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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

It is not so very long ago since individual salvation was preached as the be-all and the end-all of religion. The question of transcendent importance was, 'What must *I* do to be saved?' Since then the accent has shifted. The emphasis upon individual salvation has tended to be replaced by an emphasis upon social salvation; and the question that is now being asked, with an anxiety and almost a despair not far removed from that which inspired the older question, is this, 'What must society do to be saved?'

The very titles of recent books are significant of this change of accent. We have Peabody's *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, Louis Wallis's *Sociological Study of the Bible*, Ambrose Shepherd's *The Gospel and Social Questions*, C. R. Brown's *The Social Message of the Modern Pulpit*, C. R. Smith's *The Bible Doctrine of Society*, Walter Rauschenbusch's *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, the series of essays on *The Social Teaching of the Bible*, edited by S. E. Keeble, and a score of others that might be named.

Signs are not wanting, however, that the accent is shifting again—shifting back to the individual. Or if this is not quite true—for never again will decent men, to say nothing of Christian men, be able to ignore the importance of social salvation—it is at least true to say that an attempt is being made to preserve the significance of both accents. It is now coming to be keenly felt, clearly seen, and it will soon—it is hoped—be very explicitly said to those whom it most concerns, that the quality of a society depends absolutely upon the quality of the men and women who compose it. Society can never be nobler than its noblest members: and if we want a nobler society, then we—all of us—must aspire to be nobler. Social salvation is in the last analysis dependent upon individual salvation; and so it comes back to this, that, after all, the fundamental question is, 'What must *I* do to be saved?' If *I* am saved, that will be at least a tiny contribution to the salvation of society.

Those who urge the social nature of salvation are accustomed to appeal to the Hebrew prophets and to count them among the pioneers of social reform. But any one who would describe the prophets as social reformers would be betraying but a very shallow appreciation of their mission, as they themselves conceived it. Certainly their message, had it been laid to heart, would have had, as one of its issues, what we now call social reform; but it would be no more accurate to describe them as reformers than it would be so to describe Jesus. They were aiming at a deeper thing than that.

To them the real solution of the social problem was the religious solution: it was the men and not the situation that they sought to reform. The reformed men could be trusted to reform the

situation; and men were re-formed in God. In that sense, if you like, they were reformers. 'If any man,' said Paul, 'is in Christ, he is a new creature'; and a prophet might have said, 'If any man is in God, he is a new creature.' Or, if he might hardly have said quite that—for 'to be in God' is not an Old Testament phrase—he could at least have said, 'If any man knows God, he is a new creature.'

For the prophets lay much stress on knowing God—which shows incidentally how far they are removed from the conventional reformer. Indeed, Hosea says, 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge,' and the ignorance which was dragging them to ruin was ignorance of God. 'There is no loyalty,' he complains, 'nor kindness, nor knowledge of God in the land.' By this he does not only mean that knowledge of God is one of three things lacking in the society of those days, he means that this is the lack which explains the other two. In more modern language, social morality was at a low ebb because personal religion was at a low ebb.

This thought recurs in Jeremiah. After paying an affectionate tribute to the memory of King Josiah as one of those who 'judge the cause of the poor and needy,' he goes on to say, 'Was not this to know me, saith the Lord?' When we remember how for ages the knowledge of God has been associated with mystical experience, the ethical turn that Jeremiah gives to the phrase is nothing less than wonderful. The Old Testament knows practically nothing of mysticism, as that term is commonly understood; to it anything like the absorption of the human personality in the Divine is inconceivable. In virtue of that overwhelmingly ethical bent which is so characteristic of the Hebrew genius, it links up the knowledge of God with the practice of social duty.

We have the singular good fortune to possess a definition of the prophetic function from the lips of a prophet himself. Micah declares that the task for which he is divinely equipped is 'to declare unto Jacob his transgression and unto Israel his sin.' Nothing is here said of social reform any more than of prediction. The prophet's business is, in modern language, to stir the popular conscience; and he does this, not by proclaiming a social or political programme, but by setting conduct in the light of the divine demand.

The first great contribution of the prophets to the solution of the social problem was their unwearying insistence on the paramount importance of personal character. Environment undoubtedly affects character; it counts, and counts immensely; but it is not the fundamental thing. The prophets traced the problem down to its roots in the human heart. It is the heart, as Jeremiah said, that is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; and it is in the heart that any change that is to be of enduring worth must be wrought.

Closely associated with this is their other great contribution, which consists in their recognition of the value of personality. If God is truly Father, then, in virtue of this relationship, the potential worth of every human being is incalculable. Certainly the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God is not very explicitly taught in the Old Testament, but often enough it is implied or suggested—implied, for example, by Isaiah, when he represents God as saying of Israel, 'I have nourished and brought up children,' rebellious children indeed, yet children; and suggested in the beautiful and familiar lines, 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.' Again, when Malachi says, 'Have we not all one father,' he is thinking doubtless of the Jews, but the germ of the larger truth is there.

Every human heart, according to Jeremiah, is corrupt; but in the golden age, the law of God will be written upon every heart, 'and they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest.' Every man has thus a direct and indefeasible value in the sight of God. That will not indeed secure the instantaneous solution of any specific problem, but it furnishes the right attitude to all problems, and rules out as unworthy and impossible every solution in which men are regarded as tools and the helpless exist to be exploited.

Was not this, too, the attitude of Jesus? His aim was not to transform the situation, but to win the man—to win him for God and for Himself. A society composed of such men would still have its problems, but friendly solutions would always be sought and found, for it would be a harmonious society, a society of men who were brothers, not in name only but in deed and in truth. In all its members would be that life which Jesus came to communicate: 'I came,' He said, 'that they might have life, and that they might have it in abundance.' They would care more for that life than for anything else in the world: but in caring for it supremely, they would find that 'all other things would be added unto them.'

In *The Martyrs: A Study in Social Control* (Cambridge University Press; 13s. 6d. net), Mr. Donald W. RIDDLE handles a well-worn subject in a novel and distinctive fashion. He approaches the study of the early Christian martyrs from the psychological rather than the historical or theological side. Regarding religion psychologically as one of the forces of social control, he discovers in the experiences of persecution and martyrdom a clear and impressive illustration of this aspect of religion. The persecutions of the Christians (only the persecutions under Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian are properly called such) are to be viewed as group conflicts, and the deeds of the persecuted as the results of attitudes socially produced.

The book is interestingly written, and shows a wide knowledge of the relevant patristic literature. If the author is often guilty of needless repetition, it may be set down to his strong desire to press home his points. We suspect, however, that he sometimes fancies he has made a point when he has merely translated a recognized psychological position or motive into the technical language of modern sociological psychology. Less technicality in the use of language would have been to the book's advantage.

While this study of the martyrs is projected as a full and detailed application of 'social-historical method' to one set of data, it is based upon the conviction that an analysis of behaviour under martyrdom in the early Church, for which the sources are adequate, should throw light upon the New Testament period of Church History, for which the sources are comparatively meagre. It is because of his attempt, towards the close of the volume, to justify this conviction that Mr. RIDDLE's study is cited in these columns.

But before referring to this we should like to give our readers an impression of the book as a whole. It emphasizes the point that the social control over candidates for martyrdom was effected by the Christian groups or societies. The basic element in the control was the force of the value of the group-unity. It was for the maintenance of the group-unity that rewards were promised, and for the failure to maintain it that punishment was threatened. And the essential factor in the control was the influence, variously applied, of the group. The immediate influence of the group upon its single adherents was matched by the skilful and effective influence mediated through the several conventional sorts of writing, in particular the martyrologies.

There was, of course, a basis of control which made success possible. Here a contrast appears between Judaism and Christianity. The difference was in the unit to which control was directed. The Christians maintained the integrity of their group by directing control to the individual, while Judaism consistently effected control by appealing to the group as such. The reason was that Judaism possessed a racial-national basis, as Christianity did not. The Jews were a people, as the Christians were not. It is significant that, whereas the Jews made use of the Apocalypse to encourage the persecuted, the characteristic type of Christian writing in persecution was the martyrology. In the one case salvation was for the race, in the other for the individual.

Which leads us to one of the main considerations adduced by Mr. RIDDLE in support of his con-

viction that the 'social-historical method' as applied to the phenomena of martyrdom throws light upon the interpretation of the New Testament. He invites us to see in the Passion story of Mark the functioning of a primitive martyrology. There, as in the fully developed martyrologies, the example of Jesus exhibited in graphic detail constitutes one of the strongest of all urges to undergo the experience of martyrdom. But there also the apocalyptic method of dealing with the situations of persecution is to be found. Which suggests that the martyrological character of the Passion story in Mark is indeed primitive, as representing a stage before the martyrology and the Apocalypse were differentiated in the method of control. Fully developed martyrologies are non-apocalyptic.

But the coercive activity of certain Roman emperors influenced more than the form of the Gospels: it affected the content as well. It was the martyr interest in the Gospels which led to the inclusion in Mark of the telling example furnished by Peter's denial; as also to the celebration of such heroes as James, early known as a martyr; Peter, even more famous as bishop and martyr; and John, who achieved in certain circles the martyr's dignity. And in Matthew and Luke also the martyr interest is to be found, both in sections where Mark has been used as a source and in sections which are independent of Mark. Nor is the martyr interest absent from the latest of the Gospels. Indeed, the Fourth Gospel is the most thoroughgoing of the four in picturing Jesus as the deliberate martyr, who seeks by His death to draw the world to Himself; and it carries also the martyr interest in its reference to the death of Peter.

Instances of teaching directed to the theme of martyrdom (which are in part didactic sayings, in part apocalyptic portents, and in part editorial and narrative in character) are detailed in Mr. RIDDLE'S pages. We go on to ask with him, How are these reflections in the Gospels of the martyr interest to be understood? Applying to them the 'social-historical method,' we must recognize, he says, that some of the Gospel materials belong not to the primary but to the secondary situations. For example, the sayings about persecution, considered as Jesus' words, have an 'academic ring,' being neither essentially relevant to His own experience nor immediately applicable to the experience of His followers. But when the persecution logia are regarded in the light of the known experiences of the early Christians, they are relevant and eminently practical; and it is altogether proper to regard them in that light. In fact, the relation of Christians to the State produced the entire literature on martyrdom, including the Gospel sayings on persecution. Those sayings were put in the form of words of Jesus because this, above all other forms, secured sanction for them.

Thus 'the martyr interest,' concludes our author, 'was effective in the content of the Gospels as well as in their literary type. They picture Jesus as a martyr, and cryptically refer to the martyrdom of other heroes, and thus function as practical martyrologies. But they have as a purpose, together with other objects, the securing of proper attitudes on the part of their publics. To be sure, they recommend a dependence on charismatic inspiration to secure a confession—a method which subsequent experience found to be impracticable and in consequence discarded. But the Gospels devote themselves, as do other and later types of literature, to the task of securing confessions. They aim to assist in the maintenance of the integrity of the religious groups, even though this involved martyrdom for some of their adherents. The necessity of securing control in persecution became apparent in Christian leadership as early as the production of the Gospel materials, and in this necessity the martyr interest was a notable producing factor.'

In the remarkable book, reviewed in another column, *The Riddle of the New Testament*, there is an interesting chapter on 'The Language,' which contains some novel elements. The New Testament is written in Greek, but of all languages that of the Greek-speaking people has probably been

the least static. Both their thought and expression have been involved in a rapidly changing process. And so no relics of Greek thought and expression can be so valuable for the understanding of the New Testament as the records of the actual age in which the writers lived. Formerly, in the absence of these, the usage of the classical period was applied to the interpretation of writings which originated in a later and fundamentally different society.

This proved both unsatisfactory and misleading. Happily the last fifty years have witnessed the discovery of a great mass of contemporary inscriptions, records, and letters, and the student is now able to find illustrations of the contemporary use of almost every word in the New Testament. And much is now clear that was before obscure. Among other results it is seen that words which were apparently vague in meaning are capable of a significance quite concrete and precise. The Prodigal Son did not vaguely 'gather together' his share of his father's substance: he 'realized' it, converted it into ready money. St. Paul had not heard that some of the Thessalonians were 'walking disorderly,' but that they were 'playing truant,' not going to work. Judas carried the 'money-box' not the 'bag.' And Jesus forbade His disciples to take with them, not a 'leathern bag for provisions,' but a wallet such as mendicant friars of that age used for collecting alms.

But (and here is the novel point) an exaggerated insistence on the value of this new material tends to lead us into error. The New Testament documents were written in a language intelligible to the Greek-speaking people of the age. But there is a strange and awkward element in the language and allusions which no ordinary Greek man or woman could understand. And the reason is that behind these writings there is an intractable Hebraic, Aramaic, even Palestinian material. The writers are struggling to interpret into Greek a non-Greek method of thought, and a non-Greek terminology. And there is a different literary background, that of the Jewish Sacred Scriptures. The contributions to our understanding of the New Testament made by contemporary documents are, in reality, for the most part trivial. They fail to resolve the more important problems of language on which an understanding of Primitive Christianity depends.

This fact is illustrated by the usage of two words in the New Testament, *ekklesia* and *aletheia*. In contemporary Greek, *ekklesia* meant an assembly called together for political purposes, or sometimes a congregation of people without reference to their purpose. But this meaning does not interpret the use of the word in the New Testament, as, for example, when Paul speaks of having persecuted 'the *ekklesia* of God.' Neither classical nor contemporary usage presents any analogy to this. We may, however, turn more hopefully to the Septuagint, for the Greek translation of the Old Testament was of prime importance to New Testament writers just because they, like the men who produced the Septuagint, were faced with the problem of giving expression in Greek to ideas which had first taken form in a Semitic idiom.

In the Old Testament, *Qahal* was used for the people of Israel as God's people, the chosen of Jehovah for His service. And this word was translated in the Septuagint by *ekklesia*. And 'the *ekklesia* of the Lord' in this way became a common Scriptural phrase. And when the Christians called themselves 'the *ekklesia* of God' they were claiming to be in part the true elect race as opposed to the Jews who rejected the Messiah. But when Paul defines the word it seems to go back to something of its root-meaning: 'to the *ekklesia* of God which is at Corinth, to them that . . . are *called* to be saints.' The word, then, seems to describe those who have a special relation to God, who have been called by Him to be saints.

But there is something more to be said. It would seem at first as though the Old Testament idea of the People of God had simply been Christianized by a reinterpretation of the relation to God in the light of the gospel. But we have the plural also used: 'all the *ekklesias* of Christ salute you' (Ro 16^{16}). And we have this plural often. And sometimes one of the *ekklesias* may be

a meeting in a private house (1 Co 16^{9}). And thus the name can be given to the whole body of Christians, to local bodies, and even to smaller groups within the local bodies.

So the language of the New Testament must be interpreted in the light of three facts: first, the usage of the *koine* as exhibited in the records dug up out of the sands of Egypt and other countries; second (and far more important), the Hebraic background which is always in the minds of the New Testament writers; and, finally, something fully as influential. The actual creative element which is at work in the New Testament language is everywhere due to a vigorous recognition that the Living God has acted in a particular history, and that Christian moral and spiritual experience depends entirely upon that particular history. Always provided we remember that that history took place in the heart of Judaism and on the background of the Old Testament Scriptures.

These generalizations are illustrated again in the use of the word *aletheia*. Take, for example, such a passage as Eph $4^{21.\ 24}$, 'Ye heard him, and were taught in him, *even as truth is in Jesus* . . . put on the new man which after God hath been created in righteousness and *holiness of truth*.' What conception of truth justifies the statement that hearing about Jesus will have, not an intellectual, but a moral and spiritual effect upon people? Is truth connected with a manner of life? What has truth to do with righteousness and holiness? In the Greek of Paul's day *aletheia* meant just what 'truth' means to ordinary people to-day. But as the translation of the corresponding Hebrew word it meant conformity to a standard, and that standard was the nature of the God who was truth and who was true, *i.e.* steadfast. And this was un-Greek, because it does not limit truth to rightness of knowledge. It is rightness of speech, of motive and of action as well. And so, with this Hebraic background, St. John's expression 'to do the truth' becomes at once intelligible. And St. Paul's expression 'as truth is in Jesus' is also intelligible. It means that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are 'truth.' And this historical happening is the supreme Act of God. The gospel is the Truth, because it is the action of God. And thus the conception of truth in the New Testament is based on that of the Old. It is a quality of God. His truth is revealed in and through a particular history, and His truth must be imitated and realized not merely in the sphere of knowledge, but in every sphere of life by those who stand in a peculiar relationship to this particular history.

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Scholarship has suffered a great loss by the death of the Rev. John A. Selbie, D.D., Professor of Old Testament Language and Literature in the Church of Scotland College (formerly the United Free Church College), Aberdeen. And because of his association with the late Dr. Hastings, and with this magazine, it is an act of 'piety' and remembrance that an appreciation of his life and work should appear here. It is not an altogether easy task, for Dr. Selbie loved the shade, as Principal Cairns expresses it in felicitous words, 'I had very rarely seen any one less troubled with himself, either in the way of personal self-esteem or self-seeking, or personal feeling of any kind, than my dear colleague.' He belonged to the type of the 'Ideal Servant' of the Old Testament, chastened, gentle, and undemonstrative, 'who did not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.'

But, while this 'noiseless tenor of his way' does