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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

We have once more observed the anniversary of the Armistice. The hearts of the generation that lived and suffered through the agonies of the War cannot but be stirred with a bewildering variety of emotions in which gratitude for deliverance, pride in and sorrow for the fallen, sympathy for their dependents are mingled. Yet as the years pass each Armistice anniversary seems to bring ever more clearly to mind the problems of suffering, disillusionment, and sense of futility—in a word, the many-sided problem of evil.

Three books whose value is not to be measured by their size—they are all small—have come into our hands, and each has a section devoted to the study of evil. The three books are: *Man and his Maker*, by the late Dr. Percy Dearmer (S.C.M.; 3s. 6d. net); *The Crisis of Christian Rationalism*, by Professor Kenneth E. Kirk (Longmans; 3s. 6d. net); and *Can We Believe in God?* by Dr. C. A. Alington (Rich & Cowan; 3s. 6d. net). The names of the writers are almost sufficient guarantee that all those books are excellent—compact but suggestive and lucid in treatment.

To read all three is illuminative as to what is the common ground in Christian thought of to-day on this age-old problem. While each writer has his own lines of argument, his own way of expressing it, and, above all, his own freshness of illustration, all three are in large measure of agreement. All recognize that the fundamental problem is, How can we believe in an omnipotent and good God in face of the terrible discords, sufferings, cruelties, etc., which we find in the world in which men have to live? An old, old perplexity *si Deus bonus, unde malum?* All three are at one likewise in pointing out that a large part of evil is due to man—his ignorance, his folly, his sin. Suppose all evil things due to man were removed, what 'problem' of evil would be left to puzzle us? But why is man evil? Why did an omnipotent God of Love allow man to sin? All three agree in their answer—God made man free, and freedom involves the possibility of taking the wrong turning. God *might* have made man so that he *could* not do wrong. Think out what that means. It means that man is an automaton, and that means, to follow Dr. Kirk, that it is not obvious why man should have real existence at all. 'With God, to *create* a mechanical universe would in no way add to the reality conferred upon it by *thinking* it alone.'

Dr. Alington makes this point—if we argue that God must leave man free, it is absurd to expect Him to interfere as soon as any wrong choice is made. 'We do not expect or really wish God to stop us from doing something wrong, for we know, or think we know, that we are in this world to develop our characters, and the fact that our error is to have bad results is precisely the way in which we are being taught to do better.'

He goes on to make a remark which is very much

in place at Armistice time when so many wonder why God permitted such a disastrous calamity as the Great War. We are not greatly perplexed when an individual does something wrong which has ill consequences for himself and those nearest him. Well, Dr. ALINGTON asks, why so perplexed when a statesman through ambition or treachery causes a disastrous war involving the misery of a multitude? The scale is vaster, but is there more cause of perplexity in the one case than in the other?

All agree, too, in asking why should we be so ready to shiver before the problem of evil, forgetting that there is a problem of goodness, which mystery Dr. ALINGTON will have it is the greater of the two. 'I can understand why I react to what I know to be wrong; what I cannot understand is why, being the selfish creature I am, I am quite unable to applaud my own selfish mistakes, and have continually in my mind the belief, if not the certainty, that I was made for something better.' 'Why is it,' asks Dr. DEARMER, 'that the average sensual man recognises and admires that which is better than himself? There is no explanation except that of theism. We respond to a goodness that is not ours, because the Soul of the World is good.'

All agree, of course, on points that have been made by most who have ever treated the subject from a Christian point of view, such as the educative, soul-forming, character-developing influence of much that at first sight seems unrelieved evil. On that it is not needful to quote any of them, nor on the point that without evil we should not know goodness.

Let us close with the very practical point briefly emphasized by Dr. ALINGTON, and dealt with at some length by Dr. KIRK. 'The practical problem for each of us is not whence came evil, but what am I personally to do about it? Christ never discussed the origin of evil. He did show how it could be overcome. Throughout His life He was bringing good out of evil, and His death on the Cross was but the inevitable and dramatic evidence of what His life had shown. The Christian religion does not evade the problem of evil but bids us grapple with it in the assurance that it cannot ultimately harm the man of good-will.' Yes, we have to emphasize 'ultimately,' for we must agree with Dr. DEARMER that 'there is no explanation of the whole problem of pain and evil and no answer to it of any permanent value, unless we are convinced of the immortality of the soul.'

A certain human interest attaches to the recent volume, *What is the Faith?* (Hodder & Stoughton; 7s. 6d. net), by Dr. Nathaniel MICKLEM, Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford. In this volume (chosen as the 'Religious Book of the Month'), very readable and full of unobtrusive theological learning, the endeavour is made to indicate what elements in the traditional theology and religious language of Christendom must be deemed of the substance of the faith, however they may be retranslated, and what elements pertain to the form which may be transient.

But the point of human interest is this. The author takes us into his confidence and tells us how difficult he sometimes finds it to be a Christian believer. His constant cry is, 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.' He tells us further that, while in these pages he has set forth what he takes to be the Faith, it is not the presentation of the Faith he would have made some time ago.

There is a sincere intellectual endeavour in this work to uphold the essential 'catholic' position against the radicalizing or liberalizing tendencies of the time. It is the same endeavour as we meet with in the Barthian movement on the continent of Europe. And it is significant of the sharpening of the issue between 'catholic' and 'radical' or 'liberal' that this Protestant theologian is found, like Karl Barth himself, to be constantly falling back upon scholastic writers, notably upon St. Thomas Aquinas, the classical exponent of Roman Catholic theology.

The first part of the work before us treats of

'The Nature of Dogma,' and the discussion comprises such subjects as the Definition of the Faith, Revelation, Natural Religion, the Bible, Experience, and Authority. The second part, 'The Content of Dogma,' deals with the subjects of the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, the Atonement, and the Church. These subjects most readily illustrate the principles laid down in the first part.

Here is how revelation, dogma, and theology are distinguished from each other. 'Revelation is the act of God opening our eyes to behold His glory in the face of Jesus Christ; dogma corresponds to the affirmations which we are bound to make when we attempt to express the logical and spiritual implications of revelation; theology is the systematic attempt to relate dogma to the whole of knowledge, and to present it in the form of explanation or philosophical and articulated expression. Thus revelation corresponds to the poet's moment of rapture, dogma to the poem (in this case, an epic poem), and theology to gloss, paraphrase, and exposition.'

The central contention of the book is that all Christian theology should spring from the Word of God, and that every dogma must be an expression of the Word. The Word (or the gospel), it is added, is in form a story or *mythos*; for it implies the use of active verbs, such as God sent or took or came. 'In other words, the central and pivotal dogma of the faith is the Incarnation taken not as a metaphor (as, for instance, every good man or beautiful object may in some metaphorical sense be taken to be an incarnation of a divine idea), but in its proper sense of an inconceivable act of mercy on the part of Almighty God in history.'

Principal MICKLEM is insistent throughout the book upon this representation of the Word or gospel as a story. 'Our mortal eyes are not able to see the pure white light; we can only apprehend it in the many colours of the spectrum. We can, however, speak of the light which we cannot see. Not dissimilarly we can only express the divine action in a series of propositions concerning the Birth, the Death, the Resurrection, and Ascension of the Lord; we apprehend under the form of a time-series that which we can speak of as one single divine act in our redemption.'

The position here taken enables our writer to uphold the Christian faith in the light of modern knowledge. It is implied that the Incarnation, which is the core of the Christian faith, is not, and cannot be, a strictly philosophical conception. Many abstract or general truths are involved in the gospel, but the gospel is not itself a series of such truths. It is a *mythos*, a story, that God sent His Son. Not doctrine but story is the unchangeable kernel of the Christian faith. It is the 'old, old story.' It may be told in different ways, but it is always the story of the divine Charity, the heavenly Condescension, the Redemption of mankind through God made man.

The story has many moments, corresponding to 'the mighty acts of God.' 'It begins with the Creation; there follow the call of Abraham, the sending of the Prophets, the Incarnation of the Son, His Cross, His Resurrection, the sending of the Holy Ghost, the calling and commission of the Christian Church; it ends with the Consummation, when all that came into being through the Son returns to the Father through the Son, and the redeemed creation in the unveiled Presence joins in the eternal worship to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.' This is a truly 'catholic' presentation of the Faith, and full of the Evangelical spirit.

Dr. Neville S. TALBOT, in the preface to his new book, *Great Issues: Studies in Reconciliation* (S.P.C.K.; 3s. 6d. net), apologizes for adding to the 'spate of little books on Christianity' which pours through the publishing presses. And, looked at from the outside, this looks very much like one of these. But we soon lose any such impression as we get inside the book. It is a work of remarkable originality, and it seizes attention and respect by its sense of urgency and its passionate conviction. The ostensible subject is Reconciliation, but

its real message is about the 'relevance' of the Bible, or rather the gospel, to the needs and problems of our time.

One of the chapters is entitled 'The Relevance of the New Testament,' and one section, which is worth noting, is on 'The Gospel of God and the Incarnation.' Its object is to enforce that the gospel is really about God and that it is the revelation of the ultimate mystery of things. Does this need enforcing? Dr. TALBOT thinks it does. For the gospel of the Incarnation has been deprived of its full effectiveness through the prevalence of sub-Christian or non-Christian conceptions of God. There is a dualism in the minds of many people: on the one hand, a reverence for our Lord as man; on the other, and unrelated to it, a vague and horrid conception of God, the Almighty.

This has come about, in part at any rate, owing to the obscuration of the essential Christian gospel by doctrinal veils. There has been a displacement of the centre of gravity from God to our Lord. Dr. TALBOT finds this in some of the great evangelical hymns and in Catholic extra-liturgical use of the Holy Sacrament, as well as elsewhere. God has become remote, invisible, unimaginable, while magnetically the nearer, the more real, Figure has riveted attention on Himself. Thought has from early days been preoccupied with the question: What is to be affirmed about Christ? Yet there is a deeper question than that, namely: What is to be affirmed about God?

The preoccupation of men's minds with Jesus instead of with God may be a reason for the swift decline of Christianity from its initial glorious vitality. Some muffling of the essential gospel came about from very early days. The very essence of that which was revealed in Christ suffered a certain subsidence, a certain removal from attention. Controversy became predominantly Christological rather than theological or theistic. Thus the mighty edifice of Orthodoxy was reared, the foundations of which were not for a long time shaken.

But they are being shaken to-day. Root and branch conclusions have upheaved everything. Unshakable assumptions do not exist. Ultimate questions, which former generations could coolly presume had been long laid to rest, are alive again. The elemental issues about God and man and existence are alive again. The days when men cry out—not because of some speculative interest, but with hearts shaken by the dread emergencies of history—for a gospel of God have come round again. Under these conditions we have to look out how we read and how we expound the New Testament, and therein especially the Synoptic narratives, and therein especially St. Mark's Gospel. The real message of Christianity is masked and disguised if the story of the experience of the disciples is viewed exclusively from the standpoint of belief in the Incarnation: more precisely, if it is read as though that belief was in the minds of Christ's disciples during the ministry.

There is a way of thinking of the gospel facts which Dr. TALBOT calls 'the Christmas-carol frame of mind.' It illustrates the suffusion, the saturation of the historical by the devotionally doctrinal. It is full of the sense of the mystical, the mysterious, and the romantic, as it plays delightedly, nay adoringly, round the scene where the Maker of the Universe lay swaddled in a manger. But this surely provokes scepticism and induces a sense of unreality, unless it is flanked by the bold affirmation that that in which it so delights was in no one's mind at the time or at any time during the ministry, not even in the mind of the Mother of Jesus. Is it not strictly inconceivable that any Jewish maiden could have looked upon herself as called to be 'the Mother of God'? The Mother of the Christ, yes, but no more.

We must begin at Bethlehem, but historically not doctrinally—that is, not with Christian Incarnational doctrine in our spectacles. More precisely we must do so with Jewish doctrine, with Messianic expectation, in our minds. We must so begin, or we invite the nemesis of unreality which threatens the Christmas-carol frame of mind. It is necessary to follow what Baron von Hügel calls the genetic

method in reading the Gospels. We must abide by 'sheer history,' and trace the real experience of Jesus as He moved steadily forward in the venture of faith in the Father, the reality of which was to be vindicated in the supreme hour of His life. We must disinter the real history from the cerements of dogma.

Even when we come to Caesarea Philippi and Peter's confession we must not carry back into it what we know of developed truth. At Caesarea Philippi the Jewish faith and hope in God mounted to its highest pitch in the acknowledgment of Jesus as the Christ of God. Nevertheless it was Jewish faith, not, as we say now, Christian faith. The recognition of that is of absolutely first importance. It was Jewish faith in God more than faith in Himself as the Christ of God. It was not faith in what He as Christ would do, but in what God would do through Him. Higher than that peak the faith of the disciples could not rise.

The faith of Jesus Himself did rise higher. But the claims that Jesus had made for Himself as the Christ were all along grounded not upon what He Himself could or would do, but on the action, the Will of Him in whom He trusted. Taken by themselves as self-assertions, they are the claims of a madman, as many clever men have declared, from Bernard Shaw upwards or downwards. But they were not self-assertions. They were the absolute expression of filial trust in His God and Father. Thus at the climax everything hung upon Him in whom He trusted. And thus, in the steadfast going to His death by Jesus as the Christ of God, the faith of the Old Testament reached its crisis.

Its justification came in the Resurrection. The New Testament throbs with fulfilment and verification. The Resurrection was the ratification and vindication of the faith of Jesus, and therefore of all faith. It sets the seal for ever on His interpretation of existence. Out of it sprang, with the force of light dispersing darkness, and of life swallowing up death, and of mercy obliterating sin, the gospel of God with which the New Testament rings. The Resurrection is, then, the primal fountain of the Christian gospel of God. And the rest of the New Testament, after the Gospels, is the record of the expansion of this earliest gospel from its initial limitations. The Acts in particular is the drama of such expansion. And the Epistles tell how the Resurrection, as an external event, became an inward fountain of redemption from sin and of new life with righteousness both to the Jew and to the Gentile. And so every great gospel word in the New Testament is an affirmation about God.

The Ninth Commandment.

By Professor James Moffatt, D.D., D.Litt., New York.

Like the third, the ninth commandment is concerned with a vice which finds expression in speech. In later days charges may have been occasionally laid before a court of justice in written form, as was the case in Egypt and elsewhere throughout the Ancient East; but normally in Israel a witness made his statements orally, appearing in person to give evidence either as a plaintiff in his own suit or in support of another complainant; he might also be summoned as a witness in some public trial, to state what he had seen or heard. Seating himself before the elders or priests who were already seated in the primitive tribunal, he was called upon as a loyal member of the community to tell, without fear or favour, what he knew either for or against the accused. Hebrew procedure attached the highest importance to the duty of veracity in a witness, but the temptations to make partial or untruthful depositions were so subtle, the possibilities of a witness being bribed or bullied by a wealthy defendant or an influential plaintiff were so notorious, and the tendency to allow personal