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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE central theme of Christianity, as of other religions, is its conception of God. 'To-day,' as Mr. WHITEHEAD says, 'there is but one religious dogma in debate: What do you mean by "God"?' And in this respect, to-day is like all its yesterdays. This is the fundamental religious dogma, and all other dogmas are subsidiary to it.'

The Christian conception of God has been likened to a threefold cord. One strand of that cord comes from general religious experience. It is the conviction that God is a personal being. And what is implied for the religious man in the thought of God as personal? It is not, or should not be, that God is a being possessed of 'body, parts, and passions,' like a human person. It is that God is a being with whom man may enter into personal relations; which is to say, with whom he may hold communion or fellowship. God may respond to the heart that seeks Him, as the answering echo is awakened with the striking of the musical chord.

It is said that in the Muhammadan religion the sense of the Divine love and goodness is somewhat deficient, and that as a consequence the relation between Allah and his worshipper tends to be formal and external; yet it is undeniably a personal relation. In the religion of Israel the relation between Jehovah and His worshipper is close and intimate and richly personal. It is enough to recall the Book of Psalms, which truly contains, as Mr.

Prothero puts it, 'the whole music of the heart of man, swept by the hand of his Maker.'

But the deepest and most personal relationship of all is surely that of the Christian believer to his God. It is expressed through the great spiritual symbols of fatherhood and sonship: 'Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be.'

This, then, is the testimony of religious experience in general, that God, whatever else He may be in the depths of His unfathomable nature, is at least a personal being, with whom the worshipper may enter into fellowship. And here is the first strand of that threefold cord of conviction which is the Christian idea or conception of God.

The second strand comes from the philosophic insight; and philosophic insight is not restricted to professional philosophers. It is the conviction that God is the ultimate reality of the universe, the basic principle which unifies all things, the absolute or self-sufficient being behind all things and in whom all things live and move and have their being.

Muhammadans, Hebrews, Christians, and indeed most believers in one God, not only regard God as a personal being, but attribute to Him mastery over the universe. As the first of these convictions has its source in the religious experience, the second

has its source—as already said—in the philosophic insight. And as religious experience deepens and reflection matures the two meanings of God tend to coalesce, and the personal being with whom man holds converse, and unto whom he lifts hands of prayer, is explicitly acknowledged as identical with the ultimately real being whereof philosophy is in quest.

But there is nothing distinctively Christian in the conception of God as hitherto stated. A third strand of conviction remains to be interwoven with the other two, and it is the distinctively Christian one. It comes from the specific Christian experience. It is the conviction that God has so revealed Himself in Jesus Christ that in Jesus Christ as in none other we may discern the Divine character and will. Jesus Christ is a portrait in time of the Divine eternal nature, a window—as Dr. Adams Brown expresses it—through which we may behold the Divine face. This is the distinctively Christian conviction, and with it the Christian conception of God is completed.

And the full Christian conception of God is summed up in the name of Father. This expressive symbol serves to convey the thought of kinship with man, of likeness to him, which is involved in the idea of God as a personal being. Again, it serves also to convey the thought of supreme power and authority which is involved in the idea of God as the ultimate reality of things. Lastly, no other name can better convey the thoughts of holiness, love, and sacrifice which are involved in the idea of God as revealing His character and will in Jesus Christ. He that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father.

Personality, Reality, and Christlike character—such are the three strands composing the Christian conception of God. It is not easy for Christian thought to weave them together in one. But Christian faith does it, and this threefold cord is not lightly broken.

Mansfield College, Oxford, has celebrated its

Jubilee. We should like with all respect to offer our hearty congratulations on the interesting occasion, and in a sentence to express the gratitude which, with so many more, we feel towards that distinguished centre of Christian scholarship.

The Jubilee has been commemorated by the College itself by the issue of a volume of Essays by past and present members of the staff. The subject is *Christian Worship: Studies in its History and Meaning*, edited by Nathaniel MICKLEM (Milford; 12s. 6d. net).

The choice of subject is very significant. Fifty years ago, nay, twenty years ago, it would not have been *Worship* that was selected. It might have been 'Theological Essays' or 'Biblical Studies,' or even 'The Principles of Independency.' It might have been almost anything except 'Worship.'

For it is only now that in all the churches in our land outside the Roman and the Anglican Communion there is a growing feeling that we have strangely and stupidly paid little if any attention to the study of the Christian Cultus, and an uneasy fear that that neglect has cost and lost us more than we like to contemplate. In all our churches, indeed, there have been individual ministers who set store by the study of *Worship*, and did what they could to disseminate more adequate views. But theological students left the Colleges with practically no knowledge of the history of *Worship*, and quite pitiful instruction as to what the aims of Public *Worship* are and the means of realizing them. It was thought that if a man were sincere he might be left to guide the congregational worship as he thought best.

We are realizing the folly of that. In the colleges some attempt is being made to prepare men to conduct Divine Service as it ought to be conducted. But we need yet much more. What we should have in each college is a Chair of, or Lectureship in, Liturgics. Mansfield College has given us an approach to a text-book on the subject, and we bespeak for it a very wide circulation.

The Essays fall into three groups as they deal with the Biblical data, the subsequent history, or the principles of public worship. The topics are treated each of them by a scholar who has earned the right to be heard. In the first group we have Wheeler ROBINSON on the Old Testament Background; MANSON on the Jewish Background; CADMAN on the Word of God in the New Testament; DODD on the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. In the second we have Vernon BARTLET on the Ancient Liturgies; R. S. FRANKS on Worship in the Middle Ages; MOFFATT on Luther; C. J. CADOUX on Zwingli; WHALE on Calvin; A. G. MATTHEWS on the Puritans. In part three E. R. MICKLEM deals with Psychological Considerations; E. SHILLITO with the Preaching of the Word; K. L. PARRY with Prayer and Praise; N. MICKLEM with the Sacraments.

In an introductory Essay Dr. A. E. GARVIE deals with the Philosophy of Worship. Like all that Dr. GARVIE writes, it is a characteristically 'meaty' article, raising many points of interest and clarifying every point raised. Let us confine ourselves to almost the last. Should Christianity at its best or purest recognize special times or places? Yes, says Dr. GARVIE, it should. 'While religion at its highest phase consecrates all time, all space, every man; every day is the Lord's Day, every place is God's house and every man God's child; yet man being social, there must be community in worship; there are sacred seasons when and sacred places where the corporate acts of worship must take place. Without any superstition the Christian religion may recognize the spiritual value of times and spaces set apart for worship.'

'So also not all the worshippers can take part in all the acts of worship. The service must be conducted and the sermon preached by one person who represents the congregation in these corporate acts.' 'There have been false prophets as well as unworthy priests; yet priesthood as mediating the approach of man to God and prophethood as mediating the approach of God to man, freed of all pretensions to exclusive validity and authority,

are necessary and legitimate agencies of the community of worship.'

This justification of holy times and holy places leads Dr. GARVIE naturally to raise the question as to 'forms' or symbolism in worship. All his own instincts, he tells us, are in favour of as little material apparatus as possible; yet he feels compelled to ask if this indifference to form is altogether justified.

We remember the late Dr. Stalker raising as a curious point for his class to consider what justification, if any, underlies the undoubted fact that many Protestants have such a profound distrust in the eye as opposed to the ear as the gateway of religious instruction, so that their worship is so denuded of symbol.

Similarly Dr. GARVIE here argues, 'Man is no more a disembodied angel than a soulless beast. Even if we distinguish soul and body and assert the superiority of soul to body, body is the one organ of man's self-expression and self-communication.' 'Man has æsthetic sense to appreciate and æsthetic talent to reproduce beauty of shape, colour, and sound. May not beauty claim a place in religion with truth or goodness? It is in worship it can most fully be expressed. The senses are not more alien to sin than to holiness, the imagination more alien to truth than the intellect. Theology is symbol even when it attempts to define: 'Preaching is "spoken symbol"; why should "acted symbol" be so suspect? May not our worship have lost its attractiveness for many because it does not satisfy the whole man with all his varied interests?'

This matter of 'symbol' is also handled very suggestively in E. R. MICKLEM's paper on 'Psychological Considerations.' He points out that 'the Word of God is mediated to us through "phenomena"—through presentations to the senses chiefly the visual and auditory.' There is always bound to be the risk of the minds of the congregation not getting past the 'phenomenon,' whatever it be, to the spiritual reality. Whether it be the liturgical symbolical acts in which 'High Church'

worship abounds, or the sermon of the service from which symbols and rites have all but completely vanished, there is always the danger, as real in the latter case as in the former, that some part of the congregation will not get beyond æsthetic or logical appreciation. As one may leave a 'High Church' service saying 'what beautiful vestments,' one may leave the unadorned saying 'what a beautiful discourse.' So, as Professor MICKLEM proceeds very ably to expound, psychological considerations are of quite surpassing interest and importance.

Rebel Religion, by the Rev. B. C. PLOWRIGHT, B.A., B.D. (Allenson; 5s. net), contains in the opening chapter a penetrating analysis of the contemporary world-situation. The book, as might be expected, is on the side of the angels. But the author is no prophet of smooth things. He realizes the gravity of the challenge which is being hurled at the Christian faith from many quarters, and he starts his awakening argument by exposing the realities that underlie the unrest and revolt of our time.

The old Victorian optimism is as antiquated as the belief in witches, as unreal as a heraldic picture of a unicorn. The master convictions which for the Victorian bound all life together in a pleasing unity have been broken down. A landslide has buried our accustomed ways of thinking. We can no longer discern the lay-out of our civilization or understand the nature of the life which is the creative force in that civilization. The author heaps metaphor on metaphor, Niagara-torrents, earthquakes, débâcles, to make his point impressive and convincing. He then proceeds to detail.

Let us examine three of the basic ideas of the nineteenth century, and we shall see how complete the débâcle has been. First of all, the Meaning of Life, then Progress, and finally Democracy. Until recently all these formed part and parcel of the common stock of inherited and unquestioned beliefs. They were the working assumptions derived from experience and reflection. To-day every one of

them has been seriously questioned, and in some quarters passionately repudiated.

Take the first, the Meaning of Life. In the nineteenth century life was regarded and measured against the certainty of an eternal future. The present was a preparatory period of discipline. Man was immortal, bound for heaven or hell, according to his deserts, but certainly for one or other. Life was real and earnest because it was only the vestibule of life everlasting. It had essentially an other-worldly meaning. To-day all this has gone, partly because of developments within religious thought itself, and partly for other reasons.

Among these reasons are the following. The belief in hell went because of its flagrant violation of justice. It was unjust to punish a man with suffering for ever and ever because of some sins that did not seem so very flagrant. The punishment did not fit the crime. In addition to that, there was the easy-going Victorian belief in the amiable Fatherhood of God, what the author calls the 'Grandad' theology. In reaction from the old severe Calvinism, and owing to the rediscovery of the 'historic Jesus,' God was represented as a kind and benevolent Person who would not be hard on anybody.

But even more serious reasons were two others. One was the new concentration on social problems. Within religion itself the idea of the Kingdom of God received a fresh emphasis, and with it the ideal of a new world of righteousness *here*. And this chimed with the attention given to the claims of the submerged and the demand for better conditions. All this tended to concentrate men's minds on the present, and to weaken the other-worldly idea of life. And this process was advanced finally by the discoveries of science, which promised to make man master in the house of life. Material plenty obscured spiritual values and needs. And the tremendous achievements made in our own time in the conquest of Nature have cut at the roots of man's dependence on God and created a self-confidence which was alien to the Christian attitude.

Hence the growth of Naturalism, and the conception of religion as 'The Great Illusion.'

The second Victorian idea was that of Progress. The idea was soundly based on experience. The steady rise in the standard of living, the increase of material wealth, the enormous multiplication of the instruments of pleasure and satisfaction appeared to give a warrant to the idea that things were getting better and better. And the idea seemed to be confirmed by the great discovery of Evolution; only 'seemed,' because it was a false interpretation of evolution that was made to serve the idea of progress. Evolution in reality includes decay and deterioration as much as advance and development. Nevertheless there seemed to be good grounds for believing in the inevitability of progress, and it was held as an axiom.

But this idea has been undermined. The War did much to destroy it. And after the War came the New Psychology, with its assertion that not reason but instinct dominates man. The greater part of the human mind was composed of deep, instinctive, unconscious forces, partly racial, partly hereditary, partly individual. The major decisions of life were made at the bidding of the unconscious. For Freud the unconscious was largely made up of sex impulse; for Adler, of the instinct of self-assertion and self-preservation; for Jung, of an instinctive drive, the libido, which might take one of many protean forms. Yet amid their differences all agree in the emphasis on the prevailing influence of instinct. Reason was little more than the obedient servant of instinct. And with this disappearance of the rationality of man went the main prop of the belief in inevitable progress.

Another influence working in the same direction was the new interpretation of history. The idea of progress was based on too narrow a range of facts. If, instead of concentrating on our own civilization, we regard the successive civilizations of history, we see a similar pattern in them all. They have their periods of birth, infancy, youth, maturity; and then also of decay, decline, and death. The same graph of history would do for every civiliza-

tion. For inevitable progress the new history substituted the idea of cyclic development. Civilizations were only successive whorls in the stream of time.

The third idea was that of Democracy. The Victorian Age regarded democracy as the perfect form of political organization. The ballot, and in the long-run universal suffrage, were the infallible cure-all of all social ills. But the march of thought and experience has undermined this idea also. For one thing, in our time it is the economic factor that is the deciding one, questions of food and wages and leisure and work. And political institutions are judged now by their value for these economic needs. And on that basis the value of the democratic ideal is being challenged by two things. One is experience. When faced by a grave economic crisis like unemployment the political machine has proved completely inadequate. It could not provide opportunity, security, or justice. It was shut in by convention and tradition. Politicians have tinkered with the problem, but nowhere have been courage and resource to deal with the facts.

The other hostile influence has been the flight from Reason already referred to. The essential basis of democracy is the rationality of man. But if men are not rational, but driven by instinct, then clearly democracy is impossible. The only alternative is to organize political life on the basis of the a-moral instincts. It is a menacing fact for democracy that in three great nations of Europe it has been abandoned—Russia, Germany, and Italy.

Such is the picture of our modern world drawn for us in this arresting volume. Never in all probability, says the writer, has any generation experienced such drastic disturbances in its life, or been compelled to adjust itself to them so swiftly as ours. Never was the ruin so complete. Yet in the very completeness of that ruin lies our hope. We have the opportunity to build as we will. This is one of the great creative epochs in history. For good or evil life has become plastic once more, and we are the makers of a civilization that will for long bear the stamp we put upon it.