

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE chief business of the Church is to interpret to the world the meaning of the Cross, and so Christian eyes must ever be peering afresh into the depth of that divine mystery. To see with clearness and to express in simple language what has been seen is no easy task. So we have books on the Atonement which are profound, difficult, sometimes controversial, and often to the plain man not spiritually helpful.

In this connexion we can warmly commend an unpretentious little book on *The Obedience of the Cross*, by Canon J. O. F. MURRAY of Ely Cathedral (S.P.C.K.; 3s. net). It contains a series of addresses which have been given at retreats in Holy Week. The characteristic of these addresses is their simplicity and logical coherence combined with depth of spiritual feeling.

It will be universally agreed that we see in the Cross a revelation of obedience and a revelation of love, both perfectly displayed and tested by death. It is a complete expression of all that our human nature was created to become. 'We can feed our souls by the contemplation of it in the presence of God the Father, knowing that there is in it a sacrifice of a sweet savour, in which we and He can rejoice together.' It is the perfect example of that living sacrifice of ourselves to God in loyalty and love which is our reasonable service. As such it stands before the world for ever as the ideal

and pattern, however far short we may come of expressing it in our daily life.

But there is far more than that in the teaching of the New Testament. When we ask why was it necessary for Christ to die, His own words leave us in no doubt as to the answer. He came, and He knew that He had come, to give His life a ransom, to shed His blood for the remission of sins. However much the modern mind may be repelled by the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, and however alien its symbols and ideas may seem to us, 'it is no accident that the Cross itself can only yield up its deepest secret to us in proportion as we are able to grasp the reality which underlies and interprets the sacrificial symbols.' The essence of that symbolism was the identification of the sinner with the victim and the laying of his sin on the victim's head. Our Lord's own words leave no doubt that with clear conscience and deliberate intent He accepted the position of victim on behalf of His people, and 'made His soul an offering for sin.' 'The perfection of His love and of His purity, together with the closeness of the bond uniting Him to the brethren whose flesh and blood He shared, made it inevitable that He should feel as a weight on His own heart, by no legal fiction but in awful reality, the guilt and shame of His people's sin.'

This sacrifice, offered in love, is represented as

in some way giving satisfaction to God. On the basis of this theories of the Atonement have been framed which set the redeeming love of Christ in sharp contrast with the righteousness of God. But this has no ground in the New Testament. 'There is, no doubt, a real sense in which the heart of the Father, pierced through and through with our ingratitude, our distrust, our rebellion must find eternal satisfaction, a real return for all His lavish bounty, in the perfect obedience, love, and trust of His Son.' But the Bible knows nothing of any conflict between the claims of God's righteousness and the yearnings of His love. 'Indeed, so far from representing God as requiring sacrifice or propitiation, the Bible quite clearly and consistently throughout shows us God as Himself the Source of the propitiation, the Author of the sacrifice; Himself, if we may dare to use the phrase, as the supreme Sufferer; and the Cross as the final expression of the love, not of the Son only, but of the Father.'

Here we are faced with an immense difficulty which has weighed heavily upon the modern mind with its profound conviction of the reign of inexorable law. We are told that no atonement of any kind is in fact possible, that our Christian faith in the forgiveness of sins is an immoral delusion. This is stressed not merely by opponents of the faith. Dean Inge, for example, writes: 'The laws of the moral and spiritual life are just as inexorable as those of the physical world. Nothing worth having is given away; all must be earned. . . . It matters little whether cheap forgiveness is offered as the result of the magical efficacy of the Sacraments, or as the result of being "washed in the precious blood of the Lamb."' In either case it is false. Spiritual laws are inexorable.'

Can the forgiveness we believe in be fairly described as 'cheap,' and how far is it consistent with our belief in inexorable law? These are questions which must be faced, and in facing them we may discover that forgiveness is not such a simple and matter-of-course thing as we may have been in the habit of thinking. Our words and

actions do not simply go forth from us but they leave their influence behind upon ourselves. There is a real bond uniting us to every act we have ever done, to every word we have ever spoken, to every thought we have ever harboured and made our own. Moreover, 'our lives are continuous wholes in themselves, and they are inextricably bound up with the lives of others and with the life of God.' What power has forgiveness to cut these connexions and break these bonds? Easy-going ourselves we may find it natural to suppose that God is as easy-going as we are. But 'we can accept no doctrine of forgiveness, St. Paul clearly would have accepted none, that is inconsistent with this principle. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."'

Dr. Westcott has well said that we do not need a revelation to assure us of the certainty of punishment, but we do need the gospel to enable us to believe in the possibility of forgiveness. It is true that Jesus treats the readiness of God to forgive as a matter of course, and without the Cross we might be led to think of forgiveness as a cheap and easy thing. But there is another element in the teaching of Jesus according to which He makes plain that God's forgiveness, while it is free, is not indiscriminate or unconditioned. It demands repentance. In the parable of the unforgiving servant He teaches that forgiveness is no mechanical occurrence, but stands in some vital connexion with the attitude and character of the sinner. There would seem to be a law governing forgiveness according to which 'the link which binds a man to his past and which gives validity to the spiritual debt that he incurs by his violation of the divine law is not formal and mechanical, but organic and vital. So that it cannot be destroyed once for all. It needs to be continually counteracted by a power coming from God into a heart open to receive it. The sense of guilt returns upon a man with full force whenever, for any reason, he shuts the door of his heart against the operation of that power.' We have at least the assurance that forgiveness is not simply the abrogation of law, but is a divine power operating by a law of its own.

Can we discern any harmony between the law of inexorable consequences and the law of forgiveness? Perhaps in some degree we may. The case would seem to be simplest in regard to the man who sins. What he did cannot be altered, but through repentance he has become in a real sense a new man, not the same as he who committed the sin. Take the case of Paul the Apostle. 'He is still the man that once persecuted the Church. What, then, has happened that we feel that he can no longer be justly judged in the light of that fact? Is it not this? The act itself is unchanged, but his own attitude towards it has been completely transformed. It did express him once. Now, with his whole soul, he has repudiated it. The time was when he was capable of it. We now know that it is a moral impossibility that he should ever be guilty of it again. Forgiveness, then, in this case does not imply any, the least, condonation of the offence.'

With this radical change in a man's character the physical consequences of his sin, though not outwardly changed, become different in their aspect and their effect. They become to the penitent who can so accept them a discipline for good at the hand of a loving and reconciled Father.

The case is more obscure when we consider the reaction of our sins upon our fellow-men. 'Can the seducer be forgiven while the victim of his seduction is left to perish in her shame? I know of no more awful aspect of the problem than this, especially for those who, by their office, are set to watch over the souls of others, as those that must give an account, not only for what they do, but also for what they leave undone.' Here we can but fall back upon the faith that the Judge of all the earth may be trusted to do right, and that that very solidarity of the human race through which men influence one another for evil has become in Christ the very instrument of our salvation. Moreover, though it be but a bare imagination, 'who can say that it is impossible that He, the God of the spirits of all flesh, may somehow, somewhere, and sometime give His

children the opportunity of humbling themselves before each of their brothers whom they have wronged, and so entering with them into the fullness of the forgiveness of God?'

From all this it appears that the gospel teaches no cheap forgiveness, no easy-going, good-natured Governor of the universe, but a holy and loving Father who ordained death as the inevitable penalty of sin, and who sent His Son to honour the law and at infinite cost to Himself to redeem men from their sin. 'It costs us nothing because it cost Him everything. Does that make His forgiveness cheap? If you keep His forgiveness before the eyes of your heart it will cost you all your sin.'

Of the eight handsome books, published by Messrs. Allen & Unwin, containing records of 'Oxford, 1937,' it is very difficult to select one for some detailed notice. All are good, and we hope that they will find their way into many a minister's library.

To give our readers a taste of a very rich feast of many courses, we must almost arbitrarily select one, and even so we must confine attention—again and even more arbitrarily—to one chapter. So let us take C. H. DODD's contribution to the volume *The Kingdom of God and History*, one of eight volumes on the general topic 'Church, Community, and State. Let us also say that the other contributors to this particular volume are all eminent and well worth attention—H. G. Wood, E. Bevan, E. Lyman, Paul Tillich, H. D. Wendland, and Christopher Dawson.

'The Kingdom of God and History'—it is an interesting theme. How are the two related? Is the Kingdom to come when history has run its course, and if so, in what sense? As crown, or contrast? Or has the Kingdom come already, and has it been playing its part in history all along? And what does the petition mean, 'Thy Kingdom come'? Such questions have perplexed many,

and even Professor DODD may not fully satisfy everybody. But his discussion should at least make some points clear and others clearer.

He begins with a very suggestive, informative, and brilliantly executed account of the precursors of the New Testament view of the Kingdom of God among Hebrews and Greeks. Greek philosophy did not, of course, speak of the Kingdom of God, but it had something corresponding in the Platonic 'realm of ideas.' To Greek thought the realm of Nature and the field of history could not be man's true home. They were the changeful 'Many,' and the spirit of man quested for the 'One,' for the truly real, perfect, and changeless, against the eddying, unstable realm of 'the Many.' The 'ideal' world was not in history, it was supersensible, supernatural, outside Time. To escape from 'history' was the quest of man's soul, to rise above Time and change his supreme felicity.

The Hebrews on the other hand were not primarily interested in the metaphysics of 'the One and the Many.' They were interested in the moral problem of the existence of evil in a world which God had made, and in its conquest and disappearance. To rise not above change but above evil was their supreme quest. To them the world was real, history was real and unrepeatable; and God guided, and from time to time intervened in, mundane affairs. Conceiving His Kingdom to mean primarily the destruction of evil, prophets found solace in looking forward to a Divine intervention. But so real was 'history' to them that they pictured this intervention as future happenings within 'history.' As 'apocalyptic' developed, however, those predictions assumed more and more fantastic forms. In a real sense the end was to write *finis* to 'history.' The Kingdom would be 'beyond the order of time and space.' Yet it is that super-historical happening, so to say, which to the mind of the Hebrew prophet gives all history its significance. Here, of course, is an approximation to Greek thought. The Apocalyptist regards the Age to Come not simply as another period of history still in the future, but as 'an order of being essentially superior to the present order,

which will enter into human experience when this order ends.'

Thus in Jewish thought there lay at least in germ that distinction between the Kingdom as immanent and as transcendent which the New Testament shows and to which other contributors to this volume devote attention.

Professor DODD goes on to show that so far Christianity took over the Jewish *schema* of eschatology but 'made one profound and fundamental change.' Whereas Jewish eschatology looked to the close of the historical process as the necessary fulfilment upon which the meaning of history depends, 'Christianity found the fulfilment of history in an actual series of events within history—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the emergence of the Church as the bearer of His Spirit.' For the Christians prophecy was fulfilled in Christ. The Kingdom of God was no longer something to look forward to, it was something to be enjoyed. The Kingdom had come. The expected Second Coming was only the return of One who had already come. 'The understanding of history and of God's action in history no longer depends upon "vision" of an imaginary future. On the contrary, the Christian vision of the future depends upon experience of actual historical events.'

Attempts were made to reconstruct eschatology so as to allow for the new facts within the traditional scheme; but such broke down, and 'millenarianism' fell into the background in the main Church tradition. And categories of Greek thought were used even by the theologians of the New Testament 'to express the absoluteness of the revelation in Christ.'

'The Kingdom of God is not something yet to come. It came with Jesus Christ, and in its coming was perceived to be eternal in its quality.' What then is meant by the petition 'Thy Kingdom come'? 'We are not praying that at long last history may end with Utopia or the Millennium, but that in *this* situation in which we stand the

reign of God may be made manifest after the pattern of its revelation in Christ.' 'It is not in the future that we must seek the perfection of which the temporal is not capable, but in that other world in which the ultimate meaning of history resides, where "our life is hid with Christ in God."'

As already remarked it is rather doubtful if this interpretation of the petition will satisfy everybody. Professor DODD does leave it obscure as to what value, if any, he would retain for the apocalyptic expectation of 'a Second Coming in great power and glory' which is cherished in some measure by many. But this will be granted that his interpretation will enable many to utter the petition with renewed fervour due to clearer understanding of at least one meaning of which it is capable, whatever else it means.

Mr. J. A. HOBSON, the well-known economist and the author of some twenty-five works on social theory and practice, has written what may be called a professional autobiography, in which he traces the course of his thinking on the subject which he has made peculiarly his own, *Confessions of an Economic Heretic* (reviewed under 'Literature'). There are more heresies in the book, however, than the economic. He is a religious heretic as well. And the most interesting thing in his confessions is the account he gives of his religious history. He tells us why he is a rationalist, and what made him one. It is a good thing for the believer to consider this.

He was brought up in an orthodox home, under the ministry of the Rev. Sholto Douglas, who over-satisfied the taste of his congregation with sermons of an hour and a quarter. That alone would not have turned Hobson from orthodoxy, but he found the doctrine preached impossible to believe. He could not reconcile with elementary reason the two doctrines of atonement and everlasting punishment. He went to Oxford in this mood of rebellion, and found nothing there

to modify it, though Jowett, T. H. Green, and Mark Pattison were the leading figures. An intimate friendship with J. M. Robertson confirmed his negations, and extended them. And this rationalism may be said, with distinct modifications, to be his creed to-day.

After this biographical review Mr. HOBSON settles down, in a chapter entitled 'Western Christianity,' to a more systematic presentation of his case against Christianity and the Church. He thinks the churches have lost much of their former hold on their adherents, and he gives two suggestions as to the causes. In the first place, it is not due to conscious scepticism, but rather to a growing sense of the unreality of any other world or any other life than this. For how many church-goers to-day, he asks, has the doctrine of the Atonement any meaning? How many believe in the 'saving' of their souls? The interest of ordinary life has been immensely enlarged, and this has made the present, with its sport and amusement and work, and this alone, real.

The other, and deeper, reason for the failure of Christianity is its insistent attempts to foist on to Western nations, that are distinctively materialistic and individualistic in their real aims and interests, ideals of character and conduct out of keeping with their nature and traditions. The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is so evidently divergent from our real feelings about men's and women's characters and conduct as to drive its teachers to all sorts of evasive interpretations.

The full Christian character is inherently and eternally alien to Western civilized man, his valuations and ideals. Some recognition of this truth is discernible in the Aryan-Christianity by which the Nazis seek to pour the substance of their barbaric faith into the emptied shell of the Christian creed. But it is not necessary for us to go as far as the Nazis in repudiating the ethics of Christianity. All we have to do is to refuse to recognize that Christ's ethics in the Sermon on the Mount have any application to modern social institutions. These are purely personal ethics.

It is for this reason the Christian churches must side with the owning classes in opposing as revolutionary any serious attempts of a democracy to reform the distribution of wealth. Everywhere the Christian churches are found ranging themselves with the 'conservative classes,' and this sight everywhere saps their influence among the class-conscious workers. This does not imply a condemnation of the churches for failure to carry out a social ethics of Christianity, but simply a recognition that the churches belong to the 'established order,' and confer a certain sacredness on their cause. In passing it may be hazarded that many readers will open their eyes in astonishment at such a statement. But there is more to follow.

The coincidence of Protestantism with the rise of modern Capitalism was no accident of history. Capitalism could not have found its necessary freedom under the dominion which the Romish Church exercised over the conduct of secular life. Protestantism made a positive contribution in the value its churches set on economic virtues like honesty, industry, and thrift. It thus gave a spiritual sanction to successful business. But upon the whole Protestantism made for the dissociation of the religious from the secular life, the week-day ethics from the Sabbath, and as time went on reduced religion to a set of ideals, rules, and dogmas which had less and less reality in the ordinary ways of men.

But while the full substance of this Eastern faith is now widely recognized as impracticable for an operative principle in the Western world, it is not right to conclude that religion in its broader spiritual and philosophical sense is disappearing or weakening. If religion be taken to mean man's emotional concern for his life as a moral and rational personality in an ever-enlarging human

society, and his interest in the discovery of an order in the universe to which man by the use of his conscious faculties may contribute, such a religion is gradually but certainly growing, not only among the sensitive and intellectual minorities of each people, but as a pervasive motive in the minds of many.

And then follows a rather remarkable passage in which Mr. HOBSON seems to make a breach in his rationalism. He speaks of man as 'the highest present product of powers which permeate the universe and inspire in various combinations and degrees all the creatures and events which constitute the universe.' And, further, of a system 'inspired and moulded by some evolving process that may be realized as purpose or even spirit.' For the nineteenth-century scientific rejection of purposes or spiritual hypotheses was, he adds, clearly overdone. 'Among our leading scientists and philosophers there is little of that pride of intellectual self-sufficiency so blatant in mid- or late-Victorian times. Many of them admit some other faculty than reason as a means of getting truth. Materialism, Determinism, Rationalism are all discarded as inadequate instruments for reaching the highest realms of truth and for explaining the nature of a changing world.'

At several points in his book Mr. HOBSON seems to confess that he has been somewhat shaken by modern psychology and its indictment of reason as an instrument of truth. But there is more than psychology behind the passage quoted above. This distinguished economist, who began as severe rationalist, and who probably calls himself one still, has at least arrived at the recognition of a spiritual element, and even a purpose, in this changing world. Is it not just a step to the recognition of Christ as the highest embodiment of that purpose and that spiritual element?