

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

PROBABLY the most urgent question of home policy before the country to-day is that of Religious Education. We profess to be fighting broadly for Christendom, for the liberty and decency and moral standards which are the fruit of Christianity, and which cannot persist apart from the Christian Faith. But how many of our people realize this or understand what Christianity is and implies? If liberty is to survive, if honour, truth, and equity are to endure, we must see to it that the gospel out of which they spring is imparted to the generation on whom the responsibility for the future will rest.

This is being widely realized. It was the burden of the Archbishop of York's Malvern Conference. And lately two famous educationists have drawn special attention to it. One of them was Headmaster of Rugby, the Bishop of Liverpool, Dr. DAVID.¹ The other, Sir Cyril NORWOOD, was Headmaster of Harrow. Let us begin with Dr. DAVID. In a letter to the *Church Times* he deals with two points. First, he believes that the Government are willing to give religious instruction its proper place in the national system, but they dread a recurrence of sectarian controversy. If churchmen of all shades could go to them as a united body and assure them that the situation has entirely changed since 1902, that we no longer insist on a body of special doctrine being given to the children, they would probably

¹ Since this note was written Dr. David, at our request, has developed his views on Christian Doctrine and the Child in an article (page 255).—ED.

(so we interpret Dr. DAVID) agree to make religious instruction mandatory in all schools with, of course, a conscience clause.

Dr. DAVID's second point is that the centre of gravity of all education has changed in our days. It is the child that is the deciding factor, and the child decides that he needs the 'elements' of truth, not the developed form. We teach the child according to his stage of development. And when he is young it is not formulated doctrine he needs. That is why teaching religion by a catechism to young children is unscientific and futile. Doctrine comes later. This, Dr. DAVID says, 'has created a preparatory stage on which the churches can build their own full doctrinal instruction later on when the child is able to receive it. Thus the whole question is taken out of the reach of theological discussion and is set where it can be handled by practical teachers in peace.'

Sir Cyril NORWOOD in the February *Fortnightly* has the place of honour for an article on 'Some Aspects of Educational Reconstruction.' He takes a different line from Dr. DAVID. He begins with a definition of war aims. He says (1) we are fighting for our lives, and (2) we are fighting to decide on what conditions life on this earth will continue. He stresses the enormous power and resources which the allies will possess after the war, and insists that we must not compromise or let slip, for on the unchallengeability of these resources depends the well-being of Europe.

He points to the danger of an uncontrolled democracy, and this leads him straight to the problem of fitting the victorious democracy for its task of reconstruction and healing. And this problem of fitness is the problem of education. Sir Cyril is not dealing in his article only with religious education, but with proposals for reform of the educational system generally. With these we need not concern ourselves here, suggestive and important as they are. We take him up at the point where he contends that Christianity must be the foundation of the 'new order' in Europe, and 'it is obvious' that, if that is so, it must be the foundation of the education which is given in the schools.

The controversies of the past resulted in many people growing up without any religious teaching at all. But the position is not so desperate as it seems. For, while parsons and laymen have been contending with one another in abusing the Church during the last twenty years, the voices have been few indeed which have abused the teachings of Christianity. 'There has probably never been a time when there were more people ready to accept the ethical content of the Christian gospel as the highest revelation of what is possible for man. . . . Moreover, grim and disastrous as the present war is from every materialist point of view, it may well through suffering and through sacrifice bring the whole nation to a sense of the spiritual values which supremely matter.'

'Therefore,' Sir Cyril continues, 'I believe that in schools of every type the Gospels should be carefully taught, with the main emphasis placed upon their ethical teaching, that there should be regular school prayers and one day in the year set apart for a service of commemoration and dedication in special surroundings. The business of the school is to teach that goodness, truth, and beauty are absolute values, and every course of study in the school should be so taught as to illustrate these lessons; the life of the school should be designed and lived as something governed by these standards, a life in which example would always count for more than precept.'

'Doctrines and denominational distinctions are the business of the Church, the home and the Sunday school. They will count for less in the future than they have done in the past. But they are important, and it cannot be required of the schools, when the limited time at their disposal and the tender age of their pupils are taken into consideration, that they should do more than lay the foundation, and put first things first.'

It will be seen that in the pages which he devotes to religious education Sir Cyril ranges himself with the Bishop on the three main points. First, both insist that the 'elements' come at the early stage, and 'doctrine' only after the foundation has been laid. Secondly, that formulated doctrine is the affair of the Church. What is wanted to begin with is that children should be taught the simple truth to be found in the Person and Words of Jesus Christ, the 'absolute values' which His life and death embody.

And thirdly, that this people will not be equipped to undertake the task which victory will lay upon them unless they are taught what Christianity is and what its main ethical implications are. Is it too much to expect that the churches will go to the Government on the basis of these suggestions, and present to the authorities an agreed standpoint? And is it too much to hope that on this basis of agreement the Government will decree that religious education shall be really national, that a nation which has fought for the 'absolute values' shall have them taught to every child in every school?

In these columns notice is taken of theological views belonging to all schools of Christian thought. The only stipulation is that the expositions should be from competent hands. We would call attention here to a book published on the older lines of Christian apologetics by Dr. Wilbur M. SMITH, of the Department of English Bible, Moody Bible Institute.

The Supernaturalness of Christ (Wilde Co., Boston; \$1.50) is not only an affirmation of the

traditional orthodoxy but has the merit of affirming it in clear view of the objections to which it is subject. We do not think that the writer realizes the force of the objections in every case, but we respect his standpoint and appreciate his sincerity.

The scope of the work is indicated in the statement that the author seeks to set forth the basic facts involved in the Birth, the Transfiguration, the miraculous acts, and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that his aim is to vindicate the view of Jesus Christ as a truly supernatural person, the Son sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. It may be noticed that an unusual emphasis is laid upon the Transfiguration.

The longest chapter treats of the miraculous works of Christ, and we shall now give a résumé of its main contents. First we are reminded of the characteristics of the miracles recorded in the Gospels. They appear to be organic to the Gospel narratives. The records of them are marked by reasonableness and restraint. They were done publicly and could be appraised by the physical senses. Nor are they being repeated to-day by modern science. They were performed out of high and worthy motives, and their importance was emphasized by Christ Himself.

Then are set forth theories proposed to account rationalistically for the miracles. The fraud theory, first advocated by Reimarus, who looked upon Jesus and the disciples as 'a band of tricksters,' but not advocated now even by the most advanced rationalists. The mythical theory, associated with Strauss's name, which largely depends on the supposition of the elapse of a long time between the death of Christ and the establishment of the tradition embodied in the Gospels. The rationalistic theory proper, associated with the name of Paulus, which sometimes explained the miracles away and sometimes accounted for them by the use of secret remedies on the part of Christ (and the disciples).

As for the now popular theory of auto-suggestion, it is applicable only in a limited number of instances,

and it is the verdict of medical science that suggestion is incapable of removing any organic, as distinguished from functional, disorder. Our writer rejects also the explanation which rests upon the assumption, supported by Ernest F. Scott among recent scholars, that the disciples—upon whose testimony the miracles were recorded—lived in an age of great credulity.

The so-called 'spiritual' theory is also dealt with, and James Moffatt's suggested interpretations of the feeding of the five thousand are criticised. The miracle is neither the transference of poetic tradition (the Messiah was expected to feed the people with bread from heaven) into prose statement, nor is it a parable or comparison which has been turned into a tale.

A criticism of Hume's attack upon miracles leads to a discussion of the relation between miracle and natural law. It is pointed out that scientific and philosophical writers often allow the possibility of real miracle. Indeed it is difficult for the theist not to allow this possibility. But the question of actuality remains.

It is rightly urged towards the conclusion of the whole discussion that the question of actuality cannot be separated from the person and work of the One of whose life on earth the miracles are recorded. We are not dealing with an ordinary man when we are dealing with the man Christ Jesus. We are dealing with One who was the Son of God.

When Stanley visited Mackay of Uganda in time of cruel persecution he wrote of him, 'God knows, if ever man had reason to think of "graves and worms and oblivion," and to be lonely and doleful and sad, Mackay had, when, after murdering his bishop, and burning his pupils, and strangling his converts, and clubbing to death his dark friends, Mwanga turned his eye of death on him. And yet the little man met it with calm blue eyes that never winked. To see one man of this kind . . . and to

hear him lead his little flock to show forth God's loving kindness in the morning and His faithfulness every night is worth going a long journey for the moral courage and contentment that one derives from it.'

Such is the heartening that every discerning reader will receive from the last sermons of Martin NIEMÖLLER, now published under the title of *The Gestapo Defied* (Hodge; 6s. net). They are the words of a man who calmly looks persecution and death in the face, who stands like a rock when others fall, who stays his soul on God when all human help fails and justice is denied, and who calls upon his flock, when suffering the loss of all that men count dear, still to rejoice in God their Saviour.

There is nothing sensational or predominantly political in these sermons, as the title might suggest. In this respect the title is somewhat misleading and hardly worthy of the substance of the book. There is no angry or bitter word, nothing provocative or partisan; but here is a man who takes his stand, Lutherlike, upon the Word of God, because he can do naught else, and confronts the foe like some great cliff against which the wild waves beat in vain.

At the same time the crisis through which the Church in Germany has been called to pass is never for one moment absent from the preacher's mind, and every sermon is coloured by it. The speaking is plain and bold to a degree, and the attitude throughout is resolute. 'Friends, there is talk of peace. Do not believe it! What is meant is that Jesus of Nazareth should share His sovereignty for a time with a new Christ, that the Gospel of the Redeemer of sinners should compromise with the religious complacency of the "racially pure" man, that the old Gospel should fall into line with the new myth which refuses to have anything to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. But that is impossible, the Church will never do that, it does not lie in its power. For He is the Lord and will tolerate no other gods beside him.' Or again, take this. 'The Gospel must remain *the Gospel*; the Church

must remain *the Church*; the Creed must remain *the Creed*; Evangelical Christians must remain *Evangelical* Christians. And we must not—for Heaven's sake—make a *German* Gospel out of the Gospel; we must not—for Heaven's sake—make a *German* Church out of Christ's Church; we must not—for God's sake—make *German* Christians out of Evangelical Christians.'

No words could be clearer or more courageous. Without degrading the pulpit with diatribes against Hitler and his minions the preacher makes plain to every hearer the principles that are at stake. He reads the names of members of the Christian community who are in concentration camps for Christ's sake; he deplores the falling away of some who through fear have ceased to attend Church or give a Christian witness. Most bitter of all he points to some in the congregation who have turned traitor and are now present as the spies of the Gestapo. These recurring references when taken together give a vivid picture of the conditions of Church life among the evangelical Christians of Germany.

Best of all, in these sermons we have preaching of the highest kind. They are in no sense ephemeral, addressed to the crisis of the hour and therefore doomed to pass away with it. Much modern preaching is of that sort. But here we have apostolic preaching, impressive proclamations of the everlasting gospel. Christ is alone exalted; His redeeming work is set forth; and every hearer is lovingly and urgently entreated to accept Him as Saviour and Lord. This has always been the characteristic of great preaching in times of persecution. Nor is the reason far to seek. For the Apostles themselves preached, and the New Testament itself was written, in time of persecution. So that the Church is never nearer the heart of the gospel, and never feels herself better placed for receiving and understanding the Christian message, than in times of persecution. Hence we find that when such crises arise, and men's minds are agitated with anxieties and fears, Christian preachers have used the opportunity to present Christ as the all-sufficient Saviour, and to urge their hearers to take

refuge from the storm in Him and to rise above the tumult on the wings of heavenly faith and hope.

So is it here. The Word of God is set forth as the sole and immovable foundation of the Faith against all modern gospels and words of men ; Jesus Christ crucified and risen is preached as the only Saviour. Repeatedly the verse of Zinzendorf's hymn is quoted,

Christ's precious blood and righteousness
My jewels are, my festive dress.
Clad in this glorious robe of grace
Boldly I'll stand before God's face.

'Is that all we need? Yea, verily! Christ has taken away the power from death, and freed us from sin's claim to sovereignty. And Martin Luther is right when he says, "Where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation." The call to repentance is sounded. 'Dear friends, and especially dear young friends, let us, I beseech you, not lend our ears to those seductive voices that try to turn God's call to repentance and conversion into ridicule by telling us that the proper attitude for a German of to-day is the attitude of a Prometheus or a Lucifer, the attitude of a defiant Titan against the will of God and the vicissitudes of life. That attitude is nothing—assuredly nothing—

but one of Satan's lies with which he tries to safeguard human dignity.'

In view of recent reports that NIEMÖLLER has joined the Church of Rome, an event as unlikely as that Martin Luther should have bowed the knee, it may be noted that in one of his last sermons he deals with the unity of the Church. He rejoices that persecution has brought Protestant and Romanist in Germany nearer in sympathy and in a new appreciation of the fundamental things in regard to which they are at one. A consciousness is thereby awaked that 'we all belong together as one great congregation to the body of Christ, and we should like to enter the spaciousness of a real Christian brotherhood which will unite us one with the other and make us free to serve one another.' But he goes on to make clear that the one vital thing is 'that Jesus Christ—and He *alone*—is the Lord and Head of His Church, and that He directs and rules His members—who may, moreover, be manifold enough—through the Holy Spirit.' Nothing could be more wholesome than that these sermons should be widely read throughout the English-speaking world, if for no other reason than to remind us that in Germany, where such sermons are preached and congregations assemble to listen to them, there are assuredly seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.