

Words of Christ

THE VERY REV. LE B. E. FFRENCH, M.A.,

*Dean of Clonfert, and Examining Chaplain to the Bishop of Killaloe
and Clonfert.*

THE healthfulness of Christian teaching is a distinctive note of the Pastoral Epistles which we are studying together. "Wholesome words," "the wholesome teaching," "an outline of wholesome words," "healthy in the faith," "healthy, wholesome speech," these are recurrent expressions in the letters to Timothy and Titus. It is implied also that the acid test of all teaching given in the Christian community is conformity with the words of our blessed Lord. "If any man teacheth a different doctrine, and consenteth not to healthful words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is puffed up, knowing nothing . . ." (1 Tim. 6. 3.) This, of course, is in accordance with the Lord's parting charge to the Apostles; "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." This He foretold would be the work of the Holy Spirit when He came; "He shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you"; I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now; but when He, the spirit of Truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth. . . . He shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you." Our Lord knew the worth and power of His own words—"Let these words sink into your ears;" "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day;" "If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you." "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away;" "the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." In the four gospels we have recorded the words of Christ. Outside them there is in the N.T. only one of His sayings, quoted by St. Paul, which surely breathes the very spirit of Jesus,— "It is more blessed to give than to receive." One interesting sacred "Log" is found after St. Luke 6. 4 in the Codex Bezae, the famous Cambridge MS., which is a witness to what is known as "the Western Text" of the N.T. and which I have had the privilege of holding in my hands. This may record an actual incident in Christ's ministry; "On the same day seeing a man working on the sabbath He said to him, Man, if thou knowest what thou art doing, happy art thou; but if thou knowest not thou art cursed, and a transgressor of the law."

Two well known extra-canonical sayings which may be genuine are "Be ye approved money-changers," (several times quoted by ancient writers); and the words preserved by Origen, "He that is near Me is near the fire, but he that is far from Me is far from the Kingdom." The first part of this saying may remind us of St. Luke 12. 49, "I came to cast fire upon the earth"; and recall the Baptist's prediction, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." It has however been suggested that the correct reading may be "near

the Father" (not "the fire": ξἴγρως "πατζος," not "πσζος"). If this proposed emendation (?) be adopted the saying may call to mind St. John 14. 9, "he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." We must, I think, admit that we cannot be sure that we have, even in the N.T., the "*iposissima verba*" of our Lord. In 1897, and again at a more recent date, Drs. Grenfell and Hunt disinterred at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt a few Logia, one or two of which appear to be real additions to our collections of the words of Christ, though others are mostly variants of what we had already. The Editors assigned to the sayings unearthed in 1897, a date, "not much later than the year 200." In the former category—those that are new—are :

(1) "Jesus saith, Except ye fast to the world ye shall in no wise find the kingdom of God; and except ye keep the sabbath ye shall not see the Father." The editors suggest that "keep the sabbath" has the "inner meaning" "make the sabbath a real sabbath", and remind us that "ye shall in no wise find the kingdom of God" is reminiscent of St. Matt. 6. 33, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God."

(2) "Jesus saith, I stood in the midst of the world, and in the flesh was I seen of them, and I found all men drunken, and none found I athirst among them, and My soul grieveth over the sons of men because they are blind in their heart." For "the general tenor" of this saying we are asked to compare St. John 1. 11; "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not." I think it also recalls to mind St. John 1. 14, "the Word *became flesh*, and dwelt among us"; and 7. 37, "*Jesus stood* and cried saying, *If any man thirst*, let him come unto Me, and drink."

(3) "Jesus saith, Wherever there are . . . and there is one alone, . . . I am with him. Raise the stone, and there thou shalt find me, cleave the wood and there am I." The thought in the second part of this Word is similar to that exposed in a beautiful short poem by Joseph Plunkett, who was executed in Dublin after the Easter week rising in 1916; "I see His blood upon the rose, . . . His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn, His Cross is every tree." It reminds us also of Francis Thompson's lines, "The angels keep their ancient places, Turn but a stone and start a wing . . ."

(4) "(Ye ask? who are those) that draw us (to the kingdom if) the kingdom is in heaven? . . . the fowls of the air, and all the beasts that are under the earth or upon the earth, and the fishes of the sea, (these are they which draw) you, and the kingdom of heaven is within you; and whosoever shall know himself shall find it. (Strive therefore) to know yourselves, and ye shall be aware that ye are the sons of the (Almighty?) Father; and (?) ye shall know that ye are in (the city of God) and ye are (the city?)." The only part of this rather long "Logion" published in 1901, which is not new is a repetition of our Lord's words to the Pharisees in St. Luke 17. 21, "the kingdom of God is within you."

In the second class we find one which is in exact agreement with St. Luke 6. 42.

(5) "And then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote that is in thy brother's eye," St. Matt. 7., 5, has "out of," instead of "in thy brother's eye."

An interesting variant of a well-known saying is, "Jesus saith, A

prophet is not acceptable in his own country, neither doth a physician work cures upon them that know him." This Logion again agrees with St. Luke's version rather than with St. Matthew or St. Mark. The second part of it is new. In connection with it, Drs. Grenfell and Hunt aptly remark that we should notice the preceding verse in St. Luke's narrative, "Ye will say unto Me, Physician, heal thyself," and that which follows in St. Mark, "He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them."

Another is, "Jesus saith, A city built upon the top of a high hill, and stablished, can neither fall nor be hid." This is an expanded form of St. Matt. 5. 14, "A city set on a hill cannot be hid," and perhaps the scribe had in mind the parable of the house built upon a rock at the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

Two of the Logia discovered in 1897 I omit as being mutilated in form, and obscure in meaning. A few other supposed sayings of the greatest of Teachers are known and other "Words of Christ" may yet be found. Those with which His Church has long been familiar are among the most treasured possessions of our Christian heritage, and, as has been pointed out, agreement or disagreement with them, or the spirit that breathes in them, is the test to apply to teaching concerning which we may be in doubt. "If any man teacheth a different doctrine, and consenteth not to . . . the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness . . ." Attempting to make an application of these words in conditions of the present day we may say: in certain quarters, of late years, a philosophy of life has been expounded which justifies, with hardly any limitation imposed, what is euphemistically called Self-expression; but brought to the test of the words of Christ this teaching must be definitely rejected. He has taught in the plainest possible language that some, at all events, of His disciples must live what may be called a maimed life rather than be cast into the eternal fire. "If thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee." And "there are eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake." The glory of Christ's words is not only that they proceed from Him Who is "the Truth," but that they point to Him Who is also "the Way" and "the Life." For, as Ernest Renan truly said, "Jesus taught nothing but Himself." This is also at all times the glory of the Christian pulpit—to point to Christ, not to offer to "the hungry sheep" discourses of a pseudo-politics-economic type. Some of us have read with pleasure what are almost the closing words of Canon Mozley's farewell sermon preached at St. Paul's Cathedral two or three weeks ago: "The primary duty of the Christian teacher is to continue the proclamation of that mighty gospel of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, of the high redeeming Cross where in Christ's death our sins are dead, of death swallowed up in victory."

Here may be given an illustration of the way in which, perhaps in unexpected quarters, men are yearning for the distinctive Christian message and respond to it when it is given. In her *Life of A. L. Smith, Master of Balliol from 1916-1924*, his wife relates, "A. L. loved a

simple discourse. I have seldom seen him so much impressed as he was on the last Sunday before his final illness. The aged Bishop Chavasse was the preacher, and, regardless of Fellows and scholars (whose presence might seem to act as a "quencher of the spirit"), he lifted up his voice and gave us a most inspiring message. "That's the stuff!" said one of the dons as they came out. He succeeded where many abstruse theologians had failed—perhaps they think that Balliol men must have something original and elaborate given them to think about, whereas they really require 'milk for babes', and this the old Bishop gave them.*

I close with some verses by the late Canon Ainger, Master of the Temple, who in his day was a preacher of note. They were not written for publication, but appeared in "The Record" some years after his death. They were entitled (and this is significant), "On Reading a Volume of Modern Sermons."

" With eager hand that oft has sliced
 At Gentile gloss or Jewish fable,
 Before the crowd you lay the Christ
 Upon the lecture table.
 From bondage to the old beliefs
You say our rescue must begin ;
 But *I* want refuge from my griefs
 And saving from my sin.
 The strong, the easy, and the glad
 Hang blandly, listening on your word ;
 But *I* am sick, and *I* am sad,
 And *I* need *Thee*, O Lord."

*This quotation is taken from the *Life of Bishop Chavasse* by Canon J. B. Lancelot.

Book Reviews

THE LAST YEARS OF THE ENGLISH SLAVE TRADE

By Averil Mackenzie-Grieve (Putnam & Co. Ltd.) pp.331. 15s.

Students of the immortal epic of the Abolition of the Slave Trade will welcome this valuable book, which is also a book for the general public. It consists of 17 chapters, neatly arranged so as to cover as much ground as possible. The author keeps strictly to the subject of the book and does not deal with the subsequent fight for the abolition of the institution of slavery itself. That came to pass at midnight July 31st, 1834, when 800,000 slaves became free. Coupland wrote of this event "It was more than a great event in African or British History. It was one of the greatest events in the history of the world."

In these 17 chapters we are told all kinds of interesting facts about the Rise of Liverpool and its merchants—Lord Mansfield—the captains (including John Newton who is given a chapter to himself)—the horrors of the Middle Passage—West Indian society—the settlement of Sierra Leone—and such matters as the attitude of the Missions towards slavery.

The book is based on contemporary records, registers, diaries, letters, pamphlets and documents, and therefore presents a first hand picture of the period of great historical value. Though the style is sometimes a little abrupt and jerky, the book is brimful of picturesque incidents, and vivid descriptions, and shrewd portraits of the various actors and agents in the great Drama.

We read (p. 93) of 2,000 seamen rioting at Liverpool in 1775 and attacking the merchants' houses, where a small negro boy is found in a grandfather's clock.

On page 29 is printed a letter by Anna Falconbridge written in February 1791