

NOTES ON RECENT NEW TESTAMENT STUDY.

THE *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (1906, pp. 1-38) opens with a long, timely article, which has since been reprinted in the shape of a monograph, upon the relations between modern exegesis and the exposition of the New Testament. In the course of the argument, the author, Professor von Dobschütz, discusses the basal principles of that exegesis and its alleged incompatibility with the edifying use of the New Testament writings in the Christian church. The fundamental principles are held to be: (a) that the New Testament writings are to be treated like any other pieces of ancient literature. This at once destroys the old Hermeneutic, and implies that the distinction of canonical and uncanonical does not exist for the student. The gain of this has been the enrichment of exegesis by spoils won from contemporary Jewish and Greek literature. (b) Exegesis depends on accurate textual and grammatical criticism, and account must be taken of style and literary form, in order to estimate the significance of a word or phrase. (c) Exegesis deals with the meaning of the author, not with what subsequent ages have read into his words; and not only with the psychological problem of the author's meaning, but with the sense attached to his statement by his readers. One instance of the latter is to be found in the synoptic use of *ἐξουσία*, which is employed in Matthew vii. 27-29 to denote the Divine authority and consciousness of power evinced by Jesus in His preaching. A Gentile reader, accustomed to *ἐξουσία* in the magical sense of power over evil spirits (cf. Reitzenstein's *Poimandres*, pp. 48 f.), would attach this further meaning to the term, and apparently, Luke himself (iv. 36) has thus widened the original scope of the expression.¹

¹ With this explanation, Dr. E. A. Abbott's similar paragraph in his VOL. I.

Modern exegesis, further, is characterized by three notes : (i.) It claims to be a historical discipline, a claim unheard of till the eighteenth century, when the science began to rebel against being the slave of dogma or homiletic. Hence the vogue of the newer *religionsgeschichtliche* school, which brings out the difference between the modern and the ancient conceptions of the world as a factor in the interpretation of the early Christian literature. "If the eighteenth century discovered the human personality of the Biblical writers, we moderns are confronted with the new and almost painful discovery that they were persons belonging to the ancient world, separated from us by thousands of years (for their view of the world was much older than themselves)." Such conceptions, therefore, as those of angels, demons and the like, are not to be ignored or rationalized in the Gospels and epistles. They are frankly to be estimated as an element in the environment and mental heritage of the early Christians.

In the second place (ii.), modern exegesis is realistic, its effort being directed towards the attainment of concrete and definite ideas in regard to any term or phrase—such as, for example, *in the name* or *in Christ*. In eschatology, particularly, there is a recoil, in the interests of historical exegesis, from the spiritualizing methods of Origen and all his followers, and the same revision of method applies to the newer investigations into the early Christian conception of the Spirit.

Thirdly (iii.), modern exegesis practises the method of

Johannine Grammar (§§ 1572 f.) ought to be compared. He points out, however, that, while Matthew only refers to the authority of doctrine in this connexion, he proceeds, in viii. 9, to suggest that diseases also were under the authority exercised by Christ over the minds and souls of men. "The mischief that might arise from regarding the 'authority' of Christ as a magical power of casting out evil spirits . . . is seen in" Acts viii. 9, where the correlative power of the Holy Spirit is in view.

isolation. "As a philologist declares that, while the legends of the founding of Rome are to be given up as unhistorical, in their entirety, details must be retained as genuine, so is it" with the primitive Christian literature, where special sources are isolated and discussed, apart from the context in which they are found; and not merely different sources in one book, but, as in the case of Pentecost, different conceptions must be taken apart, different phases of reflection, different cycles or strata of tradition.

One result of all this exegetical activity is to stamp, as irrelevant to our day, much of what has hitherto been regarded as Biblical and authoritative, and this raises an undoubtedly serious problem for the preacher who has to use a Bible exposed to such methods of interpretation. But certain considerations have to be borne in mind, which render the chasm between exegesis and exposition less formidable than at first appears. In the first instance, the very emphasis upon exegesis as a historical discipline does not mean that the primitive conception is necessarily to be exalted above the modern. The aim of historical exegesis is not to stop short at a discovery of what is foreign to us in the primitive world of faith, but to expose what was new to those early Christians. Paul's world of angels and demons is unknown to us. We do not breathe that mental air. But, in a passage like Romans viii. 38 f., the supreme element is not the allusions to ærial and angelic powers; it is surely the consciousness that Christ's authority transcends all in heaven and earth, that the Divine love rises higher than all obstacles, and so forth (cf. von Dobschütz's own *Probleme*, pp. 99 f.). And the same criterion applies to the realistic note in modern exegesis. The terms *πλάτος*, *μῆκος*, *ὑψος*, *βάθος*, etc. (cf. Eph. iii. 18) may reflect certain earlier and astral conceptions of Egyptian magic, as Reitzenstein has striven to show (*Poimandres*, p. 25, note 1);

yet their usage and content in the New Testament are not adequately explained by any such discovery of their earlier collocation, or of their philological derivation. Ample illustrations may be gathered, from the Greek mysteries and elsewhere, of the widespread use of language about being *buried with* and *rising with* a god (cf. e.g. Dieterich's *Mithrasliturgie*, pp. 157 f., 169). But such analogies and parallels are far from sounding the depths of passages like Romans vi. and Colossians ii. 11 f. All over, the function of exegesis is to determine what was new and creative in the writer's mind, and, in the case of Paul, his own personality and what he owed to Jesus, go far behind all his debts to rabbinical or Hellenistic Judaism.

This differentiation of theology and personal religion forms one avenue to a proper use of modern exegesis. While the horizon of the soul remains the same, with "its three poles of *God, myself, the world*, the formulas expressing the soul's outlook change with the changing eras. The early Christian writers are valuable to us as religious personalities, whose difference of clothing is, after all, a secondary matter. Exegesis, if sound, unbars the innermost personality of the writer through his words, and if it discharges this part aright, it brings home to the modern reader, behind and below all contemporary differences and details, the permanent and vital heart, which is greater than all the particular modes of its expression.

Such, then, is the function of historical exegesis: to protest against the careless fusion of the old and the modern; to trace development not only from the Old Testament to the New, but within the latter, and thereby to reach the living core and vital force of every writer and agent in the creative era of early Christianity. Exegesis thus ministers, if properly treated, to the best methods of exposition. It produces a sense of reality. It excludes the use of texts

as mere mottoes, and it enriches the resources of the preacher by unlocking the wealth of contemporary religious life which flowed around the early Christians. But this practice of exegesis demands, in dealing with early Christianity as with any other topic, more than philosophical accuracy, literary sensitiveness, and æsthetic feeling. Sympathy and community of spirit are essential to the understanding of these New Testament writings. "Be he ancient or modern, the pious person understands the pious person," and he alone. "Faith still works wonders. It converts the hard stones of the materials gathered by the science of religious history into bread which will satisfy the souls that are hungering for life."

Another article, bearing generally on the interpretation of the Gospels, is Herr Otto Frommel's study in the *Deutsche Revue* for March (pp. 344-358), on the poetry of the Gospel, which consists of some pages from a forthcoming volume on the poetical form of the sayings of Jesus. He discusses and illustrates the ordinary parallelisms and strophic phenomena pretty much as Professor Briggs did, some years ago, in the *Expository Times*. He draws attention to the incisive, plastic, and concrete character of Christ's teaching, as a supreme condition of its popularity, and at this point attaches himself cordially to H. Weinel's views in *die Bildersprache Jesu in ihrer Bedeutung für die Erforschung seines inneren Lebens* (1900). It is incredible, he thinks, that the synoptic tradition can be correct in attributing to Jesus the motives of Mark iv. 11 = Matthew xiii. 10-15, inasmuch, as elsewhere, the object of His parabolic teaching was not to confuse or puzzle, but to instruct. "Allegory," he also asserts, surely with some rashness, "teaches nothing; whereas the parable aims at proving something." As to the parable of the unjust steward, Frommel insists on a recogni-

tion of the humour in it. "The moral conduct of the steward was not in the mind of Jesus, who could not, of course, have approved of it. But he did not need to be eternally moralizing; and consequently he could tell this story, and even the not less humorous one of the widow and the judge." "Yet," for all His artistic sense, "Jesus was not in the first instance a poet. To none less than to Him would the term *l'art pour l'art* apply. His parables will only reveal their depths to him who can pierce through the shimmering mist of their poetry into the divinely filled soul from which they sprang."

In the *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* (1906 pp. 18-60), Herr J. Häcker presents an exegetical study of the virgin-birth within the New Testament literature. In Paul he finds such a conception not merely unexpressed, but inherently unlikely. The Johannine and other Christologies ignore it, and consequently the stress of the discussion falls on the synoptic narratives, i.e. on Matthew i. and Luke i. 5-ii. 52. Matthew i. 16 originally ran, according to Häcker, Ἰωσήφ δὲ ἐγέννησεν (ἐκ Μαρίας) τὸν Ἰησοῦν τὸν λεγόμενον Χριστόν. The four textual variants are all editorial attempts to amend this, in order to bring the genealogy into line with the contents of i.-ii. In the Lucan genealogy, similarly, the words ὡς ἐνομίζετο (iii. 33) are an insertion, in order to adapt the genealogy of Jesus, as David's son, to the preceding narrative. Even then, Häcker deletes i. 34-37 as an interpolation, thus extending the interpolation not only from the limits suggested by Kattenbusch and Weinel (*since I knew not a man*, i. 27), but beyond even those of Hillmann, Harnack, Usener, Zimmermann, Schmiedel, Conybeare, and others, who delete i. 34-35 as an intrusion upon the text. Carrying out this argument, which regards the original story of Luke as narrating the

birth of Jesus in ordinary fashion, Häcker reads *γενναϊκί* in ii. 5.

A simultaneous statement, on the conservative side, is ably put by Mr. J. G. Machen in *The Princeton Theological Review* (1906, pp. 37-81, the second article of the series), who examines and rejects all attempts to prove that the references to the virgin-birth are interpolated. His conclusion is (p. 80): "Lobstein is correct in supposing that there might well have been a natural impulse in the early Church to invest Jesus' birth with the miraculous. But neither he nor any one else has shown how that impulse could have manifested itself in just the particular form in which it is now crystallized, unless in dependence upon fact. If Jesus was really divine, then we can say that probably there was something miraculous about His birth. Starting from that position, the most probable conclusion is that the canonical infancy narratives correctly inform us as to what that 'something' was. For otherwise it is hard to see how they could have been evolved."

Further evidence of the interest excited in this question at present throughout the United States is afforded by Dr. R. J. Cooke's article on "Did Paul know of the Virgin Birth?" in the *Methodist Review* (1906, pp. 248-261), and by a symposium in the *American Journal of Theology* (Jan. 1906, pp. 1-30) upon "The Supernatural Birth of Jesus: can it be established historically? Is it essential to Christianity?" Dr. Cooke finds strong presumptive evidence that the Apostle did know of the virgin-birth, which must have been to him a presupposition of Christ's sinlessness. Besides, Luke, his friend and companion, evidently was familiar with it. In the symposium, Professor Warfield argues similarly that the supernatural work of redemption

requires a supernatural birth of the Saviour, and that the latter is bound up with Christ's capacity and character as the redeemer of men. Dr. A. C. Zenos, of Chicago, and Dr. Rush Rhees, of Rochester, handle the subject more cautiously and historically; the former regards the virgin-birth as incapable, on the one hand, of demonstration, yet not susceptible of disproof; while the latter, starting from the fact that the tradition of the virgin-birth exercised no essential influence over apostolic Christianity, concludes that it cannot be regarded as essential to the highest Christology of the Church. Professor Bacon, in a brief and thorough examination of the historical evidence, goes even further. His verdict on the birth narratives is unfavourable to their early origin and credibility, Matthew's in particular being described as "highly legendary." The source of the tradition he regards, not as pagan, but as Jewish, due largely to the Pauline idea of the spiritual birth of believers, who are the collective Christ. "Logically, the idea of the virgin-birth would seem to be a hybrid, if not a monstrosity. Historically, it reflects the spirit of the post-apostolic age." This point of view approximates to that of A. Neuman in his recent volume on the Life of Jesus (*Jesus, wer er geschichtlich war*, 1904), and a similar critical attitude towards the birth narratives is assumed by Dr. Furrer in *das Leben Jesu Christi* (1905) and Professor Nathaniel Schmidt in his volume on *The Prophet of Nazareth* (1905, pp. 248 f.), the latter adopting the Sinaitic Syriac reading in Matthew i. 16 (*Joseph begat Jesus*), and following Hillmann's deletion of Luke i. 34-35 (with the *ὡς ἐνομίζετο* of iii. 23) as a later interpolation.

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