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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

WHO was Jesus? According to the Liberal theologians there is really no mystery. The answer to this, and to all other questions of theology, if you approach them with an open mind, is as simple as the multiplication table. A good deal simpler in fact; since even those of us who are not mathematicians remember from the days when we used to study John Stuart Mill, that it is by no means so obvious as we once supposed that two times two make four. If you seem to be up against a mystery you must have misunderstood the record. If the record obstinately refuses to be understood in any other sense, you cut it out with a pen-knife; and there you are!

In 'Jesus and the Christian Religion,' of which he published a second edition last year, Mr. Francis A. HENRY supported this simplified theology with great power and with much learning. In trying to answer the question: 'What think ye about the Christ?' we are met with another question which by common consent is of great moment: 'What did the Christ think of Himself?' Did He claim to be the Christ at all? Mr. HENRY replies that He did not. It is true that the creed of the earliest Church was comprised in the simple confession that Jesus was the Christ. This identification proved unfortunate, and for this identification Jesus was not to blame.

We bring forward the triumphal entry. Mr. HENRY replies that there was no triumphal entry. All that happened was that a passage in the Book of Zechariah, in which a King enters Jerusalem riding on an ass, was misinterpreted as referring to the Messiah, and then the incident of Jesus' Messianic entry into Jerusalem was invented to square with the supposed prophecy. We call attention to the trial scene, in which Jesus acknowledged His Messiahship in reply to the high priest's question. To this the answer is that we have no means of knowing what took place at the trial scene, since 'all the disciples forsook him, and fled.'

We fall back then on Peter's declaration, which we had always supposed to be decisive. Mr. HENRY places this scene '*at* Cæsarea Philippi,' and with an exactitude which one hardly expects from such a quarter he gives us the date—'seventeen days before (Jesus') death.' Peter impulsively declared that Jesus was the Christ, possibly with a view to force the Master's hand; but Jesus would have none of it. He would not allow the people to regard Him as Messiah, for the obvious reason that He did not regard Himself in that light.

Another method of approach to the question 'Who was Jesus?' is represented by 'The Man Himself.' The author of this book is a pronounced eschatologist, who is quite unmoved by all that has

been written on the subject in recent years. He tramples on our most sensitive corns with light-hearted gaiety, and finds theological problems that have puzzled Christendom for millennia absurdly simple.

The Old Testament teaches 'that God is a great man' and that 'He is very fond of the smell of burning meat.' The prophets were Hebrew dervishes who assumed that in order to be believed they had to begin with incredible stories about their call to preach. 'There have been more plausible dervishes than Ezekiel.' Paul at heart was a Shaker.

It is not surprising, then, to learn that Jesus was a young and very much mistaken Jewish Rabbi. According to legend, the Prophet of Nazareth set up as a magician, turning water into wine, and so forth; but no such magical performances were attempted by the Nazarene. He was neither dervish nor charlatan, any more than he was a patriot. If we can only forget all that Christians have ever learned and taught us of Jesus, we shall find His figure take on 'a grandeur no theology has ever succeeded in giving Him.'

It is a great relief to turn from all this to the pages of Mark's Gospel. We take Mark as the earliest Gospel, and the least influenced by theological prepossessions. At first we seem to be reading a simple narrative of fact, written by one whose only desire is to give us information on a matter of supreme interest. But the more carefully we read, the less satisfied we are that that is all he is doing. We read again the stories of John's ministry, of Jesus' baptism, of His temptation, of the beginning of His ministry, of the call of the two pairs of brothers, of the events of the Sabbath day in Capernaum.

At the end of each story we seem to hear the writer challenge us with the question: 'Now who was this? Was He just one of ourselves? Was He just one of *them*selves, one, albeit a greater one, of the company that began to form around Him?' Whatever He was to Mark, certainly He was not that. The simplicity with which the amazing story is told is apt to blind us to the mystery, implicit in every incident.

In 'The Messiah and the Son of Man' (noticed in a recent issue of THE EXPOSITORY TIMES), Professor A. S. PEAKE discusses some of these questions afresh with his accustomed incisiveness and erudition. The fact that Jesus was baptized by John may be taken as quite certain. If the baptism had not taken place, it would never have occurred to any follower of Jesus to invent the story. From Matthew's account of it we can see the kind of difficulties it soon caused in Christian minds. Further, in spite of the similarity of the Divine words with those heard at the Transfiguration, a critical study of the records seems to assure us that at Baptism Jesus heard the Divine declaration: 'Thou art my beloved Son.'

That Jesus did at this time begin His ministry harmonizes with the fact that at the Baptism He gained a special conviction of sonship. This conviction is the basis of the threefold temptation; and the third temptation probably also involved the conviction that He was Messiah.

Professor PEAKE also discusses the triumphal entry. It is not quite clear, he thinks, that the demonstration was designed as a welcome to the Messianic King. In Matthew and in Luke, the crowd gives to Jesus a welcome that is definitely Messianic. But in Mark, the earliest Gospel, their words need not imply any more than that Jesus is regarded as the harbinger of the Kingdom. But, whatever the entry meant to the people, it seems clear that in Jesus' own mind the action was forced upon Him by the necessity of fulfilling Messianic prophecy.

Professor PEAKE recognizes the difficulty of the question about the reliability of reports of the trial. Yet it is certain that information must

have leaked out. Formal evidence must have been given. And the peculiar form in which Jesus made His Messianic claim stamps it as genuine: in Matthew—'Thou hast said'; in Luke—'Ye say that I am'; in other words: 'I should not have used the term myself; but I admit that it is correct.'

Further, if Jesus did not claim to be Messiah, whence did the idea arise that He made this claim? It is possible, though by no means certain, that by the first Christian century Judaism had developed the doctrine of a suffering and slain Messiah. But Dt 21^{23} ('he that is hanged is accursed of God') guarantees that the Jews did not contemplate a crucified Messiah. The crucifixion of Jesus was for them one of the proofs that He was *not* the Christ.

But for the same reason no Christian could have invented the story that the crucified Jesus had claimed to be the Christ. The fact was at first so puzzling to themselves, and caused them so much difficulty in their apologetic and in their missionary work, that nothing will account for this claim they made for Jesus but the certainty that Jesus had first of all made the claim for Himself.

In *The Christ of the New Testament* (reviewed in this issue), Mr. Paul Elmer More brings a live mind to bear on the subject. First, be it said, Mr. More is no traditionalist. He thinks, for example, that the story of the Virgin birth is 'so demonstrably a late intrusion into the life of Jesus, so manifestly legendary in construction, and withal so unessential to the Christian faith, that it has been abandoned by the majority of unprejudiced scholars.' He fully accepts the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, while not prepared to dogmatize on the fate of 'His fleshly tabernacle' or on the meaning of the story of the empty tomb.

In our inquiry about Jesus' testimony to Himself, we turn with Mr. More to the Fourth Gospel. A few years ago such a procedure might have raised a smile; but since the contributions of Scott Holland, Garvie, and Manson to the study of the Fourth Gospel have been published it is possible for a student to make discriminating use of the material it supplies without losing caste.

Like other recent writers on this Gospel, he believes that at least two different strands are intertwined in it. On the one hand, we have the narrative portion, representing Jesus as a thaumaturgic being, basing His authority on His marvellous works; on the other hand, a set of discourses of Jesus, probably from the Apostle John. These discourses, like the Epistle, betray an author with 'a childlike simplicity of mind, a naïveté degenerating at times into something very close to garrulity, which suggests the loving and beautiful old age of an untrained intellect.'

But from these 'garrulous records' there flashes out of a sudden through the verbiage an isolated sentence, clear, ringing, condensed, profound, unforgettable. None but the Master could have coined this pure gold. 'Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.' 'In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' 'This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.'

Now among the Logia that represent the Speaker's testimony to Himself, some at least seem to be of this self-evidencing character. 'I and my Father are one.' 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' 'I am the light of the world.' At the very least these sayings give us the impression left on the mind of a sympathetic hearer by the language of His adored Master, after long years of loving, brooding thought. Is this impression so very different, as we are often told it is, from the impression left by a study of the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels?

We might dwell on the royal unself-conscious-

ness of the words to the leper: 'I will; be thou clean'; or of such sayings as: 'Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.' But let us take, rather, one or two crucial passages. A great stronghold of those who believe in a humanitarian Christ is Jesus' rejection of the epithet '*Good* Master.' Mr. More turns their position by asking what we should think of a man to-day who, being addressed as good, should solemnly waive the epithet with the denial, 'No, only God is good'?

Tender consciences have been troubled because Jesus pleaded ignorance of the precise date of the end of the world. But again we ask, 'What should we say to a man who goes out of His way, while setting Himself above the angels, to discriminate between Himself and God the Father?' Once more, when Mrs. Humphry Ward was expatiating to Pater on the certain downfall of the orthodox views of Christ, instead of agreeing with her as she expected, Pater said: 'You think it's all plain. But I can't. There are such mysterious things. Take that saying—"Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden." How can you explain that? There is a mystery in it—a something supernatural.'

The Liberal is ready with his answer. The whole of the passage beginning, 'I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth,' is poetry. Arrange it, as it ought to be arranged, in verse lengths, and it falls into 'the rhythmically balanced structure of ancient prophecy.' Not only so; it is not even original poetry. 'The thought and the very language are a close echo of Scripture, and can almost be reconstructed from verses out of the semi-canonical book of Sirach,' though in Sirach the speaker is personified Wisdom.

What then? Did Jesus not know the Scriptures as well as the writer of the Gospel? Is it incredible that in a moment of supreme exaltation He should have fallen into the true prophetic style? To Mr. More, at least, the passage is in substance genuine, 'the very pith and marrow of the assumption that runs through the Synoptics and in the Fourth Gospel merges imperceptibly into the high theology of the Word.'

But even if we grant that the testimony of Jesus to Himself is something like the Christ of the creeds, does it follow that we must take Him at His own estimate? It is not within the scope of this book to discuss this question; but there are three things to be said. In the first place, to use a truism which yet is not a truism, Jesus never means more to us than He means to us. The dying thief whose Christology took the simple form, 'This man has done no harm,' had a more genuine and effective appreciation of Jesus than many who could conscientiously subscribe to our most elaborate statements of faith.

Further, the theory that we need not believe but must act as if we did believe, is a desperate make-shift: 'very ingenious, very pretty, but impracticable, and at heart a lie which the world will not tolerate.' Finally, the question at issue is not simply a theory of the Person of Christ, not even the truth of the Christian religion. What is at stake is the very possibility of religion. If the Divine nature has not directly revealed itself in Jesus Christ, we need not look to find God anywhere.

A remarkable article on 'Consensus and Immortality,' by the Rev. W. R. Matthews, Dean of King's College, London, appeared in the *Church Quarterly Review* for April. At the outset he referred to the two objections to the possibility of a future life. One is the scientific view of the world and of its evolution, which, it is alleged, makes such a faith untenable. But to this it may be replied validly, that to-day it is being admitted that evolution is at least patient of a teleological interpretation.

The second objection is that the dependence of

the mind on the body is so absolute that the continued existence of the former when the latter has ceased to function as a unity is inconceivable. The reply to this is the general reply to materialism, and the contention, of psychology in particular, that the mind or spirit is independent of the body.

The positive lines of argument are two. The proof of immortality is either empirical or philosophical. Empirical proof is the production of alleged instances of psychical events which can be explained only as the work of discarnate spirits. But, even if this were certain, it would demonstrate nothing more than the possibility of a future life. It could not establish the general truth or support a belief in immortality in the strict sense. And so the decision rests in the province of philosophy.

This proof has recently been powerfully presented by Professor PRINGLE-PATTISON. God, he says, is the Supreme Reality and the Supreme Value. His essential nature is love. And so the value of the finite world to the Spirit of the universe must lie in the spirits to whom He has given the capacity to make themselves in His image. The spirits themselves must be values to God, and if so, they are not made to be broken and cast aside and to be replaced by relays of others in a continual succession.

But there is another argument of which account must be taken, that from the consensus of many minds. As a matter of fact, the belief in a future is not one painfully and slowly acquired by humanity. There is scarcely any conviction so widespread, and the farther back we go, the firmer is the belief and the more general. It is true that often this belief is in no sense a source of hope and comfort to those who hold it. Often, too, it has failed to have any ethical value. Still it is there, for whatever reason held.

What, then, is the value of this consensus? Any consensus may be of value for either of two reasons. It may guarantee the correctness of a train of reasoning. Or it may confirm the observation of some object which has been a matter of experience. So far as the question of immortality is concerned, there has been a remarkable agreement among thinkers from Socrates onwards as to the primacy of mind and value. But, striking as this is, we may not perhaps deduce our conclusion too readily from it.

The consensus on the subject of the future life is rather one of experience than one of rational deduction. The origin of religion is to be sought in a level of experience which is pre-rational. Beliefs about spirits were the first theology, but not the first religion. The days of the 'rationalist' hypothesis about the origin of religion are numbered. Religion begins with feeling in the presence of an object.

Similarly, the 'rationalist' explanation of the universal belief in a future life is out of the question. Apart from anything else, it would be surprising that the same hypothesis should occur independently to so many varied peoples. What, then, is the object in the presence of which this creative emotion arises which generates the belief in immortality? It is simply man's own self. It is the incomprehensible reality of his own being. His beliefs about a future are attempts to rationalize the mystery of his own self-consciousness.

That is why the consensus is so valuable. It is not the agreement in a chain of reasoning or its conclusion. It is agreement in a simple, profound experience, a perception which, because it is so simple and direct, is invariable and universal. This lies behind the primitive belief of the savages and the intellectual structures of the philosophers alike.

In the latest product of his pen, *The Doctrine of the Infallible Book* (S.C.M.; 1s. net), as in the old 'Lux Mundi' days, Dr. Charles GORE stands forth as the champion of a sane Biblical criticism.

The strange thing is that, at this time of day, such criticism should still be in need of defence. Did not Sir George Adam Smith assure us twenty-five years ago that, so far at least as the Old Testament was concerned, the battle had been fought and won, and that there was now nothing left but to pay the indemnity? And since then hundreds of books have been written from the frankly modern standpoint, which ought to have long ago convinced all who care for the Bible how constructive, how reverent, and how devout was the temper of those who had adopted that standpoint.

But every age has to fight its own battle. The old difficulties, already met and answered, re-emerge, and have to be met and answered again. The necessity for maintaining, in the interests alike of Truth and Religion, the rights of reasonable and temperate criticism, has been once more abundantly evidenced by the vigour of the Fundamentalist controversy which is raging in America. And Dr. GORE'S able defence of these rights is welcome; for it is only too true, as he tells us he has reason to believe, that in England as well as in the United States 'there is a revival to-day of the position that faith in Christianity, as really the divinely-given gospel for the world, is bound up with the old-fashioned belief in the Bible as the infallible book.'

He writes this little book, at the request of the Student Christian Movement, to demolish this old-fashioned belief and to replace it by a better, which maintains that inspiration does not necessarily involve infallibility or absolute accuracy in matters of historical detail. He even believes, as indeed most English-speaking critics do, that the providential purpose of God through Israel, so far from being obscured by the critical reading of its history, is only brought out into greater prominence for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

He approaches the problem from several angles. He reminds us, for example,—and it is a wholesome and necessary reminder—that 'opinions may become almost universally current in the Church without being true.' There was a time when the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross was represented as a debt paid to Satan. But nobody, we presume, accepts that view of the Atonement to-day. Similarly the identification of inspiration with verbal infallibility is not proved by the fact that many worthy and conscientious members of the Church accept it: it, too, may go the way of that now discredited theory of the Atonement, and its disappearance would be not a loss but a gain.

But again, Dr. GORE reminds us that there is no warrant even in the New Testament for identifying inspiration with infallibility. St. Luke makes no claim to inspiration, but only to exhaustive investigation and accuracy. The Evangelists differ quite freely in details, and occasionally the Fourth Gospel corrects the tradition represented by the other three. Certain statements of St. Paul imply that he does not write as one who regarded himself as infallible; and in view of all these considerations it must be regarded as a happy circumstance that the Church never attempted to *define* inspiration. Neither the Bible nor the Church binds Christian people to any theory; they are free to go wherever the facts may lead. And the Reformers,—as Professor MACKINTOSH points out in a chapter which he contributes—though they often clung to the notion of a verbally inspired Bible, yet at other times expressed themselves with a critical freedom which we are apt to think is peculiarly modern.

Further, Dr. GORE wisely insists on distinguishing between the truths which Christ definitely *taught*, and incidents in the Biblical record, like the Flood, to which He alludes. An allusion to such an event does not necessarily endorse its historicity. 'It seems to me,' he says, that our Lord 'cannot be said to *teach* anything but what is of eternal validity about God and nature and man.' Indeed, He Himself criticized the Old Testament and in the most unmistakable language insisted on its imperfections —in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere.

All this is well said. It has been said before, but it needs to be said again. Yet we doubt whether it will carry any real conviction to the genuinely Fundamentalist type of mind. Such a mind will only be provoked to be told that 'there are mistakes in the Gospels and a great number of more or less important discrepancies of detail.' Dr. GORE uses the word 'preposterous' of positions held by those whom he is confuting. 'It seems to me to be even preposterous to suggest that He binds us by His allusion to the Flood to suppose that it occurred as described in Genesis.' We quite agree with Dr. GORE, but we are equally sure that the adversary will not be convinced. What Dr. GORE regards as 'preposterous' is the view which, to the traditionalist with his particular view of the Person of Christ, seems the only reasonable and reverent one.

Such a person will be almost equally provoked and equally unconvinced by the statement that 'the writers of the New Testament used the methods of their time and often positively give the texts meanings which they cannot bear. The ideas for which these apostolic writers and preachers are contending are true ideas, but their inspiration did not make them unerring in their interpretation of particular texts.' Every scholar knows this to be true, but would it convince a mind prejudiced by instinct and training against the view that is here asserted?

Of course we must remember that Dr. GORE is writing not for Fundamentalists, but for students who presumably are accustomed to more generous ways of approaching literature. But even so, we think that Dr. GORE might have strengthened his case by dealing more explicitly with concrete cases. The passages he alludes to in defence of the sentences last quoted are singularly appropriate to his argument, but the argument would have been decidedly more effective had they been quoted *in extenso*, and had reasons been explicitly given for the statement that New Testament writers often put on Old Testament texts a meaning which they cannot bear. It is not enough to say that this is obvious, or that the reverse is preposterous. The whole Fundamentalist controversy shows that the matter is not so simple as that.

Similarly, a brief discussion of a few of the more glaring discrepancies in the Gospels, or between, say, the Books of Kings and the Books of Chronicles, or of the points at which the Fourth Gospel 'tacitly corrects' the earlier tradition, would have enhanced the persuasiveness of the argument. But the broad case for reverent freedom in our attitude to criticism has been well put by Dr. GORE, and it cannot fail to be helpful to those for whom it was written.

It is pleasant to learn that the Rev. F. R. BARRY has been placed in the Chair of New Testament Exegesis, King's College, London. He is one of the best of the new men who are doing so much to lead the Christian Church in the way of the light. He has already written two fine books, and one especially which shows his power of exposition applied to the New Testament. We may expect great things from this appointment. And he has begun well with his inaugural lecture, which is published in the *Church Quarterly Review* for July.

His first point is that Criticism, instead of 'destroying' the New Testament, has shown us its real and permanent ***religious*** value. Conventional methods of interpretation dulled the original, challenging freshness of it. We must see the New Testament books against their own background, and see their economic and social environment, their own problems, their intellectual forms, none of which is ours, and then we shall see these books as the most spontaneous books in all literature. We shall see what is temporary and local in them, and what is eternal and imperishable. This is the great constructive achievement of criticism.

Further, we shall never understand the New

Testament if we regard it, as past generations did, as primarily a text-book of theology. 'It has two or three theologies in the making, and I doubt if it is possible to harmonise them.' The New Testament sprang not out of libraries or studies, but out of the lives of toiling men and women, from the great industrial centres of the Empire and the fishing towns of the Lake of Galilee. It is a *volksbuch*, as Luther called it, written not in literary Greek at all, but in the spoken vernacular of the Mediterranean.

So the New Testament is a book of life, a record of the Christian experience at its highest and most creative moment. To try to eternalize the thought-forms in which this experience is expressed is to be untrue to the book's own genius. These thought-forms are not ours. We have to translate them. Take, *e.g.*, what is called 'Paulinism.' Paul tried to express a mystical experience in the metaphors of a Jewish law-court. And industrious people have taken his words and made out of these temporary and local forms a dogmatic system! 'If there is one thing that the religious chaos of the last four centuries has shown us clearly, it is that any attempt to base theologies on isolated New Testament phrases only results in fissiparous sectarianism.'

The authority of the New Testament reposes on one fact, that it mirrors the new life at its highest and its truest to itself. 'Just in so far as we are not limited by it, but allow it to live itself out into new conditions, we can take the New Testament as a lasting authority. We can only settle problems about the rightfulness of this or that by setting them in the presence of the New Testament spirit. Are they true to that? If so, they are genuinely Christian. If not, they are condemned.'

One of the most depressing things about the Christianity of our day is that it has drifted so far away from the New Testament. Ordination candidates to-day can give you definitions of dogma and 'the results of Biblical criticism,' but they do not know the New Testament. And yet all big renewals in the Church's life have sprung from a return to it. If there is such a return now, it will have two results—one in our life, another in our thinking.

The result in life is obvious. But it would revolutionize theology as well. Our religious thinking to-day is second-hand. Theology to-day means learning what other people have thought about God. Academic theology is bankrupt, and probably we must start almost afresh. The current religious phraseology has almost ceased to have a meaning for the mass of men and women. The continued use of it is disastrous. We want a new language to express a new life, just as the New Testament language expressed its life. 'A return to New Testament authority, a reception of the New Testament spirit, an experimental living in its way—these are the paths to revival in religion, to strength and reality in Christian thinking.'

Athanasiana.

By Professor Adolf Deissmann, D.Theol., D.D., The University, Berlin.

I.

In the spring of 1923, while I was in London after a somewhat prolonged lecturing tour in England and Wales, Mr. H. Idris Bell, the distinguished papyrologist of the British Museum, showed me a recently acquired papyrus of the fourth century A.D. which struck me as being of very great importance for the history of the period of St. Athanasius. This was a letter written by a Meletian with reference to an attack upon certain Meletian dignitaries in Alexandria, which, if not actually brought about,