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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE modern churchmen have at length come, in their annual conference, to the question of Authority in Religion. The Sixteenth Conference it was, and it was held in September at Girton College, Cambridge. The papers are all printed in the current number of *The Modern Churchman* (Blackwell; 4s. net). The same problem has twice been before the Conference of Congregationalists. It is to be feared they did not make very much of it. And on the showing of these papers, it may be hazarded that the modern churchmen have not been much more successful.

Our present purpose, however, is to draw attention to one of the most interesting of the essays read at the Conference. The title is 'A Corpus of Sacred Writings,' and the real subject may be presumed to be the authority of the Bible. The writer is Professor BURKITT. He begins by drawing attention to a striking fact, that a Corpus of sacred writings is not found in every religion. The only one that has such a Corpus is Muhammadanism, and the Koran is an imitation of, or rather a substitute for, the Bible. Without the Bible the existence of the Koran is unthinkable. The Greek and Roman religious systems had no Bible, no Corpus containing the essentials of religion. The nearest thing was the Iliad, and it was only possible to illustrate a religion from that, not to construct one.

A second point made by Dr. BURKITT is that the acceptance of the written Law (and it was their first Bible) produced a democratic, what may be called a lay, element in orthodox religion. It was an essential part of the religion of the Law that the Law was to be known by every Israelite and that it was to be practised. The will of God for priest and layman was written down in black and white, plain for all to read. During the trying times when Hellenism was being forced on the Jews it was not the priesthood but the people who remained obstinately loyal. And the reason is that study and meditation in their Bible had made them passionately attached to it.

So much by way of preliminary. Dr. BURKITT comes next to his real subject: what is required or desired in a Corpus of sacred writings. And the first desideratum is that it be *essentially true*. He makes this point because he thinks that the plea for continuing to teach the Bible on the ground that it is splendid literature is beside the mark. Either there is a sense in which we can say that the Bible is true and helps us to get at truth in a way that nothing else can, or it will drop out of use. Is the Bible true? Or, to put it historically, did the Bible guide the Jews, and afterwards the Christians, into true views of their religion?

There are, of course, many things in the Bible that are not historically true. The world was not made in six days, to take an obvious instance. And *a propos* of that, Dr. BURKITT interjects:

'It is no use to say that the Bible was meant to teach us religious knowledge, not geology or profane history. That excuse was only invented when it was found that the geology and history plainly indicated in fundamental portions of the Bible were not true.' Is Dr. BURKITT right in this? Would it not be truer to say that the fact was discovered when a better view of the Bible was attained? And is it not as a matter of fact the simple truth to say that the Bible was never written to teach us science, but to tell us about God? That is one of the liberating discoveries of modern times, that it would be as sane to expect to learn the day of the week from your watch as to expect to find modern science in the Bible. The watch was made to tell the time, and for no other purpose.

In what sense, then, is the Bible true? It is serious history. On the whole it gives a true picture of the rise and progress of religion and of the events which made the religion. How valuable it is we see when it stops! We are helpless about the period from Nebuchadrezzar to Darius because we have not the history that has guided us hitherto. And it is to be remembered that this historical Bible picture was set before the Jews centuries before Livy, and at least a couple of generations before Herodotus. It is not modern scientific history. It is homiletic, didactic, but it is real, serious, and substantially sound.

The second desideratum of the Bible is that what we need is not there ready made; a certain effort of application on our part is needed. This sounds obscure and even cryptic. What does it mean? Perhaps Dr. BURKITT supplies the key when he goes on to say that the use of the Bible for Christians is that it leads up to Jesus Christ. If eventually we are to 'leave the Cross as we have left carved gods,' we may possibly 'guard the fire within,' but we shall not keep the Bible very long. This is the uniqueness of the Bible that it enshrines the Incarnation. And if we find Jesus central to our religion, we shall find the Bible essential. The use of the Bible is to tell us about Jesus Christ.

But the Bible can only retain its authority on the ground that what it tells us about is of primary importance. And if there be any truth in the fundamental postulate of Christian doctrine, that about nineteen hundred years ago something happened which is still of vital importance to us, then the documents which preserve the record of this, or help us to understand it better, remain of vital importance. In the nature of things there could not be any substitute for this Bible.

It is justly a matter of surprise that we have only four Gospels in the New Testament. That surprise is justified by the unceasing succession of lives of Jesus down all the files of time. As significant are the characterizations which appear in every age, especially when a more patient scholarship, or a new phase of thought, quickens men's minds. To-day the interest, not only of the Christian Church, but of all moral and religious thinkers is fastened intently on His personality. Men care, and inquire eagerly, not about His miracles and not even always into His sayings. They scan and estimate His actions, His choices, His decisions. But their object is to understand and to explain His personality. That, as a great teacher once said, is the penalty which greatness imposes. It was never more evident than in the interpretation of Jesus in our day.

This fact is determining not only our studies of the Gospels but our use of them. With Paul, and the noble succession to that great master, the interest consummated on the doctrine which a study of the life and teaching would yield. Christ's sayings and doings were read and analysed for the truths of God's mind and purpose and will toward men, and their salvation from sin and its penalties. To-day they are regarded more frequently as lights held up to shine upon Christ's face. Men are less anxious about their souls. What quickens the attention of even a sluggish-minded audience, and rouses a careless reader into alert attention, is a fresh portraiture of Jesus, with a resetting of the incidents, and a searching inter-

pretation of the ruling declarations of His message to men.

Here in *The Epic of the Nazarene*, by the Rev. A. G. PAISLEY, M.A., B.A. (James Clarke ; 6s. net), there is a striking instance of this feature. The writer states that he has aimed at 'a presentation of Christ's redeeming work as a conflict with evil.' But, as Professor McFadyen writes in his preface, 'we appreciate with a new vision how truly Jesus was also the Son of Man, yet standing apart in loneliness unutterable.' To our gain, what Mr. PAISLEY really gives us is not a presentation of Christ's work: it is a new vision, with an impressive appeal to realize it, and to face its issues for our faith and obedience.

At the outset the writer declares that what we need to understand Jesus is 'the right predicate.' As he proves, there is no single right predicate. The attempt to focus on a single right predicate has led many astray, as may be seen at a glance in the instance of 'Ecce Homo.' We need many predicates to present our vision of Jesus. That is the truth set in the appealing title of this book—*The Epic of the Nazarene*. It is Jesus as Hero, in His conflict with evil—so lonely, so unfaltering, so triumphant—which is presented. The greater number of the characterizations of Jesus are lyric. They are touched to sweet music, even to song. It is Jesus, clad in the armour of His love unspeakable, His faith that never failed, His courage which never flinched, even at the grim face of death on the Cross, who appears here on every page.

In this portraiture Jesus is first depicted, to a reader's surprise, in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. That splendid and noble incident is chosen because it records the most expressive and revealing presentation of Christ's self-conscious realization of His mission as the Protagonist of evil, bearing the imprint of the Divine upon His face, following in the great succession of God's heroes, and, most significantly, 'coming down' from the Mount into the arena of the conflict. That is the index to all His chivalries, and to their cost. Up to that great day He had been engaged in the never-faltering contest with evil, in all its many forms and issues. Now, He looks out to its utmost strain and anguish. It is therefore significant that, as he 'sets his face to go to Jerusalem,' there comes the voice of high approval, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

In the light of this determining and revealing episode the author passes the course of Christ's ministry under review. The conflict with evil is set out with a certain dramatic vividness and intensity. Beginning with the conception of His conflict, under Christ's own figure of 'The Cup' He must drink, he describes Jesus as entering upon a fourfold conflict with evil. There is the clash with the ideals held by the people of the meaning of the Kingdom of God ; the fiercer personal conflict with His own temptation ; the cost and strain of disease as the issue and adjunct of evil. Then, in the last section, He is pictured coming to men in the closing episodes of His ministry, meeting all the adverse circumstances of life, and finally of death, even on the Cross.

The freshness and definiteness of this portraiture of Jesus, as not only a Conqueror but more than a Conqueror, is greatly enhanced by the energy of the expression and the impassioned devotion of the style. This is the work of a disciple. The Central Figure holds his eyes. Ever and again, as he seems to lift them from his page, he sees Jesus in the midst of an evil world, among gainsaying and scorning, and even deserting men ; and then is set down a sentence of arresting emphasis. The citations are fresh, many of them from unexpected quarters. The writer's acquaintance with a large range of English poetry, and his knowledge of French literature stand him in good stead. It is a book of great promise, especially as it comes from one who has left the student's bench little more than a year ago.

Church union is in the air. The Churches in Scotland have united, and the Methodist Churches

in England are on the verge of union. In connexion with this latter a wise thing has been done. A volume has been published—*Methodism in the Modern World* (Epworth Press; 6s. net)—which gives an authoritative statement of the Message and Mission of Methodism as understood by its leading exponents. It is a profoundly Christian book, with nothing sectarian in it, a book which may be read with profit by members of all denominations.

One of the most arresting papers is on 'Methodist Evangelism,' by Dr. J. E. RATTENBURY, a man in whose veins the spirit of evangelism leaps like fire. He reviews the elements of the evangel as preached by the Wesleys and their first followers. He shows how, as Methodism settled down to respectable domesticity till its ministers became 'pastors of the flock, and their concern was the ninety and nine, not the one,' the original fires were from time to time relighted by the grace of God. There came the outbreak of Primitive Methodism, the rise of the Salvation Army and the Wesleyan Forward Movement associated with the name of Hugh Price Hughes. In all these movements the accent of the preaching may have differed in immaterial particulars, but the message was 'in every essential matter the message of the Wesleys,' and it found the response of the people as enthusiastic and uncritical as it was in the earlier periods. 'It was the preaching of God's love to sinful men, and the gospel of immediate salvation for those who submitted to Christ and trusted Him.'

The question has to be faced, Can we preach the same gospel to-day? Will it grip the men of our generation as it gripped in former times? The difficulties are confessedly great. We have entered a new spiritual climate. New intellectual influences are at work, and old beliefs, common to evangelists and people, do not exist. 'The people have little fear of God, and hell has no terrors for them. The sense of sin is less acute, and, although there is a vague belief in a Heavenly Father, and a general admiration of Jesus as a hero and friend of the people, there is little sense of a living Christ who died to save men from their sins. The feeling of grievance is greater than the sense of sin. Many men feel themselves victims of social, and not violators of Divine, law. The heaven they seek for is not of the other world, but is a secular city in this world, for the next generation. In a word, the opinions, sentiments, and enthusiasms of the people have changed more in the last two decades than in the sixteen which preceded them.'

It may be asserted with confidence that no evangelistic campaign has ever been successful, nor is ever likely to be, unless it contain four essentials. There must be first a gospel; second, a gospel as experienced and witnessed by those who have experienced it; third, a gospel declared by men who stake their lives on its truth; fourth, a gospel declared in language and thought-forms intelligible to the people.

The first essential is a dogmatic message, a gospel, genuine good news. 'You cannot preach salvation unless it is from something into something.' Have we such a message to-day? It may well give us deep searchings of heart when we reflect that the Church seems to believe the gospel very faintly and those outside her hardly at all. 'How many of us really believe that it makes much difference in the light of eternity whether a man becomes a Christian now or not? How many preachers think that eternal destiny hangs upon the acceptance or rejection of their message? How often do we preach in such a way as to feel that people have missed something that really mattered when they did not hear us? How deeply do we feel that those who are indifferent to Christianity are lost sheep who must be sought until we find them? How far are we gripped by the notions fundamental to effective evangelism of God's judgments, of men's sins, and men's need of salvation?' These questions must be faced and answered. The acid test of a gospel is its power or powerlessness with the crude sinner. We must have a dynamic gospel ere we can hope to make a successful attack on the world's unbelief.

The second essential is a gospel 'experienced and witnessed by its experients.' Experience is the

vital spark that sets the message on fire. 'If a body of the most incontrovertible truths could be drawn up by the most infallible of committees and read out to the British public, it would be as ineffective as the recital of the Athanasian Creed. Religious truth can only be communicated when it is set on fire by conviction and experience. Evangelism is not the communication of concepts, but the personal transmission of truths that are alive; it is really the communication of life. The story of Wesley is one of the best of many illustrations of this. He preached salvation by faith in London churches, and nothing happened except that he was forbidden to preach in them a second time, until his heart was set on fire, and then he still roused opponents, but he set other hearts aflame, so that the fire spread.'

The third essential is a gospel preached by men who stake their lives and comfort on its truth. The typical modern minister, with his settled home and comfortable income, with his pipe and golf clubs and his long holidays, seems at times strangely incongruous as successor of the holy apostles and preachers of the Cross. True evangelism must have the sacrificial spirit behind it. John Wesley, tireless when nearly ninety, still preached the gospel in the open air. Hugh Price Hughes died at fifty-five, a strong man worn out by service. General Booth said, 'The doctors gave me up, so I gave up the doctors.'

The fourth essential is that the gospel be preached in language and thought-forms intelligible to the people. Can we make an effective Christian appeal to the men of our day, with their changed mentality? It may be difficult, but we are not without our *points d'appui*. 'The general belief that God is good and kind is one. It may be that on that basis people will see that God would not even be good and kind unless He were just—and justice implies judgment. Perhaps we might get back in that way to the Cross of Christ, which means both judgment and love, as the chief evidence of the goodness of God. But we have another approach in the common admiration of Jesus. It is true that the Jesus honoured by the people is more of a Socialist than a Saviour, but He still remains their hero. If we can begin with Jesus the teacher and hero, we are on the way to Jesus the crucified Saviour, who did not only die, but lives to save.' Further, there is this. The salvation that Wesley taught was 'holiness of heart and life,' including 'love to our neighbour.' Here is the great opportunity of the new evangelism. 'Not with a piping voice, but with the sound of a trumpet, we must preach the whole gospel of personal salvation and social service, and, whatever it means, have no fear of giving actual expression to love of our neighbour. It is imperative that social service should not be substituted for evangelical religion, as it sometimes has been, but be shown to be one of its integral characteristics. We cannot teach that the unfortunate are merely victims of society, but nevertheless the gospel of salvation must be preached not only as a gospel of personal redemption, but also of social reconstruction, if we are to reach this age, and if, indeed, we are to preach the whole gospel of the New Testament.'

No one fully understands life who has little experience of failure, pain, and sorrow. Civilization may hope for, and aim at, the elimination of these things; but it is more than doubtful whether they will ever be eliminated. For many, perhaps for most, these three abide, as surely as faith, hope, and love. And if by some inconceivable chance they could be entirely eliminated, it is as certain as anything can be that human life would be not the richer, but the poorer.

The supreme figure in human history is a man of sorrows. Doubtless, in perfectly fulfilling the Father's will, He also knew of a joy unutterable, nevertheless He is truly described as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. How different He is from the magnanimous man of Aristotle who lives in an atmosphere of unruffled calm, who stands to his less fortunate fellow-mortals in an attitude of superiority and aloofness, and who claims much because he knows himself to deserve

much. The Greeks and their ideals will for ever exercise a fascination over the minds of educated men; but the Hebrew Sufferer on His cross is nearer the everlasting secret of things. Nay, He is at the very centre.

Pain and sorrow, if the spirit responds to the subtle ministry with which they are fraught, bring power and insight. By the unwise they may be resented as intrusions; but, if they come into our life without any seeking on our part, they should be welcomed as opportunities. They furnish us with the means of growth in patience, understanding, and sympathy. They may, indeed, be gifts of God, to be numbered perhaps even among the choicest of His gifts. Through the thorn in the flesh may come a revelation of the exceeding grace and power of God. Even the Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering.

Suffering, alike of body and spirit, is so interwoven with human existence that he is the best minister, whether officially or unofficially, to that existence who has some experience of suffering in his own person. There are many sympathetic persons, thank God, in our difficult world, but there is a vast difference between those who are only sympathetic in intention and those who have the sympathy that is born of experience. The former stand outside the trouble they would heal, the latter stand within it. Only those who have themselves at some time and in some way been smitten can inwardly understand the sorrow and the anguish of the innumerable sick and mutilated folk who crowd the infirmaries and the hospitals of the world, or of the lonely sufferers in humble homes who are stricken with intolerable pain or incurable disease. The word that helps and cheers is the word spoken by one whose own soul or body has been scorched by the fires of affliction. He can speak not only of the things which he has heard and seen, but of the things which his own hands have handled and his own heart has lived through.

These grim experiences, when we know them at first hand, not only link us by bonds of affectionate and understanding sympathy with the great brotherhood of pain and sorrow throughout the world, they also help us to see our own lives in their true perspective. A fractured limb or a wearing sickness which incapacitates a man for weeks or months from the work which he loves, enables him to see how relatively unimportant he and his work are in the vast scheme of things within which he may have fondly fancied he was indispensable. He is set aside, but the great work of the world goes merrily on without him. This is an experience as wholesome as it is humbling. Every true man wishes to play his part like a man, but that part may not be quite so important as he fancied it to be. He has things of vital moment to learn which simply cannot be learned when his health is good and his work is prosperous and his sky is fair; and in the providence of God he may get his first glimmer of the meaning of those things when he is lying on his back on a bed of pain or weakness.

His natural impulse may be to resent this seemingly cruel interference with his happy and useful activities. Wherefore this waste? he may ask. If he is of a reflective turn, he may humbly or haughtily demand an explanation of the pain or sorrow which has laid him low and which he now begins to perceive is scattered far more widely across the lives of men than ever he had dreamt before. He may not readily find an answer. But if he looks at the loveliness of the opening rose or listens to the careless rapture of the lark, he will get a new glimpse into the gracious meaning of the world, which should help to silence his doubts and sustain his soul. He is himself a part of that system which has brought forth the birds and the flowers and happy and lovely things innumerable.

The man who daily lives in sight of the Cross will not need to fortify his soul by such an argument. But the perplexed and embittered sufferer to whom Jesus is a stranger, may well, like Job, win not only comfort but strength from the contemplation of a universe which is crowded with so many tokens of the tenderness and the wisdom of the Spirit that controls it all. The familiar lines of Robert

Louis Stevenson come home to him with exalted meaning:

> The world is so full of a number of things,
> I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

Our patience and faith are reinforced, we are enabled to endure cheerfully and to go forward hopefully, when we begin to understand that behind the mighty system within which we with our pains and perplexities stand, there is something, or rather some One, who loves beauty and gladness and who wishes all His creatures well.

The Words from the Cross.

I. 'Father, forgive them' (Lk. xxiii. 34).

By the Reverend James Reid, M.A., Eastbourne.

There is no bigger test of the real quality of a man's spirit than his attitude to those who wrong him, and especially at the moment when the wrong is being done. That is a test which we all accept, however badly we may meet it ourselves. It is a test which Christ Himself laid down. 'If ye love them that love you, what do ye more than others?'—the ordinary man can rise to that level. But this is the real test of your quality—the distinguishing mark of your spiritual worth—to 'love them that hate you, and to pray for them that despitefully use you.' These words of the Sermon on the Mount have been read and studied a million times through the centuries, and time after time people who read them have laid down the book with a sigh of despair, telling themselves and others that the thing cannot be done. Yet the words stand, and challenge us to-day, because He who spoke them passed His own test, and passed it triumphantly. For, as Matthew tells us, when they crucified Him, and had done their devilish work on His poor body, and while He hung writhing in such agony as we cannot even imagine, and looked into faces that were livid with hatred and bitter with scorn—the faces of those He came to love into a new life—His first word was a literal prayer for His enemies, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

There is something very precious about all last words. We listen carefully for some message from lips that will soon speak no more on this earth, because we long, perhaps, for one last word of love. Or it may be we have a feeling that when the shadows are falling on everything, and things begin to stand out in the perspective of eternity, something will be said which will be big with meaning. And many of the most significant things ever said have come from those who, looking their last on this fever of life, 'saw it steadily and saw it whole,' and knew at that moment, with startling clearness, the true from the false. But there is something uniquely precious about the last words of Jesus, and especially about this. For it tells how He felt towards those who were wronging Him, and there are moments when that is a thing we most of all want to be sure of. But it also reveals the fact that the thing most worth doing, in relation to one another, is to forgive. He had no breath to waste at that moment, no mind to give to trivial things, and this is what He did: He prayed and said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Does it not rebuke our petulance, our pride, the stupid irritations that cloud our relationships, the easily offended spirit that springs from self-centredness, to realize that all He found time for, when life was ebbing away, was an act of forgiving love?

Let us think of this prayer, and what it suggests to us.

I.

First of all, think what it suggests to us about Him. There is no picture in which we can more fully catch the glory of Jesus than this. The character of Jesus was often revealed in little things. His life was so unified, so harmonious, that everything He did was a bit of self-revelation. But this prayer holds in it the very essence of His spirit. It was not a supreme effort to which He rose—something unexpected and unique—it was