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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE suggestiveness of the Bible is inexhaustible. The longer and the deeper we look into any verse of it the more we shall see; but though we may see, or think we see, the bottom, we never reach it. Every fresh and sincere approach to its simplest and most familiar words discloses new vistas and depths of meaning. In the years that have elapsed since the Great War despondent hearts have been repeatedly reminded by preachers and writers of the prophetic promise of a day when men would 'beat their swords into ploughshares'; and, suffering as we all are from the consequences of that colossal strife which has seemed to lead to nothing but chaos, we have sustained not only our hope but our faith upon that ancient Hebrew dream.

But there is more in those words than the happy assurance that one day nations will learn war no more. They also suggest that the transformation of the world will be accomplished, not by the destruction, but by the transformation, of its potentially dangerous implements and instruments. The prophet does not say, as a man of lesser genius would have said, that in the days which he contemplates men will destroy their weapons or throw them away; he says that they will turn those things to a nobler use. The metal of which they were forged may still be used in the better world. Nothing need be lost; all things may be transformed.

The stuff of which we are made and the material with which we deal are neutral: what we make of them will depend upon the kind of men we are. If we are intent on war, we shall make a sword: if we are intent on peace, we shall make a ploughshare; and if, having first made a sword with a view to war, we then come to see the waste and the folly of war and learn the more excellent way of arbitration, we shall beat our swords into ploughshares. But we shall only effect this transformation if we are ourselves transformed. Only transformed men can transform the world. The generous and brotherly heart will see possibilities for good in agencies and instruments of evil. The task of life is just to turn the sword into a ploughshare and the spear into a pruning-hook.

There are forces about us and within us that threaten to destroy us; but a blessing is in them, and it is for us to capture it. Take, for example, the passions and the appetites which too often plunge life into confusion, and sometimes into ruin. The ascetic would have us exterminate them. But the thing cannot be done; in some form, wilder or more subdued, we shall carry them with us to our graves. They cannot be destroyed, for by them, in a measure, the world continues. But we shall have to take very good care that we do not allow them to destroy us. As a great preacher once said of those things, 'Crush them, and the world will die: let them become masters, and the world had better die.'

Or take the faculty of speech. 'Therewith,'

says James, 'bless we the Lord and Father, and therewith curse we men who are made after the likeness of God; out of the same mouth cometh forth blessing and cursing.' In a fit of evil temper it is easy to utter words that grieve the hearts of those we love. It is easy for an able man to coin a stinging epigram which will leave a wound upon the soul of his victim that will not be healed after many days. But in a world where there is so much nobler work to do, is it worth while? The moral ability a man displays in suppressing the clever word of satire or malice that is on the tip of his tongue is of more worth to the world than the intellectual ability displayed in devising it. And better still than silence are words that help and cheer. The power of speech is a perilous privilege, of which it is better to make a ploughshare than a sword

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The same is true of education. This is by no means necessarily a good thing in itself: it is in reality a neutral instrument which may be employed by the man who possesses it either for the blessing or the bane of society. The Great War taught us that the discoveries of science could be prostituted to inhuman and devilish ends. Well may we fear the progress of chemistry, if it is to end by tormenting the world with high explosives and poison gas. Knowledge alone will never turn a child into a good man or a benefactor of society; it may only make of him a more competent scoundrel. He must have not only his mind but his affections cultivated, and his heart set upon whatsoever things are honourable and of good report; so that when the time comes for him to step into his share of the world's work, he will use every power that he has won in the years of preparation, for the good of the society in which his lot is cast.

The Book of the Revelation has called forth various methods of interpretation. (1) For long the theory held its ground, and indeed it is only within the last generation or two that it has become discredited in the eyes of serious scholars, that the Apocalypse is a forecast of the main events of history. The business of the interpreter was, on this theory, to state and justify his historical identifications. For example, the figure of Anti-Christ was identified by many Protestant exegetes with the Pope of Rome. (2) A more creditable form of the historical theory is often now advocated. It has the merit of being truer to the Apocalypse's own description of itself as an account of current events and of events 'shortly to come to pass.' It restricts the scope of the historical exposition to the time at which the Apocalypse was written and the time which immediately succeeded. For example, instead of the Papal, the Roman power was regarded as the subject of prophecy.

The defect of both these methods was their literalism. They substituted literal or historical description for mystical symbolism. The Apocalypse is far from being merely a review, in highly-coloured terms, of historical events, whether of the future or of the present. The true meaning of the book is still to be found.

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(3) In antithesis to the historical theory we may set the spiritual view of the Apocalypse. In this view the book hardly refers to current events at all, much less to future events. Its symbols stand for abstract ideas or general principles which may be seen at work in any age. If there is any reference to current history it is only because figures in current history (like Nero) aptly illustrate the abstract idea or general principle in question. F. D. Maurice was the chief exponent of this method of interpretation.

The defect of the spiritual view has been stated as follows: 'It overlooks the fact that the *Revelation* was decidedly a message to its own age, that its tone is too fierce to be the product of a philosophical interest in the general laws of history, and that a Hebrew never thought of the spiritual except as an actual living force in present history.' And the writer goes on to say that the best commentaries of recent years have been those in which the 'Spiritual' and the 'Present-Historical' (as distinguished from the 'Future-Historical') methods have been combined.

The writer whom we have quoted is the Rev. PHILIP CARRINGTON, M.A., sometime Scholar of Selwyn College, Cambridge, and at present Dean of Divinity, University of Bishops' College, Lennoxville, Quebec; and his words appear in the spirited Preface to his recent volume on *The Meaning of the Revelation* (S.P.C.K.; 12s. 6d. net). Mr. CARRINGTON gives us in this volume an able and attractive exposition of the thought of the Apocalypse. He does not 'worry much' over the question of authorship; it is enough for his purpose to say that 'some one' wrote the Apocalypse about the year A.D. 95 and intended it to mean 'something.' What that 'something' is he seeks here to elucidate.

It seems to Mr. CARRINGTON that the progress of interpretation has been held up by two other theories of the Apocalypse. (4) One is the 'Mythical' view, according to which the Apocalypse is regarded as a mass of contradictory fragments from heathen mythology, Babylonian, or Persian, or Greek, or mixed. This theory contains a certain amount of truth. The book is undoubtedly composed from various sources, and some of the visions suggest a provenance neither Jewish nor Christian; but the fact remains that the Apocalypse is a literary unity, 'stamped throughout by the mark of a great genius.' The literary unity of the book is, by the way, a point on which Dr. Charles in the 'International Critical Commentary' is very insistent.

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(5) The 'Eschatological' view is to be reckoned with more seriously, especially as it does not stand or fall by the theory of composite authorship. Its real basis is the comparative study of apocalypse. It makes a certain allowance for historical and spiritual interpretations, but, wherever possible, it takes the symbols of St. John as 'naked material fact.' Thus it places St. John on the same plane as his predecessors and contemporaries among the Jewish apocalyptists. Among interpreters of this type, Mr. CARRINGTON would place Dr. Charles. But while appreciative of the advance Dr. Charles's great Commentary has made on previous eschatological interpretations, he refuses to bring down the meaning of St. John to the apocalyptist level of 'literalism, materialism, pessimism, and puerility.' It is no accident, he is persuaded, that the Apocalypse is capable of a high spiritual meaning throughout.

'What St. John has borrowed from the apocalypses of his time is their literary form; but he has used that literary form to convey his own meaning. It is rather as if Mr. John Masefield, let us say, had been asked to prepare a film version of the Legend of King Arthur; it would be necessary for him to master the technique and conventions of the film, and to recast the legend so as to fit into it; but we may feel quite certain that he would not use the accepted ideals and sentiments of the average film play. His production might be a re-arrangement of Mallory (*sic*); it might owe much to Tennyson; but it would be marked throughout by his own power and beauty of thought and style. In a somewhat similar way the *Revelation* is a rearrangement of the visions of Ezekiel and other ancient Hebrew writers; it owes its main message to the preaching of our Lord; and it is everywhere marked by the distinctive and lofty genius of its author.'

It will be gathered that the principles which have guided Mr. CARRINGTON in the interpretation of the book are the principles of accepted, moderate criticism, as influenced by the researches of the eschatological school. He would avoid at once the age-long errors of conservative study and the extreme positions of the latest critical modes. A distinctive feature of his exposition is his revival of the view advocated by Dr. Milligan (to whom Dr. Charles does not even refer) that the fall of 'Babylon,' which is the central event of the Apocalypse, is to be understood as the fall of Jerusalem.

Mr. CARRINGTON is deeply impressed both with the poetry and the spirituality of the visions of St. John. He beholds in the seer of Patmos not only an incomparable poet and artist, but also a mighty master-builder of ideas. Many will think that his enthusiasm for the book runs away with him at times: 'It is not only a question of weaving words, like Shelley; the imaginative structures of the *Revelation* are built up of great spiritual ideas. Behind the rush and melody of the words, behind

the glorious display of images and symbols which are a triumph of art merely in themselves, behind all this literary and artistic achievement lies an architecture of ideas which leaves Shelley or Milton or Dante far behind.'

It is the task of each successive Christian generation to restate in its own language the truths of revelation and to relate them to current thought. For unless these truths are to lie dormant and powerless they must be shown to be an integral and vital part of reality. This task becomes specially urgent in such a time as ours, when the bounds of knowledge have been so vastly enlarged, and revolutionary changes have occurred in many branches of thought. Christian truth must be restated, not necessarily altered, to meet the new situation. The Church must learn to live and preach effectively in the wider world, and it looks as if she will have to face a long period of critical and constructive work such as was done by the Greek thinkers of the early Christian centuries.

In this field Dr. J. E. TURNER has already made some contributions of note, and in his latest book, *The Revelation of Deity* (Allen & Unwin; 8s. 6d. net), he gives us a fine piece of sustained thinking, held together with close-knit logic and expressed in the clearest English. He discusses the various ways in which the Divine Nature can manifest itself so as to be comprehended by the human mind, and shows that these form an ascending series marked by fuller degrees of adequacy, culminating in the Incarnation.

Proceeding upon the basal principles that the Universe is an ordered Whole, and that mind is fundamentally different from matter—contentions which have been upheld by many philosophic thinkers of the first rank—he finds in personality the key to the universe, our highest interpretative concept. His argument in general is by way of analogy, passing upward from what is known of human personality in its noblest forms to what may be inferred of the Divine personality.

Looking at the mechanism of Nature it is at least possible, not to say reasonable, to regard it as mind-ordered. 'Materialism and naturalism have overlooked this alternative; they have restricted themselves to the principle that the only logical implication of the perfect mechanism of the natural world is the total *absence* of any directive mind; such a conclusion is radically fallacious because it omits an *equally logical* alternative inference.' Now we find that personality as it develops dominates its environment in an increasing degree. It makes use of as large and efficient a mass of mechanism as possible; it renders this instrumental mechanism as automatic as possible; and it continually devises new mechanisms whenever those already existing are found to be inadequate. The more complete this mastery becomes the more completely does the will or self transcend the mechanisms it has created, and the more completely automatic and apparently independent of control do these become. Accordingly 'the first and outstanding conclusion must be that, as personality continues to develop, it thereby incessantly becomes, not simply more dynamic and dominant, but also more *creative*.'

'We may find then, in the first place, a helpful parallel between the relation of man to his physical environment on the one hand, and the relation of Deity to the entire physical universe on the other.' Yet, while Nature may be regarded as God's handiwork, it can give only a most imperfect revelation of Him. 'Whenever the author of an obviously fine work is quite unknown, it readily becomes clear that the work, which must now be considered purely in itself, can yield but slight indications of the actual character of its creator. How little is really known, for example, about Homer and Sappho, or of the writers of some of the finest religious literature. Even Shakespeare remains a largely unknown quantity to us, and this in spite of that distinctive mark which every great personality leaves on all its products, while in the almost impersonal sphere of manufactures and inventions we can find almost nothing to indicate their originators except by turning to historical and other extraneous sources.' It need not there-

fore surprise us if the perfect automatism of the material world, endowed with its self-sufficient capacity for maintaining its own activities, inevitably conceals its Creator from direct observation. Our view of the material world is like that of a child 'entering a vast power-house and investigating its intricate and automatic machinery.' He finds no perceptible control, nothing, in fact, but a 'world' of self-acting contrivances.

If the objection be made that this form of reasoning is anthropomorphism, it should be noted that 'the primary and simpler forms of personality are almost universally separated from, and even opposed to, its later and far higher forms, simply because their characteristic modes of activity appear to be so fundamentally different from each other. Whenever the savage attributes to 'magic' those actions of civilized man which he cannot understand, he really means that he feels himself confronted by a type of mind altogether different from his own. . . . He would never dream, therefore, of attempting to explain the white man's "medicine" and wireless in any terms of his own ordinary experience.' So when the philosopher contends that to attribute even the highest conceivable mode of personality to Deity is an illegitimate anthropomorphism he is reproducing on a higher plane the superficial attitude of the savage. '"I cannot understand," such a philosopher virtually says, "how certain extremely perplexing phenomena are brought about. They plainly differ *in toto* from all that I myself can do, and therefore," he concludes—exactly as does the savage—"their ground and origin must be either wholly impersonal or wholly super-personal—either an impersonal Nature or an absolutely transcendent Deity."'

Obviously there are different degrees in the revelation of personality. Three types of such revelation may be distinguished—the mechanical, the æsthetic, and the ethical (taking the ethical in the widest sense). What has been said of the inadequacy of the mechanical to reveal personality applies also to the æsthetic, 'as, for example, in the case of a genius who fully reveals himself only to some beloved child or friend but never, through his works alone, to the world at large.' Mankind craves for some opportunity, however inadequate, of full and direct self-manifestation. Not to seek this is rightly to be judged inhuman. This is true of every self, 'but it is superlatively true of the highest possible types of personality. It is always the noblest who most deeply love their world and their fellows, and, in so loving, most fully and directly reveal themselves. . . . The same conclusion must therefore be true with regard to the Supreme Self or Deity. Here, likewise, and inseparable from His indirect and partial self-revelations in the structure and beauty of the world, there must exist a more complete and immediate revelation which is most adequately described as ethical.'

Now the universe has an indelibly ethical character. 'Morality,' as Butler said, 'is the nature of things.' There is an absolute standard of goodness which justifies the imperativeness of Duty. 'If it is argued that no such standard exists, then this negative conclusion plainly applies equally to æsthetics and to knowledge; so that both the canons of art and the laws of thought rest on exactly the same basis as every code of morals.' But, in contact with this, man finds himself in a hopeless position, bound to an absolute standard, but unable to attain, powerless to blot out what the moving finger has written, yet impelled by his noblest self to atone for it if that be possible. And this is most true of the finest types of personality. If Reality is essentially impersonal then all this human striving is futile and tragic, 'but if the nature of Deity is personal the entire situation is profoundly changed.' We must conceive of God as 'infinitely more intent on maintaining the divine purpose than any genius or reformer can ever be on sustaining the ideals which so imperatively command his allegiance.' We must also conceive as inherent in Him a redeeming purpose. 'For the ultimate basis of the heroic self-sacrifice of man on behalf of others, in his determination to atone for their wrong-doing, can be found only in a passionate and consuming love—a love equally of the hero's own ideals and of his fellows, no

matter how alien or hostile they may be. It is a love that is wholly selfless. . . . Similarly, except that perfection takes the place of imperfection, with Deity, the divine selflessness manifests itself objectively throughout the entire Universe as the expression not only of knowledge and power, but still more fundamentally of love.'

It is the conclusion of Dr. TURNER's argument that this necessity of Divine love finds its outlet and supreme expression in Jesus Christ, through whose life and personality 'Deity became incarnate, and this in no merely passive and static way, as when natural beauty is viewed as one form of divine revelation, but on the contrary as essentially active and dynamic—as doing for man, what man himself incessantly but vainly strives to do'; vindicating the Divine ideal while at the same time making adequate compensation for man's violation of it, and by the power of His love bringing into existence beings who love God and grow worthy of His love.

Moral Problems of To-day.

XI.

Class-Distinctions in the Light of the Gospel.

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ARE class-distinctions as we know them compatible with Christian principles? And if not, how may we bring our Christianity to bear upon them for their alteration or removal? Truly, a large and complicated problem. Yet it may be possible briefly to indicate some directions along which thought may explore the subject.

To begin with, can we define or at least roughly indicate what we mean by class-distinctions? It may help to say what they are not. To advocate the removal or the reduction of class-distinctions does not imply ignoring or minimizing the natural differences and inequalities between individuals. On the contrary, it may be argued that the present classes tend to produce unnatural uniformities and to prevent the free exercise and development of talent in those who find their social environment uncongenial.

Nor, again, would the removal of class-distinctions involve the equalization of incomes. Mr. R. H. Tawney, in *Equality* (the Halley Stewart Lectures for 1929—a deep and sympathetic study of the subject), puts this well: 'Some measure, at least, of inequality of circumstance is not to be avoided, since functions differ, and differing functions require different scales of provision to elicit and maintain them' (p. 153). There would doubtless not be the extremes of fortune such as we know, but 'the phenomenon which provokes exasperation is not power and inequality, but capricious inequality and irresponsible power' (*ibid.*, p. 156).

Yet again, classes are not equivalent to groups or associations. It is natural and right that people of like interests and tastes and occupations should associate together and form clubs and guilds. It is also to be expected that even in a condition of complete social equality the very able and distinguished would seek each other out for mutual stimulus and inspiration.

What then constitutes class-distinctions? It is, substantially, the maintenance of groups composed of certain individuals and their descendants without regard to their changing quality, with the assumption of the superiority of the members of one group to the members of another. In other words, it is the artificial distinction and segregation of man from man and exaltation of man over man that give the peculiar quality to social classes. This artificiality is perhaps most striking in respect of the continuance of the successive generations of a family in the same class. Unintelligent children of members of a higher class receive the education customary in that class, so as to enable them to retain their membership in it, and afterwards transmit their membership to their children; whereas only exceptionally clever and able children