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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE Selly Oak group of colleges is an enterprising body. It has brought over in one year both Dr. DEISSMANN and Dr. Albert SCHWEITZER, and the lectures they have delivered are now published in two quite remarkable books. Dr. SCHWEITZER'S lectures are on *Christianity and the Religions of the World* (Allen & Unwin; 3s. 6d. net). They make a small book but one of golden worth. The 'foreword' by Nathaniel MICKLEM, M.A., with its brief account of SCHWEITZER'S career, adds immensely to the interest of the book.

Dr. SCHWEITZER holds strongly that all religious truth must in the end be capable of being grasped as something that stands to reason; and that Christianity, in the contest with philosophy and with other religions, should not ask for exceptional treatment but should be in the thick of the battle of ideas, relying only on the power of its own inherent truth.

As a preliminary to his general argument, the author discusses the nature of Christianity and the question whether it can be traced back to Græco-Oriental religious thought. He dismisses this as a fantasy. 'Christianity is the creation of Jesus, whose spiritual background was late-Jewish piety.' Moreover, Christianity differs from the Græco-Oriental and mystery religions in two respects. It is not only a religion of redemption but of the Kingdom of God; also its ethic is not only negative but dynamic. Jesus said, not 'Free thyself from the world!' but 'Get free from the world in order to work in the world, in order to make it a more perfect world.'

The secret of these differences is that, to Jesus, God is an active God who works in man, and not pure spirituality. In the contrast between the world and God, and in the peculiar tension between pessimism and optimism, lies the uniqueness of the religion of Jesus.

Dr. SCHWEITZER then proceeds to set Christianity over against the world-religions which are to-day striving for supremacy. He puts Islam aside, unexpectedly. It lacks spiritual originality and is not a religion with profound thoughts on God and the world. Its power in the world is based on the fact that it has preserved all the instincts of the primitive religious mind, and is then apt to offer itself to the uncivilized and half-civilized races as the form of monotheism most accessible to them. With Brahmanism, Buddhism, the religion of China, and Hinduism it is different. They are great religions.

Brahmanism and Buddhism are based on the same fundamental ideas—dying to the world and to our own life, escape from transmigration into

pure being, by 'knowledge' and meditation. Here we see the essential difference between these religions and Christianity. It is the difference between the spiritual and the ethical. The God of Jesus is living, ethical Will, demanding ethical activity for the redemption of the world. It is by living for the world that we are free of it.

The religion of China is monistic and thoroughly optimistic. The forces at work in the world are good, therefore true piety consists in understanding the meaning of the world and in acting in accordance with this. God is really the forces of nature and the true aim is to become like them. The error in this view of things is that religion is not a knowledge of the Divine springing from contemplation of the universe. Our real knowledge of God does not come from the world. God is found in ourselves as an ethical Personality. This is, no doubt, dualism, and we accept it with Jesus.

After a review of Hinduism Dr. SCHWEITZER sums up as follows: Religion has not only to explain the world. It has also to respond to the need I feel of giving my life a purpose. The ultimate judgment on a religion is whether it is truly and vitally ethical or not. Under this final test the religions of the East fail. Every rational faith has to choose between two things: either to be an ethical religion or to be a religion that explains the world. We Christians choose the former, as that which is of higher value. We accept all the difficulties of the dualistic view, being ethical theists who apprehend God as a Will that is distinct from the world.

All problems of religion, ultimately, go back to this one—the experience I have of God within myself differs from the knowledge concerning Him which I derive from the world. The God who is known through philosophy, and the God whom I experience as ethical Will do not coincide. They are one; but how they are one, I do not understand. There is no doubt, however, which is the more vital knowledge of God, and it is because the gospel gives us this knowledge that Christianity is superior to all other faiths.

In DEISSMANN'S new book (reviewed under 'Literature') there is an interesting passage about the Messianic consciousness of Jesus. With many other scholars DEISSMANN regards the experience of the Baptism as the first dawning of this consciousness. He emphasizes the point that this consciousness was not the result of reflection. It was not His fixed and quiet possession but had its flow and ebb. It was not present with Him always with the same intensity. It dawns and disappears and again blazes in heavenly clearness in great hours of revelation before which He then, however, draws back in humility.

Tradition has preserved for us certain of these hours of revelation. One of the most important is the scene in the synagogue at Nazareth where He read the passage from Isaiah. The scene can be easily misunderstood if we suppose Jesus came into the church with the purpose of reading this passage and then announcing that He was Messiah. Rather, as His eye falls upon the words, the illumination comes to Him that He *is* the Anointed One.

DEISSMANN regards it as certain that Jesus claimed to be Messiah. But he does not hold the matter to be vital. 'The Christian Church would still throng round Jesus as Lord, even if there were adequate grounds for denying that He possessed the Messianic consciousness.' All the same the question, if not vital, is extremely important from an historical point of view. This consciousness of Jesus had fruitful results for the general development of Christianity.

It was, first, the cause of His conflict with the authorities, and therefore of His Passion and Cross. Further, it was the cause of the formation of a new religious community. More and more the disciples

who held by the Messianic claim of Jesus were constrained to withdraw from the Synagogue. And so this character of Jesus had a vital part in preparing the way for the Christian Church.

In the third place, the belief of the disciples in the Messiahship of Jesus concentrated attention on His person. Then it was the Messiah idea that gave the force which carried the Person of Christ into the centre of Christianity. And, finally, this centralization of Christianity on the Person of Jesus is of the greatest importance in the development of Christianity as a religion of the people. It does not gather mankind round a system of religious theories but round a Divine personality. And it is this that makes possible the evangelization of the world.

The last section of Principal L. P. JACKS' new book, *A Living Universe* (Hodder & Stoughton), is a discussion upon immortality. Principal JACKS votes for a conditional form of that, and goes quite hot over the theory that the great men existed only to lift the world nearer God, they themselves passing out. That were a 'foul wrong' to him. 'Frankly I would decline,' he says, 'if I had the offer, to be made better on those terms, because I see that it involves a violation of the fundamental principle of a moral world, by using one man as a means to the ends of another, or by sacrificing the interests of one generation in the interests of the generations that are to come.'

Yet, so far as we see it, so far as our vision carries, progress is certainly built up upon that very plan, that and no other, as the graveyards in Flanders and the Cross on Calvary make very clear. The richest thing that one can do with life is to throw it away for others, declared Jesus Christ.

Is that only true on the principle of strictly limited liability, always with the proviso that of course what you give here is nothing worth reckoning out of the eternity at one's disposal. 'Foul wrong'! Is it such a little thing to be used of God to help men even a small step nearer Him? Is it not arguable, at least as justly, that even God, whose name is love and whose nature is unselfishness, might well almost feel envious of man, if it is in his power to give so utterly, so whole-heartedly, that he can throw away for others all his little all in a way impossible to the Eternal.

The blessed hope of immortality happily has sturdier buttresses than this horror felt by Dr. JACKS. But is not that hope simply that we may have before us an eternity of being used as God's instruments for furthering His ends and helping others, with no thought of ourselves at all?

The day has passed for supposing that any real religious interest is secured by ignoring or denying the cruder elements which attach to ancient Hebrew religion. The more humble its origin is seen to be, the more wonderful does its subsequent transformation become. If religions which had a very similar start achieved so very different a destiny, we can only believe that, in the religious movement represented by the Hebrew people, the Divine Spirit was present and operative with peculiar intensity. There is no occasion, therefore, to regret or conceal the primitive facts.

Now magic is one of those facts, and it is one of the merits of Professor BEWER's book on *The Literature of the Old Testament in its Historical Development* (reviewed under 'Literature'), that he makes frank and frequent allusion to it. We hear of the magic trees in the garden of Eden, which show that 'Israel in common with other nations believed that knowledge and eternal life could be procured by the eating of certain food.' We hear of the miracle-working rod of Moses. And most of all does this magical element come to expression in the Elijah, and especially the Elisha, cycle of stories. There is the magic mantle by which the waters of Jordan were divided, the magic staff by

which Elisha hoped to resuscitate the dead child, the magical influence of the shooting of Joash's arrows on the securing of victory for Israel, and the magical power of Elisha's bones to revive a dead body which came into contact with them. Here, as Dr. BEWER says, is 'wonderland indeed.'

But these things do not imperil the ultimate quality of Hebrew religion, whose distinctive note comes to be a supremely ethical emphasis. At any rate that is the note of the noblest prophetic teaching, as interpreted by Professor BEWER. In the controversy—dealt with some months ago in these columns—which rages round the question whether the earlier prophets regarded the cult as absolutely or only relatively irrelevant to true religion, he supports the more drastic position. 'The pre-exilic prophets rejected the whole sacrificial system' (p. 256), they 'rejected the entire cultic apparatus as contrary to the will of God' (p. 267), whereas, according to the priestly conception, 'Yahweh had connected forgiveness with the cult' (p. 269).

It is pleasant, however, to find Dr. BEWER, in his discussion of the Psalter, recognizing—and the recognition is necessary—that in the songs associated with the Temple cult, the old prophetic teaching has by no means been ignored: rather might we say that it was presupposed. In Pss 15 and 24, *e.g.*, 'no ceremonial requirement is mentioned, and the entire stress lies on social morality; not on cultic cleanness but on moral purity.' 'If I had had iniquity in view in my heart, the Lord would not hear' (Ps 66^{18}). Such insistence on the absence of any secret evil intention 'shows the endeavour to ethicize the cultic functions in the temple' (p. 373). And elsewhere he reminds us that 'the temple cult of the post-exilic times was actuated by the high thoughts of prophetic teaching.' All this goes to show that love of the cult and emphasis on character are very far from being incompatible.

To readers unacquainted with criticism one of the most startling features of Dr. BEWER's discussion will be his attitude to the Old Testament historians, especially the Deuteronomistic and the Priestly. The dates and figures of the latter are 'altogether unreliable.' 'The historical sense of the people seems to have perished. History gives way to romance.' 'History is completely rewritten in the interest of dogma.'

Of the earlier Deuteronomistic historians his criticism is almost equally severe. While we admire them for the skill and the power with which they made history a vehicle for the teaching of religion, it is really a history which has been coerced or rearranged to suit their scheme. 'From the side of historiography, it is a catastrophe, since it was the beginning of that development which subordinated history to religion and led to the historical constructions in which facts were made to substantiate dogma.' Of the scheme which controls the period of the Judges and is summarily expressed in 2^{11}–3^{6} he says, 'from an historical point of view how distorted and wrong this presentation is! Dogma rules again.'

But this is only one side. The writers are essentially preachers rather than historians; their aim is to bring their people to a knowledge of God and His righteousness rather than of historical fact, and to bring them, through this knowledge, to a practical and effective penitence. The history thus becomes one 'great confession of sin,' and 'one may not withhold one's admiration for this solemn, impressive and effective presentation. How grandly the conviction of the righteous and merciful God of Israel is brought out in the history of His people!'

There is, however, a more surprising thing still, and one less familiar to readers of the Bible. We seldom reflect that the very idea of history had to be discovered, and we seldom recognize that the Hebrews were the first to discover it. Before Israel there were histories, but no history: there were annals, records, chronicles, of various kinds,

but no national history set in the framework of world-history. The Babylonians, the Egyptians, even the quick-witted Greeks had nothing like this comprehensive view of history till centuries later.

And the curious thing is that this large outlook is characteristic of the very earliest of the Hebrew historians, the Yahwist. 'Long before any Greek or Roman historian applied the universal idea to history, it was current in Israel: the history of the world was controlled by a great purpose.' It is in reference to the Priestly historians that Dr. BEWER uses these words. But elsewhere he reminds us that this is one of the controlling ideas of Deutero-Isaiah, and that in this he is but following on the lines already indicated long before by J. of whom he strikingly says, 'The vast horizon which takes in the nations of the world in its sweep, together with the comprehensive grasp of the history from the creation of mankind to the time of David, was a historiographical achievement of the first order.' If Biblical historians do not conform to modern historical standards—and is it reasonable to expect that they should?—at any rate we must not forget the religious energy of their purpose, or their large generosity of vision.

Dr. Shailer MATHEWS, the Dean of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, has a suggestive article in *The Journal of Religion* on 'Theology from the Point of View of Social Psychology.' The general contention is that theology is to be distinguished from philosophy by the fact that it is the product of the group mind while philosophy is accepted or rejected by individuals as such. 'There never was a Platonist General Assembly which adopted a Platonist confession.'

You can see the truth of this when you consider that theologies are really the result of imitation, customs, discussion, conflict, compromise, and successive decisions of groups. Doctrines became permanent which were held by a dominant political or social group. Heresy is always the belief of a defeated party. It is equally true that doctrines synchronize with the creative epochs of European history. The Hellenistic social mind gave us the doctrine of the Trinity. The Roman social mind developed an imperialistic Church. Out of the collapse of this Roman creativeness came our doctrine of original sin and the sovereignty of God. Feudal practices found expression in the Anselmic doctrine of the Atonement. And so on.

Religious faith was co-ordinated when the relations of man to God were described according to the contemporary social order. The vocabulary of historical orthodoxy is that of social experience. 'Decrees,' 'Representative,' 'Election,' 'Guilt,' 'Satisfaction,' 'Sovereignty,' 'Justification'—these terms are not philosophical but juridical or political.

In the same way the attitude of faith to Jesus was described in terms which embody the developing attitude of the groups of believers: 'the Way,' 'Lord,' 'Logos,' 'Son of God,' on to '*homoousion*.' The terms are all chosen as clarifying group belief. And, on another side of the matter, we see doctrines being formed to justify and explain and perpetuate the practices of groups. How else account for the doctrines of the mass, baptismal regeneration, worship of the saints, the use of images, and the infallibility of the Pope?

The practical value of these facts is considerable. It shows, for one thing, that theology is functional. Each doctrine is developed as it is needed by the Christian communities of a certain period. Doctrines were re-examined and re-stated in new social conditions. A striking instance of this is the transformation of the primitive Jewish Christian Messianic concept into the Nicene doctrine through successive stages of Pauline and Johannine teaching and the Logos philosophy of Alexandria. It is impossible therefore to form a theological formula of unchanging scientific content.

Conclusions follow from this. Members of groups with the same loyalties and values can use the same terms with differently defined content. Take as an example 'the Son of God.' That is one conclusion. Another is that terms which no longer express a religious value or a group loyalty ought to be abandoned. The weakness of Confessional theology is that it perpetuates such terms, and thus helps to bring theology into contempt among the rank and file of Christians. The question of 'the order of the decrees,' *e.g.*, has no meaning for men to-day.

There are other elements of value in the main contention referred to. But, perhaps, the one of immediate importance is the necessity of finding terms which will embody the social attitude of our own day. The conception of God as King, *e.g.*, and the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God are capable of re-statement in terms of the democratic life of modern times. The analogy will have to lay stress on the immanence of God which is one of the supreme rediscoveries of our time. This does not imply that the values in the experience of the past will disappear. These will persist, but they will be differently expressed.

Two books have come to hand this month, which display curiously opposite attitudes to the Bible. The one is on *The Failure of the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament*, by the late Mr. Arthur PHILLIPS, M.A., the other is *A Literary Guide to the Bible*, by Professor Laura H. WILD, B.D.

Professor WILD, as the title of her book suggests, believes that the Bible can be, and should be, treated as Literature. Mr. PHILLIPS denies this. 'It is misleading,' he tells us, 'to speak of the religious writings of the Jewish nation as a literature.' He quotes more than once with sorrowful disapproval Bishop Ryle's dictum that the external form and composition of the message of the Bible are 'entirely human.' He refers frequently with vexation to the 'human analogies' which are so often adduced in discussions of the literature or the religion of the Bible. But what other analogies are there?

The American Professor, on the other hand, goes cheerfully on her way, rejoicing in the analogies which Mr. PHILLIPS deprecates—the folk-lore, the myth, the legend, the fable, the allegory, the dirge, the lyric, and numerous other types whose presence in the Bible it is impossible to deny; and she clinches her point by referring to, and quoting sometimes *in extenso*, apt and striking parallels from the other literatures of the world.

What is the truth on this matter? Is Mr. PHILLIPS right or is Professor WILD right? Is the Bible fairly regarded as literature or is it not? Surely the truth of the matter is this, that whatever else, or whatever more, the Bible may turn out to be after a long and intimate experience of its spiritual power, it begins by being literature. If literature be defined as the noble expression of great thought, the Bible may surely claim to fall within that category. Or is it to be excluded, because it happens to be 'sacred' thought, or thought about 'sacred' things? Perhaps, in the last analysis, this attitude is subconsciously inspired by that unhappy dualism which has blinded men to the essential sacredness of all noble things.

Is there no biography in the Bible? What of the perennially fresh patriarchal stories, and more especially the exquisite and inimitable story of Joseph? What of the story of the life of our Lord, told now from this angle, now from that? Doubtless the aim which inspired Old and New Testament stories alike was not a literary aim, nor even a strictly historical one, it was a religious aim; but none the less the result is literature. St. Luke did not say when he began to compose his Gospel, any more than St. Paul when he wrote his Epistles, 'Go to now, let us make a worthy contribution to the literature of the world.' No thought could have been farther from their minds; but partly

because of this entire and self-less absorption in their mighty theme, the result is literature.

Is there no history in the Bible? Why, some of the most competent and unprejudiced critics have declared that there is, in its own *genre*, no finer piece of historical writing in the world, than that part of David's career recorded in 2 S 9–20. And are we to discount the Book of Acts as literature, because it happens to deal with the beginnings of the Christian Church? Or shall we not allow this wooden estimate to be corrected by the thrilling story of the shipwreck in chapter xxvii.?

Is there no oratory in the Bible? To say nothing of the magnificent and impassioned eloquence of prophets like Amos and Isaiah, is there in all the world a more moving speech than that in which Judah pleads before Joseph that Benjamin be permitted to return to his aged father?

Is there no poetry in the Bible? One of its very oldest poems, the song of Deborah, is one of the greatest of war-ballads: one of its dirges—the lament of David over Saul and his beloved Jonathan—stands conspicuous as one of the noblest tributes ever paid to human worth. The so-called Song of Solomon is now recognized to be a charming collection of love-songs, associated with the wedding-week. And what shall we say of the Book of Job, that incomparable drama of a soul's struggle from doubt through despair to resignation and trust?

It seems almost idle at this time of day to labour so obvious a point; but obvious as it seems to be to those trained to an appreciation of literature, it is a point that thousands of those who love the Bible intensely have clearly failed to grasp. It is true, of course, that the Bible is dominated from end to end by a deliberate religious purpose—'these things are written, *that ye may believe*.' It is true that while its voices are many, its voice is one. But that voice, or those voices, spoke through all the literary forms of those ancient days—how indeed else could it speak?—and through the sheer simplicity of those forms it continues to speak to men for ever.

St. Paul and Aeschylus.

By J. Rendel Harris, Litt.D., LL.D., Manchester.

In discussing, some time since, the question of a possible acquaintance on the part of St. Paul with the greatest of the Greek tragedians, we tried to show that the words of reproof which rang through the mind of the Apostle at the time of his conversion, and warned him that the yoke of the Gospel was already on his neck, and that further resistance was useless, were in reality a Greek proverb, of which traces could be found in Æschylus and elsewhere.

So the question was raised as to the Apostle's acquaintance with the *Agamemnon* or the *Prometheus Vinctus*, in which the proverbial terms about 'kicking against the pricks' are involved.[1]

[1] Cf. Euripides, *Bacch.* 794–5:

θύοιμ' ἂν αὐτῷ μᾶλλον ἢ θυμούμενος
πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζοιμι, θνητὸς ὢν, θεῷ.

Pindar, *Pyth.* ii. 94.

The proof was far from complete. Objection could be made that the voice from heaven spoke to Paul in Hebrew, and that, in any case, neither the Greek language, nor any particular Greek author, had a monopoly of the figure of speech employed. Let us see, therefore, if we can find another instance of the influence of Æschylean language on the Apostle's thought and expression.

In reading the *Eumenides* of Æschylus, I was struck with an apparent echo from the tragedy in the Pauline letter to the Philippians. In the closing scene of the play, which is surely one of the most sublime in the whole of the Greek dramatic literature, we have a representation of a great reconciliation which has taken place between the Erinyes or Furies, who stand for the ancient law of the vendetta, and the Athenian people, who are set, in jury, to try Orestes for the murder of his mother.