

land, and Wales; should he infer that Ireland and Wales are interchangeable terms? The inference does not become the more sound because the antiquities of the Minæans are wrapped in a veil of obscurity out of which the most fragmentary outlines emerge.

While, then, Dr. Hommel's arguments are invariably learned and subtle, no one who cannot test his statements will be justified in regarding his inferences as secure. By calling that certain which is possible, and that proved which is plausible, rapid progress may apparently be made; but it is illusory.

3. A further consideration is how far Dr. Hommel has carried out his undertaking to refute Wellhausen. Wellhausen's famous work consists of a reconstruction of the religious history of Israel; and although it would be surprising if the monuments of S. Arabia or Assyria had anything to say on this subject, still they might conceivably tell us facts about Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, and others, which would seriously endanger Wellhausen's position. These personages, however, would appear to be quite unknown to Hommel's inscriptions. Wellhausen did not deny the Egyptian episode; indeed, in dealing with it he for once dropped the weapons of criticism to assume those of Euhemerus. Later writers, however, have denied it *on the evidence of cuneiform inscriptions*. Even these daring sceptics are not answered: the

Tell el-Amarna tablets, according to Hommel, contain no allusion to Israel or to any Israelitish tribe. Perhaps Wellhausen's hypothesis would not be seriously affected, even if it could be shown that the fourteenth chapter of Genesis is historically accurate; Hommel, it is clear, has at best demonstrated that it contains seriously disfigured elements of truth; and though it might be charming to find Abraham restored to the theatre of history, this it at present lies beyond Hommel's power to accomplish. And while his theory about the tribe of Asher is brilliantly ingenious, it would, if made out, be hard to reconcile with the biblical narrative.

To those of us who have been convinced by the reasoning of Kuenen and Wellhausen, since Professor Hommel does not deal so much with facts as with inferences, it will probably seem best to endeavour to reconcile some of his results with the system they have adopted rather than to regard that system as overthrown. But even where those results seem most attractive, they will ordinarily find a gulf between his premises and his conclusion which it is dangerous to leap, and at present impossible to span. And though a man of such unusual attainments may with justice retreat upon 'Babylonian and Phœnician and Arabic, including the Sabæan and Minæan dialects,' many readers will be less alarmed by the names of those studies than doubtful whether they do not incapacitate the mind for sober historical inquiry.

The Two Fig Trees.

AN ADDRESS TO CHILDREN.

BY THE REV. HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D.

I AM going to tell you about two fig trees; one which Jesus cursed, and the other which He blessed. You all know about the fig tree which He cursed. Our Lord's miracles were works of goodness and mercy. They were done to save and bless people. But there was one of them, at least, that was a work of destruction. One day Jesus went out of Jerusalem at sunset to spend the quiet evening hours at Bethany, a little village hid in a dimple of the Mount of Olives. Next morning as He was going back to the sacred city to resume His work of teaching the people,—for He had but a short

time now to do that work, and must therefore do it with all His might,—He felt very hungry. Either He had started too early from the hospitable home of Martha and Mary to break His fast, or He was so occupied with the thought of the work that He was going to do, that He forgot all about His bodily wants, as, you remember, He forgot His thirst when He was speaking to the woman of Samaria at the Well of Jacob. In any case, He was very faint and hungry, and He looked about for something to eat, which it is not difficult to find in that fruitful and open-handed country. He

saw a fig tree by the wayside clothed with green glossy leaves, and He expected to find fruit on it; for in the fig tree the fruit comes out before the leaves, and ripens slowly under the cool shelter of the shining foliage. But He was greatly disappointed, and in the revulsion of feeling said, 'Let no fruit grow on thee for ever,' and presently the fig tree withered away. In the face of all Jesus' acts of love and kindness that knew no limit, it seems very strange that He should have used His power in this instance only to destroy. It shows us surely that Jesus is not all meekness and gentleness. There is such a thing as the wrath of the Lamb. Jesus is full of pity for sinners; but against wilful, impenitent sin, He is terrible in His judgment, and we are commanded to 'kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and we perish from the way.'

You must not suppose that Jesus vented His disappointment and wrath against a senseless tree, as a dog worries the stone that has been thrown at it. No; it was against what the barren fig tree represented that He was angry. That barren fig tree was a picture of the Jewish nation. God, the Husbandman of souls, had done everything for that tree. He chose it out from all other trees. He planted it on a very fruitful hill, in carefully prepared and enclosed soil. He digged about it, and dressed it; He gave it every advantage; and yet when He came in the fulness of time seeking fruit from it, it put Him off with the rustling leaves of profession only. God chose it and cultivated it that it might bear fruit to bless the world, and it kept all its goodness to itself; it bore nothing but the selfish ostentatious leaves of pride and conceit. The Jewish nation had failed to fulfil the purpose of God in its election. God elected it that through it, and the special advantages which it got, all the families of the earth might be blessed. But it became Pharisaical and self-righteous and self-satisfied, and looked upon itself as the favourite nation of Heaven, and looked down upon all other people, and would have nothing to do with them. And therefore God cast them out of His vineyard, and pronounced the sentence of doom upon their barrenness.

But if the withered fig tree is a picture of the self-righteous Pharisee who lives for himself only, whom Christ destroys by His curse, let me show you another tree which Christ blessed. This tree is called a sycamore in the Bible, but it is in reality

a kind of fig tree. It is very common in the warmest parts of the Holy Land, and it puts out branches from its trunk so close to the ground that it is easy to climb up into it, and a very small man, or even a child, would have no difficulty in mounting and securing a safe seat among its boughs. I saw a good many sycamore trees growing near the ruins of Jericho. This tree bears a kind of fig, but not a fig of the best sort. The common people eat it, but it has an insipid taste, and I don't think you would be tempted to pluck many of those figs after having eaten one. It has a curious peculiarity about it. You require—while it is still on the tree—to scrape or cut off the top of it to make it eatable; for if you neglect to do this before it is ripe, it becomes nauseous and corrupt. Amos, the prophet, you remember, was a gatherer or a cutter of sycamore figs; and as he worked away, cutting his figs, trying to make the fruit better, he had earnest thoughts about his own people and how to improve them also.

Well, this inferior kind of fig tree bore, on one occasion, a very extraordinary fruit on its branches. Strange to say it was a man, Zaccheus by name. He was a tax-gatherer whom everyone hated and despised, because he was a renegade Jew who took the side of the conquering Romans against his own nation, and grew rich by oppressing his people with heavy taxes. He had heard of Jesus, and he was anxious to see Him. But being a little man, and a great crowd being in the place, he climbed up into this fig tree to get a better view of what was going on. He was like a wandering bird hitherto seeking a nest but finding none, and alighting on this bough if haply he might be successful this time. The sycamore figs were around him, growing in their strange way—directly out of the trunk of the tree, and he was like one of them. He was a mean kind of fruit which everybody but the lowest disliked; and like the sycamore fig, he needed to be subjected to a certain process of cutting and training to make him palatable and useful. The procession draws near, and the keen eye of Jesus sees the strange fruit up in the sycamore tree by the wayside, waiting for our Lord to make it fit for use in the world, by acting the part of Amos towards it. Nothing could have been simpler and more commonplace than the words which Jesus addressed to him. Jesus merely said that He was going home with him, to stay all night at his house. It was an ordinary greeting which

one man might make to another. But the words meant much to Zaccheus. For, just think of what he was. His own neighbours treated him as a social leper or outcast. They would have nothing to do with him; all his wealth would not bribe them to enter his house, or exchange a civil word with him if they met him in the fields. They shut him up by their scorn and hatred into an awful loneliness. To use a modern word with an evil meaning, they boycotted him in all the relations of life; and what that meant, no one who believes how dependent we are upon our friends and neighbours for our comfort and happiness can be ignorant of.

How precious, then, to such a man would be the offer which Christ made to go home with him, self-invited; for Zaccheus would not have dared to ask Jesus to partake of his hospitality. How sweet the words of unwonted kindness that greeted him, must have sounded in his ears! They must have fallen like dew upon his parched soul, longing for human sympathy and fellowship. That he, whom every one despised and hated, should be the only one out of all the vast crowd to be thus distinguished by the great Prophet, was almost incredible, and it filled his soul with a humble joy.

But there was more than this in the words of Jesus. There was wonderful consideration in them for the feelings of one in the position of Zaccheus. No words of reproach did the Saviour utter. He did not upbraid the tax-gatherer for his unpatriotic conduct, and for his manifold cruelties and extortions in his hateful office. He who lashed the sins of the Pharisees with words of withering scorn and indignation, had not a single word of condemnation to utter against this publican, whom the Pharisees looked upon as the vilest sinner of all. It was this gracious treatment that melted the heart of Zaccheus and conquered his soul with a single stroke. Trusted by Christ, he would strive in future to become worthy of that trust. Treated with kindness by Christ, he would treat others with kindness. He would make all the atonement in his power for his past sins. He would give back four times more than he took from those whom he had unjustly taxed. And if he could not altogether or at once abandon his hated employment, he would only retain it for the sake of insuring to his countrymen more just and

humane treatment at his hands than they would receive from any other tax-gatherer that might be appointed in his room. He would so use the powers and opportunities of his office, that he would make himself, if not loved, at least respected, and cause the hatred and contempt that his people cherished towards him to disappear.

That was the kind of fruit that Jesus gathered from the inferior fig tree at Jericho. Zaccheus was a sycamore fig, as it were, which the gracious dealing of Jesus had made sweet and eatable. In the neighbourhood of the Holy City of Jerusalem, He sought fruit from the highest kind of fig tree, and He found none. He met only with Pharisaic pride and pretension, which had no real food for the cravings of humanity, no blessing for the weary, sinful world. But here, down among the dark defiles of the old wicked Jericho, with all its dark associations, not far from where Sodom and Gomorrha were destroyed for their iniquity, He found the finest fruit from the most degraded fig tree, from the most degenerate of the sons of Abraham, one who was worse than useless, one who oppressed his fellow-countrymen. And how that fair fruit must have cheered the hungry soul of Christ! How it must have been meat and drink to Him, as He toiled up the long and steep defile, to find at the top of it the cross of anguish and shame!

Jesus is come seeking fruit from you to-day. Which picture represents you—the barren fig tree on the heights beside the Holy City, with every privilege and blessing to make you fruitful, and yet continuing unfruitful—the barren fig tree which Jesus cursed and withered; or the sycamore tree with its living fruit on it, down in the low depths of Jericho, the depths of sin and shame—the fruitful fig tree which Jesus blessed? Jesus is hungry for your salvation; will you give Him nothing but leaves, mere professions, or good resolutions, or hopes, or promises that when you are older, and have had your fill of the pleasures of the world, and your leaf of life has become sear and yellow, you will produce the fruit of righteousness which He wants? Or will you now climb the Gospel tree, that wisdom, which is a tree of life to them that lay hold of her, to see Jesus of Nazareth passing by, anxious to know Him and to serve Him, feeling that He is the very Saviour that you need; to put yourself in the way of His saying to you, ‘To-day I must abide at thy house’? Are you

making use of the sanctuary worship and of every sermon you hear as a tree to climb into, and enable you to see more of Jesus, that you may love Him more and serve Him better? If so, then Jesus will come into your heart, to make the tree

good from the very centre of its life, in order that the fruit may be good and abundant. And He will say to you, 'I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.'

Point and Illustration.

THOUGHTS FROM JEAN PAUL RICHTER AND ROTHE'S 'ETHIC.'

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED BY CHARLOTTE ADA RAINY, EDINBURGH.

The Future Life.

MAN travels like the earth, from the West towards the East, but it appears to him as if he went with the earth, from the East towards the West, from life towards the grave.

WE should not so much prepare ourselves for eternity, as plant eternity in ourselves.

IN the midst of our shadowed life here below, we see the mountains of the future world, standing in the morning light of the sun, which does not rise here. So the dweller at the North Pole sees in the long night, when no sun rises, a golden twilight on the highest mountains, and he thinks of his long summer, when his sun will never set.

ALL the evening stars of this life will once again appear for us—as evening stars.

HEAVEN is made up of first days.

TO believe utterly in a great character is the only fore-taste of heaven.

WHERE man is, there beginneth, not even *Time*, but—*Eternity*.

Work.

THE virtuous heart, like the body, becomes healthy and strong, rather through work than nourishment.

Children.

YOU, little ones, are near God; the smallest world is the nearest to the sun.

The Ideal.

IN every noble heart there existeth an eternal thirst for a yet nobler one; it would have its ideal before it in a present and bodily form, in order more easily to attain unto it; for a noble soul can only ripen beside one of its own nature, even as diamonds alone can polish diamonds.

YEA, verily, O God; Thou canst and wilt give us at last a reality, which will more than realise our present ideals—as Thou hast verily shown us already in Thy love which hast blessed us with moments, wherein the Ideal became Reality. Yet, for the *Then* of that *Afterwards* hath this short 'Now' no voice. But even should our present life become all poetry, and every day a dream, that would only intensify our longings. The higher reality would only give birth to a higher poetry, to higher memories and higher hopes.

THE heart of man is eternal, and He will care for it, who gave time out of His eternity, and laid them together in the human heart. Should the fleetingness, the transitoriness of life overwhelm thee, look up to the old fortress—to God.

Life with God.

A FEW people live near to the earth, a few far from it, but very few near to the sun.

IN the depths, where no God is, and no heart to love Him, all sorrow lasteth long; on the heights of devotion we still meet with sorrows, only they are but short. Just as the nights are longer in the valleys, but on the mountains they last not long, and a gleam of red showeth alway where day has been or is to be.

FROM ROTHE'S 'ETHIK.'

RELIGION, that is, Christian religion, takes in the whole of a man; he alone is truly devout who is so with his whole being, or at least would be so; that is to say, not only with his feelings and doings, but also with all his mind (understanding) and powers (will).—Vol. i. 43.

IT is in the love of God alone that love can altogether fulfil itself.—Vol. ii. 474.

ONLY in so far as it dwelleth in love can a human soul perfectly fulfil itself; only under the condition of universal love are moral ends practicable for the human race.—Vol. i. 474.

THE lover, just because of his love, possesseth spiritually the loved one as his very own.—Vol. i. 158.

LOVE—a working together with our neighbour to the fulfilment of moral aims.—Vol. i. 519.

THE truly artistic life is essentially and absolutely a religious one.

LOVE perfected is virtue perfected.—Vol. iii. 122.

VERILY we do not need to ask for happiness. When the mind has awakened to that which is pure joy, that joy will come to meet us of itself in all our works and ways, and we shall ask ourselves how we ever could have thought of *willing* pleasure for ourselves.

NO one should be a poet, and *that alone*.—Vol. iv. 99.

A CHRISTIAN is able to rejoice in his God because of his absolute confidence in Him, and not only so, he has the certainty of being able to reveal himself *utterly* unto Him. If we cannot so reveal ourselves to men, it is an unspeakable consolation to know that yet, at the last, we shall fall into the arms of God.—Vol. iv. 163.