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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

WE have heard on high authority that people nowadays are not worrying about their sins. The same authority would no doubt assure us that people nowadays are not worrying about the Day of Judgment. Probably the truth is that the worry which was formerly concentrated on those things is now concentrated on things essentially similar, but seen under another light or named by another name.

With the Day of Judgment, at any rate, we must all be still concerned. For, little as the theological problems of eschatology affect the man in the street, or even the man in the pew, there is one aspect of eschatology which profoundly and inevitably affects us all. Some day—and it cannot, for the longest-lived, be very far away—there will be an end of all earthly things for each of us. This world, so far as we are concerned, will pass away, and that day, when it falls across our life, will be for us in a solemn enough sense a day of judgment.

Even the least curious among us would be curious enough, in a thoughtful mood, to wonder by what standards our life shall be tried, or, in other words, what are the things that matter in the sight of God. Now Jesus has left us in no doubt as to what those things are. He has made them plain beyond cavil in His immortal Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. Certain people, He tells us, will in the end find themselves on the right hand, invited to enter upon a happy inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world; and certain others will find themselves on the left,

with a prospect before them of desolation, pain, and sorrow. Who are those two groups of people?

The answer is disconcertingly simple. The people on the right are those who did some very ordinary things, so ordinary that they are astonished at so wonderful a reward for so simple a service; and the people on the left are those who omitted or neglected to do them. That is all. And what were those things on which, for weal or woe, so infinitely much depended? Just feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, calling upon the sick, and visiting prisoners. But these ordinary things were anything but ordinary in the eyes of Jesus; indeed, they were so extraordinary that men's attitude to them determined their eternity and their place in heaven or hell. If we do not quite use these words to-day, we must not discard with them the awful solemnity of the teaching which they embody.

Our ultimate place, He seems to say, depends on our attitude to our fellows, and more particularly to the sons and daughters of want or sorrow. Were we kind to them? That, Jesus seems to say, is all that matters. Kindness to them is kindness to Him; neglect of them is neglect of Him. In His eyes a man could not be a religious man who neglected to help the lowly or unfortunate or exploited members of society. And it gives us pause to note that, in the eyes of Jesus, the thing that sends a man to hell is not necessarily that he has been guilty of some great and shocking crime, but simply that he did *nothing*—that in this world

of countless opportunities for relieving distress he declined to relieve it. The hungry, the wretched, the poor were nothing to him ; he did nothing for them, and in the end he finds himself in the outer darkness.

Our hearts tell us that, simple as this standard of judgment is, it is eminently fair. The words of Jesus have a curious but infallible way of commending themselves to our deepest conscience ; and no word of His is more convincing than this. We bow before its pre-eminent reasonableness. But a whole-hearted acceptance of this standard of His would in a generation transform the face of human society.

Some months after the close of the Great War, a little German girl, poor but happy, was asked how she was being fed. 'Oh !' she quaintly replied, '*ich werde gequäkert*,' i.e. 'I am being Quakered.' What an eloquent tribute lies in this quaintly formed verb to the gracious ministrations of the Friends ! She meant, 'My need is sore, I have been poor and hungry. But the Quakers heard of me, and they came to me ; they fed me and cared for me, and it is well with me now.'

Doubtless the Quakers were not the only Christians who lavished their practical love upon the needy ; it would indeed have been an indelible reproach to others who bear the name of Christ, had they not cared too. But it is the simple truth that the Quakers, as a body, won an imperishable place in the hearts of the needy by the swiftness and the devotedness of their response to all the manifold distress and sorrow created by the War. One who watched their work reported that 'no more intelligent and valuable relief work was being done anywhere : they were Friends indeed.'

Friends indeed—in deed ! They were just exhibiting Christianity in practice, and Christianity is nothing unless as it affects practice, and affects it throughout. 'Every one of them out there,' another reporter of their work in Belgium wrote, was there 'actually to do things, and not to supervise some one else. They took hammers and nails

and saws and built houses for people to live in. The girls baked and sewed and washed and visited the people in their homes.' The spirit of Him who said, 'I am among you as he that doth serve,' was shining through those eager but unobtrusive servants of His—shining through their radiant eyes and happy faces and through their every act of unstinting help.

Here was a religion in whose beauty and power every one was constrained to believe, for it was expressed not in creeds and formulæ, but in deeds of love. For the needy to know that they were in the hands of the Quakers was to them a source of inexpressible comfort and strength. And why should not every Christian, in just the same way, be radiating comfort and strength and help ?

This is our business as Christian men. It is a thoroughly fair, but terribly revealing, test of the quality of our religion, to ask ourselves what we are doing to meet the desperate need—the hunger, the misery, the destitution, the sorrow—of which we all know only too well. It is a fair test, because it is Jesus' own test, and it is Jesus' test because it is a fair test. In His wonderful picture of the Great Judgment, as we said at the beginning, He represents the King as honouring certain people with a place at His right hand, inasmuch as they did something. Did what ?—inasmuch as they gave food and clothing and shelter to those who needed them. Simple enough things these ! Yet, by doing them or neglecting them, men reveal their inner quality and determine their place now and in the world to come.

In the January number of the *Holborn Review*, edited by Professor PEAKE, there is an article on 'The Church and the Child,' which is sufficiently bold, if not startling, to occasion some serious heart-searching among church people. We do not know the special credentials of the writer, Mr. Roland SURTON, but that does not matter. It is what he says that concerns us. His subject is one that deeply concerns the Church, and happily it is a subject that is very much before the mind

and conscience of the Church at the present time. Our own columns bear witness to the amount of serious literature that is devoted to its discussion, and there is hardly a religious body that is not giving attention to it.

Mr. SUTTON begins with a statement of the seriousness of the problem. He says that during the last half-century the Church in Great Britain has lost a million and a half scholars. About half of our children are enrolled as pupils of some Sunday school, and of these about half attend with reasonable regularity. Mr. SUTTON does not agree with the prevailing opinion that the real problem is that of the adolescent and that the real tragedy is that we are losing the adolescent. If the Church obtained the *child*, he thinks, even if it failed to keep the *youth*, the *man* would often return. The serious disaster is not that the Church is failing to retain the adolescent, but that it does not seem to be getting the child. This is one of the points on which the writer of the article holds his own view, and certainly in opposition to the view generally maintained.

As to the causes of this loss of the child, Mr. SUTTON maintains that it is due to the social and religious atmosphere by which our children have been, and are, surrounded; and he enters into an analysis of present-day conditions which will perhaps seem to readers more eloquent than sufficiently explanatory. It comes very much to this, that we are in the grip of a feverish materialism that alienates the child mind from religion, and also of a critical and rebellious spirit that kicks at all authority. Besides this, there is the legacy of the War. Years of malnutrition, lack of control, and, above all, years of war-weddings with their unfit parentage, have helped to produce the present generation. There is indeed some hope of better things, for a reaction may be traced in our modern life against a good deal of what is evil, but the facts as stated remain true.

Well, what about the Remedy? At this point the writer deals with the way in which the Church is handling the problem, and he produces his most

revolutionary assertion. He thinks the Sunday school superfluous. It was started to give education, but this is now given far better in the day schools. And, as a matter of fact, the Sunday school is inefficient and bound to be so. The teaching is bad and is inevitably contrasted by the pupils with the kind of teaching they receive day by day in State schools. 'The majority of our Sunday schools are deplorable' is the writer's verdict. The buildings are ugly and inadequate. The prayers are long, boring, full of deadly iteration, and remote from child life. The lesson is 'taught' by teachers who are less efficient than their best scholars. And if this picture seems unfair to some schools it is no caricature of the average school.

What, then, should the Church do? The writer would give up the Sunday school altogether, and concentrate on teaching the child to worship. That is one thing. Another is that the Church should become the centre of *all* the child's interests, his play, his friendships, his home. These are the two positive suggestions in the article. But if the school is to be retained, the writer holds that it should be given a totally different place. It should be *first*. The Church must be prepared to spend far more money on it to make it efficient, on its buildings and organization and administration. It should be the main concern of the Church instead of being a kind of appendix to its activities.

Mr. SUTTON has written what may be regarded as an extreme indictment of the Church's methods with the young. But there is enough truth in what he says to provoke grave thought and concern. What he says of the Sunday school is largely true. He does not give enough credit to the earnest reformers in all the churches who are trying to improve matters. But it is certainly true that the churches are not taking their duty to the Sunday school seriously. No Education Authority would allow teaching to be done in conditions that prevail in the average Sunday school. And no body that realized its full duty would be satisfied with the kind of teaching that is often given. One thing at any rate is clear. If the Church is to retain the child it must set itself very seriously to make the

Sunday school a reality. The school must be made a nursery of worship and a place where the child's mind must be worthily trained in the best kind of religious knowledge. Above all, we must have the best thought in the Church given to the problem, for it is clearly the supreme task of to-day.

Professor Benjamin W. BACON revives in his recent volume, *The Story of Jesus* (reviewed in another column), a distinction of which he has already made much, and which he owes to a lecture he once heard in Berlin from Harnack. It is the distinction between the religion *of* Jesus and the religion *about* Jesus. The former has been defined as the paternalistic theism of the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer. The latter may be defined as the Pauline message, that through Jesus God has been restoring the world to His favour and fellowship.

It is BACON's conviction that Christianity, rightly regarded, is both the religion *of* Jesus and the religion *about* Jesus; and this conviction he maintains against the modern critical liberalism on the one hand and the new idealism on the other, and we sympathize with his position. For the modern critical liberalism finds in Christianity no more than the religion *of* Jesus, and the new idealism finds in it no more than the religion *about* Jesus.

On the one hand, there are those among us who maintain that the Christian ideal, properly understood, is the social ideal of religion which Jesus Himself cherished. 'Back to Jesus' is their cry; back to the man of Nazareth, to the prophet of Galilee. And when we get back to Him, and discern His doctrine as it was originally, before the enveloping mists of ecclesiastical dogma gathered around it, we shall discover that Christianity is the highest social morality lit up with the emotions or sentiments of trust in God and loyalty to Jesus.

This is a view of Christianity that appeals strongly in our modern time. We have caught afresh the enthusiasm of humanity, the feeling and emotion of human brotherliness, that glowed in

the Master's heart, and many are persuaded that there is no higher end in life, and no better religion, than to labour in His spirit for the furtherance of social welfare. And in the social ideal of universal brotherhood many would find the inmost heart and core of the religion which He founded.

On the other hand, there are those among us who maintain that the Christian ideal, properly understood, is essentially a personal as distinguished from a social thing; it is that spiritual or mystical sonship with God in Christ which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the present life, and the guarantee or surety of personal survival in the life to come and of a blessed immortality. We misunderstand the true nature of our religion, it is said, if we rest upon the Jesus of history as the religious leader of the world instead of advancing with St. Paul to the conception of Jesus as the eternal Christ of God, known and adored in individual Christian experience as the soul's Redeemer and Saviour.

There is much, again, to commend to us such an interpretation of our religion. Nothing is more characteristic of Christianity than the new sense of the value of individual life which it embodies. Christ affirmed—and, indeed, it was an old Greek conviction—that there is nothing higher or greater in the universe than the individual human soul. He further affirmed—and this was even more characteristic of His teaching—that men and women are all, ideally if not as yet actually, sons and daughters of the Most High.

But any valid presentation or reconstruction of Christian doctrine must combine both these views of the Christian ideal. Christianity is not only the gospel *of* Jesus, who announced the ethical Kingdom of human brotherhood upon the earth; it is also the gospel *about* Jesus, in union with whom individual men and women may enter spiritually, even here and now, into the heavenly kingdom of Divine sonship. For Christianity is a religion both of Divine sonship and of human brotherhood in Christ Jesus; it enshrines both a personal and a social ideal.