
A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

AT last we have in English a worthy *History of Israel* (Milford), on a scale as elaborate as the scholarship behind it is unquestionable. It is in two volumes, each costing fifteen shillings, and running to four hundred and ninety-six and five hundred pages respectively. The first, by Professor T. H. ROBINSON of Cardiff, carries the story from the Exodus to the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.; the other, by Professor W. O. E. OESTERLEY, covers the period from 586 to the Bar-Kokhba Revolt in A.D. 135. The volumes may be purchased separately. Each author, though responsible only for his own volume, has had the benefit of continuous collaboration with the other, so that, despite the diverse authorship, something like a real unity characterizes the presentation of the history. In this issue we shall deal only with the first volume, reserving to the next issue our comment on the second.

Professor ROBINSON comes to his task with ample qualifications. His linguistic accomplishments are not confined to the Semitic languages, and out of his extensive knowledge he is able to speak of Hebrew as 'the most musical tongue ever spoken by human lips.' Here surely it is the voice of the specialist that speaks; we fear that there are other than first year Divinity students who would demur to this description. Anyhow, we can be sure that we are in the hands of one who is thoroughly at home in all the linguistic facts. He has a broad outlook on religion, having already given us an 'Introduction to the History of Religions.' More particularly he has recently collaborated with Dr. OESTERLEY in a study of Hebrew Religion, while his book on 'Prophecy and the Prophets' shows his competence in dealing with that crucial phase of Hebrew religion. All this was a fitting preparation for a volume on the history of the people whose supreme interest for the modern world is its religion.

Naturally, in this volume he endeavours to exclude this aspect of the subject as far as possible, though to exclude it altogether would be as impossible as it is undesirable. But the task of writing the secular history of Israel is beset by difficulties of many kinds. There is not the smallest doubt in the mind of any scholar that the original documents have been drastically edited. The Elephantine papyri, for example, remind us that gods other than Jahweh were acknowledged by Egyptian Jews as late as the fifth century B.C., and presumably this was also so in pre-exilic Israel to an extent greater than our existing documents would lead us to suspect. Again, on many important events we have the views of only one of the participant parties. What should we really know, for example, of the history, if we had only the Chronicler to guide us?

It is difficult, for example, for the most scrupulous historian to do full justice to Saul, as even in the early histories, and much more in the later, he is

overshadowed by David. We echo Dr. ROBINSON'S wish 'that we had the story as written from Saul's point of view. If we had, we should probably see the young warrior, receiving every benefit from the King, including the hand of his own daughter, yet seeking to undermine his influence and ultimately to supersede him. It would be clear to us that the distraction in Saul's mind and the division among his people were among the main causes of his fall and final defeat.' This helps us to realize how cautiously the modern historian of Israel must tread among her pathetically scanty historical remains, and the rôle which intuition and the historical imagination must play in the reconstruction of her story.

To add to the historian's difficulties, the text is at certain, even crucial, points obscure, and it may even in places have been deliberately altered. Students interested in the Hebrew text will therefore be glad to note Dr. ROBINSON'S occasional discussion of textual difficulties: for example, of the awkward passage about 'the blind and the lame' in 2 S 5^{8} (p. 215), or the revolt of Edom in 2 K 8^{21} (p. 343), or the crowning of Joash in 2 K 11^{12} (p. 351), where Dr. ROBINSON shows a preference for the traditional עֵדוּת (testimony) rather than Wellhausen's clever emendation צְעָדוֹת (bracelets) or עֲדִיוֹת.

This illustrates a certain not unreasonably conservative temper which marks the *History* generally. For example, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve patriarchs are for the most part real historical personages, 'though the stories told of them (except Abraham) may often be interpreted as tribal rather than individual history.' Again, Dr. ROBINSON firmly holds to the current critical view of the date of Deuteronomy and its connexion with the reformation of Josiah, as against Welch on the one hand, and Hölscher on the other. Also he is inclined to accept the reformation of Hezekiah (2 K 18^{4}), on which doubt has been cast. He also argues for a Scythian invasion of Palestine about 626 B.C., which has hitherto served as a historical background for certain passages in Jeremiah and Zephaniah, but which has been called in question by Wilke, who has been followed by several scholars; and he thinks there may be substantial accuracy in the story of Jer $11^{1\text{-}14}$, that Jeremiah at first welcomed and supported the Deuteronomic movement. These contentions, whether right or wrong, show that we are dealing with the deliberate judgment of a cautious and well-informed scholar, who has not been swept off his feet by the newer criticism.

The detail in such a book as this is legion, but we are never allowed to lose the main thread of the story; and clear as is the march of the facts in the individual chapters, the conspectus of their progress is greatly facilitated by the brief but admirable summaries which precede them: and a special word of praise is due to the three exhaustive indexes of Biblical references, modern authors, and subjects treated or alluded to. Eleven maps are interspersed throughout the volume.

Interesting speculations are opened up. What a different course history might have taken, for example, if the Philistines had founded a great empire; and Dr. ROBINSON shows how very nearly that came to pass. Or what if, instead of Solomon, who was born in the purple and soon learned the manners of an Oriental potentate, one of David's older sons, who had known the hardships of his earlier life, had succeeded him? Or what if the Hebrews themselves had become a first-class world Power and founded a mighty empire? But for the disharmony that continually marred the relations between Israel and Judah despite a deep underlying unity, such an issue was by no means inconceivable. 'There is nothing impossible or fantastic,' as Dr. ROBINSON says, 'in the supposition that, in favourable circumstances, an Israelite kingdom might have arisen which should have stood in history among the world's great empires and have made an epoch in the political story of mankind.'

It is fortunate that it was otherwise ordained. Hers was the nobler task of founding a spiritual kingdom, and of enriching the world with gifts of incalculable importance to the higher life of man,

and this ultimate spiritual victory, as the writer points out, she owed largely to her ultimate political insignificance. Doubtless there was in the life of Israel something unique from the start. Her earliest codes, for example, breathe a far more deeply humanitarian spirit than the codes of other ancient peoples, noble in many respects as some of these are: and Dr. ROBINSON traces the secret of much of Israel's greatness to her early experience of nomadism. In that period she learned that love of liberty, that respect for personality, that insistence upon human rather than material values, in general that democratic temper, which remains with her more or less to this day. The prophets saw that her salvation, when she entered the 'cultural' stage, lay in the maintenance of the stern traditions she had inherited from the earlier period.

Many aspects of the discussion will appeal as much to the layman as to the scholar. Among these are the fine estimate of the complex character of David, the summary of the prophetic teaching, and the section of Life in Israel under the Monarchy, which reminds one of Bertholet's 'History of Hebrew Civilization.' Scholars will be interested to note that on the origin of the Decalogue he is non-committal—of the theory which ascribes it to Moses 'it can only be said that it seems to be capable neither of proof nor of disproof'—while he seems to incline to the view that it was among the Kenites that Moses learned to know Jahweh. He is certainly right, as Weinrich has conclusively shown, in believing that Isaiah's attitude to politics was primarily religious; and exegetes will be interested in his interpretation of the famous passage in Is $7^{14ff.}$: 'If a woman were to conceive now and the child were born in due time, then, before it could tell the difference between good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, Jerusalem would be safe, and the two threatening kings would have perished.'

Dr. ROBINSON concludes by reminding us that Israel's threefold legacy to the world was her democratic conception of monarchy, her great literature, and her religion. When the Christian Church broke loose from the Jewish community, she was in reality just liberating the ideals which counted for most in Judaism itself. Her religion was her supreme contribution to human welfare; and the story of the social, political, and international forces among which that religion arose and developed, by which its expression was in part conditioned, and against which it had frequently to assert itself, is told by Dr. ROBINSON with a wealth of detail, with a sense of perspective, with an eye for the salient things, and with an accuracy of scholarship which are likely to make it the standard book on this period of Israel's history for many a day to come.

What is Mysticism? Most diverse answers would be given to that question, for the name has vastly different meanings and associations to different minds. To some it represents the topmost height of religious fervour and Christian attainment; to others it suggests the dethronement of reason and the perilous visions of a disordered fancy. The Catholic Church, while acknowledging some of the Mystics as among the greatest saints, has always betrayed a certain uneasiness in regard to their experiences of ecstasy.

Books innumerable have been written about Mysticism and the Mystics, but we can think of nothing clearer and more to the point than an essay on *Christian Mysticism*, by Mr. Paul Elmer MORE (S.P.C.K.; 3s. 6d. net). It is frankly critical though by no means unappreciative, but it is especially valuable for its careful analysis of the various types of mystic experience and the interpretation to be put upon them. Though brief, it is extraordinarily close knit and full of matter.

All mysticism is not Christian, as is evident to any one who has the slightest knowledge of Hindu or Muhammadan religious experience. Mystical experience may be found on three planes, which at the one end fall short of normal Christian experience, and at the other end go beyond it. On the first plane we have 'a conviction of supernatural realities accompanied with a sense of the illusory nature of the phenomenal world.' This is really

the pre-requisite of all religion. It is found equally in Plato and in St. Paul. 'Strictly speaking, it is not mysticism, though often so named, and does not necessarily lead to mysticism.' On the second plane there is 'an immediate contact with supernatural reality, whether given through sensuous sights and sounds or by spiritual communications.' This belongs more properly to the field of mystic experience, but still is rather a quasi than an absolute Mysticism. 'As a rule, in this plane of experience the supernatural, with the advance of culture, takes the form of a single entity, at once infinite and personal, which reveals itself to the human soul by an act of grace.' On the third plane we reach complete Mysticism, which implies 'absorption of the soul in the supernatural reality, whether conceived as a pancosmic or a transcendental Absolute.' It is here that Mysticism passes beyond the bounds of Christian faith, and even of theism. 'The notion of personality, whether in the soul or in the Absolute, becomes a part of the illusion to be transcended, and the final state is inexpressible in the terms of theistic devotion, or even in the language of vision.' Much of what is currently known as Christian Mysticism hovers ambiguously between the second and third planes, and so has given rise to the diverse judgments of approval and disapproval passed upon it.

There is a strong mystic element in Plato, with his emphasis on the world of ideas as the eternal and only real. 'But mystery and the mystical mood it engenders, though our speech fails to observe the difference with due precision, are not the same thing as mysticism; and to jump to the conclusion that the Platonist, because he possesses a key to the invisible world of Ideas, is therefore a mystic, would be to throw the whole range of noetic experience into disorder.' Plato's conception of Ideas as entities in themselves precludes any theory of knowledge as a coalescence of the knower and the known. That conception came with the Neoplatonism of Plotinus. 'In truth this is the decisive point of difference between Platonism and Neoplatonism: whether the utmost reach of wisdom is to discern Ideas as objective facts, or whether there is a state beyond this, wherein nothing externally regulative of the reason remains, but Ideas become the property of its own activity, and the distinction between subject and object, knower and known, disappears.' And here is the point at which full-blown Mysticism parts company with the Christian faith.

It was undoubtedly the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy that led to a full development of Mysticism within the Christian Church. A strong bulwark against excess lay in the Hebrew conception of God as intensely personal and in the doctrine of the Incarnation. Such a Being could not be attenuated to a mystical abstraction without extreme violence to the authoritative records. In writers like Gregory Nazianzen and Augustine there is much that has a mystical ring about it, but they keep within the bounds of Christian thought and are worlds away from Plotinus's ideal of absorption in the divine. But later, through the influence of the Pseudo-Dionysius there came the great development of mediæval mysticism. It set out to find God by the *via negativa*, which means simply that 'by a process of denial we reach ultimately the same goal as by a process of affirmation, that by a successive surrender of all claims to know anything we attain at last to the utmost knowing.'

The progress of the soul along the mystic way is variously described but generally in accordance with Bonaventura's three stages of the *via purgativa*, the *via contemplativa*, and the *via unitiva*. In the first stage the soul must be utterly purged from sense, for every satisfaction of the senses, however innocent, is a barrier to the soul's progress. This includes all memories, visions, revelations that come to the soul in sensuous form. St. John of the Cross explicitly says: 'We picture to ourselves Christ on the Cross, or bound to a pillar, or God sitting on His throne in great majesty. . . . All these imaginations and apprehensions are to be emptied out of the soul.' In the second stage the spiritual faculties of the soul must themselves be benumbed or purged away. Memory and imagination must be quenched, the understanding be blinded, and the will cease to strive. And so at

last, in this dark night of the spirit, in this self-imposed vacuity, we come to a union with God, a state in which infinite darkness is one with infinite light.

It is obvious that the *via negativa* is something different from the highway of Christian salvation, and, however scriptural the language of Mysticism may be, it is difficult to reconcile its underlying assumptions with the central tenets of the Christian faith. It cannot easily escape the charge of quietism with its complete passivity of the will. Its doctrine of love expressly excludes the second of the great commandments, for, in the words of St. John of the Cross, 'He who loves the creature becomes vile as that creature itself. . . . He, therefore, who loves anything besides God renders his soul incapable of the divine union. . . . This applies to every kind of affection to which we are liable in this life.' All the symbolism whereby earthly things become pictures of the heavenly is thrust aside. The very sacraments become a hindrance, and even Christ Himself is left behind when the soul wings its lone way to the uttermost darkness which is beyond all light.

It need hardly be said that the thoroughgoing mystic is not always logical, and, like many others, is often more Christian than his creed. But 'essential mysticism, so soon as it passes beyond the first plane, is something quite different from the genteel presentation of it by popular expounders who mingle the three planes without discrimination, and then sentimentalize the mixture.' 'Mysticism is a disease of religion, and not its perfection, and the effort to lose our sense of responsible being in the gaping abyss of the unconscious is a temptation of the spirit just as surely as the surrender in the opposite direction is a temptation of the flesh. . . . As for the Christian, let him not suppose that a humility content to abide within the limits of traditional orthodoxy, with no passion for the immediate vision of God, is a lowering of his religious or philosophic courage. Rather let him be assured that in this voluntary inhibition lies the act of heroic faith and noblest endeavour. To believe seriously in the other world of God and Ideas, to lift the mind habitually to the contemplation of supernatural realities until it learns of a certainty that its home is there, to live in that realm whole-heartedly, yet without shirking or denying the claims of Nature to centre the distracted will upon God as the King of righteousness, to retain faith in a divine purpose at work within the world despite all the persuasions of infinite illusion, to take one's part valiantly in the eternal conflict of truth—that is not a light choice or a feeble task. Against the temptation to sink below this mediatorial plane we have, to him who listens, a clear call of the spirit; the ambition to rise, here and now, into what allures us as a higher plane is equally a temptation, however it be disguised.'

Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion, by Friedrich HEILER, Dr.Theol., Dr.Phil., Professor of the History of Religions in the University of Marburg, was published in German during the War and went through five editions. It was fitting that the English translation should be made by one who is himself a recognized student of the subject—Dr. Samuel MCCOMB (assisted by Dr. J. Edgar PARK). The translation is published by Mr. Milford at the Oxford University Press. As the book runs to three hundred and seventy-six pages it was presumably inevitable that the price should be sixteen shillings. When will it be possible to publish important theological books at a price within the reach of the average clergyman?

The volume represents an amazing amount of industry. In the fifth German edition there were more than two thousand quotations. Dr. HEILER'S range of sympathy is as wide as his range of reading. When he wrote this book he was a member of the Roman communion. He writes with respect even of some of the more repulsive developments of Roman mysticism on its erotic side. Even at that time he had 'fought his way up to an œcumenical position through his studies and experience of life.' No one who reads this book will be surprised to learn that he has since joined the Lutheran communion and has kindly relations with the Anglican

and the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Even in his Roman Catholic days he recognized John Bunyan as England's greatest religious genius.

The average man has only one question to ask about prayer: Does God answer prayer? In other words, prayer is popularly conceived as petition, and usually as petition for earthly blessings, not much above the level of the prayer of primitive man. Many people to-day have satisfied themselves that 'God does not answer prayer,' and that that settles the matter. Moreover, when they speak of 'God answering prayer,' they always mean 'God granting their petitions,' however foolish and unreasonable these may be. The possibility that a divine answer to prayer may take the form of a wise and loving refusal to grant a petition does not occur to them.

Yet many of the prayers in the Old Testament Psalms and many non-Christian prayers contain no petitions and no expression of wants. They are simply utterances of confidence in God: 'In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust.' Luther also speaks of 'abandoned prayer.' The petitioner begins by making his claim on God; and then, in a mood of joyful resignation, withdraws it, leaving the issue to God. 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me . . . nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.' In praying for the sick elector Johannsen, Luther first threatens God that he will throw down his keys and bring no more honour and tribute; then, as it were in humble, trustful repentance, he adds: 'O Lord, we are Thine, do with us as Thou wilt, only give us patience.'

Among the Mystics, some have gone further still, and denied that petition, even supplication for spiritual gifts and mercies, is ever permissible for the Christian. 'The soul,' says Francis of Sales, 'has no other attitude towards God than that of waiting, which excludes fear and hope as symptoms of egoism.' Madame Guyon assured Bossuet 'that she was incapable of asking God for anything in prayer.' Quietist Mysticism rejects even the prayer of praise and thanksgiving, since this also is an act of one's own will. Among the recorded prayers of Jesus, only one is an outburst of joy (Mt 11^{25}).

Primitive man has no such scruples. He prays for the things of this world, and for nothing else. It is only in later days, as at the height of Greek civilization or among the prophets of Israel, that religious experience is moralized and petition for moral values becomes the centre of prayer.

When this stage is reached there is a tendency to regard petitions for earthly things as among the childish things that have been put away. As Augustine says: 'Ask nothing from God except God Himself.' 'Ask for the blessed life,' says Augustine again, and for him prayer for material goods is 'carnal prayer.'

Yet outside of Mysticism, the robust sense of men of prayer has refused to accept this limitation of its scope. In the Old Testament a common theme of impassioned prayer was national independence and greatness. James exhorts to prayer for the sick. Large sections of the Church will accept the succinct creed of Thomas Aquinas, following Augustine: 'It is permissible to pray for whatever it is permissible to desire.' Jesus Himself taught His disciples to pray for their daily bread, and it was only the philosophizing tendencies of later days that transformed this into a petition for spiritual food.

In our day natural science has taught that natural law is immutable; and so the conclusion has been widely drawn that prayer in the sense of petition is as foolish as it is vain. Prayer, therefore, in the traditional sense has been largely abandoned, not only in intellectual circles, but even among the masses in our great cities, who get vague impressions of the general trend of scientific thought without much knowledge of detail. Much philosophical writing has tended in the same direction. If God is the 'First Unmoved Mover' of Aristotle, or the 'Anima Mundi' of the Stoics, or the 'grand être' of Auguste Comte, then not only prayer as petition, but prayer in its true meaning of trustful intercourse with God, becomes perilously near an absurdity. It is then a

temporary educational expedient, useful only for the spiritually immature. As Kant says: 'He who has made progress in the good life ceases to pray, for candour is one of its first maxims.'

By its explanation that the apparent answer to prayer for spiritual strength and comfort is only a reflex action of the mind of him who prays, psychology has also played its part in the destruction of the belief in the efficacy of prayer. If this is all that is in it, then there is nothing in it. An answer to prayer which depends on self-deception is no answer.

Yet in spite of Science and Philosophy, multitudes of Christians and multitudes who are not Christians continue to pray, and continue to find their life infinitely enriched and strengthened as a result of their prayers. Poets and artists, for example, have often seen more truly into the heart of the universe than men whose main concern was scientific generalization or philosophical abstraction. In Beethoven's diary we come upon the following prayer: 'Serenely I will submit to all changes and I will put my whole confidence, O God, only in Thine unchangeable goodness.'

The question concerns not the accidents but the essence of Christianity. Bousset has called Christianity 'the religion of prayer.' For Söderblom, Christianity is the peculiar home of personal prayer; or, as Dr. HEILER puts it quite simply: 'To be a Christian means to be one who prays.'

But many have to revise their conception of prayer. There is what may be called, not inaptly if somewhat irreverently, 'the pump-handle view of prayer.' If the blessings asked for are poured out, then we 'believe in prayer'; if not, we disbelieve. But there is nothing mechanical in prayer. A certain state of mind is presupposed in him who prays. The efficacy of the prayer for forgiveness depends on the presence of the forgiving spirit; and a moment's reflection will convince us that answers to prayer would be meaningless if they came without regard to the moral health, the humility, the repentance of him who prays, without regard to his confidence in God and sense of dependence on Him.

'Ask, and ye shall receive.' But the asking to which Jesus refers is something more than mechanical and verbal petition. It is a quest with the whole being, an earnest knocking with the spirit at the doors of the treasure-house of God's grace. Moreover, before we receive what we ask, there is a price to be paid. The reason for much unanswered prayer is that God knows we are not willing to pay the price. The blessings, even the spiritual blessings, for which we ask, can be given only to those who are prepared to receive them. The sons of Zebedee prayed that, when Jesus came in His Kingdom, they might have the places of honour on His right hand and His left. Could they have looked forward a little and seen Jesus on His cross, with a cross on either side, would they still have prayed that prayer?

When the man in the street tells us that God does not answer prayer, he has a pitifully inadequate conception of what prayer is. Prayer is something more than a 'demand note.' To the man of to-day, dominated by Copernicus and Kant and the teaching of modern science, prayer is at worst foolishness, and at best a stumbling-block. Some in their distress take refuge in a kind of substitute for prayer, a vague, devotional mood or æsthetic contemplation. But the man who comes to God through Jesus Christ knows whom he has believed. He knows he has direct and living fellowship with God, a communion which does not exclude petition, but in which petition is but one element; a communion which finds room for adoration and thanksgiving, for confession and intercession, but refuses to be limited by any theological categories.

In prayer the Christian speaks face to face with God as a man speaks with his friend. It is for Science and Philosophy not to deny the facts of the prayer world, but to explain them as best they can, if so they choose. In the phrase of Ménégoz, the religious man will decisively affirm prayer 'in its entirely non-rational character and with all its difficulties.'