THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

A FEW months ago the Rev. J. M. THOMPSON, Fellow and Dean of Divinity, Magdalen College, Oxford, published a book on the *Miracles in the New Testament*. He had already published two volumes of New Testament study, from either of which it might have been gathered that the miracles were incredible to him. But this was a small book. It could be easily bought and easily read. After a short but sharp discussion, chiefly in the correspondence columns of the newspapers, Mr. THOMPSON was suspended by the Bishop of Winchester from exercising his office as a teacher of theology in Magdalen College.

Then the editor of the *Guardian* invited three scholars to criticise Mr. THOMPSON'S book, and he invited Mr. THOMPSON to answer them. First came Dr. Walter LOCK, Warden of Keble College, with a single article in the *Guardian* for the 31st of July. After him Dr. Henry SCOTT HOLLAND, Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford, with three articles. Next the Rev. H. H. WILLIAMS, Fellow and Tutor of Hertford College, Oxford, with two articles. And in the issue for the 1st of September Mr. THOMPSON makes his reply.

Has Mr. THOMPSON read the articles in the *Guardian*? He does not say that he has not read them. But he ignores them. He goes back to the book without one word about the articles, and 'I should like,' he says, 'to recall our controversialists to the simple question, "Is what I have said true?"'

Now it may be doubted if Mr. THOMPSON had the right to accept the editor's invitation and then ignore his contributors. They are men of as much learning as himself. They have given as much of their lives to the study of the Gospels. But, apart from that, Mr. THOMPSON ought to know that the question 'Is it true?' is often quite unanswerable. He repeats his previous questions. For the most part they are long and complicated. Even if the subject were an easy one, such questions could not be answered with a simple 'Yes' or 'No.' But in so great and so difficult a subject as the supernatural in the Gospels, such a demand is utterly unreasonable. The truth is that in the study of the New Testament we ought by this time to have got beyond the pistol-shot question, 'Is it true?'

'Is it, or is it not, true "that St. Paul believed himself to possess special powers of the Holy Spirit, but that the language in which he himself describes these powers, does not cover anything more than faith-healing, and exorcism, which are instances of natural law, not miracles"?' That is Mr. THOMPSON'S first question. Is it possible

to answer it with a monosyllable? If Mr. THOMPSON demands a monosyllabic answer, the probability is that nine out of ten of the students of the New Testament in this country—we mean men who have studied the New Testament as thoroughly as he has done—will answer 'No.' And if they do, where is he then? His whole article proceeds on the assumption that every one of his interrogatives 'Is it true?' must receive the answer 'Yes.'

'Is it true'—this is his second question—'that those miracle stories in St. Mark which fall outside the sphere of faith-healing can be adequately explained by "the tendency to transform natural events into supernatural, the love of assimilation, the ease with which an editor can give a new turn to a passage, and the influence of present interests upon the representation of the past"?' Did any man ever spread a net in the sight of a bird before? Mr. THOMPSON has cleverly condensed the whole modern argument against the Gospel miracles into one sentence, and demanded, Yes or No? The argument has been forged from the history of religion. But it is impossible to imagine any one who has studied the history of religion answering 'Yes.' We know what the myth-making faculty has done here and there. We certainly do not know that it has ever done all that Mr. THOMPSON assigns to it. Only once, indeed, has it had the chance. That is in the Gospels themselves. For only in the Gospels are miracles such as these to be found. We may think that the Bishop of Winchester was precipitate, but we must admit that any teacher who put so complicated a question deserved to be suspended, for incapacity.

But it is after we have passed Mr. THOMPSON'S interrogatives that we come to understand him. His article is divided into two parts. The second part opens with the familiar statement, that the miracles in the Gospels do not differ from other miracles. 'The miracles of St. Thomas of Canterbury,' says Mr. THOMPSON, 'are in many cases of the same kind as those recorded in the Gospels; they often show the same character of benevolence, the same capacity for illustrating or enshrining spiritual faith; the same naturalness and simplicity; they tend, as the Gospel miracles do, to become more and more miraculous; they could be divided in the same way, and with about as much success, as the Gospel miracles have been divided, into a canonical and an apocryphal series; the better attested of them rest on stronger evidence than any miracles in the New Testament.'

Mr. THOMPSON declares that the miracles of St. Thomas show 'the same capacity for illustrating or enshrining spiritual faith.' If by 'spiritual faith' he means 'spiritual truth,' what a revelation this is of his entrance into the mind of Christ. But if he uses the word 'faith' purposely, in order to suggest that the miracles of Christ are like the miracles of St. Thomas in that they also need faith and the same faith to apprehend their value, then what a revelation it is of his conception of faith.

He dares to say that the miracles of St. Thomas often show 'the same naturalness and simplicity' as the miracles in the Gospels. And then he says that 'they tend, as the miracles in the Gospels do, to become more and more miraculous.' The miracles in the Gospels do *not* tend to become more and more miraculous. There are miracles in St. Mark that are as miraculous as any miracle in St. John. Finally, he says that the better attested miracles of St. Thomas 'rest on stronger evidence than any miracles in the New Testament.' From which it is very clear that Mr. THOMPSON does not know what evidence is.

And this is the explanation of his attitude throughout. He takes the miracles of the Gospels in groups, brings forward what he calls evidence for or against them, and so disposes of them in the lump. And when he has disposed of them, as natural events transformed into supernatural, or as due to the love of assimilation, or to the skill with which an editor 'can give a new

turn to a passage,' he is convinced that he has explained, and explained away, the supernatural in the Gospels.

There is no doubt that the denial of the supernatural in the Gospels is now very common. The most plausible argument against it is found in the history of religion. And Mr. THOMPSON is right when he claims that that argument has not yet received the attention it deserves from the Christian Church. Men who make some claim to scholarship, and who, at any rate in the pulpit, handle the question of miracles occasionally, are in almost total darkness about the history of religion. But that is no excuse for Mr. THOMPSON. For every one of the writers in the *Guardian* has shown himself well acquainted with the argument that the miracles in the Gospels are the slow product of the myth-making faculty. Dr. LOCK even admits that there is a progress in the New Testament from a more human conception of Christ to a more divine. But he claims that that progress is not in myth-making, but simply in interpretation.

'The life described in the Gospels,' he says, 'is admittedly many-sided, and moves on a level far above that of ordinary men. The teaching, the actions, were often misinterpreted in His lifetime; the Teacher was constantly spiritualizing Jewish language, Apocalyptic and other, that He found ready to His hand; His followers were constantly materializing His teaching. The conception of what the Teacher was, grew very gradually in the minds of those who were most intimate with Him. When it had grown, it was shattered by the crucifixion, and gradually it had to be rebuilt and reinterpreted in the light of the Resurrection.'

Dr. LOCK asks: 'Is not such a life exactly the life which most needs some distance in order to see it in true proportion?' He admits, of course, that the Gospels, all the Gospels, are later than most of St. Paul's Epistles; that they come from a Church, and are accepted by a Church, which was accustomed to St. Paul's high Christology and teaching about the Spirit. And yet, on the whole, he says, they reproduce in a striking degree the thought of the earlier days; they show the gradual deepening of insight into the meaning of the life. And Dr. LOCK concludes with the strong but defensible statement: 'It is therefore as likely as not that the writer of the Fourth Gospel is far nearer to the true interpretation of what Jesus said and did and was than the compiler of Q, that document which is supposed to be the oldest source for the life of Christ.'

There are several promising volumes of sermons in the autumn lists, including three in the 'Scholar as Preacher' series. But it will take a very fine volume to surpass in interest one that is already published by Dr. RENDALL, late Head Master of Charterhouse. And yet the sermons it contains were every one of them preached to boys. The title is simply *Charterhouse Sermons* (Macmillan; 3s. 6d. net).

Take the sermon on Forgiveness. Most of us make mistakes about forgiveness. But Dr. RENDALL is concerned with the mistakes which boys make. The first mistake which boys make is that when a sin is forgiven its consequences are cancelled. Are they cancelled? Dr. RENDALL declares that life, experience, history, all proclaim the opposite. As Marcus DODS, in his *Early Letters*, familiarly puts it, 'What's did *is* did and can't be didder.' That which is done is done, and cannot even by forgiveness be undone.

And that which is left undone cannot be done. Most appropriately, in speaking to boys, the Head Master of Charterhouse selects the sin of idleness. 'There is no magic,' he says, 'by which in after years you can hope to make good, wasted terms that will never come again.' 'Their record,' he says, 'will be a blank on the day you stand before the judgment-seat, and the books are opened. It is true that the hymn says comfortably, "Time

that's lost may all redeem." But the hymn does not say so truly. Idleness may by God's grace be done away; by repentance, by strain of godly sorrow and forgiveness it may be changed, *re-born* into resolute and energetic desire for service. But the fruits of idleness remain. Their effect in others' lives, and in your own, has passed out of your power to change or better.'

The mischief caused by the notion that consequences can be cancelled is manifold. For one thing, it fosters the idea that the punishment of sin is arbitrary and imposed from without. Do we not even deliberately teach our children that if they commit sin, God will punish them for it? We ought to teach them that they punish themselves. Did not each sin of which even Sir Percival had been guilty rise up against him as he drew near the Holy Grail?

Then every evil word I had spoken once,
And every evil thought I had thought of old,
And every evil deed I ever did,
Awoke and cried, 'This Quest is not for thee.'

And sin begets sin. Separate sins become habits of sin. And then the conflict is lamentably unequal.

And as oft
As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,
So many a time he vaulted up again;
Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,
Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,
Labour'd within him, for he seem'd as one
That all in later, sadder age begins
To war against ill uses of a life,
But these from all his life arise, and cry,
'Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down.'

Nevertheless there is forgiveness. And the miracle of it is that it makes the sin, not as if it never had been, but better than if it never had been. Dr. RENDALL, speaking to Public School boys, is not afraid to say it makes it better. By God's grace, he says, the forgiven soul, like the oyster, may 'mend its shell with a pearl.' Where the wound and blemish was, there comes, he says, with the healing, not a scar, but a pearl. We leave the miserable consequence in the hand of a God of healing, and in thankfulness acknowledge that for us the besetting sin is changed, as it were, into a guardian angel. So forgiveness transfigures life.

This is the modern mystery. It is for this that the modern Milton has to rise and say:

What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.

We dare not sin against God. God forbid that we should ever dream that we may sin against God and not be the worse for it. And yet have we not come to the conclusion, that forgiveness is more than the old military word of command—'As you were'? Have we not come to believe that to whom much is forgiven the same loveth much?

The other mistake that boys make is to think that forgiveness means forgetting. 'Forgive and forget,' the careless proverb says, 'and I read only the other day the eulogy of one who, it was said, knew not only how to forgive, but what is far better, to forget.' That thought makes two mistakes. It misses the virtue of forgiveness, and it misunderstands the work of the love of God.

God does not forget. The All-wise, the All-knowing, the All-caring, He by whom 'the very hairs of your head are all numbered,' He who 'understandeth our thoughts long before,' and 'who putteth our tears into his bottle,' is it possible that He should put away omniscience and forget? Is it desirable that He should forget? When we are sorry for a sin, when we turn from it with shame and detestation, is not our first instinct to

make a clean breast of it, to be rid of the hateful secret? Is it not our strongest desire that He against whom we have sinned should know it to the uttermost? Dr. RENDALL recalls the parable of the Prodigal Son: 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him'—hiding nothing from him.

And as we wish the sin to be known, we wish it to be remembered. For the forgiveness of the sin becomes a sacred tie of friendship, affection, and trust. To wish it forgotten is to wish to make it less than it is, and so to make the forgiveness less. It is to repent that it was confessed in all its fulness. It is a treachery to love.

It is a treachery to human love. If I forgive a sin I do not need to forget it. The love that enabled me to forgive is large enough to cover the remembrance of its forgiveness. And if the sin is not forgotten, then it is a holy pledge between me and thee that as long as the remembrance lasts the repetition of that sin has become morally impossible.

And it is a treachery to the love of God. 'My sins are ever before me,' said the Psalmist. For he knew that they were ever before God, and that the remembrance of them gave him the assurance of the inexhaustible love of God, and kept him from continuing in sin.

'Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5^{48}). In these days of 'No theology, please,' is there any one left who is interested in perfection? There are still some who are interested in it. They are interested in it practically, as a matter of life and conduct; which means, no doubt, that they are much less violently interested in it than if it were a matter of theology and theory. But those who believe that they are already perfect, and those who believe that they never can be—those two classes are interested in perfection still.

Was it to those who are already perfect that our Lord said, 'Ye shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect'? That is clearly impossible. Not because we must take the verb in the future tense. We need not take the verb in the future tense; and we had better not. For if we are ever to be perfect, let us be perfect now. He did not say, 'Ye shall be perfect,' or 'Be ye perfect,' to those who believed they were perfect already, simply because to them He never had anything to say at all. 'They that are whole,' He said, 'have no need of a physician'; 'I came to call sinners.'

To those who believed that they were perfect already, He had nothing to say. It was only incidentally, and turning for the moment, as it were, from His proper work, that He addressed Himself to them at all. And then only to let them understand that they were very far indeed from being perfect. Nicodemus came to him by night. Nicodemus was perfect already. By the very principles of the life he lived, he and all the Pharisees with him were perfect. If they offended in one thing, they offended in all. They knew that. And therefore they persuaded themselves, as they were bound to do, that they had not come short of the demands of the Law through all their life in respect to one jot or one tittle of it. 'Master,' said one of them, 'all these things have I kept from my youth up.' Of course he had; they had all kept all these things.

What did Jesus say to Nicodemus? He did not say that he was not perfect, but He said that he must be born again. He said that if he was perfect on his own lines his perfection was worth nothing. It was worth less than nothing; it was a hindrance to true perfection. He said that Nicodemus must take down all that building which he had built so laboriously and so admirably, and begin at the beginning again. To use His own most graphic and inimitable figure, He said he must start his life over again as from infancy, as a new-born child, in a new attitude

and with a new aim. He said he must be born again.

A rich young ruler came to Him. To the ruler He said, 'Sell that thou hast, and come, follow me.' It is the word to Nicodemus over again. Begin at the very beginning. Sell everything; leave nothing, absolutely nothing, unsold. Give the whole of it to the poor, and then begin a new life in a new attitude, in a new relationship which you will find in Me. Sell and come. These are His two demands always upon the already perfect. Sell, that is, get rid of the whole of the bad method of living; and come, that is, begin a new life with a new motive, a life which not only leads to but actually is perfection.

Nor did Jesus say, 'Be ye perfect,' to those who hold that nobody can ever be perfect on earth. That is as undeniably clear as the other. For it is the earth, you may say, that He speaks about always. In comparison with His interest in the earth, He is just as little interested in heaven as we are. 'Be ye perfect' is the sum of the Sermon on the Mount, and the Sermon on the Mount is meant for this world.

Nor is it a 'Counsel of Perfection' merely. Our Lord never in all His teaching uttered one single 'Counsel of Perfection'—one single precept that could not be translated into life and conduct. This in connexion with the Sermon on the Mount is our grand mistake. It is our fatal mistake. 'I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also'—if that is not meant to be done, there is mockery in the statement of it. Those who deny that it is meant to be done, are living in entire misapprehension of what the Sermon on the Mount is meant for. Certainly it is just as difficult to turn the other cheek as to be perfect; but both precepts are possible here and now, or Jesus had not uttered them.

Now the first thing to notice is that there is at least one person who is perfect already. 'Ye therefore shall be perfect, *as your heavenly Father is perfect.*' Do you say, Of course God is perfect? Well, of course He is; but that is not what our Lord says. He says *our heavenly Father* is perfect. God is perfect as Father, that is what He says. And when is a father perfect? He is perfect when he loves. He is perfect when he loves his children with a perfect love. And love in our heavenly Father is no more an abstract, distant thing than is love in an earthly father. Our Father knows what we have need of. 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him.'

God is perfect as a Father. It is the only perfection in God that we are interested in. It is the only thing that we need to know about in God. And just as it is the perfection of a father that Christ attributes to God, so is it the perfection of a son and no other perfection that He demands from us.

For, first, it is the perfection of a man. It is the perfection of a man with a will, a will to obey or to disobey. Otherwise He would not demand it; He would simply impose it. He does not say to the lilies of the field, 'Be ye perfect'; He simply makes them perfect. And that is just another way of saying that it is not the perfection of the Pharisee. The perfection of the Pharisee is the perfection of a circle. Take your compasses and draw it. Let the two ends meet accurately. Your circle is complete and perfect, but it is not the perfection of a son.

It is not only the perfection of a man. It is the perfection of a man who has been imperfect, who is imperfect still. He has been imperfect. He has not, like the Pharisee, remained at home doing his day's work faultlessly. He has not gone out every morning at the same accurate hour and returned every evening with the same sense of satisfaction, so much work done, so much wages earned. He has been away in the far country.

He has spent his substance in riotous living. But he has come home again. And when he came home, the father said, 'This my son'; 'bring forth the best robe.'

He is imperfect still. Here is the paradox of perfection. We shall be perfect whilst we are still imperfect. That is what our Lord means. He means that we shall be perfect as sons, perfect in having entered into the real relationship of sons, in having the heart of sons, in loving as only sons can love. 'I am bold to say'—this is the Pharisee:

> I am bold to say,
> I can do with my pencil what I know,
> What I see, what at bottom of my heart
> I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
> Do easily, too—when I say, perfectly,
> I do not boast, perhaps.

'Father, thou knowest that I love thee.' This is the perfection of the son.

The Present Theological Situation.

By the Rev. J. M. Shaw, M.A., Logiepert.

I.

The outstanding feature of the theological activity of the last twenty years has been the thorough-going application in the sphere of religion of a method or principle of study which was first applied with good result in other branches of human inquiry. The guiding idea of the nineteenth century—the idea of evolution or development—bade us see everywhere not sudden inbreaks of creative power, but continuous progressive change from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher, by means of an immanent power working according to certain observable laws. Fruitful in the world of nature, this scientific conception became increasingly applied to the study of history, converting an atomistic into an organic view of things; until in the latter half of the nineteenth century the method—generally spoken of, in its particular relation to the study of history, as 'the historical method'—employed in the sphere of religion gave rise to a new reading of religious history.

The first application of the new evolutionary conception was within Christianity itself. Its general result was to emphasize the fact that the revelation of God to Israel culminating in Jesus Christ was a gradual progressive revelation, suited or accommodated to the developing religious capacities of the race and individuals. When this was realized, many formerly felt difficulties found a natural explanation. The imperfect morality of the Old Testament, for example, and the correspondingly imperfect forms of worship which it brings before us, ceased to appear unworthy of a place in the record of a Divine revelation. Doctrines and practices which were morally impossible as the last word of revelation became intelligible when seen in their place as steps or stages in the process.

But this idea, once adopted, could not fail sooner or later to demand a wider and more thorough-going application. An evolution or development there is within Christianity. That is granted. May not Christianity itself also come within evolution? Two things combined to delay until recent years the coming forward of this further question. *First*, there was the belief in the special revelational character of the Christian religion, according to which it was viewed as a religious phenomenon of an exceptional miraculous character extra- or supra-natural in its rise and progress, infallible in its sacred books, over against all manner of false religions—'a holy island in the sea of history.' In the very nature of the case, such a belief discouraged any attempt to relate, for purposes of elucidation or explanation, the religion of the Old and New Testaments to extra-Christian religious history. *Second*, even where such a belief was no longer actively operative, our knowledge of non-Christian religions was so meagre that the indispensable fact-basis for the application of such a method of study was not yet provided. The