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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

DOES the Church languish through a failure to preach the ideal of Christian Perfection? Dr. R. Newton FLEW, of Wesley House, Cambridge, believes that it does; and in his recent scholarly work, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology* (Milford; 15s. net), he quotes with approval the words of John Wesley: 'The work of God does not prosper where perfect love is not preached.' Dr. FLEW knows that there are many who dislike the phrase or who suspect the maxim, but he is convinced that the surest way to victory over the many is to begin with the few. 'A vast evangelistic advance,' he says, 'can only be sustained if the Christian ideal for this life is steadily set forth in all its beauty and its fullness as being by the grace of God something not impossible of attainment.' He believes that, when it is not simply identified with sinlessness, the doctrine of perfection is not 'a bypath in Christian theological systems,' but 'is veritably the King's highway.'

We have already referred to this challenging book in a review in our last issue, and do not intend here to discuss its masterly survey of the history of the doctrine, except to say that it provides those who are interested in the subject with a summary of all that has been taught about Christian Perfection, extending from New Testament times to Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Peter Forsyth. Our purpose here is to refer to the constructive conclusions which Dr. FLEW states in his closing chapter. Two principles he regards as primary and determinative. These are, first, that the full Christian ideal must span both worlds, the present life and the life to come; and, secondly, the belief that the Christian life is the gift of God. From these principles Dr. FLEW makes his advance to others. No limits, he holds, can be set to the moral or spiritual attainments of a Christian in the present life. 'The one person who cannot be perfect is the person who claims to be.' It follows also that the Christian ideal must include within it the various realms of the good life. The Christian ideal must be the life of a society, 'and the perfect life of that society will include the pursuit and partial attainment of truth and beauty as well as of moral goodness.'

A further inference is the belief that daily work is to be viewed as a divine vocation. If we follow out Ritschl's ideal, every task is service rendered to one's fellows, and therefore to God. 'Just as those who visit the sick or the prisoner are thereby in communion with Christ (Mt. xxv. 31–46), so the Christian grocer or artisan may hear after every day's work the words: *Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brothers, ye did it unto Me.*' This ideal involves the principle of concentration on each moment. The ideal life is a 'moment-by-moment' holiness. 'The Christian ideal is a gay sanctity, freed from anxiety and fettering self-consciousness, a holiness unaware of itself, and symbolised by birds and flowers. It can only be achieved by living in the moment, and steadily refusing to be

anxious for the morrow.' Dr. FLEW maintains that the acceptance of this principle would modify the confession of sins which English Christians feel by their tradition compelled to make, since the daily repetition masks 'a tacit admission that even by the grace of God we are destined each day to defeat in the moral task.'

This last observation does not mean that Dr. FLEW is in danger of making light of the Christian's constant sense of imperfection. On the contrary, he describes the co-existence of the sense of victory over the world with a deep sense of personal unworthiness as 'the problem of problems,' and supplies a detailed and penetrating analysis of 'unworthiness' which we have not space here to reproduce. Nor, again, can we do more than mention a valuable final section in which he discusses the principle of 'the dying out of the temporal realm into the eternal.' We cannot forbear, however, the pleasure of a last quotation. 'The believer must always reserve the possibility that he is sinning unconsciously. Indeed, it is possible that our worst sins are those of which we are unconscious. . . . The ignorance may be overlooked, but forgiveness in its full Christian sense is no mere passing over of unrecognized sin, and the communion with God, to which He introduces us in forgiveness, cannot be according to His will for us if all the time we are egotists, quarrelsome, selfish.'

This excellent book raises a further important question. Has not the time come when, in view of present-day needs, we have the right to ask for more original, and even personal, contributions of a creative character? This is not said in criticism of Dr. FLEW'S work, for a book must be estimated in terms of its writer's aims and intentions; and, judged in accordance with this principle, *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology* deserves nothing but praise. Moreover, as we have shown, in his closing chapter Dr. FLEW states personal views which are of very great interest and value. What we have in mind is the succession of learned works in recent years which have largely contented themselves with a meticulous account of the history of doctrine. Such books were needed, and will always be needed. Indeed, in a history of doctrine a writer can often best indicate his own views. Our suggestion is that this method has been overdone, and that, in an age of doctrinal unsettlement, busy clergymen and ministers cry out for something more positive and creative.

Perhaps it is too much to hope that we shall often get books like M'Leod Campbell's 'Nature of the Atonement,' or R. C. Moberly's 'Atonement and Personality'; these are theological classics, and it is given to few men to write such works. If we can be blessed with books which follow in this tradition, we shall be happy indeed; but it is not primarily of masterpieces that we are thinking, but rather of clear, positive statements of Christian doctrine, written by gifted men in 'language understanded of the people.' We cordially agree with the closing sentence in Harnack's Preface to the English edition of his 'Das Wesen des Christentums': 'But this I know: the theologians of every country only half discharge their duties if they think it enough to treat of the Gospel in the recondite language of learning and bury it in scholarly folios' ('What is Christianity?' p. v). We confess that we should like to maroon a dozen gifted writers on a desert island without prospect of escape until they had fulfilled the undertaking implicit in Harnack's vigorous words.

One word more. We are not blind to the difficulties of attempted restatements of religious belief. In an age which demands the use of scientific methods and of exactness of statement, many writers are loth to express opinions which cannot be supported by an imposing array of 'references'; they feel that an unsupported opinion is a grave risk. This is one reason why footnotes are often the most interesting and valuable part of a modern work; the writers tell us, in a kind of aside, what they really think. Again, writers are aware of the mischievous tendency of many readers to identify them for all time with opinions they once expressed in print; what they have written, they have written! Twelve, or even twenty years later, they may be credited with views which subsequently they have found reason to modify

or reject. Further, they have always before them the fear that they may come to be identified with a position which fails to win its way; their views will be labelled 'So-and-so's theory,' and may even come to be included by some versatile critic under the heading 'Mares' Nests in Theology.' For these reasons a creative theological work is a hazardous undertaking which calls, not only for knowledge and insight, but also for courage of a very high order.

Dr. L. P. JACKS delivered the most recent of the Hibbert Lectures, and these have just been published under the title *The Revolt against Mechanism* (Allen & Unwin; 2s. 6d. net). Dr. JACKS has earned the respect of the religious world by the sane and genial spirit in which he writes of the profound matters that affect us all. And when he delivers his soul on a great theme, as he does in these lectures, he will find many sympathetic listeners. The gist of his message is contained in the quotation he makes from M. Loisy's latest work: 'A religious faith is, in essence, nothing less than an effort of the mind, imagination, intelligence, and will, to break through the mechanical framework of the natural world in which fate seems to have bound it.'

This, at least, is the starting-point, but Dr. JACKS goes a step beyond Loisy, contending that the business of the mind is to turn mechanism the enemy into a friend. And he is not thinking merely of material mechanisms, but also of the invisible but immensely potent mechanisms which the mind itself has created—'systems,' as we call them, philosophical, theological, ecclesiastical, social, economic; and beyond these 'the all-embracing mechanism of the universe at large, a tremendous background, rather felt than seen, but dominating all the rest.' The mind is a born rebel against them all. The believing mind, that is to say. For every living faith, like the homing bird, hits the invisible path proper to its nature and destiny, making for its home in the house of many mansions where the Divine Excellence, enthroned in joy, lives and operates creatively.

Dr. JACKS deals both with this revolt against mechanism and with the effort (and duty) to use it creatively. In expounding the former of these two points he draws attention in some finely written pages to the fact that there is always a resisting medium in life, that nothing is accomplished without battling against forces that would hem us in and bind us hand and foot. The bird needs the resisting medium of the air to fly, the fish needs the water to swim, and man, learning to stand upright—perhaps the greatest victory the human race has ever achieved!—is resisting the force of gravitation. The same thing holds of all moral attainment. And religion, 'the victory that overcometh the world,' is the supreme example. In our age the resisting medium is mechanism in all its forms, the most powerful and all-pervading, because of the achievements of science; and the most dangerous, because it has dominated our very habits of thought.

One hopeful fact is that we are to-day becoming *conscious* of the danger. Evidence of this may be seen both in philosophy and science. Philosophy is departing from the mechanical systems of Herbert Spencer and Hegel, and, in such works as Bergson's 'Creative Evolution,' is becoming adventurous and creative, shaking off the trammels of a mechanical completeness that makes the world commonplace and uninteresting. And in the realm of the physical sciences also, once the stronghold of the mechanical faith, apostasy has raised its head, and the apostates are quite considerable persons. Recent investigations of matter have revealed in it a nature which plain men find hard to distinguish from the nature of spirit. And rumours are actually circulating in the laboratories about an element of indeterminism, something akin to free-will, in the substance of the universe. Einstein, Eddington, and Jeans are the names cited, and in them revolt seems to be taking a profoundly significant form—a scientific revolt against the dominance of the very mechanism of which science itself makes use.

But religion is the real rebel. Christianity itself began in a revolt against the mechanical legalism of the Scribes and Pharisees. And its history has

been one all along of revolt. When a new mechanism invaded it, in the shape of the Catholic Church, revolt came with the Protestant Reformation. And when the Protestants themselves proceeded to build systems hardly less rigid than the Catholic, new revolts were seen. That is the significance of men like George Fox, Wesley, and Newman. That is the real significance of the present Group Movement. Dr. JACKS equates this with parallel phenomena like the fellowships of youth, humanisms, new moralities, romantic movements in literature and art—all parts of a vast insurgence of the creative spirit against the bonds in which mechanism of one kind or another would confine it.

But religion does more than revolt. Its real essence is creative. Its real achievement is to turn the mechanism that everywhere threatens it into a friend. Even in the lowest forms of religion we may discern an effort to create a meaning for things that have none, such as stocks and stones. As we approach its highest forms the creative urge becomes more and more active until, in the highest form of all, religion claims to make all things new, taking hold of all human experience, and then, by the alchemy of a spirit inscrutable to the mechanical mind, transforming it, transfiguring it, and revaluing it. The enterprise would be sheer madness were it not for one tremendous fact, namely this, that the whole strength of the universe stands behind it. The story of religion is that of a conquest won against overwhelming odds. That is why the interests of religion are on the side of the creative forces now rising in revolt against the tyrannies of mechanism.

Happily for this great adventure of religion in our time the omens are favourable. We find one source of encouragement in the new spirit slowly appearing in education, which, under the inspiration of enlightened teachers, is seen to be striving to awaken, in all kinds of ways, the creative spirit in the rising generation. And, apart from philosophy and science, and the new spirit manifest in these fields of human interest, we may find encouragement in the fact that mechanism itself is providing an opportunity of undoing its own mischiefs by liberating our energies and lengthening the time when we are free to use them in the joy and fulfilment of leisure. It is not too daring to set our hope on the coming of a time when machines will be mastered, when the spirit will have the upper hand of them and use them for its own ends. The present mechanical age is only a stage on the way to this El Dorado. And when it comes, that day will be a good day for religion, and for joy and peace and goodwill among men.

Almost simultaneously with the news of the appointment of Professor John BAILLIE to succeed Professor W. P. Paterson in Edinburgh we received his latest book, *And the Life Everlasting* (Milford; 10s. 6d. net). It is a very happy and, we are sure, a quite undesigned coincidence.

The book is not merely a fresh revelation of Dr. BAILLIE's erudition, intellectual power, and clarity in writing; it is a revelation of the writer himself, and we see him here as a man of firm faith, wonderful sympathy with real difficulties, and likely to make a very distinguished place for himself in the Divinity Faculty of Edinburgh University.

It is a really great book on a subject of perennial interest and wistful questioning, the world to come. It guides us on right lines; it warns us of mistakes that have been too commonly made in handling the topic. Most mischievous of such mistakes, we gather, has been the tendency to overlook the circumstance that what we as Christians ought to be concerned about is not primarily and directly immortality, but eternal life. Of course that lies open and manifest on every other page of the New Testament; but somehow we forget it. Dr. BAILLIE shows how dubious is the oft-repeated statement that all men have had a hope of or a craving for immortality. It is not true. Primitive man believed that life continued somewhere and somehow for the dead, but that conviction had no more religious significance than his other conviction that, though the sun set, it would rise again.

Immortality, or at least some measure of continuance, was not something craved or hoped for. It was just something that happened. Further, as time went on there was no 'evolution' of this belief. It stood where it was, and among highly civilized peoples—Israel and the Greeks being here curiously alike—such immortality as was pictured became something not only unattractive but repellent.

About the same period Israel and the Greeks arrived at a new thought—fellowship with God. The Greeks thought of union, Israel rather of communion, with God. Man found his abiding peace and highest bliss in his participation in the life of God. It was not something merely for after death, it might be enjoyed here and now. Among both Jews and Greeks the thought of eternal life had displaced the thought of mere continuance of life or immortality. This was no evolution; it was, in Dr. BAILLIE's term, a 'break.'

But immortality is implied in the New Testament conception of eternal life. Beings whom God loves can never perish; and the individual, as Christ revealed, is unspeakably precious. In brief, it may be said that is the only argument of much constraining force that Dr. BAILLIE respects. And we cannot imagine any one reading his masterly, eloquent, and often moving exposition of this without feeling that the question has been lifted to a new level from which many things appear in new proportion.

Immortality, according to Dr. BAILLIE, does not admit of proof; we walk by faith, not by sight. Yet objections to or arguments against immortality may be answered; and in this work they are fairly stated, fairly met, and, we think, satisfactorily answered. Excellent is the criticism passed on the youth who protests that as to a future he neither knows nor cares. 'You ought to care,' says our author. Are you to stand by the corpse of the one dearest to you, the one you loved and esteemed best, and tell us that you do not care, you are not interested, as to whether or not they are like a flame blown out? Not to be interested in immortality is treason to your love.

Very convincing, too, he is in dealing with the view that the values of individual achievement or attainment or suffering may be sufficiently conserved in the race. The race itself is doomed to death. Individual influence lives on, no doubt, for a time in posterity and neighbours, and that 'Ciceronian' immortality has its value. But a time is coming, however remote, when all human life will vanish from this planet. If there be no elsewhere, if a time must come when there will be no one to tell the story of human struggle, achievement, and splendour, and no one to listen to it—well, is it a bearable thought?

Nor has he any great difficulty in taking the plausibility from what we imagine is the most subtle substitute for individual immortality—the notion that on death the individual is reabsorbed into the sea of Being from which he originally emerged. This view is plausible; and no doubt it is, in one form or other, rather widely entertained. 'Are any of us prepared to accept that view with all its consequences? Are we prepared to hold that human individuality has, as such, no significance and can fade without loss into a general fund of spirituality? I cannot think that we are. The disloyalty of such a position is too manifest.' 'If you tell me that my neighbour's personality may disappear at death without anything of value being lost, then you must absolve me from the duty of respecting my neighbour's personality now.' 'And you must allow that if I destroy my neighbour's personality, I am not doing any real harm.' This would be to 'unwind the spool of ethical progress.'

It is beyond our design to give anything like a full account of the richness of content of this outstanding volume. We should have liked to indicate the lines of the deep-sighted discussion of the concept of the Kingdom of God with its four aspects—present, future, individual, and social; or the most interesting treatment of other-worldliness, or the criticism of certain of our popular hymns. But we must be satisfied simply to mention such things.

Let us refer only to Dr. BAILLIE's treatment of the eschatological problem as to the final destiny of

unrepentant souls. The three important views are —eternal punishment, conditional immortality, and restorationism. That there are grave difficulties arising from the frank acceptance of any one of the three we are all aware, and Dr. BAILLIE gives lucid expression to the perplexities we feel. On the whole he inclines, we gather, to universalism. For if God be love and forgiveness be somehow greater than retributive justice, eternal punishment is surely most difficult to believe. Conditional immortality is too facile in its presupposition that there are, or can be, some souls of so little value that nothing will be lost with their annihilation. But if Dr. BAILLIE, as we think, cherishes the 'larger hope' to which Tennyson gave memorable expression, he does so fully conscious of the difficulties here too, and is careful to impress them and emphasize them. 'If we decide for universalism, it must be for a form of it which does nothing to decrease the urgency of immediate repentance and which makes no promises to the procrastinating sinner. It is doubtful whether such a form of the doctrine has yet been found. But one has the feeling that in this whole question of the fate of the unrepentant we are touching one of the growing points of Christian thought at the present time.'

The Message of the Epistles.

The Letters of the Presbyter.

BY THE VERY REVEREND J. G. SIMPSON, D.D., DEAN OF PETERBOROUGH.

THE three epistles of John are a series of letters addressed to a community, to a family group, and to an individual. The first, though it has no epistolary introduction, and has in consequence created a doubt in some minds whether it is a letter at all, is described in the title, like the epistles of James and Peter preceding it in the canon, as a general or catholic epistle, probably because the contents suggest a more universal application than the circumstances of any particular community would supply, and a more extended and less closely defined circle of readers, like that which is implied in the introductions to the three documents which it immediately follows. The other two letters are obviously intended only for the eye of those to whom they are addressed.

The latter is a strictly personal letter, to be destroyed or (as the event proved) to be preserved by the recipient at his discretion, but in any case a privileged communication. The former belongs to the same category, though in this case the privilege is extended to a group, 'the elect lady and her children.' The designation is so curious, so entirely wanting in precision, not even a name being mentioned, that the question has been raised whether the document is not, like the first epistle, addressed to a community, described under a figure, familiar to all readers of the New Testament and particularly of the Apocalypse, which represents the Church as the Bride of Christ. In that case 'The Elect Lady' is the Church in a particular town, or a group of Churches in a particular area, let us say, of the province of Asia, or even the Church at large, and 'her children' the members of that body. The precise reference of the phrase we can, in any case, scarcely hope to recover. But it seems to me far more natural to suppose that the obvious suggestion of the letter itself, that it was addressed to a household, is correct, and that there were reasons why the writer, while no doubt providing his messenger with definite directions for its delivery to the proper persons, should have refrained from compromising the intended recipients, if the letter should fall into other hands, by indicating who they were.

My suggestion is that, if we take the three documents, that is, the two brief notes and the relatively long letter, to which they may be regarded as pendants, as three communications addressed by the Presbyter, as he calls himself in the two last, and as he probably also called himself in a lost introduction to the first, to 'The Church in such and such a place,' to a household within that Church described as the 'elect lady and her children,' and to Gaius, who was a member of the same church, we shall be able to view them in a perspective which reveals their relation one to another.