

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

MR. HENRY STURT, M.A., of Queen's College, Oxford, is a member of the Oxford Philosophical Society. In 1902 he edited a volume of philosophical essays, written by eight members of the University of Oxford. He himself, as one of the eight, wrote the essay on 'Art and Personality.' In 1906 he published a criticism of Oxford thought and thinkers from the standpoint of personal idealism, to which he gave the title of *Idola Theatri*. He has now resolved to become the founder of a new religion.

It must be very difficult to become the founder of a new religion. To become the founder of a sect, whether it be a sect of Buddhism or of Christianity, is easy enough. But a new religion! It will soon be a century since COMTE offered us (with indifferent success) the 'Religion of Humanity.' And there has not been an attempt made in all that time. Four years ago, it is true, a Fellow of another Oxford College published a volume which looked as if it were meant to be the sacred book of a new religion, which he courageously called *The Religion of all Good Men*, though we have only heard of one good man who professed it. But Mr. GARROD did not deliberately resolve to found a new religion. His religion was a sort of reformation of Christianity. Mr. STURT will have nothing to do with reformation. Christianity is as incapable of reform as

Fetishism. He will clear it out of the way. His religion, to which we may provisionally give the name of Sturtism, is altogether new and unheard of.

'It is an essential element,' he says, 'of the proposals contained in this book that we should cut ourselves clear away from Christianity.' And again, he says, 'I feel as certain as any one can be about a matter beyond the reach of the exact sciences that all compromise with Christianity is undesirable, and that schemes for reforming and tinkering up the old system are delusive and will end in bitter disappointment. The only manly and sensible course is to clear this obsolete religion away and begin afresh.'

Accordingly Mr. STURT is not content to criticise the conduct of Christians. He criticises Christ. He examines the contents of the Gospels. He writes a new life of our Lord upon earth.

Now this was a mistake of Mr. STURT. He can criticise Christians effectively. Few men have so minute a knowledge or so keen an appreciation of their faults. But he cannot criticise Christ, for he does not understand Him. He cannot rewrite the life of Christ, for he has not a first-hand acquaintance with its materials. He does not know the Gospels.

There is no occasion to blame Mr. STURT for not knowing the Gospels. He may never have had the privilege of learning his lesson in his tender years. And there are very few men who in after life can fill up the gaps of their early education. When we see Mr. STURT struggling with the Gospel narrative and turning desperately to Abbé LOISY for deliverance, we think of KEATS, hungry for a classical education and making his acquaintance with HOMER in the translation of CHAPMAN.

It is not that Mr. STURT makes so many mistakes. It is the uncertainty with which he moves within the general atmosphere of the place and the time. He is put out by references to familiar customs. He is puzzled by the use of everyday language. And so, when the meaning is manifest Mr. STURT makes suggestions and suppositions which are as far-fetched as they are uncalled for.

His uncertain walk would not be so evident if he did not so often assert his confidence. He is very fond of the phrases of the amateur—'it is probable,' 'it must be so,' and 'there is no doubt about it.' Speaking of the miracles—which of course present no problem to him—he says, 'We cannot doubt that in most places the failures of Jesus must have vastly exceeded his successes.' And then, in the next sentence, 'Moreover, after the first burst of enthusiasm, the preaching of Jesus must have found an ever-cooler reception: such is the fate of those who make tremendous promises and predictions that remain unaccomplished.' His explanation of the cleansing of the Temple, unsupported as it is, he introduces by a 'there can be no doubt.' Jesus did not drive out the money-changers Himself. 'There can be no doubt that Jesus headed a large band of his followers from Galilee and Peræa who, armed with rustic weapons, raised a violent brawl against which the Temple police were for the moment powerless.'

Even so simple a matter of fact as the arrest at

the garden of Gethsemane receives a new meaning, and becomes indeed quite a new situation. 'Jesus himself was anticipating the arrest, as he knew there was treachery in his band. At one time he thought of resistance and armed some of his followers. There was a slight scuffle at the arrest and one of the Temple servants was wounded by a Galilean. But at the last Jesus, who was no fighter, went quietly, and his disciples scattered in the darkness.'

There is certainly a suspicion sometimes that Mr. STURT knows a little more than he seems to know. Here, for example, he drops all reference to the twelve legions of angels; but in another place he uses it for his own purpose. He says that when Jesus came up to Jerusalem, 'He thought that his actual assumption of royal dignity would take place when his Heavenly Father descended in power to inaugurate the Kingdom and to give him more than twelve legions of angels to subdue all hostile powers. Till that came to pass he remained, so to speak, a Messiah *de jure*, but not *de facto*.'

Now it must be admitted that the founder of a new religion does not need to know the religion which he proposes to displace. It may be better for him not to know it. We can scarcely conceive MUHAMMAD being so successful if he had known Christianity better. For his success just lay in this that his religion was worse than Christianity. And in that lies the success of Muhammadanism up to the present day. But Mr. STURT, who has determined to destroy Christianity—a task which MUHAMMAD can scarcely be said to have had before him—ought to have been far wiser than to enter upon a criticism of the Christ of Christianity, seeing that he was so inadequately furnished for it. For there must be many who, attracted by the vigour with which he denounces existing Churches and living Christians, will nevertheless hesitate to become members of his Church when they see that he has so little knowledge of, or so little concern for, the undeniable facts of history.

And it is all the greater mistake that the criticism of Christ and of Christianity was so unnecessary. For on any understanding of Christianity he will have nothing to do with it. Take the interpretation of Christianity which he starts with, and which will be admitted by every well-informed Christian to be essentially true. Christianity is a Gospel. It is the Gospel of the grace of God to sinful men. Its fundamental fact is that men have failed. Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost.

But the fundamental fact of Sturtism is success. 'Faith,' says its founder, 'is confidence in success, and success is the establishment of faith. The more success the life of free religion brings us, the firmer becomes our confidence in its principles. Thus do we break the old and evil connexion between religion and failure.'

Mr. STURT does not say that there may not be success without religion. But success without religion is 'a hard and, generally, rather a vulgar affair.' The Religion of Success is success that has been 'dignified' with a little culture. But in any case, if success is not perfect without religion, religion is nothing if it does not lead to success. The unpardonable sinner of Sturtism is 'a desperate failure.'

Mr. STURT calls his book *The Idea of a Free Church* (Scott; 5s. net). For he is not content to issue a manifesto. First he states his ideal of true manhood. Next he sets forth the principles of that religion which will enable a man to attain to this ideal. And then he endeavours to organize his followers and to establish the true Church.

'It will be the business of a free church, as a centre of education and enlightenment, to show what religion is good for and what are the bounds of its usefulness, to teach a philosophy of life where religion takes its proper place in conjunction with other elements, and to dis-

courage sternly the morbid fanatics who turn a noble privilege into a desolating curse.'

How simple it all seems to be. And in some respects how idyllic. 'It will be the function of the committee to manage the affairs of the congregation, to raise money for its buildings, services, and charities, and to prepare lists of preachers and readers. There should be a considerable variety of preachers, chosen mainly from the members of the congregation. The work of preaching should be put into the hands of as large a number as possible: nothing would make people more critical, and at the same time more tolerant towards preachers, than the knowledge that their own turn would come round shortly.'

But there must be no failures. There must be no failures in the committee, among the preachers, or in the congregation. And what will Mr. STURT do if, in spite of all, one of his congregation, one of his committee, or even one of his preachers, should be heard to say, 'I have sinned and come short'? He will have to be merciful. If not to the sinners, he will have to be merciful to Christianity. Out of the general wreck he will have to leave here and there a church to be a refuge in time of trouble to the distressed.

Messrs. Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier are the publishers of the *Reports of the Commissions of the World Missionary Conference, 1910*. The Reports are issued in nine volumes (18s. net; single volumes, 3s. net).

There are nine volumes because there were nine Commissions, and each volume contains the report of one Commission. Turn at once to the fourth volume containing the report of the fourth Commission. Its subject is 'The Missionary Message in relation to Non-Christian Religions.' The Chairman of the Commission was Professor D. S. CAIRNS, D.D., of the United Free Church College, Aberdeen.

The Commission sent out questions to missionaries. They sent them to missionaries in every part of the world in order to receive information about the contact of Christianity with every religion approached by it. The questions need not be quoted. Their drift is gathered from the replies made to them. Replies were sent from nearly two hundred missionaries. Take the missionaries to Islam. Twenty-nine missionaries to Islam sent replies to the questions.

Their replies are gathered into sections. The first section gives an account of the various tendencies in Islam, the second of the value of Islam as a religion, the third of any visible signs of dissatisfaction with Islam as a religion, the fourth of the hindrances that are found in the way of the conversion of Muslims to Christianity, the fifth of the right attitude of the missionary to Islam, the sixth of points of contact between Christianity and Islam, the seventh of the attraction or repulsion of the Gospel for Islam, the eighth of the influence of the Higher Criticism on Islam, the ninth of the influence of the contact with Islam on the Christian faith of the missionaries themselves, and the tenth on the influences which lead Muslims to embrace Christianity.

After all that is valuable in the answers has been extracted and arranged, and the whole vast accumulation has been condensed into these sections, the chairman runs his eye over the entire field and offers us his 'General Conclusions.' This is our immediate interest. What does Professor CAIRNS find to be the present position and future prospect of Christianity in the face of its one irreconcilable rival and only formidable opponent upon earth, the religion of Muhammad?

The first thing that he discovers is the truth of KUENEN'S saying that 'Islam is the kernel of Judaism transplanted to Arabian soil.' For Judaism is legalism and Islam is legalism, and the reign of law is the fundamental fact that makes each of them a religion. And so the missionary

in Muhammadan lands is thrown back to the very first battle that the Gospel had to wage and win, and may take the Apostle Paul in all simplicity as his missionary model.

Whereupon he obtains a vivid insight into the conditions of Pauline preaching. Two results flow from the hard legalism of Islam—spiritual pride in some, and spiritual discontent in others. The same twofold result of the pressure of the Law was found in Judaism, and guided Paul in his preaching as well as in the development of his theology. Hence the Pauline gospel, on the one hand, denies every vestige of human merit and ascribes salvation to the love of God alone, and thereby destroys the very foundation on which the Pharisee stands. On the other hand, it meets the need of those who seek for closer union with God than the Law can give by the promise of the Spirit, that is of vital union with God through Christ. And so it comes to pass that some of the missionaries to Islam desire that the modern writers on systematic theology should lay more emphasis on the new life of liberty into which a man enters who has 'risen with Christ.'

But there is another thing that the Islamic missionary looks for in his handbook of theology and finds not. It is a steady insistence on the unity and sovereignty of God. This is the strength of Muhammadanism. This is the secret of its vitality. You may think that it owes its progress over the world entirely to the concessions which it makes to the natural heart of man. These missionaries do not think so. Professor CAIRNS does not think so. They see that the unity and the sovereignty of God are beliefs which make the Muslim a fanatic sometimes but always a force for conquest.

Now the follower of Christ believes in the unity and the sovereignty of God, as does the follower of Muhammad. But the unity of God receives more emphasis in Muslim than in Christian theology. And so much has popular Christian teaching had

to say about the Fatherhood of God—rejoiced in as almost a discovery of our day—that God's sovereignty has been neglected, and has not always escaped rejection and ridicule. These missionaries to the Muslim do not want sovereignty without love. But on the other hand they believe that love without sovereignty means disorder and tragedy and a division of life which leads us back to polytheism.

The last thing revealed by the experience of these nine-and-twenty missionaries to Islam is the secret of the uncompromising opposition which the faithful Muslim makes to the offer of the Gospel. The offer of the Gospel is the offer of Christ. Now the picture of Christ presented to Muhammadans is contained in the Koran, and it is a distorted and degrading picture.

'Supposing,' says Professor CAIRNS, 'that to-day there were to arise a great religious genius among the peoples of the Congo, suppose that all that he knew of Jesus Christ was what he could learn from those representatives of His who condoned the policy of King Leopold, would it be just to say of the religion which he founded that it rejected Christianity?' Thus he excuses the caricature of Christ in the Koran. And thus he is compelled to excuse much of the bitter hostility to Christ Jesus of the follower of Muhammad to-day.

The series of volumes containing the Reports of the Commissions of the World Missionary Conference of 1910 contains also the official record of the doings of the Conference itself. And the last thing they contain is the final address of the President.

With what encouragement did Dr. MOTT dismiss the delegates? With no encouragement at all, but with a warning. It is as if he felt the risk—so successful had the Conference been, and so vast the volume of emotion stirred—that its

members should be unwilling to take up again their daily burden. It is as if he read the desire in their faces to continue the Conference still, as Peter wished to prolong the stirring experiences of the Mount. So he sent them away with a word of warning. Their work had to be done, he said, and it had to be done immediately.

He said that their work had to be done. Using a phrase which he had brought with him from America—it is not quite naturalized in Britain yet—he said that he must lay emphasis first on the need of *reality*. 'Infinite harm will have been done to have gathered here and have had facts and arguments burning in our brains with convincing force, to have had our hearts stirred with deep emotion, unless we give adequate practical expression to all these emotions and convictions.' And then he said that it is better not to know and not to feel than to rest satisfied with feeling and knowing. 'There is something subtly and alarmingly dangerous in acquiring any knowledge of the needs of man and the designs and desires of our Saviour, if these convictions and feelings do not escape in genuine action.'

For God is no respecter of persons. Many missionaries were left at their labour. A few were sent to Edinburgh. It was a privilege to be sent, as it was a privilege for Peter, James, and John to be taken up into the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus. But Peter, James, and John have to return to the healing of disease. And as they descend they will just be in time to see the boy in his most violent and revolting paroxysm.

The work is there and it has to be undertaken at once. There is the need not only of reality but of immediacy.

Time worketh,
 Let me work too;
 Time undoeth,
 Let me do.
 Busy as time my work I ply,
 Till I rest in the rest of eternity.

Sin worketh,
 Let me work too;
 Sin undoeth,
 Let me do.
 Busy as sin my work I ply,
 Till I rest in the rest of eternity.

Death worketh,
 Let me work too;
 Death undoeth,
 Let me do.
 Busy as death my work I ply,
 Till I rest in the rest of eternity.

The Witness of the Four Gospels to the Doctrine of a Future State.

BY THE REV. ALFRED PLUMMER, D.D., FORMERLY MASTER OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, DURHAM.

At the outset, I wish to express my unshaken conviction that the Fourth Gospel was written by one who had known our Lord intimately during the time of His ministry on earth, and had been His personal disciple, and that this intimate and beloved disciple was probably the Apostle St. John; also that the last chapter of the Fourth Gospel, with the possible exception of one or both of the two last verses, was written by the author of the rest of the Gospel. Consequently, evidence taken from this Gospel is as authoritative as evidence taken from the Synoptic Gospels. In one sense, it is more authoritative, because such a disciple may be expected to have been more intimately acquainted with the mind of Christ; although, in another sense, it may be regarded as less authoritative, because, being written later, there is more possibility that the writer may, in some cases, have unconsciously given us, as Christ's words, what are his own interpretations of Christ's words. This possibility, however, does not outweigh the enormous advantage, possessed by no other Gospel, of being, throughout, the testimony of one who had himself 'heard, and seen, and beheld, and handled, concerning the Word of Life.'

Whether or no we are all agreed as to the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, we shall all of us, I suppose, allow that for the doctrine to be now considered, as well as for any other article of faith, the evidence derived from Christ's words, as reported in the Gospels, is of higher authority than the evidence derived from the rest of the New Testament. When we are sure of what Christ has said, and of what He meant by the words, the question, in any matter of faith or morals, is closed

for Christians. But here it is necessary to point out that, in using the evidence of the Gospels, we are in an inferior position, and therefore have need of greater caution, than in using the Epistles and the Revelation. The Apostles, and others to whom we owe books, have put what they had to say in writing; and, although here and there there are uncertainties of reading, yet, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred,—to take a very low estimate,—we are not in doubt as to what they have written. Christ has left nothing in writing. All that we have is a report of His words; or, indeed, in most cases, a translation of a report of His words; for we may regard it as certain that, as a rule, He spoke in Aramaic, and not in Greek. And, in the case of the Second and Third Gospels, together with a good deal of the First Gospel, what we have got is a report of a translation of a report of His words. Thus, St. Luke gives us his report of a translation of some one's report of what Christ said. We may say that, in St. Mark's case, the translation of St. Peter's report is probably made by Mark himself; but still, even here, it is a report of a translation of a report that we get. There are perhaps few, if any, cases in which we have got an exact report in Greek of what Christ spoke in Greek. There are perhaps not *very* many cases in which we have an *exact* translation in Greek of what our Lord said in Aramaic. On the other hand, there may be cases, and possibly many cases, in which the Evangelists have given us, neither an exact translation, nor even an accurate equivalent, of what was said, but an enlargement of it, or an interpretation of it, or an inference from it, made by a first or