

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

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ST. JOHN. VOL. III.

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET,
CAVENDISH SQUARE.
IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

1873AD

JOHN XX. 24-31.

24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.	hither thy hand, and thrust <i>it</i> into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.
25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.	28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.
26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: <i>then</i> came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace <i>be</i> unto you.	29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hath seen me, thou hast believed: blessed <i>are</i> they that have not seen, and <i>yet</i> have believed.
27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach	30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book:
	31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

THE story of the unbelief of Thomas, related in these verses, is a narrative peculiar to the Gospel of St. John. For wise and good reasons it is passed over in silence by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and was probably not given to the world till Thomas was dead. It is precisely one of those passages of Scripture which supply strong internal evidence of the honesty of the inspired writers. If impostors and deceivers had compiled the Bible for their own private advantage, they would never have told mankind that one of the first founders of a new religion behaved as Thomas here did.

We should mark, for one thing, in these verses, *how much Christians may lose by not regularly attending the assemblies of God's people*. Thomas was absent the first time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, and consequently Thomas missed a blessing. Of course we have no certain proof that the absence of the Apostle could not admit of explanation. Yet, at such a crisis in the lives of the eleven, it seems highly improbable that he had any good reason for not being with his brethren, and it is far more likely that in some way he was to blame. One thing, at any rate, is clear and plain. By being absent he was kept in suspense and unbelief a whole week, while all around him were rejoicing in the thought of a risen Lord. It is difficult to suppose that this would have been the case, if there had not been a fault somewhere. It is hard to avoid the suspicion that Thomas was absent when he might have been present.

We shall all do well to remember the charge of the Apostle St. Paul: "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is." (Heb. x. 25.) Never to be absent from God's house on Sundays, without good reason,—never to miss the Lord's Supper when administered in our own congregation,—never to let our place be empty when means of grace are going on, this is one way to be a growing and prosperous Christian. The very sermon that we needlessly miss, may contain a precious word in season for our souls. The very assembly for prayer and praise from which we stay

away, may be the very gathering that would have cheered, and stablished, and quickened our hearts. We little know how dependent our spiritual health is on little, regular, habitual helps, and how much we suffer if we miss our medicine. The wretched argument that many attend means of grace and are no better for them, should be no argument to a Christian. It may satisfy those who are blind to their own state, and destitute of grace, but it should never satisfy a real servant of Christ. Such an one should remember the words of Solomon: "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors." (Prov. viii. 34.) Above all he should bind around his heart the Master's promise: "Whosoever two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. xviii. 20.) Such a man will rarely be left like Thomas, shut out in the cold chill of unbelief, while others are warmed and filled.

We should mark for another thing in this verse, *how kind and merciful Christ is to dull and slow believers*. Nowhere, perhaps, in all the four Gospels, do we find this part of our Lord's character so beautifully illustrated as in the story before our eyes. It is hard to imagine anything more tiresome and provoking than the conduct of Thomas, when even the testimony of ten faithful brethren had no effect on him, and he doggedly declared, "Except I see with my own eyes and touch with my own hands, I will not believe." But it is impossible to imagine anything more patient and compassionate, than our Lord's treatment of this weak disciple.

He does not reject him, or dismiss him, or excommunicate him. He comes again at the end of a week, and apparently for the special benefit of Thomas. He deals with him according to his weakness, like a gentle nurse dealing with a froward child:—"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side." If nothing but the grossest, coarsest, most material evidence could satisfy him, even that evidence was supplied. Surely this was a love that passeth knowledge, and a patience that passeth understanding.

A passage of Scripture like this, we need not doubt, was written for the special comfort of all true believers. The Holy Ghost knew well that the dull, and the slow, and the stupid, and the doubting, are by far the commonest type of disciples in this evil world. The Holy Ghost has taken care to supply abundant evidence that Jesus is rich in patience as well as compassion, and that He bears with the infirmities of all His people. Let us take care that we drink into our Lord's spirit, and copy His example. Let us never set down men in a low place, as gracious and godless, because their faith is feeble and their love is cold. Let us remember the case of Thomas, and be very pitiful and of tender mercy. Our Lord has many weak children in His family, many dull pupils in His school, many raw soldiers in His army, many lame sheep in His flock. Yet He bears with them all, and casts none

away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to deal likewise with his brethren. There are many in the Church, who, like Thomas, are dull and slow, but for all that, like Thomas, are real and true believers.

We should mark, lastly, in these verses, *how Christ was addressed by a disciple as "God," without prohibition or rebuke on His part.* The noble exclamation which burst from the lips of Thomas, when convinced that his Lord had risen indeed,—the noble exclamation, "My Lord and my God,"—admits of only one meaning. It was a distinct testimony to our blessed Lord's divinity. It was a clear, unmistakable declaration that Thomas believed Him, whom he saw and touched that day, to be not only man, but God. Above all, it was a testimony which our Lord received and did not prohibit, and a declaration which He did not say one word to rebuke. When Cornelius fell down at the feet of Peter and would have worshipped him, the Apostle refused such honour at once: "Stand up; I myself also am a man." (Acts x. 26.) When the people of Lystra would have done sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, "they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you." (Acts xiv. 14.) But when Thomas says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God," the words do not elicit a syllable of reproof from our holy and truth-loving Master. Can we doubt that these things were written for our learning?

Let us settle it firmly in our minds that the divinity of Christ is one of the grand foundation truths of Christianity, and let us be willing to go to the stake rather than let it go. Unless our Lord Jesus is very God of very God, there is an end of His mediation, His atonement, His advocacy, His priesthood, His whole work of redemption. These glorious doctrines are useless blasphemies, unless Christ is divine. Forever let us bless God that the divinity of our Lord is taught everywhere in the Scriptures, and stands on evidence that can never be overthrown. Above all, let us daily repose our sinful souls on Christ with undoubting confidence, as one who is perfect God as well as perfect man. He is man, and therefore can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He is God, and therefore is "able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him." That Christian has no cause to fear, who can look to Jesus by faith, and say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God." With such a Saviour we need not be afraid to begin the life of real religion, and with such a Saviour we may boldly go on.

NOTES. JOHN XX. 24-31.

24.—[*But Thomas one...twelve...Didymus*] The story of the second appearance of Christ to the whole company of the Apostles, for the special benefit of Thomas, is one of those narratives which are only found in St. John's Gospel. We ought to feel thankful that it has been recorded. It is precisely one of those stories which supply strong indirect evidence of

the divine inspiration of the Scriptures and the genuine honesty of the Gospel writers. An uninspired man, much less a dishonest impostor, would not have told us of the unbelief of a chosen Apostle. Moreover it is one of those stories which throw most useful light on a very interesting subject. That subject is the great variety of temperament which may be found among true Christians.

Chrysostom remarks, "Observe the truthfulness of the disciples. They hide no faults, either their own or others; but record them with great veracity."

Cardinal Bellarmine, according to Gerhard, goes so far as to say that the history of Thomas, like that of Noah's drunkenness, David's adultery, and Peter's denial, is a reason why the laity ought not to read the Bible, lest forsooth they should get harm! The worthy Cardinal forgets that we need beacons to warn us against danger, and examples of Christ's mercy to sinful and dull people in order to encourage us to repent.

Concerning the Apostle Thomas we know little. Twice in the Gospel of St. John we find him saying something, and on each occasion he appears in the same character. When our Lord declared His intention of going to Bethany, and says plainly that Lazarus is dead, Thomas says to his fellow-disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." (John xi. 16.) When our Lord in His parting address to His disciples said, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" (John xiv. 4, 5,) He always seems to be one of those desponding, fearful, gloomy-minded Christians, who look at the dark side of every subject and condition, and can never see a bit of blue sky,—who go on their way to heaven with real faith and true grace, but are so full of doubts and fears that they are unable to enjoy religion, and are a trouble to themselves and all around them. This I believe to be the true account of his character. The modern theory that he was a man of *free thought and wide range of intellect*, who wisely required reasonable evidence of everything in religion, and properly dreaded taking anything on trust, is a theory which I believe to be utterly without foundation, and I cannot receive it for a moment. He was simply a good man with a very doubting and gloomy turn of mind;—a man that really loved Jesus and was willing to die with Him, but a man who saw little but the dangers attending everything that a disciple had to do, and the difficulties belonging to everything which a disciple had to believe. There are many like him. It is a very useful picture. John Bunyan's "Fearing," "Despondency," and "Much afraid," in Pilgrim's Progress, are types of a large class of Christians, who are successors of the Apostle Thomas.

[*Was not with them...Jesus came.*] The reasons why Thomas was not with the other ten Apostles on Sunday night when Jesus appeared to them, are not given, and we have no clue whatever to them. Most commentators consider that he was to blame; and that by his absence he missed a blessing, and was kept in suspense a week. I admit that this may be true, and I think his example teaches indirectly that it is unwise to be ever absent from the assembly of God's people without good cause. But I believe we must not press this point too far, and must not lay too much blame on the Apostle, in the absence of direct evidence that he was in fault. For anything we know, he may have lodged at a greater distance from the place of meeting than any of the eleven, and thus been unable to reach the place at an earlier hour; or he may have been detained by necessary business. One thing is very certain: the disciples found no fault with Thomas for his absence when they said, "We have seen the Lord." Moreover, our Lord Himself, when He appears, does not blame Thomas for having been absent on a former occasion, but only chides his unbelief. The simplest view of the subject appears to me to be, that Thomas's absence was a part of his character. He was slow and dull in action as well as in perception,—the sort of man would always have been last in Church, and last in a meeting. In the present instance I venture to conjecture that he meant no harm, and intended to have been present

when the ten Apostles met; but that he probably started late, walked slow, and was so absorbed in doubts, and fears, and anxious meditations about the prospects of Christ's disciples, that he never reached the place of meeting till Christ had withdrawn Himself.

The question has been needlessly raised by some, whether Thomas was not deprived of the gifts and privileges conferred on the other Apostles by his absence? Lightfoot sensibly replies, "Surely not: it was a privilege common to the whole Apostolate, and peculiar to them as Apostles. St. Paul was distant, while these things happened, both from apostleship and religion. Yet, when made an Apostle, he was at once adorned with this privilege." Some think that his case is like Eldad and Medad, who had their share of the Spirit, though absent, like the rest of the seventy elders. (Num. xi. 27.)

25.—[*The other disciples...said...seen, the Lord.*] We are not told when and where the disciples said this. I incline to believe that they said it the very evening that our Lord first appeared to them, and that Thomas came into the assembly very shortly after the Lord disappeared. To my eyes it reads as if the ten Apostles all exclaimed together, full of joy and delight at what they had seen and heard, "Thomas, we have just seen our Lord and Master! If you had been here a little sooner, you also would have seen Him." I think this for two reasons. (a) The words of the twenty-sixth verse, "after eight days," seem to indicate that there were eight days between our Lord's first appearance and his second, and also eight days between Thomas's expression of unbelief and his being convinced. (b) It seems highly improbable that Thomas would allow a whole day and night to pass away, after the rumour of our Lord's body having been removed from the sepulchre had spread through Jerusalem, without seeking out the other Apostles and inquiring what it meant. Slow and dull in faith as he was, he would hardly sleep without finding out something about it. These considerations incline me to believe, that before the ten Apostles had time to separate, after our Lord's appearance to them, Thomas came in. Then they told him immediately, that they had just seen the Lord. And then came the remarkable declaration which the doubting Apostle made.

[*But he said unto them, Except, etc.*] The unbelief of Thomas, expressed in this famous sentence, was a sad fault in a good man, which cannot be explained away. He refused to believe the testimony of ten competent witnesses, who had seen Christ in the body with their own eyes. He refused to believe the testimony of ten true friends and brethren, who could have no object in deceiving him. He passionately declares that he will not believe, unless he himself sees and touches our Lord's body. He presumes to prescribe certain conditions, which must be fulfilled before he can credit the report of his brethren. He uses singularly emphatic language to express his scepticism:—"Others may believe if they like; but I shall not and will not believe until I see and touch for myself."—All this was very sad and very sinful. Thomas might have remembered that at this rate nothing could ever be proved by witnesses; and that he himself, as a teacher, could never expect men to believe him. His case shows us how foolishly and weakly a believer may speak sometimes, and how, under the influence of depression and doubt, he may say things of which afterwards he is heartily ashamed.

After all, the case of Thomas is not an uncommon one. Some people are so strangely constituted that they distrust everybody, regard all men as liars, and will believe nothing except they can see it all, and work it all out for themselves. They have a rooted dislike to receive anything on trust, or from the testimony of others, and must always go over the ground for themselves. In people of this kind, though they know it not, there is often a vast amount of latent pride and self-conceit; and it is almost ludicrous to observe how entirely they forget that the business of daily life could never go on, if we were always doubting everything which we could not see for ourselves. Nevertheless they exist in the Church, and always will exist; and the case of Thomas shows what trouble they bring on themselves.

Two things must, in fairness, be remembered, which form some slight extenuation of Thomas's unbelief. For one thing it does not appear that any one of our Lord's Apostles ever understood, up to the time of our Lord's crucifixion, that he was really going to be crucified, buried, and rise again. Simple as these great facts appear to us now, it is perfectly certain that they formed no part of the creed of the Apostles, so long as our Lord was with them. This may seem astonishing, but it is true. They believed that Christ was the Messiah, but they did not realize a crucified Messiah. Of these Apostles, I would remind the reader, Thomas was one. Does not all this throw a little light on his extraordinary scepticism about the reality of the resurrection? For another thing we must remember, that Thomas, like all Jews, had a firm belief in the reality of spirits and ghosts, and the possibility of their appearing. Even after this, when Peter was delivered from prison, and came to the house of John, surnamed Mark, the disciples said, "It is his angel." (Acts xii. 15.) May we not therefore conceive it possible that Thomas, overwhelmed and confounded at the astounding news that Christ had been seen, would cling, with his characteristic incredulity, to the notion that the Apostles had only seen Christ's spirit or ghost? That they had seen something he did not dispute, but that what they had seen was the real material body of his Lord, he could not bring himself to believe. These things are worth considering. I do not for a moment excuse or defend Thomas. I only remind those who condemn him wholesale, and can find no words strong enough to use about his unbelief, that it was not quite so easy for a pious Jew, brought up and trained as Thomas had been, to receive at once the resurrection of our Lord as a proved thing, as it may appear at first sight to an English mind.

Musculus remarks, how extraordinary the unbelief of Thomas seems, when we consider that he not only had heard our Lord frequently foretell His resurrection, but had actually within a few weeks seen Lazarus raised from the dead at Bethany!

Bengel remarks, "No doubt Thomas seemed to himself to be entertaining and expressing sentiments altogether judicious. But unbelief, while it attributes defects in judgment to others, often itself discovers and betrays hardness of heart, and in that hardness slowness of belief."

26.—[*And after eight days again, etc.*] This verse describes how Jesus was graciously pleased to appear again to the company of the Apostles, for the express purpose of convincing and satisfying the mind of Thomas.

He came "after eight days." That means a week according to the Jewish manner of expressing a space of time, by which the first and last days were always reckoned in, if any part of them was employed. Thus our Lord was buried on Friday afternoon and rose again on Sunday morning, and was actually only thirty-six hours in the grave. But a Jew would say that He was "three days" buried. It thus appears that, both on the first and second times when our Lord appeared to the Apostles, it was a Sunday. Poole remarks that we have here the beginning of keeping holy the first day of the week.

He came when the disciples were "within." That means that they were assembled in a room, and probably in the same house where they had assembled before. The conviction and reproof of a weak disciple was a thing which was mercifully transacted in private, and among friends. We cannot doubt, moreover, that at this period the disciples would hardly dare to assemble in the open air anywhere about Jerusalem. The rumour that they stole the body of our Lord would still be rife in the city, and they might well feel the necessity of caution.

He came when "Thomas was with them." That means that He timed His visit, so that not one of the Apostles were missing. He knew exactly who were assembled, and where they were assembled, and He ordered His appearance accordingly. It should be a great comfort to believers to remember that their Lord's eye is always upon them, and that He

knows exactly in what place and in what company they are.

He came “when the doors were shut.” That means that He appeared exactly under the same circumstances under which He appeared a week before, in an evening, when the doors were carefully closed for fear of the Jews. Thus, as on the previous Sunday, He suddenly, without a moment’s notice, stood in the midst of the assembled disciples.

He came with the same gracious salutation with which He had appeared before. Once more, the first word that fell from His lips is “Peace be unto you.” Thomas was there. The disciple who made his emphatic declaration of unbelief, might well expect to hear some word of rebuke. But our Lord makes no exception. He saw Thomas, and well knew all that Thomas had said; and yet to him, as well as to the other ten, He once more says “Peace.”

We should note carefully the amazing kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ to a weak disciple, and the trouble He was pleased to take, if I may use such a phrase with due reverence, about one single soul. The unbelief of Thomas was most provoking and inexcusable, and if he had been cast out of the company of disciples we could not have said His excommunication was undeserved. But our Lord cares tenderly for this weak member of His mystical body, and specially appears in order to heal and restore him. What a wonderful example He gives to all His people! How kind we ought to be to weak brethren, and how ready to take any pains and trouble if we can only do them good! The Christian of modern times, who is ready to excommunicate everyone who cannot speak his shibboleth, and see every point of doctrine and ceremonial with his eyes,—the Christian who is ready to turn away from every brother who is overtaken in a fault, as graceless, godless, and unconverted,—such a Christian may flatter himself that he is very zealous and faithful. But he is a Christian who has not got the mind of Christ. What Christ did for Thomas, we ought to be ready to do for others.

Let us not forget that Thomas continued a whole week in unbelief and doubt, while his brethren around him were rejoicing. We may well believe that it was not a very happy week with him. He that sows a short period of scepticism often reaps a long period of trouble.

Rupertus, almost alone, maintains that the second appearance of our Lord, for the special benefit of Thomas, was in Galilee, in Nazareth, at the house of Mary. But the vast majority of commentators think that it was at Jerusalem.

Musculus observes how kind and brotherly was the dealing of the ten Apostles with Thomas. They did not excommunicate him, and cast him out of their society for his unbelief, but allowed him to assemble with them as before.

Rollock observes, “The loving dealing of the Lord with Thomas teaches us this comfortable lesson. The Lord marks not narrowly the infirmities and wants that are in His own. He looks not narrowly to the weakness of their faith, to the imperfections and wants of their prayers and requests, for their prayers are full of imperfections. He oversees their infirmities, He misknows the corruption wherein their faith and prayers and desires are involved, and hath a regard to their faith, albeit they have it in small measure.”

27.—[*Then saith He to Thomas, etc.*] The verse before us is a wonderful instance of Christ’s pitifulness and condescension. To come into the world at all, and take a body on Him, to allow that body to be scourged, crowned with thorns, nailed to the cross, and laid in the grave,—all this, beyond doubt, was astonishing condescension. But when the victory over sin and death was won, and He had taken on Him His resurrection body, to come to a doubting, sceptical disciple, and bid him touch Him, put his finger into the nail-prints on His hands, and put his hand into the great wound in His side,—all this was a condescension which we can never sufficiently admire and adore.

The last sentence of the verse is a rebuke and an exhortation at the same time. It would have been more literally rendered, "Be not an unbeliever, but a believer." It is not merely a reproof to Thomas for his scepticism on this particular occasion, but an urgent counsel to be of a more believing turn of mind for time to come.—"Shake off this habit of doubting, questioning, and discrediting everyone. Give up thine unbelieving disposition. Become more willing to believe and trust, and give credit to testimony for time to come."—No doubt the primary object of the sentence was to correct and chastise Thomas for his sceptical declaration on the preceding Sunday. But I believe our Lord had in view the further object of correcting Thomas's whole character, and directing his attention to his besetting sin. How many there are among us who ought to take to themselves our Lord's words! How faithless we often are, and how slow to believe!

Let us note here, as already remarked, that the wounds on our Lord's body must have been still open, from the language He addresses to Thomas, and that the wound in His side must have been a very large wound, from His telling Thomas to thrust in *his hand*.

Let us not fail to observe our Lord's perfect knowledge of all that passed on the previous Sunday, of all that the Apostles had said, and of the sceptical declaration which Thomas had made. Such knowledge showed clearly that He was God and not man. He hears every idle word that we say, and notes all our conversation.

Let us observe our Lord's thorough acquaintance with the special faults and besetting sins of every one of His people. He saw that Thomas's defect was his unbelief, and so He says, "Be not faithless, but believing."

28.—[*And Thomas...my Lord...my God.*] The famous answer of Thomas, contained in this verse, is precisely the short interjectional exclamation of a man taken by surprise, convinced at once of his own grievous mistake, and so overwhelmed by a variety of feelings that he is unable for the moment to use many words. It is the language of amazement, delight, repentance, faith and adoration, all combined in one sentence.

Whether it is to be taken in the third person, as an exclamation, "It is my Lord and my God!" or in the second person, as an adoring, loving, believing address, "Thou art my Lord and my God," is an open question which the original Greek does not settle. If I must give an opinion, I prefer the second person. But in either case the sense is good.

The text before us is one of those which are justly quoted, as an unanswerable proof of the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is called "God" in the presence of ten witnesses, and He accepts the language, and does not say one word to reprove the person who uses it. Unless a person is prepared to deny the inspiration of St. John's Gospel generally, or the genuineness and correctness of this text in particular, it is hard to see how the force of the sentence in favour of Christ's divinity can be evaded. The suggestion of Theodorus of Mopsuestia, and some modern Socinians, that Thomas only used a kind of oath or exclamation, which he did not mean to apply to Christ Himself, is utterly untenable, and almost profane. It is unreasonable to suppose that a pious Jew, like Thomas, would take God's name in vain and break the third commandment, however much he might be surprised. Moreover, there is no proof whatever, although a careless Greek, Roman, or Englishman, might say "*My God*," when suddenly taken by surprise, that any such expression was in use among the Jews. In short there is, in my judgment, but one way of regarding the text, if we treat it honestly. It is an incontrovertible proof that Thomas looked on Christ as God, and addressed Him to His face as God, and that our Lord made no objection, and did not reprove him.

Bullinger remarks how emphatically Thomas says, "MY Lord and MY God," showing the reality of his faith.

Rollock says, "If we compare Thomas with the other Apostles, we shall see that as he surpassed them all in unbelief, so he surpassed them far in believing and confessing the Lord." But he adds, "Jesus praises not Thomas for his faith, because he tied his faith to his senses. He calls him not blessed for it, but pronounces them blessed who believe without seeing."

Whether, after all, Thomas did actually touch our Lord's wounds, as he was told to do, is an open question, which we have no means of deciding. There is certainly, as Augustine observes, no proof that he did, and his exclamation reads as if it was sudden and immediate, and not the result of examination and deliberation. May we not well believe that the discovery of our Lord's perfect acquaintance with every word that he had said on the previous Sunday, combined with the evidence of his own eyes that he saw before him a material body, and not a spirit, would be enough to convince him? The question is an open one, and every reader must form his own opinion about it. We are neither told that Thomas did touch our Lord, nor yet that he did not. Certainly our Lord says in the next verse, "Because thou hast *seen Me*, thou hast believed."

29.—[*Jesus saith, unto him, Thomas. etc.*] This verse contains a grave and solemn rebuke to Thomas, and a warning to all who are disposed to demand an excessive amount of evidence before they believe. The first part of our Lord's words would be translated more literally, "Because thou hast seen Me, Thomas, thou hast believed." The whole sentence may be thus paraphrased and expounded. "Thomas, thou hast at last believed my resurrection, because thou hast seen Me with thine own eyes, and touched Me with thine own hands. It is well. But it would have been far better if thou hadst believed a week ago, on the testimony of thy ten brethren, and not waited to see Me. Remember from henceforth, that in my kingdom they are more blessed and honourable who believe on good testimony, without seeing, than those who insist first on seeing, before they believe."

The sentence "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed," would be rendered literally, "Blessed are those persons not having seen and having believed,"—consisting, as it does, of two participles connected with "blessed." The idea that our Lord had in view any particular person, such as Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, and, generally, the Old Testament saints, appears to me utterly untenable. I believe our Lord had in view no individual case, but only laid down a great general principle which Thomas had forgotten, as a lesson to him and the whole Church in every age. The construction of the Greek language allows us to regard the past tense as a present, in such a sentence as this. (See Jelf's Greek Grammar, 401, 403; and Farrar's Greek Syntax, 130.)

Gregory well says, "The incredulity of Thomas has done us more good than the faith of Mary." He means that if Thomas had never doubted, we should not have had such full proof that Christ rose from the dead.

The principle contained in the sentence before us, is one of vast importance in every age, and specially in our own. In a day of scepticism, free inquiry and rationalism, so-called, when hundreds are continually railing against creeds, and dogmatism, and priestcraft, the sentence deserves close attention and consideration. Nothing is more common now-a-days than to hear people say, that they "decline to believe things above their reason, that they cannot believe what they cannot entirely understand in religion, that they must see everything clearly before they can believe." Such talk as this sounds very fine, and is very taking with young persons and superficially educated people, because it supplies a convenient reason for neglecting vital religion altogether. But it is a style of talking which shows a mind either proud, or foolish, or inconsistent.

"In matters of science, what sensible man does not know that we must begin by believing much which we do not understand, taking many positions on trust, and accepting

many things on the testimony of others? Even in the most exact science the scholar must begin with axioms and postulates. Faith and trust in our teachers is the very first condition of acquiring knowledge. He that begins his studies by saying "I shall not believe anything which I do not see clearly demonstrated from the very first," will make very little progress.

In the daily business of life, what sensible man does not know that we take many important steps on no other ground than the testimony of others? Parents send sons to Australia, New Zealand, China, and India, without ever having seen these countries, in faith that the report about them is dependable and true. Probability, in fact, is the only guide of most parts of our life.

In the face of such facts as these, where is the common sense of saying, as many rationalists and sceptics now do, that in such a mysterious matter as the concern of our souls, we ought to believe nothing that we do not see, and ought to receive nothing as true which will not admit of mathematical demonstration?—Christianity does not at all refuse to appeal to our intellects, and does not require of us a blind, unreasoning faith. But Christianity does ask us to begin by believing many things that are above our reason, and promises that, so beginning, we shall have more light and see all things clearly.—The would-be wise man of modern times says, "I dislike any religion which contains any mystery. I must first see, and then I will believe." Christianity replies, "You cannot avoid mystery, unless you go out of the world. You are only asked to do with religion what you are always doing with science. You must first believe and then you will see."—The cry of the modern sceptic is, "If I could see I would believe." The answer of the Christian ought to be, "If you would only believe, and humbly ask for Divine teaching, you would soon see."

The plain truth is that modern freethinkers are like the Jews, who were always demanding some visible sign that our Lord was the Messiah, and pretended that they would believe if they only saw it. Just in the same way there are hundreds of people in this latter age of the world, who tell us they can believe nothing which is above their reason, and that they want stronger evidences of the truth of the doctrine and fact of Christianity than probability. Like Thomas they must first see before they believe.—But what an extraordinary fact it is that the very men who say all this, are continually acting all their lives on no better evidence than probability! They are continually doing things on no other ground than the report of others, and their own belief that this report is probably true. The very principle on which they are incessantly acting, in the affairs of their bodies, their families, and their money, is the principle on which they refuse to act in the affairs of their souls! In the things of this world they believe all sorts of things which they have not seen, and only know to be probable, and act on their belief. In the things of the eternal world they say they can believe nothing which they do not see, and refuse the argument of probability altogether. Never, in fact, was there anything so unreasonable and inconsistent as rationalism, so called. No wonder that our Lord laid down, for the benefit of Thomas and the whole Church, that mighty principle, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."

The remarks of Richard Cecil, on the subject before us, are so apposite, that I make no apology for quoting them. They will be found in his "Original Thoughts." (Vol. i., p. 440-442.)

"When a man doubts, after proper evidence, God calls it folly. When we complain and want more evidence, the fault is in us and not in God's dispensations. A humble spirit will accept a glimmering light, and not refuse to walk because it has not the noontide sun. Incredulity, as to divine truth, has its root in pride and self-sufficiency, and is ac-

accompanied by much rashness and ignorance. It presumes to understand and comprehend everything that is proposed to it. The incredulous man calls for demonstration. The feeble creature, who cannot explain the nature of his own formation, would have things made out as plain as that two and two make four. The true believer receives the truths of the Bible as he receives the kingdom of heaven,—with the simplicity of a little child.”—

—“Let us beware of the danger of following our own imaginations. A man may make one demand after another, till, at last, nothing will satisfy him; and the next step is, that, when he will not be content with what God shows him, he shall be left in darkness and perplexity.—Consider the nature of believing; it is not like believing that two and two make four. Do not men believe on probability in other things? God has given all the evidence that man requires or needs; and if in a right mind, we shall thank God for the dispensation of light we have, willing to walk by faith and not by sight. If we do not get on in this way, we shall not get on at all. Divine justice punishes incredulity by credulity; by giving up the unbelieving to the dominion and bondage of strong delusions. When men get into a high mind and an unbelieving spirit, and reject the truth, God punishes them by letting them believe a lie. Let us take heed how we say, like Thomas, we will not walk at all without such light as we think proper.”

The opinion expressed by Dean Stanley, following Dr. Arnold (in Smith’s “Bible Dictionary,” Article “Thomas”), that Thomas is a remarkable example of “free inquiry combined with fervent belief,” is one which I only mention in order to express my dissent from it.—I see nothing like “free inquiry” in this Apostle. I read of no question he asked of his brethren. I see no trace of any willingness to investigate, sift, weigh, and consider the testimony which they bore. I discover no readiness to go to the grave, to examine the linen clothes, to talk with Mary Magdalene, to question the two disciples who journeyed to Emmaus. All this would have been “free inquiry.” But I see nothing of the kind. I only see a dull, obstinate, desponding declaration that, whatever his ten friends may say, he will not believe till he sees. This cannot surely deserve the name of “free inquiry!”—As to the “fervent belief” of Thomas, no doubt, at last, when his most compassionate Saviour almost forced conviction on him, in pity for his dullness, and made unbelief quite impossible, he made a most beautiful confession of faith. But it was a confession, we must remember, that came out only at the last moment, and was extracted, as it were, by a miracle of kindness. Above all, beautiful as it was, it did not prevent his gracious Master speaking words of grave and solemn rebuke. Beyond doubt, Thomas lay down that night a pardoned and forgiven man,—a man raised from faithlessness to strong faith. But we must not forget that he was not praised and commended, though raised, convinced, and pardoned. If words mean anything, he had received a reproof, and one that I doubt not he felt deeply. To me therefore it appears that, to represent him as an example of “free inquiry combined with fervent belief,” is an entire mistake, and a misapprehension both of his character and of the whole drift of the remarkable narrative of this passage.

If, as I believe, St. Mark’s remarkable words apply to this appearance of our Lord for the special benefit of Thomas, it is impossible to regard our Lord’s language to Thomas in any other sense than that of rebuke. St. Mark says, “He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen.” (Mark xvi. 14.) Most commentators certainly take this view. Chrysostom says that Thomas received a “sharp rebuke.”

30, 31.—[*And many other signs, etc.*] The two last verses in this chapter contain one of those parenthetical comments, or glosses, which are so peculiar to the Gospel of St. John. It must be admitted that they seem to break the thread of the narrative, and come in with a rather startling effect. We need not, therefore, wonder that the right meaning of the two

verses has long been a subject of dispute.

(a) Some think, as Calvin, Ecolampadius, Brentius, Poole, Rollock, Lampe, Hengstenberg, Pearce, and Alford, that St. John refers to the whole history of Christ's ministry, and is comparing his own Gospel with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They would paraphrase the two verses in the following way:—"Jesus did many other miracles during His ministry, under the eyes of His disciples, which are not recorded in this Gospel of mine, though they are recorded in the other three. But those few which are recorded in this, my Gospel, are recorded in order that you who read it may be convinced that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ of God, and that believing on Him you may have eternal life through His name."—It is a heavy objection to this interpretation, that the two verses, on this view, appear to come in rather abruptly, and without much connection with what goes either before or after. In short, it is not very easy to explain why they come in here at all.—Moreover, it is not very easy to see the drift of the expression, "signs in presence of His disciples," considering that many of our Lord's greatest miracles were worked before people who were not disciples at all.—Furthermore, it is not very clear what St. John can mean by saying "other" signs. That word "other" seems to point to miracles just performed, yet there was no special miracle performed at this particular, beyond, of course, our Lord's miraculous appearances.

(b) Others, as Chrysostom, Theophylact, Rupertus, Beza, Bullinger, Calovius, Musculus, Gerhard, Ferus, Toletus, Maldonatus, Henry, Tholuck, Scott, Bloomfield, and Olshausen, think that St. John writes these two verses with a special reference to the wondrous signs and evidences which the Lord had just given to the disciples of His own resurrection from the dead. They would paraphrase the two verses in this way:—"Many other wondrous proofs did the Lord give to the Apostles of His own resurrection, which are not written down in this Gospel, though they are written in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But the three appearances which I have narrated, are written down in order to convince you that Jesus is the true Messiah, the Christ of God, and that, believing this firmly, you may have eternal life through faith in His name."—According to this view the two verses refer to nothing but this twentieth chapter, and are a parenthetical comment on it. It is as though John would say, "Do not suppose that these three appearances of Christ are the only wondrous signs and proofs of His resurrection. There are others which you will find recorded in the other three Gospels. But I have related these three in order to confirm your faith, and to show you that in believing on a risen Saviour you are resting on solid ground."

Of the two views I prefer the second one, as involving the fewest difficulties. It is more probable, considering John's peculiar style of writing, to suppose that he makes a short parenthetical remark about a single chapter, than to suppose that he makes it about the whole of his Gospel. Above all this second view gets over the heavy objection that, after bringing his whole Gospel to a conclusion by a general remark on the whole of it as compared to the other three Gospels, St. John seems to begin again in the twenty-first chapter, and to write a postscript or appendix.—In short the common theory, that these two verses apply to the whole Gospel, makes St. John finish his history, lay down his pen, complete his work, and then suddenly take up his pen again, and add the twenty-first chapter as a kind of after-thought. To say the least, this is an undignified, not to say rather irreverent, view of the composition of an inspired writer!—The other theory, or the theory which strictly confines the application of the two concluding verses of the twentieth chapter to the matter contained in that chapter, viz., the signs which our Lord gave of His resurrection, is entirely in keeping with St. John's style of writing his Gospel. He simply remarks parenthetically that there are other proofs of Christ's resurrection, which are to be found in the other Gospels, and that he has only written down such

accounts as he was guided by the Spirit to consider most calculated to stablish the faith of his readers.

I frankly confess that the passage appears to come in abruptly under any view, and I cannot expect that all will adopt the explanation which I have advocated. If the Gospel of St. John had ended with this twentieth chapter, I might perhaps have acquiesced in the theory that the two verses were meant to form a brief concluding remark about the whole of the Evangelist's work; and a brief admission of the fact that he passed over many miracles recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But I cannot acquiesce in the theory, when I see that St. John goes on to write the twenty-first chapter. The existence of that chapter alone satisfies me that, in the two verses before us, St. John is only speaking of the signs of Christ's resurrection, which he has supplied, and is admitting that there are others in the other Gospels. As a rule, moreover, when I find a parenthetical comment or gloss in St. John's Gospel, I prefer to apply it to the immediate subject of which he is speaking. It is the habit of this Evangelist to turn aside for a moment, and make a short explanatory remark; and then to take up the thread again, and go on with his history. Of this habit, I think the two verses before us are an example. When the Holy Ghost plenary inspired the writer of any Book of Scripture, both as to his faith and his words, He did not prevent him writing in his own peculiar style.

Whatever view we may take of the matter in dispute about these two verses, there are things in them which are abundantly clear and ought never to be forgotten. For one thing, St. John generously recognizes the existence of other books beside his own, and disclaims the idea of his own Gospel being the only one which Christians ought to read. Happy is that author who can humbly say, "My book does not contain everything about the subject it handles. There are other books about it. Read them."—For another thing, we should note the grand end and object for which this and all the books of the New Testament were written. They were written to glorify Christ, to make us believe on Him as the only Saviour of sinners, and to lead us to eternal life through faith in His name.

It is interesting to remember that ecclesiastical historians assign to Thomas the honour of being the Apostle who first preached the Gospel in India; and they also say that he there suffered martyrdom. A society of Christians in Malabar is said to be still known by his name. Unhappily, the truth of all this is very doubtful, and rests on a very sandy foundation.