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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

The Unknown God (Sheed & Ward ; 7s. 6d. net), by Alfred NOYES, we regard as a most attractive book, and it might well stimulate the minds of preachers and teachers. It might be described as an apologetic for theism and Christianity within the framework of a spiritual autobiography, but such a description would fail to convey an adequate impression of the book. For it is no ordinary or conventional apologetic, but one which has largely taken its form in the mind and heart of a poet. Instead of the detailed and logically progressive exposition that we usually associate with works on religious philosophy, we have here the statement of a broad theme, followed by a series of variations upon it. The result is peculiarly impressive, especially as the concluding movement is emphatic and strong.

The broad theme is that the great agnostics who had so much influence upon thinking people in Britain in the last decades of the nineteenth century—Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer—gave the impression of feeling more than they could say, yet of saying more than they thought they were saying. In a word, they had each some contribution to make towards the elucidation of the Unknown God. And in this, says Alfred NOYES, they were in line with other agnostics. A characteristic feature of his book is, in fact, the co-ordination of positive views which it tries to effect, as may be gathered from the following quotation.

‘If the Unknowable Being of Herbert Spencer, Omnipresent, Supernatural, Perfect, Absolute, is to be identified with Huxley’s Eternal, who requires justice and mercy ; and this again with Voltaire’s Supreme Being who must be capable of compassion ; and this again with Shelley’s “Light whose smile kindles the Universe” ; and this again is to be co-ordinated with the God in man of a “free-thinking” nineteenth century poet [Crashaw] ; and this again, across the ages, with Plato’s vision of Love, the Mediator between man and God, we are not so very far, after all, from the mystery discerned by the Desert Physician :

The Very God ! think, Abib ; dost thou think ?
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice.’

The climax of the book is its exposition of the mystery of the Incarnation, as the very truth of truths and the kernel of the philosophy of Christendom. In reaching his Christian convictions, Alfred NOYES was greatly helped by Hegel and his followers, whose system of thought he regards as the highest and deepest achievement of philosophy during the last three hundred years. We have long noticed the affinity of the Higher Rationalism with Mysticism, and we are not surprised to find it appealing to the poet’s mind and heart, so mystical in tendency. Plato in the ancient world and Hegel in the modern, these are for our writer the commanding philosophers.

There is an aspect of the Incarnation on which Alfred NOYES is poetically suggestive, incidentally offering an interpretation of the mysterious Cry of Dereliction. It might be urged, he in effect says, that the death of Socrates had a touch of sublimity that might seem to be necessarily lacking in the death of the Son of God. Socrates was uncertain of the end to which he was going; Christ was assured of His own resurrection and ultimate victory. Agnosticism here seems nobler than knowledge. It is not only faith without sight. It is almost faith without hope; and, in this, there is a sublimity which seems to transcend anything that could be experienced by a Divine Being.

‘What could an almighty God know of that forlorn adventure? What could the absolute Ruler of an ideal and eternal realm know of the infinite majesty of the dead man lying across his broken sword; the bitterness of final defeat; the dumb farewells of the beloved and dying; the blind tears in the night; the look of the brown earth by the open grave? . . . But if God Himself were incapable of that ultimate of ultimates—the forlorn hope—man in his bitterness might well feel more divine than God in His greatness, and the heavens would seem emptier than the least of mortal hearts that ever carried its load of grief for another.’

Only the Christian philosophy of the Incarnation, to which both Plato and Hegel have contributed, offers a solution to this riddle. And the answer as well as the question is hidden in one dark sentence of the New Testament. When Alfred NOYES came to rest upon the truth of Christ Incarnate, he could never think again of the Supreme Being ‘as inhibited from that loneliest of all adventures; the forlorn hope in which man has again and again proved his own kinship to the Divine.’ ‘No hope was ever so forlorn as that which rang through the agnostic night, when the clouds went over the face of the God-abandoned Image of God on Calvary, crying, *Eloi! Eloi! lama Sabachani?*’

The doctrine of the Fall has always been a storm centre in Christian theology. It has been the battle-ground on which opposing forces manoeuvred for position, in view of the clash of systems which would inevitably follow. It is instinctively felt that the position taken up here must in the end dominate all our thought about man in his relation to God.

In our time the doctrine lies under a somewhat heavy cloud. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that in many minds, even of theologians, it has ceased to have any real place. The reasons usually assigned for this are the effect of Biblical criticism on the Genesis narrative, together with the new view of the universe and of man’s place in it as taught by modern science.

An interesting book on the subject has been written by the Rev. H. T. POWELL, D.D., *The Fall of Man: Its Place in Modern Thought* (S.P.C.K.; 5s. net). It is commended by the Dean of Exeter for the spirit in which it is written, the clearness of its style, and the complete intellectual honesty of the writer. At the same time the Dean expresses doubt about some of the conclusions reached, and many readers will probably share his view. But the book is one that will stimulate reflection and deserves to be widely read.

Dr. POWELL at the outset frankly dismisses the Fall, ‘on the ground that the doctrine can no longer be defended.’ This, of course, is nothing new, but Dr. POWELL differs from other critics in the earnestness with which he labours to retain and reinforce every vital Christian truth. His contention, indeed, is that the system of Christian doctrine loses nothing, but on the contrary gains much, when the doctrine of the Fall is excised.

He affirms *ex animo* the universality of sin, but he does not seem to have sufficiently pondered the significance of that strange fact. It seems on the face of it to point to some profound perversion, some tilting of the balance to the wrong side. If it were not so, if the balance were held

even at every birth, then the law of averages would inevitably bring it about that the world would be peopled in equal numbers by the sinless and the sinful. It is in explanation of this undeniable fact of the universality of sin that the doctrine of the Fall is offered.

Had Dr. POWELL been content to maintain the universality of sin as a sheer mystery for which no explanation could be offered, he might have been on strong ground. But, rejecting the doctrine of the Fall, he goes on to offer an alternative theory of the origin of man's sin, the usual evolutionary theory according to which sin is the relic of the beast which man is in process of throwing off. If this is all, if sin is part of a natural process, it is difficult to understand how judgment can be pronounced upon it as a thing which *ought not to be*.

The evolutionary theory is a somewhat precarious foundation for any system of theology to build upon. It is now increasingly recognized that Darwin did not leave a finished solution, but rather a problem which it will take generations to work out. Already great modifications have taken place, and no one can predict what form the final statement of the theory will take. To Dr. POWELL science is simply biology, and he seems to forget that there are other departments of knowledge which are equally entitled to have their say. In particular, he takes no account of the fact that the world of living things, in which an upward evolution is traced, is but a microscopic and most transient part of a far more vast and age-long cosmic process, whose general direction is downward. It is but a fleck of foam thrown up by a receding tide. As Sir James Jeans has strikingly put it, all the ascent of man on which we fix our hopeful eyes is to be likened to a sailor climbing to the masthead of a sinking ship. He may climb to the masthead, but the ship is doomed.

Dr. POWELL is optimistic like the nineteenth-century evolutionists. He is mightily cheered by the sight of the climbing sailor. As a Christian thinker he does not forget that all climbing is done

by God's strength, and he is assured that that strength will not be withheld. So he would say to the sailor, 'Climb on, and by God's grace you will reach the top.' One had supposed that such evolutionary optimism had lost its glamour in these dark times following the World War, and given place to a pessimistic view of man's future. There can be no question that the latest word of science is that, though the sailor climb never so high, in the end ship and mast and sailor will go down to a common grave. Natural science knows nothing of salvation and offers no immortal hope to man.

That hope must be sought elsewhere, as the Psalmist well knew who said, 'O, let him help send *from above*.' Sinful man needs some help to come from above, some power that is able to lift him out of this evolutionary flux and give him his portion in the eternal. This is the experience of salvation, an experience which many have had. 'He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters. . . . He set my feet upon a rock.'

Without doubt Dr. POWELL would cordially assent to all this. But when he attempts to express salvation in terms of evolution he completely fails to do justice to the facts. It is not merely that he is attempting to express Christian truth in categories foreign to the New Testament, but he is so obsessed by the idea of continuity that he leaves no room for atonement and regeneration in the accepted sense of the words. 'Is it conceivable,' he asks, 'that at any point in this progression the plan embodying the purpose of the Creative Spirit broke down, rendering what followed other than it existed in the preconceived idea of the Master Mind? If we could allow such a possibility we should next ask: At what point did this hypothetical setback take place?' Again, 'Christ gives no hint that He is anticipating anything in the nature of a restoration. His message is simply one of progress and of the privilege and joy of sharing in it and personally promoting it.'

There is a searching question which goes to the root of all theologies, and separates them by a

gulf which cannot be crossed. It is the question whether salvation is of God or of man, whether it comes from above or springs up from within. We do not forget that the transcendent God is also immanent, and that 'every virtue we possess, and every thought of holiness are His alone.' Yet the distinction remains, and will give a colour to every statement of doctrine. And when evolutionary ideas are dominant, the great words of the New Testament — sin, atonement, redemption — may continue to be used, but they have lost something of their original significance, and in this new context we feel that they do not ring true.

In the first chapter of his new book, *Everyman Prays* (Allenson; 2s. 6d. net), the Rev. B. C. PLOWRIGHT gives us an illuminating survey of present conditions, and the adequacy, or inadequacy, of the Church to deal with them. Never did the Church have a heavier responsibility, or a richer opportunity, yet never did she have to meet her responsibilities and opportunities with fewer resources. We have done all we can, and gone as far as we can, with our present spiritual equipment, but this equipment is not sufficient to deal successfully with our pressing problems.

We live in a world that changes rapidly from day to day. The movement of thought which began with the Renaissance and the Reformation has reached its climax in our own times. Broadly speaking, that movement may be described as one in which human interest was transferred from an inward regard to an outward, from a preoccupation with one's own state of mind and soul and destiny to an increasing zest in the external world. For the last four hundred years the modern has increasingly bent himself to know and understand and enjoy and, if it might be, to control the world in which he lives, and the characteristic discipline and intellectual pursuit of this period is *Science*. Within broad limits it is true to say that we are able greatly to modify, if not wholly to appoint, the terms on which we will live.

More, that same science has contracted the world to less than a span. The international contact which a century ago took half a year to accomplish by means of a slow sailing-ship to-day is achieved by wireless in a fraction of a second. Yet, nevertheless, we have come to the end of the epoch, and we are passing into a new era. According to the Hegelian formula (thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis) we have come to a third stage. A thousand years of exclusive interest in the inner life were followed by four hundred years of intensive concern with the outer, and now there awaits us the task of reconciling the two. We have begun to recognize that spirit and matter, science and religion, must be resolved in a higher unity.

The specifically spiritual issue which is implicit in this situation is raised in the form of two basic problems, *Justice* and *Community*. The first of these problems faces us in the fact that we have too much wealth. We produce an abundance of goods which we cannot consume. Machinery has displaced labour to such an extent that men cannot buy the goods our machines produce. We starve because we have so much. There are at least 25,000,000 unemployed in Western industry, and owing to the economic conditions the basic rights of life are denied to them. The real essence of the problem of unemployment is the problem of the just distribution of the power to consume.

But this already involves the problem of community, which is just the problem of reconciliation, on the national scale between classes or groups, on the international between nations. The sense of injustice, or the craving for just treatment, has produced a great labour movement which presses the question, whether the social structure that allots the main rewards of industry to one class is right. And the rise of an intense nationalism since the War in different quarters, with its ambitions, fears, jealousies, and self-consciousness, has presented the same grave problem of community. It is all the graver since the world is so small, and we are so near one another. It is like half a dozen people living day and night in one room. The constant close contacts of the new

world make this nationalism a sinister and explosive fact.

These twin problems are pressing ones for one particular reason. Schemes for achieving community and justice are already afoot and are proving amazingly effective. Fascism on the one hand and Communism on the other are the first and fascinating efforts of the human mind to solve the spiritual problems which our scientific and mechanical civilization has raised for us. They both give the same answer, and they provide it in what at bottom are identical terms—in the doctrine and practice of the 'omni-competent state.' They have both achieved great things. They have created an amazing and passionate sense of Community, and they have given to their people a soul, a vision, an ideal.

Is it surprising that the workless artisan in Lancashire or London finds something to attract him in such achievements? He has no part in the life of his own nation, and he has a burning sense of injustice that in a world of plenty he should have no means of obtaining his fair share of at least the necessities of life. He looks abroad and sees these two great experiments that have given new meaning to the life of the individual. Is it any wonder that he sometimes thinks that under one or other he may find a meaning for his own life within the community, and a square deal which is denied him in the system under which he lives?

Mr. PLOWRIGHT contends that the Christian Church cannot accept the conception of the state which underlies both Fascism and Communism. What, then, is the true attitude of the Church in face of the spiritual problem raised by the conditions of life in our time? Mr. PLOWRIGHT believes that her duty is to set clearly forth her own conception of a Christian society. This will undoubtedly put upon her the greatest possible strain, and make the greatest demand yet made on her for courage. It will be risking her existence as a corporate body in order to save her soul. That is why the question of her spiritual resources

is all-important. She can only do her part in the modern situation if God is all in all to her. The world is waiting for moral leadership from the Church, and if this can only come from her inner resources, the real and urgent religious problem is the deepening and enrichment of the spiritual life of her members. To this the writer addresses himself in the rest of his book.

In Eph 5²²⁻³³ St. Paul sums up the duties of husbands and wives as love and reverence—love on the man's part and reverence on the woman's. But if St. Paul had been alive to-day his summary of conjugal duty would probably have shown a different emphasis, and he would have exhorted husbands and wives to mutual love and reverence, or simply to mutual love, which includes mutual reverence, loyalty, considerateness, and many other things besides. For in our day the principles are freely acknowledged of the personal independence of the individual and the spiritual equality of men and women before God. This is in accordance with the mind of Christ Himself, and indeed St. Paul had written in Gal 3²⁸ that in Christ there is 'neither male nor female.'

Perhaps it was because St. Paul saw in the marriage relationship a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church that he was led to set forth the duties of husbands and wives in what we should be inclined to call a one-sided fashion. As Christ loves the Church, so a man should love his wife; as the Church reverences Christ, so a woman should reverence her husband. In any case we have here a reminder of the sacredness, from the Christian standpoint, of the institution of marriage. It is no mere civil compact, but a significant symbol of sacred truth.

St. Augustine also sees in marriage a sacred and significant symbol. For him it signifies another high mystery—the mysterious relationship of the Three in One. The lover, his beloved, and the love which unites them, in these he finds a 'trace' of the Holy and Blessed Trinity.

It follows from what has been said that Christian marriage should be regarded as a holy vocation, as such making the highest demands upon the man and the woman who enter upon this estate. They are called to a holy calling. They are called, as we read in 1 P 3⁷, to be 'heirs together of the grace of life.' And there is only one way of realizing this high and holy calling. It is by the cultivation of mutual love. Only so shall the spiritual union which lies at the basis of true marriage be carried to higher and nobler fruition.

Conjugal love is apt to be a sensitive and delicate plant. It withers before indifference. It is killed by selfishness. And it must not be left to take

care of itself. It requires to be cultivated. Its leaves should be bathed in the sunshine of a constant affection. Its roots should be watered by the dews of tenderness, and by the tears—if need should be—of compassion and sympathy. It cannot be cherished and fostered too carefully.

Nor will it properly grow and expand if it should be enclosed in the garden of a selfish happiness. Marriage, as being a holy vocation, is intended for the discipline and development of character and personality, and there is no true development of character and personality unless the social sympathies be enlarged, so that the Christian home becomes a radiating centre of goodwill and neighbourly service.

Literature.

RELIGION AND THE EUROPEAN MIND.

DR. KELLER is an indefatigable traveller, lecturer, author, and helper of the Protestant churches of the Continent. Probably no man knows as much from experience as well as study of the religious situation on the Continent, and no man has done more to convey that knowledge to the English-speaking world on both sides of the Atlantic. His, however, is not only a practical interest, he knows that he may relieve need; but he is scholar and thinker enough to get below the surface of the religious situation, and to disclose its theological significance, he knows that he may understand the hidden springs. He is a sympathetic exponent, but not an indiscriminating disciple of Barth. In a previous book he had shown the bearing of the Barthian theology on Christian unity, as he is active in the œcumenical movements. In the present volume, *Religion and the European Mind* (Lutterworth Press; 6s. net), he sets 'faith as the spiritual problem, which underlies the German Church Revolution, and its universal significance.' I find it difficult here as in other writings of the author on the subject always to discover how far he disagrees as well as agrees with the Barthian theology. He has shown how great the influence on theological thought on the Continent the world

crisis has exercised, and how important Barth as an exponent of potent tendencies has been; but we cannot assign to these tendencies the universal significance which the author inclines to assign to them. That there is an *optimistic activism*, more in America than in Great Britain, which needs rebuke and correction such as these Continental movements may afford, we are ready to admit; but as the competent theology of this country did not go to the lengths of 'liberalism,' which were vocal in Germany, so we do not need so evident a reaction as Barthianism affords. But before discussing the general question this volume raises we may give an outline of the contents.

In the Introduction the author discusses generally the influence on religion of the Revolution through which Europe has been passing since the War. 'The battle is on,' he says, 'between the truth that comes from God and the truths that come from man' (p. 21). As the situation is conceived to be similar to that at the Reformation, he next describes 'the rebirth of the Spirit of the Reformation.' 'In the *sola gratia, sola fide* we hear the beating heart of the Reformation. In this respect there is no difference between the *sola gratia* of Luther and the *solī Deo gloria* of Calvin' (p. 22). He has, however, to record that there has been a return not only to the central position of the Reformation, but also a