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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

IN Hab 2⁴ we read in our English Version, 'The just shall live by his faith.' This sentence is to be found in A.V. in the almost identical form, 'The just shall live by faith,' in two Pauline passages (Ro 1¹⁷, Gal 3¹¹), and also in He 10³⁸. It may be useful and instructive to consider the meanings of the sentence. We shall find that the language of the English version of the Habakkuk text represents the meaning of the text as quoted by St. Paul, but that the original meaning in Habakkuk is more exactly reproduced by the author of Hebrews, and that the original meaning carries the best message for our modern time.

Habakkuk possessed a reflective mind. He is called in the Bible Habakkuk the prophet, but his attitude towards God was not the characteristic prophetic attitude. The prophets, speaking generally, were spokesmen of God to Israel; but Habakkuk was, in the first instance at least, a spokesman of Israel to God; baffled and bewildered by the ways of Providence, he was actually moved, like Job, to interrogate the Almighty. And what was the particular aspect of Divine providence that troubled him? It was, as the Cambridge Bible has it, that 'God looked on in silence while men perpetrated their deeds of violence upon the earth.'

In the dramatic dialogue between God and His prophet with which the Book of Habakkuk begins, the prophet raises his problem. But the Divine answer, that the Chaldeans are being raised up to

punish and destroy the wrong, does not satisfy him. Why should God employ as the instrument of His judgments a nation so fierce and rapacious as the Chaldean? So the prophet awaits God's further answer. And in God's own time the answer comes. The excesses of a people like the Chaldeans carry ruin within them; pride, arrogance, and cruelty have no lasting quality. But moral security is their lasting heritage who trust in God and yield Him steadfast loyalty: 'The just shall live by his faith.'

A better rendering of the Hebrew is, 'The righteous shall live by his faithfulness.' That is to say, the faithfulness or fidelity of the just or righteous man shall be unto him as a principle of life. If it was not a real solution of the problem raised by the Hebrew prophet, it was at least a solution which embodied a true interpretation of the genius of the Hebrew race. What is written of Moses—that 'he endured as seeing him who is invisible'—was true of many in Israel, before and after Moses. Indeed, it was by their native faithfulness, their steadfastness, their loyalty to Jehovah, amid perplexity, adversity, and trial, that the people of Israel survived the changeful fortunes of their history.

The Pauline passages above mentioned bring before our eyes another figure than the patient watchman in his tower, waiting for the message wafted to him at last on the winds of heaven. We

do not mean the eager, restless figure of St. Paul. We mean the figure of one who in the after days caught again the Pauline spirit and sent it aflame through our Western world. At the foot of the *scala santa* we see him kneeling—a young monk, in appearance earnest and devout, with the marks of monkish zeal upon his frame. And now we see him climbing the holy stairs on hands and knees, at every step a prayer. But suddenly he stops half-way, then rises to his feet, and walks slowly down the steps again. Through the chambers of his brain the words had rung forth, 'The just shall live by his faith.'

In catching up this ancient phrase of Habakkuk's, St. Paul had missed its exact meaning. For the phrase came to him not from the Hebrew original but through the Septuagint, and there faithfulness (פִּיִּיּוּ) is rendered by πίστις, which may mean faithfulness, but which also means faith in the sense of an act of belief. And it was upon this narrower meaning of the Greek word that St. Paul fastened, thus supporting evangelical doctrine by a form of words derived from Habakkuk. And in this Luther followed St. Paul. If the just shall live by faith, if it is by a believing acceptance of the grace of God in Christ that a man is justified in God's sight and receives the forgiveness of sins, then why this pilgrimage to Rome, why this act of penance?

Thus our prophet's words, which in their original significance may be taken as a motto of the Hebrew race, may be also taken, as applied by St. Paul, as the motto of evangelical Christianity. But, further, the author of Hebrews, whose use of the words resembles the original rather than the Pauline use, helps us to translate them into our modern life. For the world in which we live is not so theological a world as Luther's was, and the old battle-cries of the Churches do not sound so loudly in our ears; and the best application of the text in these times consists in taking up the old problem of life which troubled the ancient prophet and carrying it, as indeed the author of Hebrews does, to its deeper and more personal—as distinguished from national—issues.

We are often perplexed at the ways of God with the nations, but we are also perplexed, and much more than were the men of old, at the ways of God with our own souls. Sometimes our difficulties are practical ones, sometimes they are speculative. What should be our attitude? Despair? Impatience? God forbid! Instead of being impatient before life's problems, let us turn to the strengthening message of God's prophet in Israel. Take your stand upon the watch-tower. Occupy your post upon the rampart. Be faithful, patient, vigilant, ever ready for the answer which by God's grace shall come. Let patience have her perfect work. Though the vision tarry, wait for it.

'There are not, and in the very nature of the case there cannot be, any scientific or philosophical difficulties in the way of believing in prayer exactly as the simplest piety does, except such difficulties as arise out of an assumed determinism; and such an assumption makes not only prayer, but all moral and religious conceptions of life, absolutely impossible.' This bold assertion is made and strongly supported in a chapter on 'The Problem of Prayer' which forms part of *Studies in Religion*, by Mr. Henry BERT, M.A. (Sharp; 5s. net).

Can the assertion be upheld? Can simple believing prayer be justified on scientific and philosophical grounds? If so, then many Christians 'professing themselves to be wise have become fools' in restraining and renouncing prayer. For undoubtedly in our time prayer has been restrained or wholly renounced in deference to what were conceived to be the demands of modern science. 'The assumption is always that the modern conception of the universe, which is expressed in phrases like the uniformity of nature, the universality of law, and so forth, makes it impossible to believe in prayer as really affecting anything in the physical universe, though it may possibly have some sort of effect in the psychical region.' In other words, you may pray for spiritual blessings, perhaps also for health (for the body is influenced by the spirit), but it is hopeless and absurd to pray

for good weather. This position has been endorsed by no less an authority than William James, and seventy-five per cent. of students who answered a questionnaire on prayer expressed the same view.

This view appears, on examination, to be beset with fallacies. It divides the universe into two halves, the physical and the spiritual; the former under the dominion of law, the rigid laws which rule physical antecedents and consequences, while the latter, the spiritual half of the universe, is assumed to be under the dominion of—what? It cannot be ruled by chance, for in that case prayer could effect nothing. But, if it be ruled by law, then the operation of law must be as rigid in the spiritual as in the natural realm. ‘The fact that the universe is governed by law, if it forbids physical results to follow from prayer, equally forbids spiritual or moral results to follow from it.’

But, further, let us look more closely at this conception of natural law which has obsessed the modern mind, and become a bogey to drive timid Christians from their knees. For one thing it wears a mantle of authority to which it has no just claim. Most unfortunately the same word ‘law’ is used to express, as Lord Oxford pointed out, ‘both the command of a sovereign authority and the generalisation of a Newton or a Darwin.’ The two are quite distinct, and it is a piece of sheer anthropomorphism to speak as if natural laws have some sort of authority or power of enforcing themselves. They are simply observed sequences, expressions of the fact that certain things happen in certain ways. As to what makes them happen so, or happen at all, natural law can tell us nothing.

Moreover, the description of the laws of Nature as fixed laws is singularly delusive. It gives the impression of invariable sequence—B follows A inevitably, and no other result is possible. This, of course, is right enough so long as we consider the sequence in the abstract. This is what would happen if the law existed and operated by itself. But the point which is often forgotten is that ‘in the life of the universe no natural law ever does actually exist or operate alone; it is always con-

ditioned and often suspended or superseded by the existence and operation of other laws.’ In fact, speaking more strictly, the same event never recurs, for, as modern physics is now so strongly insisting, no two events in the universe are precisely similar. The fixity of the law or the uniformity of Nature, as we perceive it, is really due in large measure to our imperfect perception. ‘It is merely a kind of statistical average, an abstract and approximate formula—something which does not actually exist in nature, but which our minds import into our conception of nature, and which we find extraordinarily convenient in use, as a kind of working principle.’

In such a fluid world, amid the myriad interactions of its forces, and the incalculable possibilities of permutation and combination, there is ample room for Divine action in answer to prayer. Of course if our final philosophy be determinism that makes an end not only of prayer but also of free will and of everything having the name of religion and morality. But, if there is a God at all, ‘He can order the limitless interactions of natural laws and natural forces, without any exercise of miraculous power, so as to produce whatever result He wills, and, if He so wills it, the result for which we pray. If man can rearrange the interactions of physical laws so as to produce different results (and that is what all human activity amounts to), surely God can do the same on the infinite scale?’

But another objection has been raised by timid apologists, who are really seeking a religious sanction for conceding what they conceive to be the scientific objection to prayer. Is it not foolish, they say, or even blasphemous, to think of prayer as altering the will of God? Now, no doubt, the will of God, taken in the general sense of His universal purpose of good, cannot be altered. But to think that the will of God implies that every event is rigidly and unalterably fixed is to deny the reality of human freedom and make an end of all morality. ‘It is fundamental to all religion and all morality to believe that man should be able, within limits, to do a thing or not to do it; to do the good deed that is in accordance with the will of God, or to do the

evil deed that is the sheer denial and defiance of the will of God, to fulfil or frustrate the will of God, in the Apostle's phrase.' If, then, we believe that God's will can in some real sense be thwarted by sin, so that it has to be wrought out in some other way because of man's defiance, surely it is reasonable to believe that in an opposite direction God's will may be influenced by prayer, and be enabled to accomplish itself more readily through man's desire and trust. 'Is it to be thought that I may divert the course of events in an evil sense by my sin, and that I may not divert it in a good sense by my supplications, so that by a man's sin, but not by a man's prayer, the general purpose of God may be fulfilled along a different line of happenings? That is a very insolent anomaly, one would think, for any religious mind to accept.'

There is urgent need for a reinvigorated faith in the power of prayer. The human spirit will refuse in the end to be satisfied with a conception of prayer which makes it a mere auto-suggestion, while it leaves the whole of life in the grip of inexorable fate. If it comes to be thought that all that a man's prayer can do is to persuade his own will into a more submissive acceptance of what is irrevocably destined, and what neither his most earnest supplication nor anything else in the world can change in the smallest degree, we do not believe that prayer will continue for long to hold a place in the life of men; and when prayer is no longer believed in as a real activity of the spirit which has real results not only in the sphere of self, but also in relation to the universe and to the will of God, religion will not long survive.'

Jeremiah is coming into his own. In February we called attention to Professor WELCH's scholarly study of the prophet; and, by a singularly happy coincidence, that book has been followed up by one of a very different type which admirably supplements it. That was pre-eminently a scholar's book, this is pre-eminently a preacher's book, by one of the most distinguished of American preachers, the Rev. Charles E. JEFFERSON, D.D.;

it is entitled *The Cardinal Ideas of Jeremiah* (Macmillan; 8s. 6d. net).

Dr. JEFFERSON brings to the elucidation of the prophet's message a contagious and overwhelming enthusiasm for the man and his ideas. He describes the prophet as 'one of the greatest men who ever lived,' 'one of the greatest men God ever sent into this world,' 'one of the greatest thinkers of all time,' 'the man who, with a solitary exception, had a greater genius for hoping than any man who ever lived.' The Hebrew prophets, he tells us, were the deepest thinkers the ancient world produced, 'and of these none is deeper than Jeremiah.'

To the uninitiated this may sound like the language of extravagance, but the ten chapters of this very striking book adequately substantiate this high claim. Dr. JEFFERSON is well aware that most of the good people who sit in our pews will rub their eyes at such an estimate of the prophet; but that is because they know nothing about him, and that again is partly because they do not read his book and partly because they have never been trained to read it. 'In our Sunday-school days we were not instructed in the ideas of Jeremiah. It never occurred to us that he had any ideas.' Those who by chance do read his pages 'almost go to sleep, because it all seems so tame and dull; but if you only had the information and the imagination, you would hear the hissing of the red-hot lava which runs in boiling streams below the surface of the tranquil language of this ancient book.'

But it must not be supposed that Dr. JEFFERSON's enthusiasm is indiscriminating. His aim, he tells us, is to make Jeremiah live, and he does this by painting the real man, warts and all, a man who was tempted and tried in all points like as we, and much more sorely than most of us, and who sinned as we do. He had his moods; he could be cynical, he could be vindictive, he could be sceptical, and Dr. JEFFERSON does not hesitate to say that he 'sometimes talked like a fool. He was a wise man most of the time, but sometimes he was exceedingly foolish. His life was so full of suffering that sometimes he felt it was unendurable.' He felt it and

he said it; he reproached God with having made a fool of him.

This candour is part of the charm alike of Jeremiah and of his most recent interpreter. There are few things more absorbing in this absorbing book than the chapter on 'Prayer as Conversation with God.' Every one who knows his Jeremiah is astonished at the prophet's prayers, with their imprecations, their recriminations, their challenges of God, whom he compares to a treacherous brook and to waters that are not sure. Dr. JEFFERSON explains that Jeremiah talks thus to God, just because God is so real to him. He was the great Friend, to whom in his unspeakable loneliness the prophet took all his troubles and before whom he poured out all his heart, charged as it so often was with perplexity and indignation.

He 'had all the boldness of a child, he blurted out things to God which shock us.' Among his first recorded words stands the confession, 'I am a child,' and a child, in one sense, he remained to the end: hence the naïveté of his prayers. This is very illuminating, and this chapter is full of illuminating things. It suggests that the difficulty many of us experience in praying is 'because we look upon prayer as a speech, a little speech to God.' It has nothing of the joyous spontaneity of conversation. But prayer is essentially dialogue rather than monologue. 'Jeremiah said something to God, and God replied. God said something to Jeremiah, and Jeremiah responded. We too often make prayer monologue. We do all the talking.' Our prayers, so far from being irksome and monotonous, might have all the freshness and variety of Jeremiah's, if, like him, we looked upon prayer as a daily conversation with God.

But the book deals more particularly with the ideas of Jeremiah, because, in the view of Dr. JEFFERSON, the supreme need of the Church to-day is for more thinking. Men will pray, sacrifice, give, do anything rather than think, and religion without thinking must degenerate either into convention or superstition. He even makes bold to say that 'you cannot be a good Christian unless you think.'

Where, then, did Jeremiah get those ideas which are of such superlative importance to the world and the Church to-day? To say that they were 'revealed' to him does not carry us far. Dr. JEFFERSON reminds us that the revelation of the meaning of the world comes to the man with the eyes that have looked at it observantly and with the mind that brings questions to it. One of the perennially perplexing problems, for example, is that of reconciling the Divine Sovereignty with human free will: Jeremiah's solution of that problem is enshrined in ch. 18, 'one of the most interesting episodes in the Bible,' and 'in that conception of the Divine Potter and the human clay you have one of the great achievements of the human intellect,' which 'will probably remain forever the most satisfying image which man can form of the Divine Sovereignty in relation to the freedom of the will.' The clay may be refractory, but the potter does not destroy it: he simply crushes it into a shapeless mass, and proceeds to make 'another vessel.' So with the Divine Potter. And this lesson came to Jeremiah not by way of some magic inspiration, not even in the Temple, but in a pottery! He used his eyes and put his mind behind them, and then and thus came the revelation.

Another of the dominant ideas of Jeremiah is that the individual is the key to the world-problem. The Corporation, the Union, the Press, the Church, the 'masses'—the very words suggest how steadily the individual is receding from the view. In this, as in so much else, Jesus was like Jeremiah—He had 'the individualizing eye': His parables are concerned with 'a certain man,' 'a certain householder,' etc. In His messages and His personality Jesus so strikingly recalled Jeremiah that some of His contemporaries were constrained to say, This is Jeremiah come back from the dead. What a tribute to Jeremiah!

One of the most searching chapters discusses the question of conflicting loyalties and throws welcome light on the problem of the conscientious objector—a type which Dr. JEFFERSON thinks will be much more widely represented, should there ever be a

'next' war. In this connexion 'no other book in the Bible has so much help to give us as this ancient Hebrew volume.' In exhorting the soldiers not to fight, and in encouraging his king and his countrymen to surrender to the enemy, Jeremiah was undoubtedly guilty of treason; yet no man loved his country or sought her welfare more passionately than he. A traitor, yet a patriot, the truest patriot of them all. 'He resisted the politicians, who were a coterie of reckless jingoes, a bunch of hundred-percenters, who were always chattering about national honour, and knew nothing of national wisdom.'

Like Jeremiah, Dr. JEFFERSON is not afraid to speak the unpalatable truth to his countrymen. While his indictment of modern society generally is severe, his criticism of America is particularly unsparing. Our civilization may go the way of other civilizations which have vanished from the earth. 'We only know that it cannot go on as it is. It is too dishonest.' The most damning indictment of popular government is that 'it takes forever to get anything worth while accomplished, and when it is done it is often done in an extravagant and bungling manner.' But the most drastic treatment is meted out to America. 'We are a spectacle to the nations because of our gullibility.' The tragedy of America is that 'there is so much chatter and so little accomplished.' 'We Americans are probably the most superficial of all peoples.' 'In certain circles a clergyman is denounced as a traitor if he dissents from any opinion expressed by the officers of the navy or army'; and 'our intellectuals, so-called, are too often pessimists and cynics.'

This is plain speaking, and yet the book is essentially a heartening book. The preacher reminds those who are depressed by the widespread indifference to traditional religious observances that 'religion to its contemporaries has always seemed to be going.' It must have seemed so to devout Jews of the first century and to devout Catholics of the sixteenth. Religion was indeed going, but it was 'going on and going up'; and as it was then, so it is now: only 'we twentieth-

century people are religious in a different way,' and each generation has the right to be religious in its own way.

The book bristles with points that will be greedily appropriated by the preacher. Here is one: 'the world needs two things, light and salt—light to keep it from tumbling into a ditch, and salt to save it from putrefaction.' But the real strength of the book is its vivid portraiture of Jeremiah, the man and his message. In language of delightful and almost colloquial, but never undignified, simplicity, it brings that ancient world before us and makes us feel how modern it all is. Dr. JEFFERSON'S ambition, he told his hearers, was to stimulate their minds and to induce them to make an honest effort to master the cardinal ideas of this mighty Man of God. He has been singularly successful.

A question of supreme importance for faith is the value of St. John's Gospel as an historical narrative. It is to-day common ground that there is a large element of interpretation in the Fourth Gospel, and that this has coloured to some extent the narrative, and to a large extent the report of our Lord's words. But the issue goes deeper. Can we accept 'St. John' as an authentic narrative written by John or at least containing his memories? There is a widespread tendency to depreciate its value as history and to take our picture of Jesus Christ solely from the Synoptists, to regard the Fourth Gospel as a theological treatise in narrative form, containing incidents moulded, or indeed created, in order to express the writer's view of Christ, and so to ignore the contribution which St. John offers to the Christian faith in Christ.

There have been voices of protest against that conclusion. Among these was a remarkable deliverance of the late Canon Scott Holland in a book published in 1923. And the Canon's plea for a more positive estimate of the Fourth Gospel has been reinforced by the Dean of Wells, Dr. J. Armitage ROBINSON. He has republished, with enlargements and additions, some lectures which

were delivered in Westminster Abbey in 1907, under the title *The Historical Character of St. John's Gospel* (Longmans; 3s. 6d. net). The book has two qualities which will commend it to the inquiring mind. It is the book of a competent scholar, familiar with the region in which he is moving, and it is marked by a most persuasive sincerity which never overpresses an argument or a fact. And both qualities make its contention an important one for those who are anxious to know the truth.

Dr. ROBINSON states frankly the considerations that bear against the historicity of the Gospel. These are of two kinds. One is general. It is the contrast between the whole representation of the ministry of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and in St. John. There is a contrast of atmosphere, a contrast in the teaching of Jesus, and finally an extraordinary diversity in the scenes of our Lord's ministry. When you pass from St. Mark to St. John you are in a different world. It is a totally different picture of the Lord. The other fact that seems to tell against the narrative worth of St. John is the series of discrepancies between it and the earlier Gospels. The most important of these is the conception formed of Christ Himself by the disciples and by their Master. In the earlier Gospels the disciples do not recognize Jesus as Messiah till late in the story, in St. John they accept Him as Messiah from the outset.

These are serious facts and seem to tell strongly against the traditional view of the Fourth Gospel. What has Dr. ROBINSON to say in reply? The outstanding difficulty is that the Fourth Gospel deals in the main with a ministry in Jerusalem, whereas the others state that the ministry was in Galilee and only bring Jesus to Jerusalem for a brief space after the ministry in Galilee was closed. But is it not in the highest degree improbable that Jesus worked only in Galilee? He must have attended the Jewish feasts. Is it credible that He never spoke to His people at the centre of their faith?

It is to be noted that St. John represents such visits to the feasts as the occasions of our Lord's ministry at Jerusalem. And it is extremely likely,

a priori, that such visits and such a ministry did take place. How otherwise can we explain the words that occur in the Synoptists, 'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children . . . and ye would not'? These words are inexplicable except as a reminiscence of words done and words said in pursuance of a saving mission in the city. If this be so, is it not highly probable that these two ministries went on side by side? The Galilean ministry might leave its mark on a narrative drawn up by a Galilean apostle like Peter, while the Jerusalem ministry would appeal to one who had special links with the city, and who desired to relate such incidents as illustrated the truths which he wished to enforce.

Such is the line of argument urged with great force by Dr. ROBINSON, as it had been urged by Canon Scott Holland. The difference in atmosphere and in the teaching of Jesus is accounted for by the fact that the aim of the later writer is to interpret as much as narrate, and also to supplement what had been previously told. The most serious difficulty, however, is the contrast we find between the attitude of the disciples to their Master in the earlier Gospels and in the later one. Dr. ROBINSON does not meet this difficulty with any marked success. May it not be true, however, to say that the disciples eagerly accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah at first, as very many others were prepared to do, but that as the days went past His actions and words so contradicted their conception of Messiah that the identification faded away in their minds? And may not St. John, looking back after many years, have put into the first eager acceptance more than it actually contained?

In any case, Dr. Armitage ROBINSON has done us all a great service by the republication of these lectures. Many people have quietly accepted the adverse verdict about the Fourth Gospel, and this has meant an impoverishment of their faith and of their conception of our Lord. Dr. ROBINSON has given solid ground for a reconsideration of their verdict, and his own firm confidence in the historical worth of the Gospel will do something to restate it in the confidence of others.