THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

ONE of the picturesque and powerful titles given to God in the Book of Isaiah is the title of 'Rock.' Now, even as early as Isaiah, most titles of God, as most other things, had already a history. We see at once what Isaiah meant when he said (Is 44^8):

Ye are my witnesses: Is there a God
Or a Rock beside me at all?

In Driver's accurate language, 'it designates Jahwe, by a forcible and expressive figure, as the unchangeable support or refuge of His servants; and is used with evident appropriateness where the thought is of God's unvarying attitude towards His people.' But where did Isaiah find the figure?

Driver seems to give Isaiah himself the credit of it. 'The figure is, no doubt, like *crag*, *stronghold*, *high place*, etc. (Ps 18^2), derived from the natural scenery of Palestine.' And assuredly Isaiah was able to invent so accessible and appropriate an image. But he was not the first to use it. The very way in which he uses it seems to say that it was familiar to his readers and himself. 'Great Rock' (or mountain) is a common title of the gods of Asshur and Bel in Assyrian; and in Dt 32^{31} 'Rock' is used of a heathen deity. So it is not that Isaiah arrested his readers with a new and encouraging description of the God of Israel; it is that in the name of Jahwe he challenged the gods that were called Rock, wherever they might be: they do not deserve the name, he said; and threw his words into the mouth of Jahwe Himself: 'there is not a God that deserves to be called Rock beside me at all.'

In this way Dr. W. O. E. OESTERLEY in his *Studies in Isaiah xl.–lxvi.* (Scott; 3s. 6d. net) speaks of the use in the Bible of the word 'rock.' The use that is most puzzling to us and most familiar is St. Paul's in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. 'For they drank,' says the Apostle (1 Cor. 10^{1-4}), 'of a spiritual rock that followed them; and that rock was Christ.'

What idea do we obtain from that? We take it that the rock referred to is the rock in Horeb which Moses smote with his rod and brought forth water for the people to drink (Nu $20^{8ff.}$); and to our Western mind the only idea that forms itself is that the water, once begun to flow, kept on flowing, and followed the Israelites wherever they went, a refreshing stream which they could dip into at any stage of the wilderness journey.

But that idea, like the water, is rather far-fetched. And it contradicts the Scripture. For it is not the water that is said to have followed the Israelites, but the rock. 'They drank of a spiritual *rock* that followed them; and that *rock* was Christ.' Dr. OESTERLEY shows that St. Paul had not in

mind the rock in Horeb and the water that flowed from it. He had in mind that charming incident of the later journeying of the Israelites, when to their great delight they came upon a well in the wilderness and sang a song of rejoicing: 'Spring up, O well!' (Num. 21^{16-18}).

For it is of this well that the legend is told which the Apostle used and adapted to his evangelical purpose. We find the legend in the Targum of Onkelos: 'And from thence was given to them the living well, the well concerning which the Lord said to Moses, Assemble the people and give them water. Then, behold, Israel sang the thanksgiving of this song, at the time that the well which had been hidden was restored to them through the merit of Miriam . . . from the desert it was given to them for a gift. And from thence it was given to them in Mattanah; turning, it went up with them to the high mountains, and from the high mountains it went down with them to the hills surrounding all the camp of Israel, and giving them drink, every one at the door of his tent.'

It is weird enough; but that is nothing against it. Is it appropriate? Does it not speak of a well rather than of a rock? St. Paul speaks of a rock; where does the rock come in? The answer is found in the Midrash Rabba on Numbers. The Midrash Rabba is of much later date than the Targum of Onkelos, but it contains many ancient elements. In its comment on Num. 1^{1} it says: 'They had the well through the merit of Miriam, as it is written: "And Miriam died, and was buried there." And what follows immediately after? "And the congregation had no water." And how was the well formed? It was a crag like a beehive, and it used to roll along and accompany them on their journeyings. And when the standards were pitched, and the Tabernacle rested, the crag came and settled in the court of the Tent of Meeting, and the princes came and stood beside it, and said, "Spring up, O well," and then it would spring up.'

Ah! those Jewish interpreters! they are just as prosaic as we are, and much more incredible. But St. Paul? Out of all this absurdity St. Paul fetched a figure which at once suggests Christ the living water, and carries the gospel into every thirsty soul.

The Right Rev. Herbert Edward RYLE, D.D., Dean of Westminster, has published three addresses 'concerning our Belief in the Life Everlasting,' which he delivered in Westminster Abbey during Advent, 1915. The title is *Life after Death* (Scott; 2s. net). In the third address Dr. RYLE tells us what the promise of Life Everlasting which we have in the Gospel carries with it. It carries three things.

It carries with it the assurance of the continued consciousness of Personal Identity. We shall be ourselves, and we shall know it. What proof has Dr. RYLE of that? His proof is a right interpretation of the words of Jesus: 'I go to prepare a place for you.' St. Paul interpreted these words aright, and they became to him the inspiration of his vehement and glorious anticipations of the future.

Now this is one of those peculiar properties of Christianity which exalt it to immeasurable heights above other forms of belief. Dr. RYLE gathers all other forms of belief in the future into two classes. Either they are pantheistic, and talk of immortality as another name for the absorption of human souls into the cosmic forces of the material universe, wherein individuality and will are lost; or they take refuge in successive reincarnations—a solution of the mystery surrounding the Personality of the soul that is to the mind of the Dean of Westminster simply 'fantastic.'

But the words, 'I go to prepare a place for you,' are only the promise, the risen body of Jesus is the pledge, of this continuance of conscious Personal Identity. Our identity seems to us here to be wrapped up with our body. We cannot think ourselves out of it. We do not need to think

ourselves out of it, says Dr. RYLE. We may be unable to understand the nature of the body of our glory. It is enough to know that we shall be like Him who is 'the First-born of the dead,' and of whose glorified body we have some glimpses in the Gospels. It is enough. With that we can enter with St. Paul into the longing 'to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven,' being confident that 'the Lord Jesus Christ shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory.'

Now Personal Identity carries with it mutual recognition. This Dr. RYLE believes to be 'the most passionate and pathetic instinct of yearning of which our human nature is capable.' Can we say that just for that reason it will not be disappointed? The Dean of Westminster does not say so. But he says that the Master Himself and His Apostles pledge their word for it. For the Master, there is the discourse to the disciples in the Upper Chamber and the promise to the poor malefactor on the Cross. And for the Apostles, there is the whole atmosphere in which they lived and moved and had their being. To St. Paul and St. John death did not even stand between; it was not even a thin veil; it was not there. Already they were walking in heavenly places in Christ Jesus and only waiting for that brighter light in which they would know as they were known.

And Dr. RYLE goes one step further. If we are to know one another we must know one another as reconciled by the blood of Christ—not only as man to God but also as man to man. This is the Dean of Westminster's greatest word. Barnabas and Saul had their 'contention.' Did they meet again? They met in heaven. And the contention had ceased. There are those of us between whom there has been a sharper contention than that between Barnabas and Saul.

Another assurance which the promise of Life Everlasting carries with it is that we shall enter upon a new phase of Activity. Dr. RYLE does not suppose that at death we pass into a condition of slumber or unconsciousness. He sees no reason for supposing so. Why should we? There is little said about it because there was little need. But our Lord's words to the dying thief, 'To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise,' would be hard to understand if a period of unconsciousness was about to be entered on, however long or short.

But what kind of Activity? Dr. RYLE cannot tell us. He is sure enough it will be no return to the toil and the weariness that gave so many lives on earth their unendurable burden. 'There will be relief from the tension of sorrow and the torture of suffering. The drudgery of physical exhaustion will have ceased. The weariness of overwhelming burdens will have gone for ever. There will be no sense of shame in work, and nothing sordid in the discharge of the lowliest duty.' All *that* he knows or can heartily believe, but beyond that he cannot go.

Is it worth while speaking of heaven as a sphere of activity at all then? It is well worth while. There is a sentence to be pondered: 'My Father worketh hitherto and I work.' Why? Because their work was not, and is not, yet finished. Our's will not be finished when death comes. We do not know how it will be carried on. We know only that it will be carried on. And so 'as we think of the terrible toll of life exacted by this European war, of thousands cut off in their very prime, we can faintly dream of the wonderful adjustments, which the great unknown Future will bring about, in careers hardly commenced and characters hardly formed, to meet the call of services wholly spiritual.'

The third expectation is Progress in character and growth in spiritual powers. This follows, Dr. RYLE thinks, as a corollary to the continuance of Personal Identity and Personal Activities.

Now it is just as well if it is necessary to believe this, for it is not very easy. The Puritan divines

did not believe it, and they had as keen a desire to look into these things as the angels had to look into the things of Christ. They believed that the souls of the righteous were *at their death* made perfect in holiness. Dr. RYLE believes that at their death the souls of believers begin just where they left off and then make progress.

And for a moment Dr. RYLE is much the easier to follow. It stands to reason, as it were, that, the veil being so flimsy, the rending of it should make no change. But is it not just then that we see Him as He is? Is it not just then that we know as we are known? And if we know, shall we not be? Is more than knowledge necessary? Surely there will be no defect of will.

The Dean of Westminster is very reasonable. 'Here on earth,' he says, 'you and I know what it is to have hopes of better things, to have aspirations after higher truths, to have yearnings after greater holiness, to have repinings for weaknesses and blunders and tempers, to long for the vision of purer insight and for the gift of gentler expression of sympathy and more stable exercise of self-control! Never on earth can men fully attain to that for which they pray. In the Life to come, can we think that all will in an instant be simultaneously perfected? Will the mere act of bodily dissolution be so efficacious for good? Nay, rather, may we not expect that before the vision of each spirit-Personality there will be opened out, under the new social conditions of which no idea can as yet be formed, a continually widening horizon of possibilities?'

It is very reasonable. But is it right? It is a fine modern idea; but is Dr. RYLE sure that the Apostle Paul had attained to it?

The conscience has always been troublesome to men. But it has not always been troublesome in one way. There are times when it is most troublesome to the man who has it. And there are times when it is most troublesome to the man who has it not. At the present moment 'the conscientious objector' may be troublesome to himself, but he is much more troublesome to the tribunals.

Can we do anything for the tribunals? Their difficulties are very great. They have not always had the patience with the conscientious objector which is to be expected of a tribunal. They have doubted his moral sanity sometimes. Sometimes they seem to have doubted his existence. Their words, reported by a sensational press, gave such occasion for alarm that a number of men issued a public protest. They were not Quakers. Nor were they irresponsible enthusiasts. Among them, if we mistake not, were the Bishops of Winchester and of Oxford. But if we expect the tribunals to have patience with the conscientious objector, we also must have patience with the tribunals.

For it is one of the most difficult things on earth to judge another man's conscience. Did not the Apostle Paul say that it is impossible? 'Who art thou,' he said, 'that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth' (Ro 14^4). The time may come in the history of a country—it has come now in the history of this country—when the Magistrate has to recognize the existence of a conscience in men and citizens. Then he may find reasons for doubting the citizen's obedience to his conscience. But further than that he cannot easily go. And the reasons must be found outside the conscience itself. If therefore we are to assist the tribunals in their difficult duty of dealing with the conscientious objector, it can only be by making our appeal to the conscientious objector himself.

A book which has just come into our hands will help us. Its author is a clergyman of the Church of England, clear-headed and warm-hearted, with exceptional opportunity, as Warden of the London Diocesan Penitentiary, of recognizing cases of conscience, the Rev. T. A. LACEY,

M.A. Mr. LACEY calls the book which he has published *Conscience of Sin* (Scott; 2s. 6d. net), which is not our subject. But in the end of it he republishes a chapter from a previous book of his. That book, he says, is out of print, and 'I am too much dissatisfied with it as a whole to think of a new edition, but the section treating of Conscience seems to me not unsatisfactory, and it may be useful as an appendix, stating in more theological form the basis of the sermons.' That section treating of Conscience is exactly what we want.

'Who art thou,' said St. Paul, 'that judgest another man's *servant*?' Notice the word. It is the beginning of the understanding of the Conscience. For in the New Testament the Christian religion is usually described as the service of God, and Christians are servants. The word is a strong one. It is 'bond-servants,' or frankly 'slaves.' Their wills are their own, but they are their own to make them His. They enter into this service as free, and they remain free; but their freedom is only to do the will of God, and that so absorbingly that in all their freedom they are His bond-servants or slaves.

Now the first thing for the servant is to know his lord's will. It has always been recognized by religious writers, Greek and Roman as well as Christian, that a knowledge of the will of God is necessary to the practice of religion. And it has been recognized that this knowledge must not be external, but part of the man himself. It must enter into him and be his. When that takes place he is said to have a conscience of God. The very word means intimate knowledge. When it takes place in relation to Christ he has a conscience of Christ. It is then that he asks, as Saul of Tarsus did, 'What shall I do, Lord?'

Now it is a striking but undeniable fact that when a man gains a conscience of God he gains at the same time a new conscience of himself. That is to say, he recognizes in himself impurity of motive, iniquity of life. When even the Romans spoke of a man's conscience of himself they meant consciousness of iniquity. St. Paul's language is alike. 'I am conscious of nothing,' he says, and does not need to add the word 'evil.' And again, he speaks of men who are 'branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron.'

These, then, are the first two uses of the word 'conscience' in Scripture. It is the personal consciousness or knowledge of God, and it is the consequent knowledge or consciousness of oneself as sinful.

It is then that the word receives an interesting addition to its meaning. It is used to denote that faculty of the mind which declares an action or even a motive to be right or wrong. Sometimes it is distinguished from the mind as if it were a separate faculty or power of a man's personality. St. Paul speaks of mind and conscience as both defiled by sin. That is to say, the reasoning faculty which seizes the distinction between right and wrong as objective fact, and the faculty which views the distinction subjectively in relation to self, are alike impure.

We come to the conscientious objector. When the impure conscience is cleansed by the blood of Christ it is called pure or undefiled. That does not mean that it is wholly free from warping and misdirecting judgments. The conscience devoid of deliberate offence before God and man may still be capable of mistaken determinations. To its complete emancipation from error two things are necessary—full knowledge and firm decision. A conscience that is well furnished with knowledge and firmly directed by the will is called by St. Paul a strong conscience. When a conscience is ignorant and undecided it is called weak.

A weak conscience sometimes restrains a man from doing things which he might lawfully do. The historical example is the eating of food which had been previously offered to an idol. An idol is nothing in the world. But the man with the

weak conscience does not know that. He is afraid that an idol may be something after all. And as it is his business to follow his conscience at all hazards, he refuses to eat meat which has been laid out in the pagan temples.

He is right to refuse. He is in the possession of a 'pure,' that is to say, a Christian conscience, and he must follow it at all hazards. If he ate food while his conscience was disturbed about it he would defile his conscience. And *we* must respect his scruples. The Apostle puts our duty before us with perfect clearness. And it is the only possible Christian Duty. We must encourage no man to defile his conscience. We must rather abstain from eating such food ourselves in case our example should have this evil influence.

The man with the weak conscience is right to refuse. But he is not right to have a weak conscience. A weak conscience is either an ignorant or an undecided conscience. It is the duty of every man, it is especially the duty of every Christian man, to obtain the necessary knowledge and decision which will make his conscience strong. He will then be able to eat food offered to idols, asking no questions for conscience' sake. Will he be able to go to war?

Yes, he will be able to go to war, if his standard of right and wrong recommends him to go to war. For every conscience has a standard. It does not come to its decisions *in vacuo*. It does not say, 'This is right or wrong because I think it so.' Such a conscience would be undeserving of our regard. It would not be a conscience. For it would not be able to judge at all. To judge is to have a standard to which the question is always referred and by which the decision is always obtained.

Now the natural conscience will refer to many standards, public opinion, the opinion of one's family, club, or community, and the like. The Christian conscience has one standard, which is Christ. The Christian conscience has thus a great advantage over the natural conscience. Its standard is one and infallible. No doubt it has this disadvantage, if it is a disadvantage, that when the mind of Christ is known the decision of conscience is inflexible. That is very puzzling, and sometimes very provoking, to those whose conscience is directed only by public opinion or 'the country's needs.' But in reality the Christian conscience, *when it knows the mind of Christ*, stands incomparably higher than the natural conscience, and is capable of acts of incomparably greater heroism.

When it knows the mind of Christ. We have put that in italics. For the mind of Christ is not so easily known as some men with a pure conscience seem to think. There is no serious difficulty in understanding the general principles of Christ's teaching or the general purport of His example. The difficulty is in the detail. Many of the decisions of modern life were not once mentioned by Him; nor had they ever to be taken by Him. He never said 'Go to war' or 'Go not to war.' He did say, 'Resist not evil'; but it is an extremely weak conscience that makes that saying cover every possible occasion of attack, and refuse on any occasion whatever to offer defence. The conscientious objector has to see to it, not only that he has a conscience void of offence toward God and man,—that is essential and unquestionable,—but also that his conscience is not 'weak' through ignorance. He may be excused if he loses his patience with those who throw such texts of Scripture at his conscience as 'I came not to send peace but a sword'; but he cannot be excused if he loses his patience in the difficult but delightful duty of discovering the mind of Christ.