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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

'RELIGION is the undying fire of human aspiration. Its flare searched the Great Dark before our little lamps of culture were ever invented. The monstrous shapes and ghastly figures that seemed to hover where the wild light fought the dark in those early days of savagery have been driven back by the steady, even light of modern culture. But out beyond the illumination of our craft and knowledge there still streams the glare of this quenchless flame of religious aspiration, searching amid vague shapes and shadows for those further possibilities which all Being has to offer. There is no questing in all human life so valiant, so heroic and adventurous as religion.'

The quotation is from an exceedingly fresh and able book on *The Wrestle of Religion with Truth*, by Professor H. N. WIEMAN (Macmillan; 10s. 6d. net). It would be difficult to give an adequate idea of the richness of its contents, which deal both with the method and the concepts of religion, but some notes may be given on a striking chapter entitled 'Worship as a Means to a Successful Life.' 'Successful,' it need hardly be said, in the highest sense.

Life is a question of adaptation to environment. 'Life of any sort, and certainly the best life, is not achieved by human effort alone. Rather it is something produced by environmental conditions when we make right adjustment to them. Take, for example, the simple case of breathing. It is frequently assumed that the organism does the breath-

ing. As a matter of fact, the environmental air plays a far more potent and difficult part in breathing than do the lungs. The lungs simply provide a partial vacuum; the air rushes in of its own accord. . . . Or take the case of walking. It is not the body alone that walks. The earth does the walking, the body merely adapting itself to those conditions which automatically bring about the walking. . . . What is true of breathing and walking is true of loving and thinking and appreciating beauty and all the other works and joys of living. In all cases certain environmental conditions initiate (stimulate) and sustain the process, the organism merely adapting itself in such a way as to permit these conditions to fulfil the process called living. And in the highest form of living, in that abundant living which man at his best attains, the environment does not recede, but rather becomes more intimately and richly involved.'

The part we humans have to play in living, whether at the biological level, or at the level of most joyous and triumphant living which the greatest spirits have known, is to establish those habits which are so adjusted to environment as to make it possible for the environmental conditions to produce such a life. Now worship is the way we establish that system of habits which is so adapted to the total environment as to catch the supporting lift and movement of this most helpful phase of our total environment—God. 'I think of a little street car in Los Angeles that carries people to the top of

a steep hill. The hill is so steep that the car cannot use a trolley. It is lifted by a steel cable, which runs endlessly beneath the car and between the rails. But the car does not move till it connects with the cable in proper manner. The car stands still until its passengers are in, then a certain clamping mechanism closes down upon the cable and the car is lifted to the top of the hill. . . . Worship is the way we clamp the cable that lifts the highest.'

Worship has three stages. The first is that of exposure. We give ourselves a time exposure to God. We put ourselves into that bodily and mental state in which we can feel most profoundly the stimulus of that order of being which most vitally affects us. Our fathers called this stage of worship praise and adoration. The second stage in worship is diagnosis. 'We must find out wherein our habitual adjustments are inadequate for realizing those possibilities which the environment has in store for human living. What is wrong with our "clamping mechanism"? How can we better lay hold on the lifting cable?' In the hour when we seek the highest, in the hour of worship we can see in ourselves what we cannot see at any other time. 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me.' We may be sure the wicked way is there, but, for the most part, we cannot discover it except by self-examination in worship. Our fathers called this confession of sin. The third stage of worship is reconstruction. It is that curative treatment which cannot be applied until after diagnosis. It is that reconstruction by which the worshipper establishes those mental attitudes which are better adapted to 'clamping the cable.' It is getting right with God.

Prayer is here the effective agent. It is not a matter of words, but of attitude and habit. 'The method by which this reconstruction of habits is accomplished is somewhat as follows. In the stage of diagnosis one discovers his peculiar and most fundamental defect or need in respect of habits. Then he forms as clear and definite a concept as he can of what is required of him, in the form of readjusted attitude, to correct the faulty habit and

enable the environment to accomplish what is desired. Then he states this required readjustment of habits in words as comprehensive, accurate, concise, and forcible as possible. These words in themselves alone do not constitute prayer; the prayer is in that attitude of mind and body which the words serve to engender and establish.' But, it may be said, this is mere auto-suggestion. No, it is more. It is prayer to an objective environmental God, in which auto-suggestion may very well have some part to play, as it has in all our converse with the world around us. Auto-suggestion may serve to arouse and establish the prayer, but prayer 'clamps the cable,' and the vital thing is that there is a cable to clamp.

By this method of worship one can develop the various arts of effective living. Worship enables us to reach down more deeply into our inmost nature and reshape the secret impulses of the heart as nothing else can. 'The outermost limits to what worship can accomplish by the threefold method of exposure, diagnosis and reconstruction, we do not pretend to be able to state.' One may mention, in illustration, the cultivation of courage, of brotherly love, of mental concentration and accurate thinking, the mastery of fear in all its forms and of the sense of failure. 'But the master art of them all is the art of worship itself, by which may be developed any specific ability within the limits of physiological possibility. And the limits of physiological possibility have never yet been found.'

There are, however, two supreme requirements which must be met, else effective worship is impossible. The first is honesty. A man must be honest with himself and with God, searchingly and pitilessly honest, else he cannot expose himself to the presence of God, he cannot diagnose himself, he cannot worshipfully reconstruct. The second requirement is to be definite, specific, and accurate in diagnosis and in statement of need. This can only be done fully in private. Unless the worshipper gets beyond conventional generalities and pious phrases in his private worship he will never accomplish anything. He must be precise and searching, cutting down to the roots of his nature,

if he would worship effectively. And this requires solitude. 'It takes time to learn how to worship. It takes years to acquire the art. One does not become a successful musician in a day. One does not master the methods of high finance in a year. It requires half a lifetime. And it requires no less to master the much higher art of worship. But it is the most precious of all the arts, for it is the key to them all. And we must remember that all arts acquired through worship, and all such habitual attitudes, are prayers. They are wings outstretched to catch the lifting wings of God. Worship is the way we develop such persistent prayers.'

One of the fruits of religion is peace. But there is a certain kind of peace which the average religious man covets and which religion, properly understood, does not guarantee. There is a peace possessed by those who believe they have an external authority to which they can appeal, and who can conscientiously bow before the judgment it pronounces. But true authority in matters of the spirit can never be external. How, then, is authority to be reached or defined? Or the question may be put more radically. Does authority, in the old sense, exist at all?

These are not new questions. They have arisen wherever the human spirit was fully awake. They were raised in a very acute form at the Reformation. The authority of the Church was challenged, and the allegiance formerly given unquestioningly to her was transferred by the Reformers to the Bible. But it was inevitable that the authority of the Bible itself should be challenged. The rise of the historical method of interpretation and the application to the Bible of the critical method and the scientific spirit, which have led to so many advances in other realms of truth, have certainly modified, if not shaken, the old conception of the authority of the Bible; and men who feel that they can no longer appeal with the old confidence to individual utterances of the Bible have fled for refuge to Christ as the ultimate court of appeal and the final authority in religion.

In what sense, if in any, may the Bible still be regarded as an authority, and how are we to interpret the authority of Christ? These are the questions to which Professor C. H. DODD, M.A., of Mansfield College, Oxford, addresses himself in his most timely book, *The Authority of the Bible* (Nisbet; 10s. 6d. net). Professor DODD brings to his task all the qualities necessary for a really fruitful discussion; he has a thorough historical and exegetical knowledge of the Bible; he is a man of philosophical mind and of deeply religious spirit. No one can read his book without feeling that he has been brought into a spacious world, in which, while he must walk with the humble reverence due to the great masters of the spirit, he can move with exhilarating freedom.

But one who is seeking in the Bible an external and infallible authority will get little comfort from Professor DODD. For one thing, the Bible is not all upon the same level of religious significance and attainment: there are the mountain-peaks of prophecy, and there is the plain country across which the historical and the legal literature moves. Again, the Bible as a whole, and the prophets in particular, are too deeply implicated in the contemporary situation to offer us, who are afar off, a ready answer to the multitudinous problems which we of the twentieth century have to face. The prophets, while they are men of the eternal order, are no less men of their own time. But, if they are not infallible, they were, and still are, creative of religious experience, and, for the religious life, that is something infinitely more important. They had an intimate experience of the great Reality, and their words have still the power to make us participate in that experience of Reality.

But there must be no thought of external infallibility. Professor DODD is frank enough to say that 'it is high time to assert unambiguously that the Bible contains a good deal which if it is taken out of a temporary historical context and given general and permanent validity is simply pernicious.' Of utterances like 'Jehovah will not have compassion on their fatherless and widows,' or 'The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish,' he says that 'they are false and they are

wrong.' There is an instinctive Christian criticism which it is legitimate to exercise even upon the words and deeds of Jesus as reported in the Gospels. Not even the evidence of the earliest Gospel will induce him to believe that Jesus cursed a harmless fig-tree because it failed to satisfy His craving for fruit out of season. In the same Gospel there are words of Jesus which 'either are simply not true in their plain meaning, or are unacceptable to the conscience or reason of Christian people.' When we read, for example, in Mk 13 that 'this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened,' by no legitimate ingenuity of interpretation can it be shown that anything resembling some of these events happened before A.D. 100.

Authority in the absolute sense resides in the truth alone. Nowhere is the truth given in such purely objective form that we can find a self-subsistent external authority. When Jesus was asked to furnish proof of His authority, He retorted by asking whether the Baptism of John was of Divine or human origin. The implication was that a Divine thing carries with it its own authentication, and cannot fail to make its appeal to a true mind and an unsophisticated conscience. Jesus does not absolve men from responsibility for their own judgments.

The book gives an admirable sketch of the spirit that animated Judaism, alike in its strength and in its weakness, and it enumerates, as follows, the unsolved problems which Judaism left: (1) the issue between nationalism and universalism, or the question of the implications of monotheism; (2) the issue between righteousness and grace, or the question of the Divine character; (3) the issue between Divine justice and the human lot, or the problem of suffering; (4) the issue between this-worldliness and other-worldliness, or the question of immortality; and (5) the issue between transcendence and immanence, or the problem of mediation. The Christian solution of all these problems came through the discovery of God in Christ. The section in which this thesis is argued is one of the most valuable and convincing sections of the book; and the con-

clusion of the whole matter is that while God, whose supreme act in history is the Incarnation in Christ, touches us supremely in the literature of the Bible, 'the criterion lies within ourselves, in the response of our own spirit to the Spirit that utters itself in the Scriptures.'

'I do not think that the tenderness of Jesus has been exaggerated. I do not think that His sympathy has been over-emphasised. I do not think that there has been too much preaching of the love of God or the love of Christ to sinful men. But there has been created a false picture of Jesus because we have had a false idea of love. We have sentimentalised about Jesus, and He could not bear sentimentality.' In these words the Rev. JOHN E. M'INTYRE, in his book *The Idealism of Jesus* (reviewed in another column), lays his finger on a serious error which has had an immense influence for evil on our religious education and on our religious thinking.

This error has been a false conception of the historical Jesus. In hymns and pictures and in teaching He has been represented as meek in a sense entirely alien from the truth as we see it in the Gospels. We are familiar with the conventional portrait of Jesus in wall-pictures, that of an effeminate person, with a pale, almost anæmic, face. That cannot be the real Jesus. Jesus lived in the open air. He must often, perhaps habitually, have slept in the open. He walked the length and breadth of the land. He would speak nearly all day to crowds of thousands. 'He was no pale Galilean. His face was bronzed with the weather.' He was tirelessly strong.

One of our well-known children's hymns runs:

I want to be like Jesus,
So lowly and so meek,
For no one marked an angry word
That ever heard Him speak.

Could anything be more unlike the Jesus of the Gospels? 'He looked round about on them with

anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.' St. Mark specially notes that piercing eye of Jesus as it flashed in lightning stroke on the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Think, too, of the scathing denunciation of the Pharisaic party, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' Remember His message to Herod, 'that fox.' And picture the scene when He cast the men out of the Temple courts.

Jesus was meek. But the meekness Jesus showed, and commanded, was a humility *towards God*. In face of injustice or hypocrisy Jesus was never 'meek.' He was flint and fire. The fact is that what we see in the Gospels is One who possessed that hardest thing to define, Personality. The man who has personality dominates any company where he appears. He is never negligible. People are either definitely attracted or repelled by Him. This is the effect Jesus produced. He aroused passion everywhere, the passion of devotion, or the passion of hatred.

What we see in Jesus above all, then, is Power. It is significant that when the disciples were retailing the opinions the people had formed of Jesus they should have mentioned that He was regarded as a second Elijah. 'Could the 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,' of the hymn have been thought of as an Elijah? Elijah was the John Knox of Israel, strong, self-reliant, a thunderous figure. And when the people said to one another, 'Here is Elijah back again,' they could only have said that of a person who had in Him something of Elijah's spirit.

Then, again, if more is needed, note that everywhere and always we get the idea of sheer competence in Jesus. He taught as one having authority. 'What manner of man is this?' the crowd whispered, as great deed on great deed was seen. The leper who came to Him had no doubt of

His capacity: 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.' The woman said to herself, 'If I but touch the hem of his garment, I shall be made whole.' The learned Pharisee, Nicodemus, came to Jesus to have his doubts resolved. All sorts of people came to Him with problems and questions and needs, believing that here in this new Personality there were wisdom and power.

Have we been wrong, then, in thinking and speaking of His love and even His tenderness? No. But the love of Jesus is not the love of a Person who 'could not say an angry word.' It is the love of a great, strong, august Person. It is strength stooping to weakness. It is sheer Power putting itself at the service of trouble and perplexity and need. 'When Jesus offered Himself in His daily life and at last supremely on the Cross, He did not offer the sacrifice of a weak, passive, ineffective being. He offered the sacrifice of the most living, virile, eager and beautiful spirit the world has known.' Instead of the world turning 'grey with his breath,' as Swinburne said, the true picture of Jesus will always bring fulness of life and power and happiness just because we can worship and trust His power.

It is of the utmost importance that this true picture should be taught in our schools. As Jesus is generally presented to the youthful mind, He does not attract it. The ordinary child never chooses Jesus, or thinks of Him, as one of the great personalities of history. Children do not *admire* Jesus. That is because the conventional portrait of Him is so 'weak and ineffective.' But not only is that portrait untrue, as Mr. M'INTYRE has shown in this excellent chapter on 'Some Neglected Characteristics of Jesus,' it is the source of much of the feeble religious teaching in our time. When Jesus is presented as the Hero, the Being of Power that He actually was, we shall find Him taking His true place in the love and worship and imitation of a new generation.