THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THOSE who know anything about the game of golf know something about Mr. Horace G. HUTCHINSON. To them it may be a surprise to learn that Mr. HUTCHINSON has until recently been a religious agnostic. It will certainly be a surprise to them to know that he is now a believing and rejoicing Christian. How he passed *From Doubt to Faith* he tells us in a small book with that title which has just been published (Longmans; 1s. 6d. net).

He was an agnostic because he could not believe in the Divinity of Christ. He was able to believe that Christ might possess 'something of the divine creating spirit.' So might any man. He was willing to grant that He might possess a larger share of that spirit than any other man, and so be, in that limited sense, more divine than any other person of whom we have record in history. But he knew that that is not what is meant by the Divinity of Christ. He knew that in admitting so much as that he had gone no way at all towards acceptance of 'the claim of Christianity for the nature of its Founder.' Believing all that he could believe, he knew that he did not believe that Christ was more than 'a mere man.'

The Divinity of Christ is 'the one great primary and crucial difficulty of the agnostic.' He may believe this or disbelieve that other item of the Christian creed, but he knows that this is the only belief or disbelief that matters. This is the cardinal or 'hinge' belief. If he can believe the Divinity of Christ, the door is open to the fullest acceptance of Christianity. He has but to go forward. If he cannot believe it he has not crossed the Christian threshold.

Why could not Mr. HUTCHINSON believe the Divinity of Christ? Because it is a miracle. What is a miracle? It is 'an interference with, an interruption of, the ordinary course of Nature.' Does he mean, then, that such interruption or interference is impossible? 'No man who was not an absolute fool' would say so. If God can create at all, if He can set the machinery of the Universe in motion, He can, if it seem good to Him at any time, 'alter a screw here and there in the mechanism,' which is to Mr. HUTCHINSON the same thing as interrupting the action of the laws of Nature, or performing a miracle. But *He has never done so.* That is the difficulty. He has not interfered. 'We have, at least, no certain warrant, outside revealed religion, for saying that He has at any point or at any moment interfered with the mechanism, by the readjustment of a screw or by alteration of the smallest detail, since first He set the great complexity in movement.'

At any point, or at any moment? Mr.

HUTCHINSON returns upon these words. Are there no moments in the history of the Universe at which a readjustment or interference has taken place? There are said to be two such moments. The one is the introduction of life. The other is the beginning of self-conscious reason in man.

But we are not sure of either point. The authorities are divided. Biologists, who are the experts on the one point, and the composite committee of biologists and psychologists, who are the experts on the other, have come to no agreement. And until they agree, or at least approach more nearly to an agreement, it is not competent for us to use these moments as proof that interference has taken place in the orderly evolution of the Universe.

We are thrown back on the historical evidence. If the evidence for the incarnation of the Son of God is so good as to outweigh the improbability of such a miracle occurring, then we may and must believe it. But in order to convince the agnostic that such a miracle had occurred, 'an immense cloud of witness would be needed. The testimony would require to be most emphatic and most clear. And it did not seem as if testimony of sufficient strength could possibly be produced.'

At this stage the obvious thing to do was to examine the evidence. Mr. HUTCHINSON did not do that. Does any agnostic do it? We have read the writings of agnostics not a few, and we have been astonished at their ignorance of the evidence and of the literature in which it is set forth. Mr. HUTCHINSON did not examine the evidence. But he was aware of the disadvantage of agnosticism. He saw that if he could believe in the Divinity of Christ he would certainly be a happier and might possibly be a better man. So, though he did not at once examine the evidence for this great miracle, he set about considering if in the nature of things there were any probabilities for or against it.

He found one probability, and it strongly impressed him. Supposing that the Creator set going the whole scheme of evolution as science tells us that He did, and supposing that the scheme included the evolution, in process of time, of a being endowed with reason and free will, so as to be able to follow one or another line of conduct at his choice; supposing, further, that the Creator, looking down upon this being whom He had evolved, perceived him misusing his gifts, acting wrongly, foolishly, in a way which did not accord with His great design—what, in that case, may we deem it likely that the Creator would do?

He might do one of two things. He might at once stop the machinery, or He might determine to put Himself into communication with man in order to point out to him how he had gone astray and if possible bring him back to the right way. If He adopted the first plan it would be a confession of failure. It seems most likely that He would adopt the second.

But how is God going to communicate with man? He would certainly do it in the simplest and most natural way. He would do it in such a way as to cause the least apparent interruption of that evolutionary scheme which He had set going in the indefinitely remote past. Does it not, even to our limited human intelligence, seem manifest that the simplest way would be to 'give to some creature, who in all outward aspect should be very man, a portion of His own divinity—a portion of His own divine wisdom and divine goodness'?

This is the probability that occurred to Mr. HUTCHINSON and impressed him. It impressed him sufficiently to induce him to turn again to the evidence. Now before this probability occurred to him the testimony for the Divinity of Christ did not appear to him to be sufficient to carry conviction. 'But when I came,' he says, 'to examine that testimony from rather a different point of view, after I had been led to see the reasonableness of supposing that the Creator might converse

with and give guidance to His creatures in just that way which the Christian creed would have us conceive, then it is likely enough that I began to consider the testimony with a greater sympathy.' In any case he regarded it with closer attention. And what did he find? 'The effect of the new examination was to reveal the fact, which I had not realized before, that the testimony, pointing in its totality to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was something very much more than mere man, really is immense, and very remarkable alike in its quantity, its kind, and its variety.' In short, it seemed to him now that the simplest way of accounting for the mass of evidence in favour of the Incarnation was to believe in the fact of it.

It was an intellectual conviction, but it brought peace, and he believes that it will bring progress. The things of this world now fall for him into quite a different perspective. He regards the death of the body, which from the agnostic's point of view appears the possible end and annihilation of his consciousness, as nothing more than a new and most thrilling adventure in the life of the soul. He looks forward with eager interest and hope to that which is beyond, confident that within an infinitesimal space of time after his mortal death his soul will be energizing, perhaps with immensely increased vigour, in a different environment, endowed with different and far higher capacities for the achievement of its new aims.

Professor H. R. MACKINTOSH has written a book on the Christian Doctrine of Eternal Life, giving it the title of *Immortality and the Future* (Hodder & Stoughton; 3s. 6d. net). It is a difficult subject. It has always been difficult. But for a special reason its difficulty is greater now than it has ever been.

For now its discussion involves the doctrine of the Person of Christ. The most momentous words about the Last Things were spoken by our Lord, and they seem to contradict one another. We have been told that the contradiction is due to His reporters, but that explanation has not been found satisfactory. It has not fitted all the facts. At one time our Lord seems to expect the end of the world immediately, even within His own generation; at another He seems to look forward to a long period of progress or decay before the end comes. To cut away one series of prophecies and attribute them to His reporters has been found to be impracticable. The apparent contradiction remains. And as soon as we try to explain it we are up against the extreme difficulty of His Person.

Professor MACKINTOSH accepts the contradiction. Certain texts, he says, appear to indicate an intense belief on Jesus' part that the Parousia would arrive speedily. The language of Mt 16^{28} is unambiguous: 'There be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.' And in Mk 13^{30}, after an enumeration of signs presaging the Return, it is said: 'This generation shall not pass away, until all these things be accomplished.' That is the one side.

On the other side there are indications in the parables — slight indications, Dr. MACKINTOSH calls them—that the interval might be a long one. He gives two examples. The first is Lk 12^{45}: 'If that servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming'; with which he compares Mt 25^{19}: 'Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh.' The other example is Mk $4^{26\text{-}29}$, where, in the Parable of the Seed, the End seems to be postponed to a quite indefinite distance. He also quotes the phrase employed by Jesus in His eulogy of the woman who anointed Him: 'Wheresoever the gospel shall be preached in the whole world'—a phrase which he thinks (if it is part of the original tradition) must be reckoned as proof that in His view the interval preceding the Return would be protracted.

Professor MACKINTOSH'S solution of the diffi-

culty is simple. He believes that Jesus' thought of the Parousia 'varied in different moods. At one time He looks for it immediately, at another He beholds it far away, at a third He distinctly disclaims all knowledge of its day or hour (Mk 13^{32}).'

'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith' (2 Co 13^{5}). There was a time in Scotland—it is within the memory of less than 'the oldest inhabitant'—when this text was frequently preached from. It was the text, beyond all other texts, which was used for the 'Fencing of the Tables.'

It is not much used now, because the Tables are not now fenced. If they were fenced still, this text would still be used. For there is no other that fits the occasion. In all the New Testament—and no one would go to the Old Testament for the Fencing of the Tables—there is only one other text which encourages to self-examination. It may have been the discovery of that fact, leading to a consideration of the value of a duty which had so little encouragement in the New Testament, that served in some degree to the disuse of the Fencing of the Tables. And there may have been other reasons. But so it is. This and the text in First Corinthians which is called in Presbyterian Churches the 'Warrant,' are the only two passages in all the New Testament which recommend self-examination.

And both passages recommend self-examination for a special purpose. We know what the 'Warrant' recommends it for. Here also the purpose is put very pointedly: 'Examine yourselves, *whether ye be in the faith*.' The occasion was as pointed as the injunction. There were those who denied the apostleship of St. Paul. They came as far as to Corinth denying it. And they persuaded some of the Christian Corinthians. St. Paul had to defend himself. He claimed to be an apostle. It is true he was not one of the original Twelve. But then an apostle is not known by a number, like a private soldier. An apostle is known by his works.

The works of an apostle are the bringing of men and women to Christ. St. Paul has been at Corinth. Has he brought any to Christ there? He puts the question to the Corinthians themselves. Have they or have they not been brought to Christ? If they have not, he is not an apostle. If they have, he is. 'Examine yourselves,' he says, 'whether ye be in the faith.'

Now, how are we to examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith? What is the test? Here the apostle says that, if we be in the faith, Jesus Christ will be in us, and that we shall know it. 'Know ye not,' he goes on to say, 'that Jesus Christ is in you?' But however easy to the Corinthians, that is a little difficult for us. It will be easier if we go back a little and see how Christ comes to be in us. Let us, in other words, ask the question first of all how one becomes a Christian. When we understand that, we may be able to tell whether Christ is in us or not.

The best account of how one becomes a Christian is to be found in St. Paul's own words: 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love' (Gal 5^{6}). This is at once the clearest and most complete account of the way to become a Christian which he gives in all his Epistles. How does a man become a Christian? By exercising faith. If the faith is genuine it will work through love. That is to say, it will enable a man to love God with all his heart and his neighbour as himself, which is the sum of the commandments. And if a man keeps the commandments in the sum of them, he has fellowship with God, or in other words, Christ is in him. The only necessary thing therefore to the making of a Christian is the exercise of faith.

Faith needs a little knowledge. It does not need much, but it needs a little. It needs the knowledge first that Christ lived and died, and next that He rose from the dead and is alive now. It needs the knowledge that He lived and died for

the forgiveness of sin, and that He rose and lives now for the deliverance from sin. That is all. On that knowledge faith works. And how does it work? It appropriates those two facts to a man's personal use. It makes those two facts his. He says that Christ lived and died for *his* sins, and that He rose and lives for *his* sanctification. When a man makes that appropriation he is a Christian.

Now this is very elementary doctrine. Why should it be repeated here? In order that, at such a time as this, we may examine ourselves whether we be in the faith. Why were we not able to prevent this war? Some say because we have not made enough progress in our Christian life. More likely it is because we have not begun it. Examine yourselves, says St. Paul, not as to the extent in which faith is working through love, but whether ye be in the faith.

Certainly we have faith in God. But St. Paul did not tell the Corinthians to examine themselves whether they had faith in God. They might be Jews or they might be Gentiles, in either case they had faith in God before he came to them. What he called them to was faith in Christ.

Have we faith in Christ? We have faith in Christ as a fact of history. We have faith in Christ as an ethical example. We have faith in Christ as a revelation of the Father. St. Paul thought of none of these things when he asked the Corinthians to examine themselves. Let us understand clearly that St. Paul was much less interested in the revealing Christ than we are. His interest was in the redeeming Christ. Have we faith in the Christ who gave Himself a ransom?

If we have not, we are not Christians. It is true that Christ gave Himself a ransom to bring us to God. If, therefore, we are at one with God, if we have entered into fellowship with Him, all is well. But have we? We believe in the Fatherhood, and we got that through Christ. Well, the Fatherhood may be the highest revelation of God. But the revelation of the Fatherhood will carry us only a little way. It *has* carried us only a little way. It has made us abhor 'the bloody and deceitful man,' but it has not given us power to prevent the European war. Why have we not been able to prevent the European war? Because so many of us have been theists, and so few of us Christians.

Theism is good. It is belief in a true God. It is better than atheism, which has no God to believe in. It is better than deism, which believes only in a God who takes no interest in us. But it is helpless in the present and it is hopeless for the future. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself—that is the God to believe in. And when we appropriate the reconciliation, by faith in Him who lived and died and rose again and lives now, we reach a God of power, a God of the power of love. Faith works through love, not our love to God only, but also God's love to us. And that love has power to prevent war. We know what Christ would have. He would have us love our enemies. And we know that, when by faith in the redeeming Christ we reach God, love lays hold of the power of God, and we are able to love our enemies.

Many years ago there was a cry raised, 'Back to Christ.' What did it mean? It meant back from Paulinism. It came to nothing. Let the cry again be 'Back to Christ,' but let it mean back from theism. We have been persuaded that it is not necessary to be Christians, if we are theists. The uninstructed mystic is partly to blame for it. We have been persuaded by our interest in mysticism to believe that a man may leave Christ out of account and yet come to God. But we have been much more generally persuaded by sentimentalism. Every ardent adjective has been used to describe the beautiful life of Jesus and the wonder of His revelation of God as Father. But it is only when admiration is lost in adoration that the Jesus of the Gospels becomes the power of God to the staying of war.