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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

CAN the Sermon on the Mount be put in practice? The answer at present is an almost unanimous No. It is so nearly unanimous that we are arrested at once when a man declares without qualification that he believes it can be. Mr. A. E. FLETCHER, some time editor of one of the great London dailies, believes it can be. And in a book with the title of *The Sermon on the Mount and Practical Politics* (Griffiths; 2s. 6d. net) he says so.

Mr. FLETCHER says so, not only without qualification, but with clearness of thought and vigour of language. He does not enter upon questions of literary criticism. He takes it for granted that if Christ did not speak the Sermon on the Mount as we have it, the Sermon on the Mount as we have it expresses the mind of Christ. He proceeds to show that Christ intended it to be no unattainable ideal but an actual working rule of life, in just such a society of men as we live in.

What are the objections? One objection is, that any attempt whatever to govern on the principles laid down by Christ must be a failure, because Christianity itself has been a failure. That objection Mr. Fletcher meets by a straight denial. About 'Churchianity' he is not sure, and it is evident that he does not feel called upon to defend 'Churchianity.' But Christianity, he says, can never fail so long as its cardinal virtues, faith, hope, and love, have any influence over the mind and heart of man. He does not claim that the Christianity of the first century can be reproduced to-day. It seems to him that Christ Himself was a Communist and held centralized government to be an evil. Now it is his belief that in the present complex state of society, with international interests at stake, a central government is a necessity. What we ought to have is a series of communes, all held together by a central authority, but each with powers over its own affairs. He believes that in our day that is the nearest approach we can make to a perfect form of government, and he believes that such a form of government would be entirely after the mind of Christ.

Mr. FLETCHER does not go over every verse of the Sermon on the Mount to show how he would carry it out politically. He confines himself to the Beatitudes. He takes up the Beatitudes separately, and shows how they may be turned into practical politics. And if he succeeds with the Beatitudes, we may allow that he will succeed with all the rest.

The first Beatitude is 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' That, says Mr. FLETCHER, embodies the principle of all righteous legislation. He would take his stand upon that Beatitude and let the whole of the Sermon on the Mount be tried by it. He hears the opponent say, 'Blessed are the poor

in spirit' sounds better, but in the end it means no more than 'Blessed are the poor-spirited.' To Mr. FLETCHER it means the very opposite of that —the very opposite. For to be poor in spirit means to be in spirit, that is, in sympathy, with the poor. And to be in sympathy with the poor is to be mightily courageous in spirit, and that in all climates and in all times.

And when the opponent turns and taunts him, saying the poor in spirit are after all promised a reward—'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,'—and therefore their action lacks disinterestedness, Mr. FLETCHER answers that to make such an objection is to miss the meaning of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of heaven is the ideal society. The poor in spirit do not look forward to some future personal reward; they have their reward already. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven.'

Professor Percy GARDNER of Oxford has written a book on *The Religious Experience of Saint Paul* (Williams & Norgate; 5s. net). It is a remarkable example of the shift that has taken place in the centre of New Testament study, a shift that was referred to last month in a notice of Professor LAKE'S volume on *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*. Professor GARDNER has still to touch some problems that are literary, but it is the religious problems that occupy him most. It is because of the study he has given to the religious world in which St. Paul lived that his book has its greatest value for us.

There is, for example, a chapter on the Pauline mystery. The word 'mystery,' says Professor GARDNER, and the ideas which it conveys, play a much larger part than is generally recognized in the writings and thought of St. Paul. And he gives a chapter of fifty pages to their exposition.

First, he takes the meaning of the word. It is very usual and indeed very natural, he says, that readers of the English Version of the Bible should attach to the word a meaning which it did not possess in the time of St. Paul. The word 'mystery' then implied institutions, societies, and ideas which were quite familiar to the people in the Mediterranean in the ages of Greek and Roman dominance, but which are quite unfamiliar to us. We have no mysteries in the ancient sense of the word. The term has been altered and degraded. The adjective 'mysterious,' which really governs the modern sense of the noun 'mystery,' is defined in some dictionaries as meaning enigmatical or incomprehensible. But if it were used in the Bible, it would mean 'of or belonging to the mysteries,' and the mysteries were not enigmatical or incomprehensible, though they were associated with a sacred awe.

Professor GARDNER explains what the mysteries were. They had three notable characteristics. First, they had all some rites of purification, whether ceremonial or moral, through which the *mystae* had to pass; next, they were all mysteries of communion with some deity; and thirdly, they all extended their view beyond the present life to that which is to come, securing for the initiated a happy reception in the world which lies beyond the grave.

The next step is to trace the history of the word in the Greek Bible. In the Old Testament it occurs only in the Book of Daniel. In the Synoptists, the knowledge of the Kingdom of God is spoken of as a mystery hidden from the many and reserved for the inner circle of believers. But Professor GARDNER does not think that that utterance is in the manner of Jesus. He regards it as probably one of the later traditions, such as are found in our early Gospels. There is a passage in the Apocalypse, however, in which the word 'mystery' occurs in a noteworthy sense. 'Then is finished the mystery of God, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the Prophets.' The meaning seems to be that with the

blast of the seventh angel the hidden purpose of God, which He had made known only to the prophets of the Christian Church, became evident to the world; so that the word is used in a way closely parallel to that of pagan Greece. Otherwise in the Apocalypse the word is used to denote a symbolical appearance which requires explanation by one who is initiated in its meaning, such appearances as those of the Seven Stars and of the woman seated on a scarlet beast.

Then Professor GARDNER turns to the Pauline writings. He finds himself in a new region as regards many sides of religion, but it is particularly new as regards that side of it which is turned towards the mysteries.

In the first place, it is worthy of note that St. Paul uses words and phrases which belong to the mysteries. Even if he does not use them in their special sense, the very fact of their occurring to him is important. The word 'perfect' (τέλειος) applied properly to a person fully initiated, and the word 'to be instructed' (μυεῖσθαι) meant to learn the secret imparted in the mysteries. To 'enlighten' (φωτίζειν), again, which is used in the Epistle to the Ephesians, is a word which expressed the illumination coming from the secret rites. How quickly the use of such terms was spread is shown by the occurrence in the Epistle of James, one of the least mystic books of the New Testament, of the phrase 'wheel of birth,' which belongs in origin to the Orphic mysteries.

What, then, are the mysteries of St. Paul? Generally speaking, when St. Paul speaks of mysteries he refers to something which has been specially revealed by God to those who are initiated into the faith of Christ. If he uses the word in the plural he may mean the doctrines or rites which belong to the Christian Church. He calls himself and his colleagues, treasurers or dispensers of the Divine mysteries. He speaks of charity as better than the knowledge of mysteries. And he uses the plural when he calls the speaking in tongues a speaking of mysteries, where it appears to mean that what was spoken or understood only by the speaker was his private secret, and had to be explained to hearers by an interpreter.

St. Paul mentions it as a Christian mystery that at the coming of Christ some shall arise from sleep and some shall be changed. This is a mystery, says Professor GARDNER, not in the sense of being anything hard to understand, for the notion of a spiritual body was widely accepted in Greek speculation of the time, but as a belief peculiar to Christians and the secret of their confidence in the future.

But there is one mystery which is at the very heart of Christianity. When St. Paul speaks of it he becomes reticent; he hints at the meaning rather than expresses it. It may be, says Professor GARDNER, that he finds it difficult to speak of things which call up in himself over-mastering emotions. He probably felt like Luther, who said, 'If Thou truly feelest this in thy heart, it will be so great a thing to Thee that Thou wilt rather keep silent than say aught of it.'

What was this mystery? Professor GARDNER believes that the commentators have usually been mistaken in their identification of the great Pauline mystery. Some have said that it is the Messiahship of Jesus Christ; others that it is nothing else than the inclusion of the Gentiles along with the Jews in a common hope in Christianity. Both these were no doubt parts of the great Divine plan which was given to St. Paul to disclose to the world. But these are not his pearl of great price.

Professor GARDNER examines the passages in which the Apostle speaks of this mystery of Christianity. He comes to the conclusion that to St. Paul the one profound mystery was 'the existence of a spiritual bond holding together a society in union with a spiritual Lord, with whom the society had communion, and from whom they received in

the present life safety from sin and defilement, and in the world to come life everlasting.'

Do we believe in immortality? Mr. A. C. BENSON thinks we do. He has evidence of it. It is the readiness with which biographers speak evil of the dead.

The old phrase *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is not only old but obsolete. And why? Not because we have less reverence for the dead, but because we have more. If we thought the dead were so dead that we should never meet them again, then we should say nothing but good about them; but if we believe that they are aware of what we are doing, and that we shall yet have to answer to them for the things which we now say about them, then, says Mr. BENSON, we shall be careful to tell the truth and the whole truth. Well, we do tell the truth about the dead in these days. Therefore we believe in immortality.

This is Mr. BENSON'S introduction to a volume of biographies. After the manner of Ruskin, of whom he has recently been writing so pleasantly, he gives his book the cryptic title of *The Leaves of the Tree* (Smith, Elder, & Co.; 7s. 6d. net). It is a volume of biographies. It contains biographies of Westcott, Henry Sidgwick, J. K. Stephen, Bishop Wilkinson, Professor Newton, Myers, Lightfoot, Henry Bradshaw, Kingsley, Bishop Wordsworth of Lincoln, and Matthew Arnold; and in all of these biographies Mr. BENSON counts the old phrase 'Nothing but good about the dead' both old and obsolete. In one instance he has been taken to task for it. The biographies were first contributed to the *Cornhill Magazine*; and when the biography of Professor Newton appeared there, his friends remonstrated. Some thought it disrespectful, and others thought only one side of him was given. Mr. BENSON does not remove anything that may have been considered disrespectful, and he does not give the other side. This is the truth about Professor Newton so far as he is able to apprehend it; and so, he first defends and then repeats it.

Let us see how this argument for immortality may be carried out. Mr. BENSON believes that the late Bishop Wilkinson of St. Andrews is aware of what is going on in the world to-day, aware of what Mr. BENSON is saying about him in this book. For that reason Mr. BENSON says this. He says: 'He was always an individualist; he thought of souls as solitary wayfarers, or as little groups of pilgrims, finding their anxious way to God—not as a mighty army marching with trumpets blowing and banners flying. A good instance of this is his strange and almost ineffective attempt to arrive at some principles of reunion in Scotland in his later days. He threw himself warmly into the reunion movement, arranged conferences, appointed days of united prayer; but when it came to taking practical steps he had nothing to give but a lyrical passion of devotion, and he sternly declined and forbade any interchange of pulpits, or any deviation from the principles of ecclesiastical organization, saying that he did not believe that any such artificial fusion would foster the cause which he had at heart.'

How much must a man believe, in order to be called a Christian? Five things, says Professor CURTIS. He must have 'a genuine faith in God's Fatherhood, in Christ as the unique Son of God, and in His power to save the world, an acceptance of Holy Writ in its evident spirit, and a devotion to the Church as the Divine instrument for the promotion of the Kingdom.'

Is that too little, or is it too much? It is not likely to be too much; for the purpose of Professor CURTIS, in the very place where he names those five things, is to encourage the Church to be content with little rather than demand much. Professor CURTIS has published a volume on Creeds and Confessions of Faith. Its full title is *A History of Creeds and Confessions of Faith in*

Christendom and Beyond, with Historical Tables (T. & T. Clark; 10s. 6d. net).

The book is mainly a history, as its title tells us. It is the most complete, and it is also the most reliable, history that has been written in our day. Professor CURTIS, who has the unique distinction of having won his Chair in the University of Aberdeen by examination, and won it with a range of learning which surprised his examiners, has given himself to this work as if he meant it to be the great work of his life. First he contributed the article on 'Creeds and Confessions' to the ENCYCLOPÆDIA OF RELIGION AND ETHICS, and then he published the book.

But, although the book is mainly a history, Professor CURTIS is too keenly interested in that mighty movement which seems as if it would carry Creeds and Confessions away with it, to be satisfied with a history of the past. His last chapter, which is the only chapter we shall touch upon, is entitled 'Subscription and its Ethics.' It is in that chapter that he utters his plea for a larger tolerance.

It is an unusual thing to find a great authority on Creeds arguing that we should sit as easy as possible to them. Professor CURTIS's argument is the argument of a statesman. He would count it a calamity if the great Creeds of Christendom were to become a dead letter, or if the great Churches of Christendom were to adopt a constitution, no part of which began with the words 'I believe.' And he sees the danger of that. There has been no very general tendency of late to cry heretic, but that is not a sign of the times that is necessarily good. Heretics who are heretics indeed may escape the due reward of their doubts simply because the strings of the Creed have been drawn too tightly and the public mind has gone into revolt. Professor CURTIS would relieve a man from the very suspicion of heresy, a suspicion that is sometimes burdensome enough without a heresy hunt, simply by giving every man freedom in the Church to express his own individuality within the mind of Christ.

And Professor CURTIS is not without the courage of his convictions. Dare one venture, he asks, on a sketch of the ideal Creed which shall rally our shattered ranks and heal the hurt of Christ's Church? He ventures on it. For he is free to acknowledge that in spite of what the Christian world calls risks, his heart goes out increasingly to the forms of the New Testament, to the simplicity of the Apostolic age, in whose holy records the Christian spirit 'still finds its greenest pastures and its stillest waters.' It will be, he says, in the sacred words of Holy Writ alone that the Churches shall finally find the symbol of their recovered unity. And then he quotes three creeds with each of which he seems to be in sympathy, and between which he seems to see but little difference.

The first is the creed of the late Dr. John WATSON. Imagine, says Dr. WATSON, a body of Christians who should take their stand on the Sermon of Jesus and conceive their creed on His lines. Imagine how it would read: 'I believe in the Fatherhood of God; I believe in the words of Jesus; I believe in the clean heart; I believe in the service of love; I believe in the unworldly life; I believe in the Beatitudes; I promise to trust God and follow Christ, to forgive my enemies and to seek after the righteousness of God.' The second is the creed of Dr. James DENNEY. Looking back, says Dr. DENNEY, to the investigations which we have just completed, and recalling the significance which Jesus had in His own mind, and has always had in the minds of Christians, it is perhaps not too bold to suggest that the symbol of the Church's unity might be expressed thus: 'I believe in God through Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord and Saviour.' The last is the creed of the late Professor FLINT. A very short creed, says Dr. FLINT, may be much better than a long one, and quite sufficient if received intelligently and firmly. 'The Lord's

Prayer is short, but if a man thoroughly believe it —thoroughly believe in God's Fatherhood, and man's brotherhood, the sacredness of God's name, the grandeur of the claims of God's kingdom, the obligations of God's will, and our dependence on Him for the supply of our bodily wants, for pardoning mercy, and for deliverance from temptation and evil—he will not only pray aright but live aright.'

Do these three creeds contain all the five elements of a creed which at the beginning Professor CURTIS said were necessary to make a man a Christian? No doubt they do. But now Professor CURTIS is out in search of the shortest possible creed. These three are short; and yet he thinks we might be satisfied now with a shorter. He ends his discussion with this sentence: 'If to the Fisherman Apostle it was given to hold the Keys, it would be difficult for him to refuse admission to the Christians of all communions who can unreservedly profess in his own earlier or later words, "Thou art the Christ, Son of the living God," or more simply still, "Thou knowest that I love Thee."'

Spiritual Power.

BY THE REV. HERBERT A. WATSON, D.D., LANCASTER.

'That ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man.'—EPH 3[16].

ST. PAUL begins this statement of his appeal on behalf of the Ephesians with a reference to the Fatherhood of God, and he traces the origin of the general idea of fatherhood, divine and human, to this original Fatherhood, which is divine. It has been said that the modern presentation of the idea, or the recent revival of its presentation, can be traced to a statement made by a statesman in the House of Commons in the course of a speech.

He had heard the phrase in a sermon, and it struck him with such force that he ventured to repeat it in a secular assembly. Thence it spread through the country. Now the idea is very old and is presented to us in the opening address of our Lord's Prayer, but, if it is in any danger of becoming outworn, there is much importance in reviving it and restoring its original vividness. According to St. Paul, the idea of the Fatherhood of God lies at the root of our family life, and, instead of saying that we represent our relation to God in terms of our human relation to one another, he distinctly states that the human relation takes its name from the divine. And he proceeds to develop this thought by showing how the human nature is connected with the divine, by making his prayer that the Ephesians may be strengthened by God's Spirit into their inner man. He does not simply state the sphere in which God's influence works, but he virtually describes the passing of God's influence into man. He lays stress upon the act of influence rather than upon the fact of its presence. And thus he implies more strongly the close connexion between God and man,—something passes from God into man. God is our Father—that is one fact; His fatherly influence passes into us—that is another fact. Now we are told, on the other hand,—and this is particularly brought out by the Modernist School,—that God is transcendent, and that our appreciation of Him can only take a symbolic form. Our actual experience is completely different from divine experience, and, if we express the one in terms of the other, it is only the terms that are the same, we are only symbolizing the idea of God, or translating it into our own experience. The two ideas remain absolutely distinct, the idea of God and the idea of man.

In this sense the whole life of Christ is symbolic, just as the whole of the Catholic religion is symbolic.

The miracles present the idea of God in symbolic form, and the sacraments and forms of religion do the same. Whether the Modernist idea has pushed itself too far will have to be decided by applying the test of time, but at any rate it reminds us of a common need, the need of distinguishing the transcendent from the human. St.

Paul avoids the danger, and explains the mystery by emphatically declaring that there *is* a close connexion between God, our Father, and ourselves, His children. The connexion is established by a similarity between the divine and the human, not an actual similarity between two natures that widely differ, but at least a common ground. The common ground is expressed by the term 'spirit,' which is certainly implied by the in-breathing of God's Spirit into man, which St. Paul accepted as a true description of man's creation.

Thus the chasm between the human and the divine is actually bridged, and the terms applied to both have some possibility of being interchanged. At least we can speak of man in terms of God. But does this connect us with the divine in actual realization? It does, if it connects us with God in fact. And of the fact St. Paul has not the shadow of a doubt. For he tells the Ephesians that they are one spirit as much as one body, and he sums up the close connexion between Jews and Gentiles by deliberately stating their power of approaching God in one spirit and linking it with their reconciliation to God in one body.

Thus he assumes a unity of spirit corresponding to a bodily unity, connecting the Ephesian Church with the ancient Church of God. We are bound to understand that the term 'spirit' as applied to God and as applied to man must have the same meaning. There is a difference of degree, but not of kind. How is the idea of the spirituality of man to be reconciled with the idea of the transcendency of God? Again we come back to the original idea of the Fatherhood of God. There is no difference in kind between a father and his children, but there is a difference of degree. So far as man is man and God is God, the two are far as the Poles asunder. But God's object is to make Himself known to man, and, in order that man may have strength to realize God's greatness—St. Paul amplifies the term by stating greatness in various directions, of breadth and length and height and depth,—in order that man may have strength to recognize the love of Christ—a special manifestation of God's greatness,—he is connected with God through spirit. Spirit is the force which bridges the chasm, effects an entry into the nature of man, and establishes a sphere in which God may work. Spiritually, therefore, God is not finally unapproachable by man, so far He is not transcendent. Spiritually we can realize Him, even though we fail to grasp Him in mind and express Him in language. The connexion with God will at last be perfect, when man's realization of God passing through the idea into purpose, and from purpose into action, reaches the completeness which is God's object for him and for the world.

The prospect is far-reaching, but the sketch of human hope is not Utopian. Not only the Ephesian Church needed this idealistic prayer, but, wherever man's horizon is limited by his immediate experience, he requires the suggestion of a wider, or rather a different, horizon. The difficulty of combining worldliness with other-worldliness is so close to our experience that it hardly needs to be stated. But, when the Quakers based their objection to the current religion of their day upon the want of spiritual religion, they at any rate realized the line that improvement would have to take. If the Church of the seventeenth century needed a warning to spiritualize itself, so also the Church of to-day cannot afford to neglect the warning. We were told long ago by Ignatius that, wherever Christ is, there is the Catholic Church, and parallel with the strengthening of the spirit stands the indwelling of Christ in the human heart, according to the prayer of St. Paul. The Spirit is to penetrate the inward man, and by that act Christ is to take up His dwelling in the heart. Thus the Spirit is closely connected, intimately allied with Christ. 'I will not leave you desolate, *I* come unto you.' The Christian completeness depends upon the realization of Christ through the Spirit of God. A *man* must be joined to God in spirit, a *Christian* must exemplify the connexion by his assimilation of Christ. Just as Christ took manhood into God, so conversely man is to allow godhead to enter into man. But he may acknowledge the fact and yet fail to encourage the influence. For it is a matter of faith and of heart and of love. The faith is the means, the heart is the place, and love is the method. But his faith is not simply the belief of others, the repetition of phrases current around him, his identification with Christian thought. It is his determination to connect belief with will, to translate feeling into action, to pass from thought to practice. This he does partly by the power that is given him, put into his spirit, partly by his use of that power. Nor is the heart simply the place where a man can

be moved, it is the centre of his actions as well as of his feelings. And love is a general not an individual method, binding him to his fellows in a society whose common object it is to set forth the indwelling of Christ.

Spiritual power, then, touches a man on his three sides—his thought, his will, his feelings. It does not exercise an external influence upon his life, but it transfuses the whole of his nature. It is not outside his worldly life, but it is within it. So far from interfering with his regular work, it guides it by supplying the required motive, often unconsciously, never visibly. But the results appear, even when the process is unseen. 'The vision splendid' need not '*fade* into the light of common day,' may even illumine it with a brighter glow. In the power of the Spirit men have gone forth to their work and to their labour until the evening. They have done what ordinary men have done, but they have done it in a different way. In them the original connexion between man and God has never been broken, nay, rather has been strengthened, as life's morning freshness has glowed into noonday heat and brightened into evening glory. It has been the thread running through their life, and, though ever and again it has been strained, it has never been severed in twain. When the vision of Christ fell upon the sight of St. Paul on the way to Damascus, it seemed to break the continuity of his life. But in reality it changed formalism into spiritual fervour, and made him fully realize the human relation on its divine side. What changed the tenor of his life may influence any life to an inconceivable degree. We do not lose the identity of our nature, when we allow it to be so directed. Divine strength is breathed, through the Spirit of God, into our inward man. From this centre God inspires all our activities, and our active life gives His holy influence freer, fuller scope of action than He could have found if man had been merely a meditative, solitary being, with no work to do in life, and no companionship to produce and stimulate effort, co-operation and resultant love. In a word, we love, because He first loved us: because God, who *is* Love, has passed into our inward nature, has quickened our thought and feeling and will, by means of our environment, into a livelier energy, and has shown us that spiritual life reaches its highest development in the domain of the material life, which must always, in this world, be its exercising ground. They, in fact, who dare to lift up their work to the highest level they discern for it—it is the spiritual method that the late Bishop of Oxford has bequeathed to us—they are most sure to meet with God. For he who is truly strengthened with power through God's Spirit in the inward man is no mere idealist, but a practical exponent of the truth that religion lives and works and loves in common life.

In the Study.

New Sermon Literature.

MESSRS. T. & T. CLARK have published the first two volumes of the second year's issue of 'The Great Texts of the Bible' (10s. each; or in sets of four, 6s. each). One of the volumes deals with the Old Testament, and the other with the New. The Old Testament volume runs from Deuteronomy to Esther; the New completes the Epistle to the Romans.

Rev. J. M. E. Ross, M.A., of Golder's Green Presbyterian Church, London, is a topical preacher, and he is not ashamed of it. Let others take texts and expound them; he takes a text as a nail to hang his topic on. His subject once is 'The Praise of Men.' He takes two texts, 'I praise you' (1 Co 11^{2}) and 'I praise you not' (1 Co 11^{17}), and he begins in this way: 'I wish to speak of the place of *praise* in human life—the uses of praise and the dangers of praise. And having that somewhat large topic before me, I do not propose to use these texts as more than finger-posts to start me upon the way.' And all those who love to expound their texts, and believe that there is no preaching like it, will find Mr. Ross a dangerous man; his topical preaching is so attractive, it is so evangelical, it is so unexceptional. After all, he builds everything upon the Word of God. He is just as little captivated by the newspaper heading as the most strictly textual expositor among us. The title of his