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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

NEITHER the Old nor the New Testament is anything like as well known as it should be, or as it used to be. But vastly more dense is the popular ignorance of the Inter-Testamental Literature, in spite of the extensive work which has been done upon it by admirable scholars, and of the many excellent attempts by scholars scarcely less admirable, to popularize it.

Now this ignorance, deplorable in itself and fatal to any appreciation of the continuity of history, in which, of course, there can be no 'four centuries of silence,' is a grievous hindrance to a true understanding of the New Testament. For this collection of Christian books, while it has for its main background the extensive literature of the Old Testament, has for a scarcely less subsidiary background the literature that grew up in the period between the two Testaments. Take, for example, the apocalyptic outlook which dominates, or at least pervades, so much of the New Testament. It is hardly too much to say that this remains obscure and unexplained to readers whose familiarity with Jewish religious literature does not go beyond the Old Testament.

It is to dispel this ignorance and in consequence to promote a truer understanding of the New Testament that the Rev. T. HERBERT BINDLEY, D.D., has written his book on *Religious Thought in Palestine in the Time of Christ* (Methuen; 6s. net). To be more precise, the aim of the book, as defined by the writer, is 'to bring together from many sources some of the more prominent features of the social, religious, and literary background of the New Testament—to capture so far as is possible the atmosphere of thought and feeling in which our Lord and His contemporaries lived.' Incidentally much light is cast on stray texts of the New Testament, but the contents of the book are in reality more comprehensive than the title would lead us to expect.

For, besides a discussion of the Wisdom Books (Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon) and the Apocalyptic Books (Enoch, the Sibylline Oracles, and several others), there are chapters on Social and Educational Conditions in Palestine, Messiah, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Samaritans, the Septuagint, Galilee, the Canon, and the Apocrypha; and it was a happy thought to add a little sketch of the once immensely popular story of Aḥiḳar. Everywhere we feel that we are in the hands of a scholar who knows how to steer his way towards essential things. The least initiated reader, for example, is made to feel, by apposite illustrations and quotations, the importance of the Book of Enoch for an understanding of much of the phraseology and thought of the New Testament.

There is a suggestive chapter on 'Our Lord's Use of the Old Testament.' This ground has been so often and so ably traversed that it seems almost

impossible to say anything fresh. Yet Dr. BINDLEY has contrived to put familiar truth in a striking way. Besides, there must be many in the Christian Church to whom the truth which he thus puts is not familiar, and who will find in this discussion a stimulus to a reconsideration of traditional opinions. Such people will fully agree with Dr. BINDLEY when he argues that Christ treated the Old Testament with very great reverence and appreciation: they may rub their eyes when they are further told that He also treated it with very great freedom. But it is even so; and the writer argues his case not only powerfully, but strikingly. He is not afraid to say that where the teaching of the Old Testament was imperfect or insufficient for His disciples, He not only added to it or superseded it, but even directly contradicted it.

This contradiction emerges in the attitude of Jesus to the teaching of the Old Testament on the Sabbath, the law of retaliation, the hatred of enemies, and the belief that suffering or calamity is a proof of sin, and the result of God's punishment for sin. Dr. BINDLEY would, of course, admit that on all these points the Old Testament speaks with two voices; earlier or inadequate teaching on these points is implicitly criticised in later or more adequate utterances within the Old Testament itself, and part of the fascination of Old Testament study lies in the abundance of the material which enables us to watch the progress of its thought from the dim dawn to the almost perfect day—a progress in which earlier or imperfect ideas are superseded or transcended.

But Dr. BINDLEY'S discussion will be of real help to those who have been trained to believe that, as the Old Testament is the Word of God, there can be nothing in it that calls for challenge. Particularly illuminating is his presentation of our Lord's attitude to the priestly account of the Sabbath and its meaning in Gn 1. His words are worth quoting. 'He wished,' says Dr. BINDLEY, 'to correct the Genesis account of Creation which implied that God's creative action had lasted six days and then ceased. So He took the opportunity of healing the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda on a Sabbath in order to teach the Jews that *God did not rest on the seventh day* (italics ours), but was ever active in the maintenance of the universe.' The working of God knows no cessation. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' These words, he says, are a clear contradiction of Gn 2^3: 'God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it: because that in it he rested from all his work which God had created and made.'

What Dr. BINDLEY says of Christ's attitude to the Commandments is also well, if boldly, said. 'It is wholly wrong to say that Christ spiritualized the Commandments or explained them. He did nothing of the kind. He took them exactly as they stood, and said that they were quite insufficient for His disciples. From them He demanded something more than had sufficed for them of old time in the past.'

Perhaps, however, the most interesting chapter in the book is that on 'Travel and Letter-Writing'—a chapter in which the writer's debt to Deissmann, which, he frankly admits, is obvious. The Book of Acts, with its long and repeated missionary journeys, is a revelation of the ease, speed, and safety with which men could travel about the world in the first century of the Christian era. Speaking of Paul's second missionary journey, which took him from Syria and Cilicia westwards as far as Macedonia and Greece and then back to Jerusalem, he remarks: 'Nothing in the narrative suggests that there was anything extraordinary about it: yet it would be no easy journey for one to carry out to-day, even with all the help of railway, steamboat, Cook or Lunn, and other modern aids.' The informal letter and the more formal epistle could readily pass along those great highways of travel.

There are many vivid quotations which help us to feel that the letters of the New Testament are real letters, which though written in the Christian cause and fragrant with the Christ spirit make wide use of the epistolary formulæ of the time. Here are some of the familiar phrases which have their analogies in the New Testament. 'I beseech thee with all my might regard him (the writer's brother)

as well recommended.' 'See that thou hinder him not.' 'I salute my sweetest daughter Macaria and my lady your mother and all the family by name. I pray for your lasting health.'

There is a brief but suggestive summary of the gains and losses involved in the epistolary method of Christian teaching. 'The dogmatic teaching lacks continuity, because it is incidental and often indirect,' also it is often controversial. And in the nature of the case the New Testament does not furnish an explicit formulation of Christian doctrine: some, indeed, of the doctrines most vital to the Christian faith are dealt with only incidentally.

But just therein lies the gain. The doctrines are always related to living issues. They emerge in the letters, sometimes almost incidentally, in answer to problems which were actually being raised or issues which were actually being faced by the churches to which they were written. Thus they furnish us with something vastly better than a compendium of systematic theology; they have all the glow and warmth of truths which were not only being taught by the writers to their converts, but which were the very breath of their life. And it is no small merit of Dr. BINDLEY'S book that it carries its readers into this atmosphere of reality.

Can modern science give us a sure knowledge of God? Is it laying a firm foundation on which religious faith can build more securely than heretofore? A good deal of recent writing has more than suggested that the science of to-day is 'rediscovering God,' and there is a tendency in religious circles to hail some of its latest pronouncements as confirmation of the Christian faith.

In all this there is need of caution. While gratefully recognizing that the physical science of to-day is very different in tone from the materialism of last century, we shall only delude ourselves if we suppose that science is giving or can ever give us a demonstration of things eternal, so that now we should enjoy the certainty of logical proof where before we had only the assurance of faith. These reflections are prompted by the appearance of a new book by Professor J. S. MACKENZIE, Litt.D., entitled *Cosmic Problems* (Macmillan; 6s. net), in which he summarizes with great lucidity the principal findings of the science and philosophy of to-day.

The presupposition on which all scientific investigation and all efforts in philosophic construction are based lies in the general postulate that human life and the Universe within which it is carried on form an orderly and intelligible whole, a cosmos, a structure that admits of being understood. 'The admission that some things are incomprehensible need not be wholly fatal to our attempt, if we can, to some extent, "comprehend their incomprehensibility." Neither science nor philosophy nor any combination of both can be expected to lead us to omniscience. It must suffice if we can gain a point of view from which the main aspects of our lives, and of the system within which they are carried on, can be seen to have an intelligible meaning and to be orderly and systematic so far as our knowledge goes.' Further, as the explanation of this cosmos, it seems most reasonable to postulate a Universal Mind, a Supreme Intelligence, ever creatively at work, building up a system through imperfection to perfection. This view, it should be noted, is a sheer postulate, accepted at the outset as a hypothesis. 'Perhaps it cannot properly be regarded as more than that; but, if we find that it fits all the facts that we know about the Universe, and that there is no other hypothesis that would adequately fit them, it might be regarded as being as fully verified as any hypothesis can be.'

With this hypothesis held tentatively in mind, we proceed to a study of the facts of the real world. We seem to be led to the conception of a creative impulse in the Universal Mind. 'The formation of the Universe may best be conceived on the analogy of the work of a creative artist. Probably the best analogy would be that of a great poet such as Shakespeare, or the unknown author of

the Homeric epics.' The analogy, however, is very imperfect. The poet or artist is concerned with the transformation of an already existent material by reproducing it in a form in which its significance is more apparent. The creativeness of the Universal Mind must be understood in a very different way. It is original and truly creative, 'and the result is that comprehensive mode of existence which is now characterized as the spatio-temporal system.' If the question be asked, What is the value of the creative process? Why should it be necessary or desirable for the Absolute to find expression in an imperfect creative process? the answer seems clear enough. 'The reality that is contained in the Absolute appears to be purely ideal. To be real in that sense is one thing: to be realized in an embodiment is quite another. The concept of Benevolence, for instance, is real and has a certain value; but a benevolent person, performing beneficent actions, like the good Samaritan, seems to have a much higher value.'

Coming to a survey of the realm of created things, we find a notable change of attitude in recent years. The material world, as conceived by the science of the latter half of the nineteenth century, seemed hardly capable of philosophical interpretation. 'A world built up of impenetrable atoms and held together by unintelligible attractive forces could hardly be regarded as the expression of a creative Power aiming at the realization of the Good.' The view that is now generally accepted is that the Universe is to be conceived as 'a spatio-temporal system, infinite perhaps in the Hegelian sense of internal coherence and completeness, but limited in the more ordinary acceptation of the term.' The idea of mass has disappeared, being now conceived as a sort of static energy. Matter, as Hegel remarked long ago, has become 'very thin.' 'Space, Time, and Energy seem to be the ultimate conceptions in the modern interpretation of the Universe. Mr. Alexander prefers to speak of *Space, Time, and Deity*; but, if our interpretation of Energy is right, there is no fundamental difference between these two expressions.' This Divine energy seems to act incessantly as a creative urge—the *élan vital* of Bergson. The general idea of evolution is in no way opposed to the idea of a Universal Mind. Rather the latter idea seems to call for some such explanation of the upward tendency in Nature. The science of to-day inclines to conceive of that upward tendency as rather of the nature of 'a vital urge in a unified system, as against mechanical struggle among the parts.'

In a world so conceived the age-long problems of God, human freedom, and immortality have to be thought out afresh. The most recent findings in physical science seem to point to a certain fundamental element of contingency in Nature, and Sir Arthur Eddington has said that physics has definitely withdrawn its support of determinism. Philosophic minds are inclined to be suspicious of this indeterminacy, and, while admitting that there may be a certain contingency even in the construction of the Universe, they are disposed to maintain that 'the temporal process would be seen by an omniscient Being as determined throughout.' In regard to the question of personal immortality certain favourable presumptions may be noted. 'If we are right in the general conception of the Universe that we have been led to maintain throughout, human beings have to be regarded as the particulars—or some of the particulars—of which the creative mind is the Universal; and it would seem that its particulars must somehow share in its eternity.' It has been suggested that the relation between mind and body is such that at death the spirit may assume a subtle body through which it may continue to function. Psychic research also appears to some to give a certain amount of support to the general doctrine of survival, on evidence which to some minds is more convincing than arguments of a more purely speculative kind. Professor MACKENZIE, however, is inclined to rely chiefly on his fundamental postulate of a Universal Mind having creative power. 'If this postulate can be taken as legitimate, it can hardly be supposed that the Universal Mind can be indifferent to the existence of the particular minds through which it finds expression.'

From all this it would appear that in regard to the deepest problems modern science and philosophy

leave us just where Plato left us. There is the same subtlety of argumentation with the same note of uncertainty. Had we nothing more to rest upon we should be bound to say, as Simmias did after listening to the exalted reasonings of Socrates, 'If a man can neither find the truth by the exercise of his own faculties, nor learn it through the help of another, then, having chosen the best and most irrefragable of human words, he ought to embark thereon, like a mariner on a raft, and make in peril the voyage of life, unless he could go more securely and with less danger on some surer vessel, some divine word.' That Divine Word, giving assurance to the human soul, science and philosophy have never spoken and can never speak. But it has been spoken in Christ. 'The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.' And through Him we have the assurance that the Universal Mind is the Universal Father and the God of love.

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In recent years Gifford Lecturers have tended to be so technically philosophical or so technically scientific that they have ceased to awaken the former interest in their writings shown by preachers and theologians. But preachers and theologians have been looking forward to the publication of the Gifford Lectures delivered at St. Andrews in 1926–27 and 1927–28. Professor A. E. TAYLOR is well known to them, not merely as an able and learned philosopher, but also as a stout apologist for the theistic and Christian view of the world; and they trusted, nor in vain, that he would seize the occasion of his Gifford lectureship to deal with the general issues of natural theology. The lectures have now appeared — *The Faith of a Moralist*, 2 vols.; volume i. dealing with 'The Theological Implications of Morality,' volume ii. with 'Natural Theology and the Positive Religions' (Macmillan; 15s. net each).

Professor TAYLOR is convinced that *the* issue for the whole future of European civilization is that of the soundness of the Christian ideal of human character and the Christian rule of life. A break with the moral tradition of Christendom will be fatal to the Christian faith as a religion, and indeed to the cause of religion itself. Accordingly, he approaches natural theology from the side of ethics, and discusses in his lectures the relations between ethics and divinity and the bearing upon natural theology of specifically moral experiences. It confirms him in the selection of this way of approach that here he ought to be least out of his depth, or, as he would even more modestly put it, will be obedient at any rate to the good rule, *ne sutor ultra crepidam.*

He does not seek for one moment to conceal from his readers that he is moulded by education in a definite moral and religious tradition. At the same time he is insistent that no man can really cultivate natural religion pure and simple, that is, apart from ideas of positive religion. He rightly maintains that a philosophy of religion, to be of any value, must not come from the detached theorist, but must be the fruit of patient and candid self-criticism on the part of men living the life they contemplate, but ready to learn alike from the other insiders and from the outsider.

The first question Professor TAYLOR examines is, Does morality supply its own *raison d'être*, or does it receive completion in the activities commonly called religious? It is an old question, and moralists are divided on the answer. But in these volumes the second alternative is emphatically affirmed. The moral life is represented as one of endeavour towards an eternal good. It is a real adventure beginning in 'nature' and ending in 'supernature.' To be truly itself it must have as its last motive love to God, and so become transfigured into the life of religious faith and devotion.

'For the moralist, belief in the true and living God cannot be relegated to the position of an "extra," which we may perhaps be allowed on sufferance to add to our respect for duty or regard for the good of our fellow-men, if physicist, biologist, and anthropologist will be kind enough to raise no objection. Belief in the absolute reality of God,

and love for the God in whom we believe, are at the heart of living morality. The good of our fellow-men is unworthily thought of when we do not conceive that good as a life of knowledge of God and transformation by the knowledge into the likeness of God. And the love which arises from our belief is the one motive adequate to secure the full and whole-hearted discharge of the duties laid on us by our ideal.'

The second question is, If our true good is an eternal thing, is moral effort a movement of endeavour on our part, or must we think of it as a movement of response, sustained from the side of the eternal? Again, it is the second alternative which is affirmed. As the answer to the first question leads us to the idea of God, so the answer to the second question leads us to the idea of the grace of God. Personality cannot be remade (and the presence of moral evil indicates the necessity of remaking the natural self) without genuine personal effort, but the initiative cannot come simply from within. All genuine morality presupposes the supernatural not only as its environment but also as its nutriment. Obviously Professor TAYLOR would take his stand in the Augustinian rather than the Pelagian succession.

But does the moral life demand the 'other world' as an environment? Is 'this world' a home or a place of pilgrimage? There is an element of the 'other-worldly' present throughout in the common everyday life of the simple good neighbour and honest citizen, and it is a duty for all to practise otherworldliness, and not to live as though this were the only world. Otherworldliness of the right kind is the vital breath of moral life. This life is truly a pilgrimage from the temporal to the eternal. And the reality of the pilgrimage is itself evidence of the reality of the goal which lies beyond. The whole chapter on the Destiny of the Individual repays perusal.

Having tried to show in his first volume that the moral life of man bears testimony to three great supernatural or otherworld realities—God, grace, eternal life; compare Kant's God, freedom, and immortality—Professor TAYLOR proceeds to reiterate the truth that there has never been an actual religion, with real power over men's hearts, which has had no content beyond that of such a natural or philosophical theology as he has been describing. 'Every great religion, which has done much for the spiritual regeneration of mankind, has done the work just in proportion as it has made God, grace, eternal life, realities to its followers, but none has ever made them real except through and in dependence on the contingent insistence on historical happenings, specific revelations, authoritative traditions, venerated institutions.'

The second volume examines the main difficulties presented to a philosophical mind by the historical religions; and it has much to say, both critical of and sympathetic with the Christian tradition, on the subjects of revelation, the supernatural, the miraculous, authority, institutionalism, and sacramentalism. It is Professor TAYLOR'S opinion that the actual tension between natural and revealed religion is principally due to a rooted prejudice of the metaphysical mind against ascribing reality and significance to the historical. But the growth of the sense of the historical is a feature of our age, as compared with the age of Hellenic philosophy; and we seem to be on the verge of a new and fruitful conception of the relation between the eternal and the temporal. Thus the aforesaid prejudice seems unlikely to maintain itself.

From the foregoing some impression should be gained of the range and scope of these ample volumes. The student of theology cannot fail to be interested in Professor TAYLOR'S views on such subjects as creation, providence, and miracle, sin and grace, the Trinity and Incarnation, Church and Sacraments. Nor can he fail to admire the combination which the work displays of fine scholarship (especially Platonic), literary culture, philosophical acumen and massive historical erudition, with deep and sincere Christian conviction.