

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

OF the many ways of arresting the progress of Christianity, the most vigorous, and probably the most successful, way is to deny the existence of Jesus. And the easiest way that has yet been found of denying the existence of Jesus is to resolve Him into an astronomical myth.

The denial of the existence of Jesus is the reverse of that method which a year or two ago reached notoriety in the controversy 'Jesus or Christ?' That controversy accepted Jesus, but denied Christ. Jesus was a Galilean, not less but not more than that which the Galileans took Him to be—simply one of themselves. Christ was a creation of the credulity of His early followers.

But the more vigorous method denies Jesus and accepts Christ. It has no difficulty with the God; it is the Man it cannot away with. The things which are said in the Gospels about Jesus are incredible of any man: but as soon as Jesus is resolved into a God, such a God as Mithra or Osiris, anything is credible or incredible.

Accordingly Mr. J. M. ROBERTSON, the most capable of all the mythological band, makes his way through the Gospels, and as he goes he resolves every incident into a reflexion of something which occurs in the heavens of mythology. Jesus as sun-god is born at the winter solstice; as sun-god

He is surrounded by Twelve disciples, the signs of the zodiac; and as sun-god He enters Jerusalem before His death on two asses—the Ass and the Foal of the Greek sign of Cancer, the turning-point in the sun's course in the heavens.

It is not easy to say how far this method has been successful in persuading men. It is, however, to be observed that a new edition of Mr. ROBERTSON'S *Pagan Christs* has been published this year, that a translation into English has been made of two of Drews' books, and that Mr. W. B. SMITH has found a market in this country not only for his *Pre-Christian Jesus*, which first appeared in German, but also for another large volume which he has published this month, and to which he has given the title of *Ecce Deus*. Amazing as the method is, in its crudity and in its credulity—an example will be found in the review of Drews' new book on another page—we must not treat it with neglect. A reply, particularly to 'The Christ Myth' of Drews, but meeting the whole mythological theory very satisfactorily, has been made by the Rev. T. J. THORBURN, D.D., LL.D. It has been published under the title of *Jesus the Christ* (T. & T. Clark; 6s. net).

The value of the book is found most of all in its candour. Dr. THORBURN has studied the volumes which have been published for and against the

historicity of Jesus, and in short notes to his bibliography characterizes them individually. But he does more than know them. He treats them respectfully, not allowing impatience with any argument however puerile, or anger at any statement however baseless, to interfere with the coolness of his judgment or spoil the effect of his reply.

And he has the scientific study of Religion with him. When Mr. ROBERTSON wrote his books he made free use of Dr. J. G. FRAZER'S work, and claimed that 'the whole of Dr. FRAZER'S investigation,' led up, though unavowedly, to the recognition of the crucified Jesus as the annual slain vegetation-god on the Sacred Tree. But since then five volumes have been published of the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*. Not a suggestion has been made that the work in these volumes is done in the interests of Christian Apologetic. But the evidence has gone steadily against the whole mythological theory.

Seven Oxford men, much impressed with the fact that 'the modern world is asking questions'; that the theology we have inherited came down from 'an age when the sun and the moon moved round the earth,' and when the psychology of religion, the historical method, and the critical study of ancient documents were yet unborn; that these things touch the foundations of old beliefs, and that it is about the foundations that the world is asking—seven Oxford men, we say, impressed with these facts have written nine essays and have had them published in a volume with the title of *Foundations* (Macmillan; 10s. 6d. net).

But is the modern world really asking questions about theology? No, not about theology, about religion. And if it were possible to answer the questions of the modern world about religion without touching theology, these seven Oxford men would do so. But it is not possible. The world is calling for religion, but it cannot accept a religion the theology of which is out of harmony with

science, philosophy, and scholarship. Religion, if it is to dominate life, must satisfy both the head and the heart. It is necessary, therefore, that the foundations of our theology should be re-examined, and if need be re-stated, in the light of the knowledge and the thought of our day, in order that we may be in a position to offer the world a religion with a real message for the present and the future.

Thus, in this introduction there are already two things about which we desire information. Who are the 'seven Oxford men,' and what is 'the modern world'? The book answers both questions.

The names of the seven men are these: The Rev. B. H. STREETER, Fellow and Dean of Queen's College, who writes the introduction and the essay on 'The Historic Christ'; the Rev. R. BROOK, Fellow and Tutor of Merton College, who writes the essay on 'The Bible'; Mr. W. H. MOBERLY, Fellow and Lecturer of Lincoln College, the author of the article on 'The Atonement'; the Rev. R. G. PARSONS, Principal of Wells Theological College, who co-operates with Mr. RAWLINSON in writing the essay on 'The Interpretation of the Christ in the New Testament'; the Rev. A. E. J. RAWLINSON, Tutor of Keble College, who contributes also the article on 'The Principle of Authority'; the Rev. N. S. TALBOT, Fellow, Tutor, and Chaplain of Balliol College, who describes 'The Modern Situation'; and the Rev. W. TEMPLE, Headmaster of Repton, who writes both on 'The Divinity of Christ' and on 'The Church.'

These seven men have written their essays independently. And it is a matter of surprise, to themselves and to us, that, writing independently, they proceed on nearly identical lines and reach nearly identical conclusions. It is true that they are close friends, that they often talked together of all these things, and even that four times they met in a retreat which continued three or four days each time. It is true also that the essays were circulated in draft form for mutual criticism. But for all that

it is both a surprise and an encouragement that it is possible for the book to be put forward 'not as a collection of detached studies, but as a single whole, and as, in the main, the expression of a corporate mind.'

These are the men. What is 'the modern world'? The modern world, or, as it is afterwards called, 'the modern situation,' is the subject of the first essay. Mr. TALBOT, who writes that essay, confines his attention to 'this generation,' which he immediately explains as meaning 'people of about thirty years of age.' In what sense is this generation in Great Britain modern?

It is modern in the sense that it is not Victorian. Its members were born while Queen Victoria was still alive, but they were not born into that mental atmosphere in which Queen Victoria lived. 'They were not born,' says Mr. TALBOT, 'as their parents were, into the atmosphere of pre-critical and pre-Darwinian religion. Their education did not begin with the statement, "Creation of the world, 4004"; nor are their minds governed by the assumptions which that implies.'

Now we know that with Darwin and the critic many things came into the world. Mr. TALBOT refers to some of them. He refers especially to the sense of insecurity as to whether God has spoken, and, if so, as to what He has said. He refers also to the feeling for the tragedy that there is in the world, the feeling and the fear that perhaps the world itself is a tragedy. What had the Victorian preacher wherewith to meet these things?

His answer at once was 'the Cross.' But he had no sooner spoken the word than he saw that the Cross is itself one of the dark facts of the world. He saw that it is the darkest fact of all. No doubt, it is the climax of a life of selflessness and sacrifice. But taken by itself it only blackens the tragic in life, and suggests the question whether, after all, that life of selflessness and sacrifice may not have

been thrown away to the demands of a great mistake.

But the Victorian preacher could proceed to the Resurrection. It is not possible that Jesus could have died in the interest of a mistake, for He rose again from the dead. In the Resurrection God made it manifest that there was no mistake in the Cross. But then the critic came. If Darwinism suggested that the Cross was simply the darkest act of life's tragedy, Criticism hinted that no relief could come from the Resurrection, for the Resurrection was not sufficiently accredited. To rely upon the Resurrection is to commit oneself to a belief in miracle. And Criticism has shown that the belief in miracles is crammed with difficulty. The preacher upon whom the evil days of Criticism and Darwinism had fallen became nervous about laying much stress on the Resurrection, and doubtful if it were wise even to mention the Cross.

With the men of the present generation it is otherwise. They were not cast out of a sense of optimism and security into darkness and indecision. They were *born* to the indecision; when they came into the light they *found* it darkness. What then are they to do? They see that it is necessary to go back to the beginning. They take nothing for granted, not even the existence of God. They go back to the beginning. And they find the best beginning in the human life of Jesus.

They go back to the condition of things when Jesus was born. There they find men who against all likelihood received Jesus, believed on Him, loved Him. They stand beside those men. They see that they are not 'lay figures in the calendar,' but fellow human beings. These men came to confess that He, for all the smallness of the things of His day, was nevertheless the Messiah. The Cross followed with disaster to their expectations. But events followed the Cross. Their faith in God, uprooted by the Cross, was replanted in the revelation of His Resurrection and the coming of

the Spirit. The foundations of trust in God were convulsed only to be relaid in Him who nevertheless was the Christ. We of this generation, says Mr. TALBOT, are sure of this as we read the New Testament.

So to this generation, as to every generation of men since the beginning, the need of the heart has given Christ His chance with it. It is the want of assurance that brings assurance. Our fathers came into a land of security and the defences of it fell around them. This generation was born into great uncertainty and is on the way to ringing assurance. Have not the times arrived, says Mr. TALBOT, the rumour of whose coming touched the prophetic heart of Robert BROWNING? It is the Pope that speaks in *The Ring and the Book*:

What whispers me of times to come?
 What if it be the mission of that age
 My death will usher into life, to shake
 This torpor of assurance from our creed,
 Re-introduce the doubt discarded, bring
 That formidable danger back we drove
 Long ago to the distance and the dark?
 No wild beast now prowls round the infant
 camp:
 We have built wall and sleep in city safe:
 But if some earthquake try the towers that
 laugh
 To think they once saw lions rule outside,
 And man stand out again, pale, resolute,
 Prepared to die,—which means, alive at last?

It is frequently said that the great truth which Christ made known to the world was the Fatherhood of God. He did make known the Fatherhood. But not immediately. What He made known immediately was His own Sonship. The Fatherhood was the inevitable next step. If in any intelligible sense Christ is the Son, God is the Father. But if His revelation had been immediately of the Fatherhood of God there would have been nothing distinctive in that; it would not

have been a revelation. Nor could His followers have taken anything out of it beyond that notion of universal Fatherhood and easy forgiveness with which so many modern writers are content. But when He revealed His own Sonship He made it possible for the early Christians to receive and interpret the new doctrine of the Trinity.

And the doctrine of the Trinity was new. A translation has been made into English of Carl CLEMEN'S *Primitive Christianity and its Non-Jewish Sources* (T. & T. Clark; 9s. net). In that great book, the greatest yet written on its subject, Professor CLEMEN investigates the question of the influence upon Christianity of other religions than that of the Jews. We know that the anti-Christian apologetic of our time almost confines itself to the religious argument. The whole history of Jesus is a clever combination of elements gathered from Buddhism and other religions, with an admixture of Judaism. Ours is not the only Christ. Every incident in the Gospels, and even every doctrine of the Epistles, has its parallel and prototype in some one or other of the religions of Paganism.

Professor CLEMEN investigates these assertions. To do so means more than industry, it means familiarity with all the religions of the world, a familiarity which no single man possesses. He has accordingly applied to his colleagues in the University of Bonn for their assistance. And the book which he has written may be taken as the authoritative word on the whole vast subject.

Among the rest he investigates the suggestions which have been made to explain the origin of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In the first place he says, and says quite unreservedly, that it is not Jewish. 'There is no evidence of the existence of such a formula as Father, Son, and Spirit in the Jewish thought.'

Three passages only have been claimed as containing the doctrine. First, Origen says that his Jewish authority explained to him that the two

seraphim of Is 6² are the Son of God and the Holy Spirit; but that, says CLEMEN, has nothing to do with it. Next, in the Ascension of Isaiah (9³²⁻³⁶), the angel of the Holy Spirit appears beside the Lord of Glory; but the Ascension of Isaiah is a Christian work. Finally, in Enoch 61¹⁰, on which Gfrörer especially relies for a Jewish origin, there is no mention of anything more definite than 'the other powers on the earth, over the water.'

But surely there are trinities elsewhere. No. There are triads; but that is a different matter. There is the Babylonian triad, Ea, Marduk, and Nebo. That, however, is not Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and Heyn's attempt to identify Nebo with Spirit, inasmuch as Nabû in Babylonian means 'speaker,' is a failure. Nor has any Indian, Persian, or Egyptian influence been more acceptable to scholars. Last of all, the Buddhist triad of Seydel—Buddha, the Law, and the Assembly of the Clergy—found in an inscription of Asoka, is now explained by Seydel himself as simply due to the sacred character of the number three, a common feature of all religions and languages.

Professor James Hope MOULTON of Manchester has contributed an article to *The Methodist Recorder* of November 28 on 'Divorce.' The article is called forth by the Reports of the Divorce Commission. In view of these Reports it is necessary that those of us who name the name of Christ should understand the Christian attitude on this most urgent question. Professor MOULTON'S article deals with the teaching of our Lord.

And the first thing that he insists upon is that, in respect of marriage and divorce, our Lord refuses to allow any distinction between the man and the woman. Professor BURKITT of Cambridge has suggested that the occasion for the teaching on divorce recorded by St. Mark (10¹⁻¹²) was furnished by the Pharisees. The Pharisees were trying to get Him to denounce the unholy marriage of

Herod with Herodias. If they had succeeded, His fate would, they expected, soon be the fate of John the Baptist. They did not succeed. But they opened the way for those words on the matter of divorce which must be the principle that directs every one of His followers.

In St. Mark's account of His words no distinction whatever is made between the man and the woman. But the first evangelist, reproducing St. Mark here, adds a phrase implying a distinction. The *woman* may be divorced for unchastity. The same exception is made by the same evangelist in the other place in which he records Christ's teaching on the subject. This is in Mt 5³², a passage which belongs to what is known as the Collection of the Sayings of Jesus, a collection which, says Dr. MOULTON, we have every reason to believe was made at a very early date by the Apostle Matthew himself. St. Luke quotes this saying from the same Collection, but *without the exception*. Accordingly most students of the Gospels believe that this exception—that the woman may be divorced for unchastity—is an explanatory gloss added to the First Gospel, and no part of our Lord's own teaching.

If that is so—and this most capable and conscientious scholar firmly believes that it is so—it follows that our Lord refused to sanction divorce for any cause whatever, whether the divorce of the man or of the woman. He forbade divorce altogether, and declared that marriage can be terminated only by death.

And if there is to be no distinction between man and woman, there is also to be no distinction between rich and poor. If Professor BURKITT is right in suggesting that the occasion of Christ's teaching on divorce was an attempt of the Pharisees to involve Him in the fate of John the Baptist, the distinction between rich and poor could scarcely be absent from His mind. For Herodias had divorced her husband in order to marry Herod, a thing which no woman of lower

rank could do. It was not necessary, however, for Him to mention that. For it is of the very essence of His Gospel that in Christ Jesus there is neither rich nor poor.

But the question must be asked, For whom did Christ legislate? And the answer must be, For His followers. His laws are all for those who own His authority. He Himself tells us that ages after the higher law had been laid down, Moses had to enact a lower law because of the unfitness of the people to bear it. The same principle, says Professor MOULTON, applies here.

'Christian legislators,' he says, 'will always feel that the laws of Christ represent the ideal to which the world ought to be tending. But, while they will keep that law themselves, they may feel bound, "for the hardness of men's hearts," to frame legislation which falls short of the ideal. It is a tremendous responsibility, but they must face it. Wise reformers, however, will recognize that Christ's ideal, here as everywhere, threatens with real and permanent loss all those who refuse to rise to it. The nation's well-being will depend upon the degree of approximation of its laws and practice to Christ's standard.'

The Unrighteous Steward.

BY FREDERICK BEAMES, B.SC., THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL, BRISTOL.

THIS parable perhaps more than any other has presented difficulties to the commentator. As usually expounded it runs:—There was a steward for carelessness and inefficiency, if not dishonesty. To save himself from ruin he instigated his master's creditors to evade their debts fraudulently. When his master found him out, he praised him for being so wily. So far the commentators agree. Then follows our Lord's commentary in which occurs the passage, 'And I say unto you, Make friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness,' which seems to commend the fraud. This is explained away or evaded in a variety of ingenious ways. What I propose to show is that the steward did not cheat his master, nor did he connive at fraud. What he did was legally right, but all the same was unrighteous. He obeyed the letter of the law, but sinned against the spirit of it. The remarks of our Lord, then, require neither to be explained away nor to be evaded.

The first point to be observed is that the word rendered 'rich man' is a technical term. St. Luke, as Sir William Ramsay, in his *St. Paul: The Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, has so ably shown, is a writer who is very careful in his choice of words, being consistent in his usage, and not using terms with different meanings in different contexts. St. Luke was a Greek whose knowledge

of Jews was partly derived from the Diaspora of the Greek cities, and partly from St. Paul. In retelling the parables of our Lord, he had to describe the usages and customs of a people with whom he was unfamiliar, and for whom he had no little contempt. He consequently was all the more careful in his choice of words when describing their habits. The parables were told to the peasants of Galilee, and are remarkable for their homeliness. They are not elegantly composed works of imagination, but descriptions of the everyday life with which our Lord's hearers were familiar. To understand them we must know the people who listened, and try to realize their everyday surroundings. What would the term 'rich man' convey to them? Clearly not the same thing as to a cultivated Greek or Roman, or even as to a poor inhabitant of the half-Greek cities of Asia Minor.

The people of Galilee spoke an Aramaic dialect, a language in which in all probability the earlier versions of the Gospels were written. The few words of our Lord, such as 'talitha cumi,' which have come down to us, show this. We know too from history, that they had been forcibly reduced to the Judaism of Jerusalem by the high-priest-king Aristobulus about the year 100 B.C.,¹ having previously practised that mixture of Judaism and

¹ See E. Bevan.