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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE late Professor Stalker used to repeat to young ministers a remark made to him by an English lady of his acquaintance: 'We have an excellent clergyman. But he never tells us where to begin.' In his recent book, *What Men are Asking*, Dr. COFFIN relates a similar reminiscence. A middle-aged professional man put the question: 'Where can we start in our religious thinking to-day, when the bottom has dropped out of all that we used to consider solid? There were certain things we took for granted, and proceeded to build on them; but all our assumptions are gone, and there is no foundation left on which to begin.' It is this question Dr. COFFIN proceeds to answer, and he entitles his first chapter: 'Where can we start?'

To begin with, he underlines the statement implied in his friend's question. A generation ago unbelief was rare. In the rural district in which Dr. COFFIN began his ministry thirty-six years ago the local blacksmith, a follower of Ingersoll, was spoken of, almost with dread, as an infidel. And Edmund Gosse tells one amusing incident of finding himself in a crowded London bus with Rossetti, when the latter, feeling himself uncomfortably packed in, loudly announced that he was an atheist; whereupon a number of the passengers left the bus. To-day, Dr. COFFIN caustically remarks, one could hardly procure a seat in a New York subway in a similar fashion!

To-day things are very different. Religious
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belief is aggressively attacked as a hindrance to man's growth to reliant maturity. Or it is regarded as an escape from reality. Or, again, it is scoffed at as a survival of childish credulity that will disappear with advancing knowledge. And, along with this loss of faith in God, has gone a loss of faith in man. Man is no longer the image of God, but 'a parasite infesting the epidermis of a midge among the planets.' And inevitably the decay of belief in a future life has followed. Dr. George Gordon, a famous Boston minister, in one of Dr. COFFIN's last talks with him, contrasted the difference between his people in the old South Church at the outset and at the close of his forty years' ministry. At the end of the nineteenth century, in dying they had an anticipation of a glorious life into which they were to enter, while two decades later, still nominally believing in immortality, they had no definite hope in prospect.

Finally, there is this generation's changed attitude to Christ. A recent book on contemporary Britain by Professor Dibelius declares that 'for the first time in history, it would seem as though England had broken with Christianity.' In America a well-known Yale lecturer used almost identical words. 'For perhaps the first time in history,' he said, 'we are confronted with the prospect of a complete secularisation of the opinion, the practices, and the emotions of mankind.' It is not merely the divinity of Christ that is questioned, but His ethics. His teaching is widely

regarded as futile sentimentality, as irrelevant to present conditions, or as a kind of obsolete pillar to the present out-worn social order. What Christianity confronts everywhere to-day is the secular mind. And this is as rampant in our colleges and universities as elsewhere.

Having thus acknowledged and emphasized the facts on which his business friend's question was based, Dr. COFFIN proceeds to answer it. Where can we start? There are numberless roads to God, he says, or roads by which God may reach us. But he suggests that we start where we are. That is to say, start with something we all admit. For himself he would choose two commonplaces, indisputably true, which, if we examine their obvious implications, take us to the bottommost facts of life, and afford us the sense of touching its solid foundation. The first of these is the general agreement among decent folk that, when one does anything well, he ought not to credit it wholly to himself; and that, when one does anything badly, he should not altogether excuse himself.

We instinctively dislike both the man who ascribes his achievements to his own prowess and the man who shifts the blame for his failures to other shoulders or saddles them on circumstances. We assume that a man's accomplishments are not entirely his own, and that his misdoings should be acknowledged as mainly his own. We praise the successful man, but we think it becoming in him to deprecate our praise as not his due. We censure the ill-doer, and we think less of him if he attempts to evade his full share of the condemnation. It is both good manners and good morals to receive successes thankfully and in blunders and failures to hold ourselves guilty. This is the commonplace of Gratitude and Penitence.

Now a feeling so widely and deeply embedded in human beings must be a response which man has found himself compelled to make to the total effect of existence upon him. And this is the religious response to life. Without these qualities of gratitude for a goodness beyond their desert and of contrition for their own faultiness men and women

are not agreeable members of human society. Katherine Mansfield, the novelist, writing home from her Swiss residence about the benefit she was receiving from the air and sunshine, said, 'If only one could make some small grasshoppery sound of praise to *someone*—thanks to *someone*. But who?' And later, 'God is now gone for all of us. Yet we must believe; and not only that—we must carry our weakness, and our sin, and our devilishness to somebody.'

Here is a religious response to life without religious faith. And the question suggests itself: Is this response, persisting singularly in some who have parted with religious faith, and producing in both believer and unbeliever unquestionably valuable results in character, without foundation? What an anomaly that would make it in a world where all organisms adapt themselves to environing fact! Or are these folk, so gracious in their humility and thankfulness, the products of a gracious Being, with whom, whether they can name him or not, their sensitive souls are in correspondence? Is the intuition which renders them likeable men and women an hallucination? Or is it an adjustment which man at his sanest makes to reality?

The second commonplace which may serve to steady us, and to start us on a similar line of spiritual discovery, is that amid our present confusion a vast amount of goodness still remains indisputably good. The staple virtues are as valuable as ever. It is still good to be honest and not a scamp, to be chaste and not lecherous, to face life with courage and not run away, to be generous in thought and act, to be public-spirited and concerned for others. When men speak of the foundations as being destroyed, bid them look outside themselves. There are things they know to be good; they cannot fool themselves into calling them bad. They may not be able to explain why they are good. But we all agree in our estimate of their value.

And what we should observe in this matter is that this good is imperative. This is something we ought to do. It is something 'given,' to use

von Hügel's word. Every one knows the story of Captain Oates, who walked out of camp into the blizzard in order to leave his companions a chance of survival. Why do we admire this? That question cuts deep into the foundations of life. Is it not that, when a man resolutely obeys his conscience, he knows himself not an automaton but a soul? He can highly resolve. He stands over against the physical universe with its power to slay him, over against his fellow-mortals exerting social pressure upon him, over against the impeding elements within himself. There is somewhat higher that commands his allegiance. This which constrains, taking a Captain Oates to his death to save his comrades—call it Duty, call it Love—is compelling. It is an ultimate from which there is no appeal. 'I can do no other.'

And then, almost inevitably, a man adds: 'so help me God.' For why should duty be supreme with him? Why does not a Captain Oates, flinging himself away in the Antarctic blizzard, seem to us a fool? It is because duty, truth, love exist outside us, and belong to the fabric of the universe. They are in the nature of things. That is to say, they are in God. The good which grips a righteous man must be part of a vaster Good, above himself. It is related to something central in the universe itself. Honesty, justice, courage, truth lay compelling hands on consciences generation after generation, and they do so, and can only do so, because in them and behind them is a supremely good will. And so, starting with obvious commonplaces, we dig down to basic reality, to the very foundation of existence. And religion interprets this as the living God.

In these days of change, when long-established institutions, customs, practices are everywhere being called in question, it is inevitable that the Church's missionary policy, too, should be subjected to a critical review.

Within the Church itself, and in quarters quite friendly to missions there is much uncertainty as

to the value of the work done and the true line of policy to be followed. The policy advocated in influential Christian quarters that it is not our business to induce members of the higher non-Christian faiths to change their religious affiliation seems to many to cut the nerve of missionary zeal and to silence the note of urgency in the gospel call. The Church to-day needs to study afresh its divine commission and to define with more clearness its missionary policy.

A notable contribution to this important subject has been made by Mr. Alexander McLEISH, in *Jesus Christ and World Evangelization* (Lutterworth Press; 2s. net). The writer, who has had a wide missionary experience, bases his conclusions on a careful and penetrating study of the teaching of Jesus and His expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God.

He finds a most significant connexion between the evangelization of the nations and the coming of the end. 'This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come.' 'The interdependence of these ideas is of crucial importance, and the reference to "the end" is not accidental. Whenever, in the Gospels, mention is made of world evangelization, directly or indirectly, this reference to "the end," and the events associated with it, is to be found. The confusion which exists in Christian teaching regarding the "last things" is common knowledge, and, this being so, the conclusion is unavoidable that there must be some misunderstanding as to the nature of the task of world evangelization so consistently associated with this part of Christ's teaching. The most casual reading of the first three Gospels shows that these two questions cannot be separated.'

The main elements of the problem are that Jesus, while declaring His ignorance of the day and hour, expressly said that 'this generation shall not pass away till all these things be accomplished,' and accordingly warned His disciples to be constantly on the watch. In His contemplation of the future He does not look beyond His own generation. Various solutions of the paradox

have been offered, but the solution widely accepted in our time, that Jesus was simply mistaken in His view of the future, is to be rejected as too utterly prosaic and inadequate.

Christ, to say the least, stood in the line of the Old Testament prophets, and His outlook resembles theirs. Now prophecy is conditional. It is never the bald statement of a fixed and unalterable future, but is dependent on the fulfilment or non-fulfilment of an attendant condition expressed or implied. Disobedience may frustrate a promise; repentance may cancel a judgment. 'The prophet clearly saw that God's promises could be realized if God's conditions were faithfully fulfilled. In Christ's teaching this certainly is so. His words in Mk 13³⁰ and elsewhere were the natural and inevitable utterance of perfect faith.' Another aspect of Old Testament prophecy was its magnificent optimism, its boundless hope in God, even in full view of the world's sin. 'Christ knew better than any prophet the power of evil present in the world and the forces of bitter and vindictive opposition arrayed against Himself; nevertheless, His optimism and His belief in renewed humanity infinitely surpassed that of any other. He discerned the unlimited possibilities of faith and obedience in His followers, and at the same time gave them a new vision of the infinite resources of God available to faith in the work of establishing the Kingdom.'

There is thus no ground for the contention that Jesus was mistaken in His view of the future, or that His early hopes, being disappointed, were gradually reconciled to the need for a long-protracted evolution of the Kingdom in the world, and an infinitely delayed Advent. On the contrary, 'arising from the uniqueness and certainty of Christ's knowledge of God and faith in men there springs a threefold hope: a hope in the faithfulness of His disciples of such a character that they would carry forward and complete the evangelization of the world; a hope in the adequate response of men to such an appeal; a hope that such an appeal and response would prepare the way for, and make possible, His own return in their generation. The

fulfilment of the first hope determined the second, and on the fulfilment of both depended the realization of the hope of His return.' As Professor Hogg puts it, 'Would He not then have been false to His Father if He had counted an early consummation unlikely? Would He not have been contradicting the spirit of all Old Testament prophecy? Is it not we ourselves who blaspheme God when we assume that the end necessarily was, or necessarily is, far off?' The tarrying of the Kingdom is due not to any inscrutable decree of God, but to man himself.

The Apostolic Church by its obvious reluctance to carry the gospel to the Gentiles failed to rise to the height of its great opportunity and to fulfil the conditions on which the Lord's outlook on the future was based. But in St. Paul, as he gives himself to the work of world-evangelization, we find 'all the factors present in Christ's consciousness and outlook upon the world,' the same faith in the infinite resources of God working for man's salvation, the same sense of the imminence of the end, the same feeling of the urgency of the message to his own generation. This outlook determined the development of his doctrine; it coloured the manner of his presentation of the gospel; it influenced his whole conception of evangelism. The time was short, the message urgent. All was spoken and done under the shadow of impending judgment and in the ardent hope of an early coming of the Kingdom.

From this attitude the Christian Church has declined and wandered far. Failing to realize the infinite possibilities which are open to faith, the Church has lost the ardour of hope, the note of urgency, the attitude of expectancy, and has settled down to a great degree of toleration with things as they are, and to a dull expectation that through a long process of evolution the predestined end will come. Could anything be more alien to the living, beating heart of the gospel? There is urgent need for the Church to review her whole attitude to world-evangelization in the light of New Testament teaching and to reconsider her missionary policy.

It will at once be seen that certain elements are of dubious value. There is, for example, the tendency to identify evangelization with civilization, so that the gospel, to its great detriment, has been confused with the customs and practices of Western nations. There is the tendency to make missionary work too dependent on the efforts of men and money from abroad, while the infant church is kept in swaddling clothes. There is a tendency to 'conserve results,' rather than to strike out into fresh fields, which is often due to timidity and lack of faith. There is in general much confusion among missionary societies and churches as to what their supreme aim is and how it may best be accomplished. 'Other religions have spread over extensive regions of the world in more natural ways than those which have marked the relatively limited expansion of Christian missions. Buddhism spread like a prairie fire over wild lands and among conservative peoples among whom our methods of approach to-day meet with little or no response. Islam, similarly, at a later date spread with amazing rapidity and still continues to do so. Other creeds, notably that of Communism, are being disseminated over vast areas by just such methods of widespread propaganda as are urged here upon the Christian churches and missions. . . . In many lands examples of indigenous propaganda have been discovered which have developed, in many cases, outside the recognized procedure of missions, indicating that the missionary spirit is there if it is only fostered and given outlet. The secret of all such experiences is found in the conception that every Christian is a missionary having his own particular witness to make. The gospel must be "gossiped along the highways of commerce" and throughout the bazaars and market-places of the world. It must free itself from special sets of conventional practices and ways of thinking, and find an entry through the witness of the common people into the hearts and homes of their fellows.'

In *His Gifts and Promises*, the latest addition to Messrs. T. & T. Clark's 'The Scholar as Preacher'

Series, Professor James MOFFATT, D.D., includes a useful sermon on the word 'Amen.' A Hebrew word, it has passed unchanged into Greek and Arabic, into Latin and English. It is found upon the lips of worshippers alike in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Few words, indeed, in the vocabulary of religion are more widely used; and few, as the preacher fears, are less intelligently uttered by those who repeat it in their worship.

Amen means 'truly' or 'so be it,' and properly signifies our endorsement of some statement by another person, especially a statement of God's truth made in His name. The Jews have rightly attached the highest importance to the congregational repetition of 'Amen.' In the early Christian Church it was the regular practice not only to repeat 'Amen' but to utter the word loudly. Jerome tells us that 'Amen' used to sound like thunder from the congregation. And Dr. MOFFATT appears to suggest that in the modern Christian Church the importance of repeating 'Amen' is not duly recognized on the part of the congregation.

Even where the word is used by worshippers only as the climax of praise, as distinguished from prayer, the utterance of it may be beneath the level of real worship. People reveal themselves, and the level of their worship, in the very way in which they sing 'Amen.' 'An Amen,' says Sir Walford Davies, 'cannot be too good. It is music's chance to embody the great Christian affirmative. In singing an Amen it is well to pretend you may never sing another, and put everything into it.'

What is required of us as Christians is not a mere assent to God's truth, but a personal assent whereby we are committed to the service of God and His purposes. And that is the meaning of 'Amen' on Christian lips. The use of the word implies that we come under a personal obligation. Macbeth realized what it meant to utter 'Amen,' for he felt he could not utter it with a dark stain of blood upon his hands. And Dr. MOFFATT suggests that before we say 'Amen,' whether after prayer or praise, we should pause for a moment and ask whether we are qualified morally to say it. Whether

we say it softly or aloud, it means that we have a good conscience or the desire for a good conscience in God's sight.

What God requires and what the world needs is a larger number of men and women who are honestly prepared to say 'Amen' not only with

their lips, but also in their lives. 'Let us one by one make a conscience of saying "Amen" thoughtfully and seriously at the end of every prayer and act of praise, so that we may thereby be enabled to answer "Yes, Lord," without reluctance or reserve, when God honours us with some fresh demand for a conscientious service of His will.'

The Message of the Epistles.

James.

BY PROFESSOR W. P. PATERSON, D.D., LL.D., EDINBURGH.

THE authorship of the Epistle of James has been the subject of an unending debate, and it is unlikely that the problem will ever be solved with general assent. But whatever its origin, it renders the valuable service of fixing attention on the chief end of the Christian religion as the making of the new man, while the deliverance of the Church has been that it has unmistakable canonical quality, and contains the indubitable word of God.

I.—THE PROBLEM OF THE AUTHOR.

From the fourth century down to the eighteenth, the Epistle was generally accepted as the work of James, supposed by many scholars to be a son of Joseph and Mary, who presided over the Church of Jerusalem in the apostolic age, ranked with Peter and John as a pillar of the Church, and sealed his testimony by a martyr's death. In his learned Commentary, Mayor thought that he had finally established the authorship of this James, and German scholars of the highest repute, notably Bernard Weiss and Zahn, pronounced with equal confidence on the same side. Within the last generation the tide of critical opinion has set strongly in the opposite direction. Following von Soden and Harnack, who ascribed it to an unknown writer about the beginning of the second century, Dr. Moffatt in his *Historical New Testament* speaks of the defenders of the traditional view as influenced by an amiable prepossession, which they have supported by arguments of no pith or moment. As a fact an intelligent jury of Biblical students might well come to the conclusion that the advocates on both sides have asked for

a finding which goes beyond the evidence, and that 'not proven' is the proper reply to both pleadings. As the result of the debate we are left the choice between two opinions—one that the Epistle probably is, but possibly is not, the work of the Apostle, the other that it probably is, but possibly is not, the work of an unknown author of the second or third generation.

That the writer was James, the Lord's brother, cannot be ranked higher than a probable opinion, as the authenticity of the Epistle was widely doubted and denied down to the time of Eusebius, while it has allusions which suggest that the Church was no longer in its first youth. On the other hand, the negative thesis has certainly not been demonstrated. The opposition in the patristic Church was due as much to theological bias as to special information, for the meagreness of its doctrine was an offence to those who searched the Scriptures for light on the mysteries of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Nor is the internal evidence so conclusive as is contended by recent critics. Dr. Moffatt makes much of the argument that the Galilean James could not have written such fluent and idiomatic Greek, but Mayor had previously pointed out that more than one of the famous Greek scholars of the period were natives of Gadara, and it may be added that in our day some of the best Greek verse has been written by men who were born and educated in the region of Aberdeen. The claim of an early date, it is further said, is disposed of by the fact that the writer borrows from writings of the post-apostolic period, but Mayor had previously gone into this in minute detail, and made out quite a good case for the priority of