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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

WHAT is a miracle? Is it, as the Archbishop in 'St. Joan' says, 'an event which creates faith'? Or is it, as a cynical follower of David Hume might suggest, an event which never has happened and which never could have happened, but which faith enables men to believe to have happened? Or is it simply something which we do not understand, an occurrence which we cannot fit in with the rest of our knowledge of the world, which does not conform to the rules of the Universe as we have had experience of them? If it be the last, then it is clear that man's growing familiarity and deeper investigation will reduce the number of events which have to be classed as miraculous, and that much that seemed to a comparatively ignorant age to be miraculous will be seen to have its 'natural' place in the order of things. In any case, this is certainly one of the matters on which clear thinking and accurate statement are required by the modern mind.

The question is raised afresh by the appearance of Canon W. J. PHYTHIAN-ADAMS' new book on early Hebrew history, *The Call of Israel* (Milford; 8s. 6d. net). One of the dangerous tendencies of modern times which has struck him is the 'Horror of Miracle,' and the consequent tendency to deny historicity to any record which claims to describe a miracle. He does not stand alone in his protest against this point of view, but there are few apologists who have approached the matter with so clear and open a mind. We are familiar with

the type of reasoning which, in order to prove the reality of 'miracle,' seeks to show that the so-called 'miracles' of the Bible are not miracles at all. Such reasoning may save the historicity of the Biblical record, but it does nothing to strengthen the position of those who would see special evidence of God at work in the story of Israel.

Canon PHYTHIAN-ADAMS takes a sounder position. He recognizes that a great deal which seemed to be miraculous in an 'unsophisticated' age is readily capable of a natural explanation. Thus he gives an account of most of the plagues of Egypt which is quite in line with normal events—we wish he had offered an 'explanation' of the last plague. Here we have little or nothing that is new, for a natural basis, interpreted as miraculous by a people who naturally see God at work only in the abnormal, is the recognized modern method of handling these stories. But he insists, and quite rightly, that even though the events themselves are capable of a natural explanation, their coincidence and their effect are 'miraculous,' in the sense that they indicate a special interference by God in human affairs. It was the call of Israel itself that was the great miracle, the unique and unparalleled event which had its place in that process of revelation which was complete only in Jesus.

The subject is developed in an illuminating way. We have first the statement of the actual belief of

Israel in her divine choice, traced back from the later period in the history of the people to patriarchal times. Next comes a critical examination of the tradition itself, with close discussion of some of its details and the means of its transmission, particularly the priesthood. Finally, we have the outstanding features of the Exodus reviewed in the light of their significance as indicating the special call of Israel. The author has used to good purpose much of the more recent work that has been done on the subject (we miss a reference to Galling's important 'Erwählungstraditionen Israels'); he accepts the volcanic theory of the Exodus, somewhat modifying the form in which it has hitherto been presented, for example by Gressmann, and discusses the geographical and geological aspects of the case at some length. Occasionally we meet with statements and comments which would not have been made by an Old Testament specialist, for example on p. 40, 'They [the prophets] are driven to speak *solely* (italics ours) because of what they believe has been done for Israel in the remote Past,' and the author naturally presents his own conclusion with a dogmatic certainty which would probably not be shared even by many who would accept his main position.

That all readers should 'agree with every word' in this book—or in any other of real importance—would be a 'miracle' in the commonly accepted sense of the term. We must, however, recognize that we have in Canon PRYTHIAN-ADAMS' new book a contribution to our thinking which should be of the highest value. He has helped us to clarify our minds, and he has condensed and crystallized what so many of us have been vaguely thinking and dimly feeling after, when he describes Israel's call as the threefold miracle of Material Coincidence, Spiritual Coincidence, and Sacramental Coincidence.

Signs are not wanting that throughout the Protestant world there is a growing feeling that modern criticism has weakened the Church's testimony, and that it is the Church's business to affirm with

conviction a divine message and not simply to investigate its human setting.

Last autumn Professor Edwin LEWIS of Drew University published an article on 'The Fatal Apostasy of the Modern Church,' which brought upon him much criticism. He was told that he had 'gone Barthian,' 'had sold out to the Fundamentalists,' and indeed was showing signs of senility.

To this criticism Professor LEWIS has replied in *A Christian Manifesto* (Abingdon Press; \$2.00). As one might expect it is a forceful and downright book. It is written with competent knowledge of modern criticism and in full sympathy with all that is necessary to elucidate the human element in the Bible and to express the Christian message in the light of modern thought. But it is written with a passionate conviction that the Church has been led away from her proper work, and in great measure has betrayed her divine commission.

'The restoration of Jesus Christ to His rightful place in the faith of the Church, and because of that to His rightful place in the life of the world—this is our urgent need. The Church cannot continue—it has no right to continue—save as it remains loyal to that faith it has been charged to keep; and the creative source and abiding centre of that faith is the atoning sacrifice of a Person who was both of us and not of us. He was of us because He was Son of man, He was not of us because He was Son of God.' But there is a widespread supposition that the Christian faith as thus understood is no longer able to maintain itself. The advance of modern knowledge has seemed to many to invalidate, or at least to cast doubt upon, the great Christian affirmations, and a fatal note of uncertainty has crept into Christian preaching.

Now this retreat is really needless and gravely mistaken. 'When a man categorically announces, "Christianity or Modernity?" he creates a false dilemma.' There is no antithesis between being a modern man and being a Christian in the complete New Testament sense; that is, provided

being a modern man does not mean simply that one is compelled to subscribe to the articles of a naturalistic creed, but that it means, rather, that one cultivates a spirit of open-mindedness to truth in all its forms, and an intense concern to understand and to profit by all the marvellous triumphs of scientific investigation, in whatever field the investigation may fall. 'Let it be said once and finally that there is nothing in Christianity that would keep a man out of an astronomical observatory, or out of a natural history museum, or out of a biological or chemical laboratory, or out of a library in which the thoughts of many minds through many ages call for consideration.' Indeed, all these, in opening vistas whose limits the mind may not discern, throw us back on ourselves as incarnate mysteries—and therefore as only the more in need of an authentic, revealing Word.

This Word is given in Christ, and is witnessed to in the Scriptures and in the living voice of the Church. Now there is simply no other way of learning what Christianity is than from its own records and its own history. We are agreed that the truth, and nothing but the truth, is to be sought after, but why should it be counted 'scientific' to approach the study of the Christian records with a rooted conviction that certain events could not have happened and certain ideas could not be valid? To take up that position is not to explain Christianity, or even to explain it away; it is simply to leave it wholly unexplained.

'It is not for a moment intended to deny the rights of literary and historical criticism as applied to the New Testament and to the progress of Christian thought. Let us welcome with open arms the work of the devoted New Testament scholar. Let us welcome the results reached by the historian as to the social and intellectual conditions under which this or that Christian doctrine was formulated, and as to the inevitable influence exercised by the conditions upon the formulation.' But behind all that there unquestionably lay an experience, a conviction, an attempt to utter some great thing. Each man had his own way of apprehending and of uttering, but it is our business to

get past all that and to discover what it was they all meant and tried to say. Take the Atonement. Nothing is easier than to criticise and even ridicule the formulations of that doctrine which have appeared in the history of Christian doctrine, but a sympathetic study will reveal the fact that there is an underlying unity. These men all shared a great conviction that salvation had come to them through the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, and they were striving to give worthy utterance to this conviction. Take the Church's doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ. When Peter made his confession, it may be freely granted that his words did not mean for him what they were made to mean in the Nicene theology. But what is apt to be overlooked is the fact that 'the Nicene statement said no more for the Nicene Fathers than Peter's statement said for Peter. He went as far as he knew how to go in the language he used—and they did no more. Had they, being who they were, stopped short of their own uttermost, they would have stopped short of the full meaning of Peter's confession, even though they still exceeded it in relative philosophic range.' All through there was a persistent, vital faith that in Jesus Christ dwelt all the fullness of the godhead bodily.

If we could read through the New Testament without prepossessions, never having seen it before, what would be the main impression made on our minds? Would it not be that every writer of this book believed that One had come into the world at the express will of God, had loved and served and suffered and died, had risen from the dead to be alive for evermore, and had done and endured all this to save men from destruction and to bring them the gift of eternal life? And would it not further be evident that each writer is striving to give expression to a divine message which will mean to others what it has meant to him? Behind all criticism and beyond all controversy there is this unity of experience and of conviction.

But had the men of the New Testament good reasons for their conviction and objective ground for their experience? They believed they had, and they based that belief on the fact of the Resur-

rection. After criticism has done its work we still have to reckon with this—that the Christian Church was born of the Resurrection. ‘You to whom the resurrection is but an empty tale, and who lightly brush aside everything in the New Testament that does not agree with your presuppositions, and who quite naïvely suppose that you would still have known all about the simple Jesus even if there had been no Church, remember this—that had there been no risen Christ there had been no written Gospels.’

Christian preaching must become more affirmative; the note of assurance must be recovered and sounded out. The Church must go back, or go down. Not back to a primitiveness of method and of expression, but ‘back to the message of original Christianity—the message of God’s atoning and redeeming love for a lost world, the message that puts a new value on every human soul and gives to it a new meaning, the message that transforms a fallen and sin-doomed creature into a potential son of God, a potentiality that becomes actualized according as by faith Christ is formed anew in the believer’s life. It is to the proclamation of that message that the Church is called to return—and, let it be added, to an incarnation of the message in its own life and work. We may clothe the message in such forms as we wish. We may bring to our assistance every bit of psychological insight that we can muster. But if we want to see a redeemed world, this is the only way by which it can come to pass.’

The Holiness of Jesus (Allen & Unwin; 10s. 6d. net), by Mr. A. D. MARTIN, is a contribution in the field of Christian Apologetics. His references to writers on New Testament subjects do not appear to us as always discriminating, and his literary illustrations—an interesting and welcome feature of the book—appear to us far-fetched at times, but we must acknowledge that he has given us a fresh and forceful study of the mind of Jesus, such as will prove helpful to teachers and preachers.

Postulating the trustworthiness of the Synoptic portrait of Jesus, Mr. MARTIN proceeds to defend the character of Jesus as holy against certain modern criticisms, and to set forth His holiness through an examination of His religious knowledge, His judgments and sayings, His communion with God, and His self-sacrifice. And in the holiness of Jesus, or even in His sinlessness—putting it merely negatively—he would find a discriminating test of vital Christianity. In place of the historic creeds and articles of religion the Christian churches might well be content, he urges, to unite in affirming the sinlessness of Jesus.

We shall not here consider the soundness of such a position, but shall give an account of Mr. MARTIN’S treatment of that crux of exegesis, Mk 10^{17, 18}: ‘There ran one to him, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good save one, even God.’ This passage is often cited by modern critics of the doctrine of Jesus’ sinlessness, who find in it an actual repudiation of His sinlessness from Jesus’ own lips. Let us see how it is expounded by one who whole-heartedly defends the traditional view.

First, it is to be noticed that the Evangelist who records these words has a high doctrine of the Person of Jesus. It is sufficient to observe that at the outset Jesus is acclaimed as the beloved Son of God, in whom the Father is well pleased. Apparently the Evangelist sees in the ‘Good Master’ conversation nothing that is inconsistent with the acclamation at the Baptism.

Secondly, at the end of the incident under discussion Jesus says to the man who addressed Him, ‘Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.’ Is that bidding, ‘Come, follow me,’ quite consistent with a sense of sin? For ‘following’ means the subordination of a disciple to a Master. Of course a religious teacher might one day admit his own sinfulness and on another offer himself as a pattern to others, but would he do the

two things in the same breath? It is thus very unlikely that in disclaiming personal goodness Jesus is acknowledging sin.

Thirdly, what He does disclaim is personal goodness apart from God, incidentally rebuking a certain glibness on the part of the inquirer. Jesus was preoccupied with the glory of the heavenly world. He was a man Divinely obsessed. Beside the awful and all-pervading Goodness of God, who could be accounted good? Was this to admit sinfulness in Himself? Rather was it not the expression of a mood for which 'sinlessness' is altogether too inadequate a word? When a man is filled with the consciousness of God he must needs repudiate all comparison with Him.

'With infinite penetration, and with all the maturing value of the hours of devotion, Jesus walked this earth of ours, often more aware of Heaven than of the ground He trod, hourly accepting from the Father the gift of all beauty and all love with a gratitude deeper than any words could express. And if once and again he would pre-empt

certain words such as "Father" and "Good" for God alone, what He said was symbolic truth, not to be measured by a forensic method, not the language of logic, but the poetry of the soul.'

Lastly, it should be remembered that Jesus could and did apply the word 'good' to the character and conduct of men. For example, He says in Mt 12³⁵: 'The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things.' It is a reminder once more that His method of speech was never after the critical debating manner, and that sometimes He was led by the Spirit of God to take certain words out of their wonted associations and reserve them for the Divine alone.

Students of the history of Christian doctrine will have gathered that, although Mr. MARTIN repudiates the Liberal or Unitarian view of the Person of Jesus, he is in line not so much with the traditional orthodoxy of the Word made flesh as with the position, which also found exponents in the Ancient Church, that our Lord was a man wholly inspired or possessed of God.

Things most certainly Believed.

II.

BY THE REVEREND PRINCIPAL H. WHEELER ROBINSON, M.A., D.D., OXFORD.

ABOUT the beginning of this century two young ministers on the threshold of their work set themselves to discover their own fundamental convictions. It was ten o'clock at night when they began their discussion, and the light of dawn was coming through the blinds when they finished it. But they had been successful in reaching something that seemed fundamental to both of them, in the sense that it was the personal starting-point of their Christian faith. One of them held the conviction that whatever else was true or false there was somebody looking after us; the other, that if a man went on with what he believed to be right he would win through. These results might seem scanty in themselves, but they had the merit of

being both simple and true for those concerned. It might be claimed that they are but differing emphases on a common truth, stated from what might be called Neo-Hegelian and Neo-Kantian bases respectively. It is the purpose of this article at any rate to attempt a statement of Christian faith from the standpoint of 'pragmatic moralism,' to use the name given to it by the Neo-Hegelian partner in the discussion.

If a Christian man examines carefully some dominating purpose of his own life, representing his true ideals, he can hardly miss its variability, the rise and fall of the intensity with which it is maintained. At one moment or period it is so strong that nothing seems able to resist it; at