in the Holy City, what can he conclude but that the critics are more imaginative than the Chronicler himself, and playing pranks with history for their mere amusement? It is all the more necessary to inquire into the foundation of the structure, and the quarry from which the stones were drawn.

The honour of the new construction of Jewish history rests with Dr. W. H. Kusters, the successor of Kuenen at Leyden. While pastor at Deventer, Dr. Kusters was invited by Kuenen to take a part in the new Dutch translation of the Old Testament. On Kuenen's death in 1891, Kusters was elected to the vacant chair, which he filled till his early and sudden death in 1897. As professor he followed in the steps of Kuenen, that acknowledged master of Old Testament literature, and devoted himself specially to the study of the Exilic and post-Exilic period. He published the result of his investigations in a small work, *The Restoration of Israel in the Persian Period* (*Het Herstel van Israel in het Perzische Tijdvak*, 1894), and defended his main positions later in several articles of the *Theologisch Tijdschrift*, of which he was

¹ W. H. Kusters, *Het Herstel van Israel*, 1894; T. K. Cheyne, *Jewish Religious Life after the Exile*, 1898; C. F. Kent, *History of the Jewish People*, Part First, 1899.