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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

SOONER or later every preacher has to face the problem of suffering. His business is the 'cure of souls,' and of every congregation it may be said, in the words of the evening hymn, 'some are sick and some are sad.' The sadness may spring from many causes, from personal failure or loss of friends or the slow progress of the world towards the noble life: but in sensitive souls that sadness is sure to arise also at the contemplation of pain and suffering. Much of it seems so needless, some of it even so unjust: what is the preacher to say to it?

He will speak of it to most purpose, if he speaks of it from within; that is, if he has himself been smitten, body and soul, with the pain and suffering whose meaning it is his business to interpret to others. But, even without any profound personal experience of suffering, he cannot have used his eyes or his heart to much purpose if he has not been touched to sorrowful questioning by the things he may see almost any day not only in the human but in the sub-human world. One day three baby thrushes are sleeping peacefully in their nest, the next they are torn from it by a cat and mutilated beyond recognition. The sensitive heart is stunned by so lurid a revelation of a 'nature red in tooth and claw'; and crueller still are the waste and pain in the human world.

It is easy to be optimistic if you are only ignorant
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enough or blind enough. The world is a very attractive place, when all the ugly facts are shut off: if you do not know of them, or if you close your eyes to them, the system of things is pleasant enough. But these things are there, whether you see them or not, and any optimism which has a right to exist must reckon with them. But there is a pessimism which is just as shallow as some optimisms, a pessimism which is as blind to the joy that is set before us and around us as optimism may be blind to the tragedies. Both pessimism and optimism may be purely sentimental and temperamental, and our only reasonable reconciliation with the world comes from seeing it steadily and seeing it whole.

This is what Professor W. Cosby BELL, D.D., does in his Bohlen Lectures on *Sharing in Creation*, noticed elsewhere in this number. His chapter on 'The Problem of Suffering' treats this world-old theme with considerable freshness. He reminds us, to begin with, that there is another side to the picture. 'Outside the window the bird is singing in the tree-top his full-throated melody of the joy of life, even though the shadow of the bird-hawk may presently still his song. "I vote for life," he seems to say, "even if there is a hawk in it." Inside the chamber the baby is splashing in his tub, and the mother remembereth no more her anguish for joy that a man is born into the world. Friendship

and love are at their daily work of enriching human existence ; journeys end in lovers' meetings ; and old men, with one foot in the grave, creep about taking an undefeated joy in one more day of life.'

To rail indiscriminately at suffering, he points out, is to assume that suffering has no value, and that the end of human life is happiness. But these are the very things to be proved. The whole course of experience, however, goes to suggest that the end of life is not happiness but a progressive enrichment of character, and to this end suffering can make a notable contribution. Many of the finest qualities which it is possible for human nature to exhibit could never come into being at all, were it not that the world in which we are set is a dangerous world. If Nature seems at times remorseless, it is not that she is really unfriendly or even indifferent ; the very sternness of the demands she makes upon us is a proof that she means well by us. She will not be content with any flabby response on our part, still less with evasion—these things she will punish ; but she invites us to conquer her, that by our victory over her we may win our own souls. The padded and the cushioned life were no life at all for a creature worth calling a man.

Or, as Dr. BELL puts it, ' a world in which no one could possibly get hurt, in which hunger always found food waiting at its elbow, in which ignorance carried no penalties and wisdom brought no rewards, in which carelessness and energy stood on an equal survival footing, might be a pleasant enough change for a week or so, but it may be doubted whether it would be good for us. It may even be doubted whether we should like it for any length of time. We might find that Elysium was but another name for boredom.' So the very system which seems callous to personal values is found in the end to nurture them, if only a heroic response is made to it.

Suffering has also its socializing effect. Joy brings men together, but not into so intimate a

bond as sorrow. It is a commonplace that, when destitution invades the homes of the poor, their neighbours, only less poor than themselves, relieve their need with an abounding generosity ; and sorrow has been known to bring an ancient feud to an end. Any experience can legitimate its claim to a place in the world-order which thus opens the flood-gates of mercy and pity.

Again, there is the faith which we cherish, at any rate in our deeper moments, that the brave and resolute endurance of whatever life may bring bears fruit somewhere, as William James says, ' in an unseen spiritual world ' ; the sense that this life is a real fight in which something is eternally gained for the universe by success. More particularly can the Christian, who knows that he is not alone in his fight, believe that there is no accident that is irremediable and no disaster that is irretrievable. By the help of God he has learned the art of transmuting the stern material of life, and with patience and hope he ' works the worst over into the best.'

It is by no means the lives most exposed to sternness and hardship that are always the saddest, often it is the very reverse. With the sorrow and the pain may go a joy unspeakable, the joy of experience no less than of hope. Dr. BELL skilfully concludes his argument by placing together two well-known utterances of Paul : that in 2 Co 11, where with moving eloquence he describes the hardships of his missionary life ; and the other in Ph 4^{10a}, where he speaks of his abounding joy in the Lord. ' Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep. But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.' Such a confession, welling out of an experience so stern, is the everlasting rebuke of pessimism.

In one aspect of it, *Christ's Gospel of the Eternal and the Divine Manifestation in Christ*, by the Rev.

W. L. WALKER, D.D. (T. & T. Clark ; 7s. 6d. net), is a plea for honesty in religious thought. It is not only, or chiefly, intellectual difficulties that prevent men from becoming followers of Jesus ; yet the traditional statement of the Christian creed puts unnecessary stumbling-blocks in the way of very many.

First of the difficulties, not inherent in Christianity but only in our statement of it, is the assertion that 'Christ is God.' Of this phrase Dr. Denney once wrote that he avoided it because it is one of those provocative ways of speaking that challenge contradiction. For him it was objectionable in the same way as the title 'Mother of God' applied to Mary.

To insist that a Christian profession involves acceptance of this formula is to alienate very many in Christian lands who would gladly be disciples of the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels but to whom the Christ of the creeds is a stranger. It is not so much that they *will not* as that they *can not* bring themselves to think in this way. There are, too, millions of peoples of other faiths who are ready to confess Jesus as their Lord and to acknowledge His Divine humanity, but who, by their inability to say 'Jesus is God,' believe themselves to be shut out of the fold.

By their fruits ye shall know them, and this doctrine must be judged by its fruits, by *all* its fruits ; and one of these is that it has been a divisive force since first it was promulgated. It alienated the monotheistic Jews ; it gave opportunity to Muhammad to come forth as a prophet of the one true God, and it was largely responsible for the rise and spread of Islam, whose enmity to Christianity has been so difficult to overcome. 'It led to bitter feelings, to excommunications, to persecutions, to strife and bloodshed, and even to open wars of Christians against Christians,' 'and not without the strong hand of force did it prevail.'

May it not even be that one of the causes of the

world war was that the popular revolt against this doctrine, in Germany for example, unaccompanied by any successful attempt to find a more satisfactory statement on the Person of Christ, became a revolt against Christianity itself ? There are, it is true, certain difficulties inherent in Christian belief, and difficulties have to be faced, not evaded. But Dr. WALKER's contention is, that when for the early Christian formula 'Jesus is Lord' we substitute the later 'Jesus is God,' it is we who create the difficulty for ourselves.

For the later formula is not taken from the New Testament. Formerly it was believed to receive support from the Fourth Gospel ; but, quite apart from the question whether the speeches of Jesus in that Gospel are literal records of actual utterances of Jesus, 'John' says that 'God was the Logos' ; he does not say that 'the Logos was God.' The same Jesus who says, 'I and my Father are one,' also says, 'The Father is greater than I.'

Is Dr. WALKER, then, a Unitarian ? We increasingly dislike theological labels, and that one would certainly be inapplicable. What he is arguing for is a return to something like the New Testament attitude to Jesus. He suggests this line of thought : If Jesus was the revelation of God, how can He also be the God whose revelation He was ? Have we not a sufficiency of New Testament phrases in which to express our reverence and adoration for Jesus ? 'Jesus is the Christ,' 'Jesus is God's Son,' 'Jesus is Lord.' Dr. Haering has said that many who would be troubled by a revival of ancient metaphysical terms find comfort and peace in the simple thought of Jesus as Lord.

But do not most of the New Testament titles of Jesus need interpretation ? Take 'Son of God' for example. In connexion with the Sonship of Jesus what we are asked to stress is not the precise sense in which Jesus was Son, but the fact that in Him, as nowhere else, the Father was revealed. Throughout history God was working towards a certain goal,

Jesus was Son of God, Dr. Walker believes, not in the sense that He was miraculously created in the womb of a virgin, but in the sense that God's eternal purpose was first fully realized in Him. The Incarnation was not an act but a process, the process by which what God is in relation to man was ever more and more fully expressed until it found perfect utterance in Jesus.

This also is what Dr WALKER understands by the pre-existence of Christ. The individual, human Jesus did not exist in and with God from all eternity—would Paul have asserted that He did? The 'Son in God' to whom the Divine love eternally went forth was the Divine ideal and goal of the Creation; that Divine, creative ideal, always real for the eternal Mind, became incarnate in Jesus.

One of the most urgent practical problems of to-day is the proper observance of the Lord's Day. It is not only a problem of practice. It is more. It has bearings on the religious life of our land. And it raises questions as to the proper interpretation of Scripture and the real authority of the Old Testament. In this country Sunday has always been more or less a day of rest. And in this matter continental nations have cast longing eyes at our practice and made tentative efforts to imitate it. In Belgium, for example, when you buy a postage stamp you find on it a tear-off piece with the words 'ne pas livrer de Dimanche,' and if you wish to take part in the national movement for a quiet Sunday you post your letter with the full stamp. If not, you tear off the milled part.

The practice, however, has in recent times been largely changed. While continental lands have been striving to approach our custom, we have been approaching theirs. Sunday golf, Sunday tennis, Sunday theatres, Sunday outings, have spread far and wide. This new habit has been adopted in the name of freedom and in reaction from a former over-strictness. People have fallen in with the new ways without knowing well why they do

so. What is most formidable in the 'modern' Sunday is not its looseness, but the fact that people have no convictions on the point. They simply follow their inclinations. And to-day it is largely true that the average Christian does not know why and how he should keep the Lord's Day as a special day.

What adds to his perplexity is that the observance of the day is often placed on the wrong ground, which he knows to be wrong. It is based on the authority of the Fourth Commandment. Now we all know that nobody obeys the Fourth Commandment. It enjoins the seventh day, but we keep the first. After our Lord's death the Christian Church abandoned the seventh day and substituted the first as the festival of the Lord's resurrection. Also, there are few people even among ourselves who do no work on the sacred day. These may seem small points, but the issue is the literal obedience to the commandment, and that obviously no one gives. It may be said that what we are to keep is the substance of the law. But what is the *substance*? That is the question we have to settle, and how are we to settle it?

Clearly on such an issue the real and only authority is our Lord's teaching. For Christians that is final. For others the question does not arise. Now that teaching may be found in three definite directions: first, in His explicit words about the Sabbath, second, in His practice, and third, in His general directions for conduct.

His great utterance on the Sabbath question was that the Sabbath was made for man. This clearly means for man's benefit, and we may interpret that as including his physical, mental, and spiritual benefit. The benefit to his body is rest; the benefit to his mind and soul is refreshment. Also, Christ looked upon the day as a *separate* day, a day with different uses and different aims from other days. His practice shows that He believed one of these uses was worship. He went to church habitually ('as his practice was, he entered the Synagogue'). It must be obvious that to our

Lord the Sabbath was given as a day on which the fountain of our spiritual life should be replenished in God's House.

But when we are considering Christian practice on any point we must not leave out the general teaching of our Lord. And for one good reason. He never legislated. He never laid down particular injunctions. He stated principles, and then said to His followers, 'Go and put these into practice in the spirit of my life and teaching.' But He gave very definite guidance on principles. And one of these principles that bear on the question of the keeping of Sunday is the great 'Commandment,' to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

Now, how does this teaching of Jesus, given in these three ways, afford us help in the problem? Well, it says to us that we must keep this day as a separate day, devoted to special ends. Further, it says to us that the day is given us for the refreshment of our faith, for deepening our life in God. Again, it says to us, 'You must not do anything on the Lord's Day that would harm your neighbour, or take from *him* the blessing the day was meant to give.' All this means that the day was not given for work, and that we must avoid, so far as possible, doing anything that would make it a work-day for others.

Does not Christ's teaching, thus interpreted, if we have interpreted it aright, give us sound guidance about the practical points that arise, about Sunday games, and travelling, and amusements? There

may be nothing wrong in tennis and golf on Sunday in *themselves*. Indeed, they have been defended as a real refreshment to people shut up all week in offices and shops. That argument is now worn thin, for, since early closing and the universal half-holiday, practically nobody is shut up all week. Everybody has evenings and a half-day on Wednesday or Saturday. What, then, is to be said of Sunday games? This, that though they may do no harm to *you*, they break down the separateness of the day and tend to destroy its special character and the possibility of its special blessings. And they involve the compulsory labour of others, in some cases to a large extent.

To sum up, according to the mind of Jesus, as we understand it, we have in the matter a threefold duty, a duty to ourselves, a duty to others, and a duty to God, and we do not use the Lord's Day as He would have us use it, unless we try to fulfil each part of this threefold duty. This does not mean that we are to restore the Puritan Sabbath or even the Jewish Sabbath, though it is a sheer delusion to think that the Jewish Sabbath was a burden, at least in Old Testament days. The teaching of Jesus is liberating, here as in all else. We may be true to His spirit, His practice, and His principles, and find the first day of the week the best and most joyous of all. But we must not forget God, or our neighbour, or our own best self. If the day has been an unspeakable blessing to the world, we ought to see to it that what has been great and gracious in it is preserved and handed on for the benefit of the generation to come.

Recent Thought on the Doctrine of Immortality.

BY THE REVEREND W. R. MATTHEWS, D.D., DEAN OF KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

THE subject of immortality and the future life has been much cultivated in recent years, and no doubt the war gave a great impulse to reflection and inquiry. It would scarcely be true to say that any remarkably new line of thought has been

discovered, but the old methods of approach have been re-examined and tested in the light of accumulating knowledge, particularly in psychology. Several important works which attempt to survey the whole question have appeared. Two among