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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

In a difficult sentence at the end of Acts 18 we read that Apollos had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and that he was an enthusiastic and accurate teacher of the things concerning Jesus, though he knew no baptism but that of John. In the next chapter we are told of disciples in Ephesus, who were in some sense believers, but who had been baptized only with John's baptism. Again, in Jn 1^{20}, the reiterated denial by John that he was the Messiah, suggests that the claim of Messiahship had been made for him. From all this it seems a natural inference that the Baptist movement was far more widespread and long-continued, perhaps even a more serious rival of Christianity, than we would gather from the Synoptic Gospels.

We are accustomed to accept as a matter of course the choice by John of the river Jordan as the scene of his baptisms. Yet historically the Jordan did not play that part in Jewish purificatory ceremonial which the Ganges has played in the religious life of the Hindus. Sir George Adam Smith describes the river as a groove at the bottom of an old sea-bed, flanked by ugly mud-banks, with dead driftwood everywhere in sight, sweeping its way to the Dead Sea through unhealthy jungle, relieved only by poisonous soil. We are not surprised, then, to be told in *The Gnostic John the Baptizer*, by Mr. G. R. S. Mead (Watkins; 5s.)—Mr. Mead at this point is following Dr. Robert Eisler—that in those days the brackish waters of the sluggish Jordan were by theologians and ritualists deemed unfit for purificatory purposes.

Why, then, did John baptize in the Jordan? Mr. Mead finds the answer in the vision of Ezk 47^{1-8}. 'In the longed-for time of the Messianic deliverance a mighty stream of holy water from the temple-hill of Zion was to flow down and heal the waters of the unclean Jordan-land, the Arabah or Desert.' Surely a much more obvious explanation is that of Sir George Adam Smith, that the Baptist had in mind the closing scene in the life of Elijah, his great prototype, and the message of Elisha to Naaman.

In the former scene 'the river that had drawn back at a nation's feet, parted at the stroke of one man,' and Elijah handed on the torch to his successor, as John recognized in Jesus his successor and supplanter. Even more relevant is the story of Elisha, who, so far as the Scripture records go, was the first to use the Jordan for sacramental purposes; just as, so far as we know, he was the last to do so till the Baptist arose.

But this precedent sheds a new light on the meaning of the Baptist's mission. Naaman was not merely a leper, but a Gentile. Moreover, Jewish baptism was for proselytes from the Gentile world. When, then, John called on Israelites to repent and

be baptized, he was in effect asking them to recognize that as a nation they had lost their birthright, and were no longer a privileged people. God was able of these stones (Aram. *'ab'nayya*) to raise (or wake) up children (Aram. *b'nayya*) for Abraham.

Besides the Gospels, another source of information about the Baptist is the famous passage in the *Antiquities* of Josephus, in which he is represented as a great preacher of righteousness, whose sayings (*logoi*) made him the idol of the people, and who used the rite of baptism, not 'as a begging-off in respect to certain sins, but for purity of body, in as much as indeed the soul had already been purified by righteousness.' According to Josephus, Herod put John to death to forestall any revolutionary tendencies that might develop.

Dr. Eisler's view, then, is that John was a Torah man, a profound student of the Law and the Prophets, that his movement was a characteristic movement of Jewish reform, founded on absolute faith in the present fulfilment of prior prophecy. Herod, on the other hand, thought of John as a potential politician. The Mandæan tradition has a third view of John, that he was a Gnostic, expelled from the Jewish community by men who failed to understand him.

The word Manda means 'gnosis,' and the Mandæans of the lower Euphrates, a community still said to number about ten thousand souls, are the only surviving representatives of the ancient Gnosis or mystic knowledge. In his article on the subject in the *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, the late W. Brandt tells us that this interesting people was first made known to Europe by Portuguese monks, and that their language is the form of Aramaic that developed in Lower Babylonia. This language is now practically reserved for their sacred books, their spoken language being Arabic, or in some cases Persian.

One of these sacred books, known as the Book of John, deals largely with the life and teachings of John the Baptizer. The tractate seems to have been for a time largely ignored by the community, but in later times they turned to the figure of the Baptist with intense interest. In the extracts here translated into English from the German translation of Professor Lidzbarski (who is continuing his work on the Mandæan literature), John, the exponent of a mystic Gnosticism, seems very far away from the simple downright prophet of the Gospels.

Portents attended the child John's birth, and the priests saw dreams. The birth was miraculous in another sense than that of the gospel story, for the heavenly messengers took 'the child out of the basin of Jordan and laid him in the womb of Enishbai.' In all this we hear echoes of the gospel story; and his self-conscious demand: 'Who makes proclamations equal to my proclamations, and who doth discourse with my wondrous voice?' may be a reminiscence of the testimony of Jesus to the Baptist.

The Gnostic John was an ascetic. Not only wine and women, but even sweet savours and scents were powerless to make him forget his Lord; and the birds assured him: 'Thou hast set thyself free, and won thy release, and set up thy throne for thee in life's House.' He was invulnerable, too, to fire and sword.

In one scene Jesus Christ is represented as asking baptism from John as a pupil of his. John refuses, and accuses Jesus of lying to the Jews, deceiving the priests, and relaxing the Mosaic Sabbath legislation. Jesus replies lengthily in true Gnostic style; and finally, in obedience to a Letter from the House of Abathur, John baptizes 'the Deceiver' in the Jordan. Then Ruha (the This-World-Mother) makes herself like a dove and throws a cross over the Jordan. In all this the connexion with the gospel story is obvious; it is equally obvious that the Mandæans were in no sense Christians, though they may at times have pretended to be Christians in order to escape Muhammadan persecution.

Further extracts tell of the breach between the Mandæans and the Jews, of the exiled community settling on the Euphrates, of the persecution of the Mandæans by the Jews and their attempts to make them return. It may well be, as Mr. MEAD claims, that the literature of this interesting people, especially when fuller translations are available, as they will soon be, will throw valuable light on Christian origins. One illustration which the author gives is not very convincing.

It is well known that in early times the fish was used as a symbol of Christianity. The explanation usually given is that the letters of the Greek word for fish form the initial letters of the Greek words for 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour.' The author thinks it has been established that 'fish' was quite a common Rabbinic symbol for the righteous man in Israel, 'who lived all his life in the waters of the Torah.' One of the Mandæan passages quoted in the John-Book is a saga of 'The Fisher of Souls.' But even if we grant that Rabbis and Gnostics had a fish symbolism, independently of Jesus, surely the author of the Gospel parables needed no help from such a traditional symbolism in the coining of His memorable phrase 'fishers of men.'

It has been truly said that every man is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. And as it is in philosophy, so it is in politics: every child—as a famous couplet reminds us—is born either a Liberal or a Conservative. The recent emergence of a political party with another name does not alter this fundamental cleavage, for its actuating principle is just an emphatic extension of Liberalism. And as it is in philosophy and politics, so it is in religion and theology: for here, too, we have our conservatives and our liberals—those who look back to the past and who tend to rest in it, if not to worship it, and those who press on to the future.

More or less is this true of all religions. It is notoriously true of Christianity: the fierce battle at present being waged in America between Fundamentalism and theological progress is the pathetic witness to the cleavage to-day. But it is no less true of Judaism. Orthodox Judaism has been confronted and challenged for over a hundred years by Reform Judaism. Indeed, the challenge is older still, it is as old as the Old Testament, where priest and prophet stood as often face to face as back to back—the priest conserving the past with its institutionalism, the prophet challenging the present in the name of the kingdom of the spirit, and by his fearless criticism laying the foundations of a future in which the mind of man could move untrammelled and free.

In a pamphlet noticed elsewhere in this number, Rabbi H. G. ENELOW defines the distinction, so far as it concerns Judaism, in these terms: 'Orthodoxy regards Judaism as fixed, immutable in every particle, settled once for all. Reform regards Judaism as mobile, subject to change and adaptation, correlated with the diverse conditions of successive ages.' To Maimonides, the Torah is an everlasting commandment, without change, deduction, or addition; to Geiger, Judaism is the result of a process of development. Can any one who knows anything of the history of Old Testament thought doubt that Geiger is right?

Reform Judaism maintains, as the Rabbi reminds us, that 'there has been no such thing as a uniform, stationary, unalterable Judaism, whether in point of belief or practice.' Between the primitive Judaism of pre-Canaanite times and the Judaism, say, of the period of Ezra, though there is doubtless a real continuity, it is surely obvious that there is a whole world of difference. Deborah would hardly have been at home among the thoughts that breathe through Is 53, and the wildest imagination could hardly permit itself to conceive of David as having penned Ps 139. Everywhere there is movement, and the thought moves *pari passu* with the history. Only the most impossible and outrageous harmonistic would attempt to combine, as of equal validity, thoughts so essentially diverse

and even conflicting as meet us everywhere in the historical books, the law, and the prophets.

It has even been maintained that the name of Israel's God, 'Jahweh,' suggests by its very etymology the necessity of a progressive conception of religion. 'I will be what I will be' has been taken to imply not a static but a dynamic idea—the idea that Jahweh will always be found to be equal to every emergency which the future may throw up, whether on the field of thought or of history. Or, as Sir George Adam Smith has well put it, 'Jahweh was never discredited by any new conception of truth or by any strange experience in their history. Every fresh moral ideal is confessed by the people as the impression of His character and will; and for each new problem raised by their contact with the world their faith in Him is found sufficient.'

Theology, then, if it is to be true to the Bible, must fear any conservatism which involves rigidity, and it must boldly recapture its right to liberty and movement. 'Christ has made us completely free'—as Weymouth translates Gal 5^{1}—'stand fast, then, and do not again be hampered with the yoke of slavery.' How often does the Bible admonish us to *walk* in His ways! Advance is not possible without movement. It is hardly straining a point to notice that this very word 'walk' is used of God Himself. The suggestive promise of Lv 26^{12} runs, 'I will *walk* among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.' Where God and His servants walk, there is movement and life, alike in thought and action: immobility is death.

The claim made by Reform Judaism for liberty of movement and adaptation must be made with equal strenuousness by all intelligent Protestants who take their Protestantism seriously. It is, strictly speaking, a mistake to identify Protestantism with a particular belief or set of beliefs or institutions; rather is it an attitude, a spirit. 'One might say,' remarks Frederic Myers, 'that the characteristics of Protestantism lie rather in the maintenance of the spirit of freedom, than in the profession of any definite peculiarities, either doctrinal or ecclesiastical.' Protestantism is the spirit that is ever ready to challenge all that obscures the truth, whether that be the teaching and traditions of an ancient church, the solemn decisions of ecclesiastical councils, the authoritative decrees of Popes, or even the traditions which in its own name have been established.

The true man is both conservative and liberal: he gladly conserves from the past whatever has proved its worth, whatever has in the olden time sustained the souls of men; and he freely accords a generous welcome to any new truth that can show its right to be believed and that can commend itself to his unfettered reason. Of course both tendencies have their dangers as well as their excellences: conservatism may degenerate into rigidity and liberty into licence.

It is hard to say which is the more perilous. But we cannot forget that it was conservatism that nailed our Lord to His cross; and the history of theological thought furnishes only too abundant proof that conservatism has often made men ungenerous and unjust to other men who loved truth as they loved their lives. Reverence for the past should not and need not blind us to the obligation to express truth in terms of the thought of our own day, nor should it be permitted to cast a blight upon the spirit of adventure: for where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

For some time there has been proceeding in the Church of England a welcome revival of a liberal evangelical spirit. More than six hundred clergy are said to belong to the movement. The aim of its leaders is to 'formulate the evangelical message anew for the age in which they live.' To this end more than fifty pamphlets have been issued, dealing with the Christian faith in relation to Theology, Sociology, and Science. A more sustained ex-

position of 'Liberal Evangelicalism' appeared two years ago and has passed through four editions. Now a second volume of essays is published, under the title of *The Inner Life* (Hodder & Stoughton; 6s. net).

The volume consists of fourteen essays by well-known teachers of the Church of England. It is no miscellaneous collection, but a well-considered and well-compacted whole. It would not be easy to name a more satisfactory statement of the liberal evangelical position. It may be that the centrality of the Cross is not emphasized as Evangelicals have been wont to emphasize it, but the passionate devotion of the writers to Jesus Christ, as God Incarnate and the Saviour of the world, is manifest. One of the most striking of the essays is by the Rev. E. S. Woods, M.A., well known for his masterly book on 'Everyday Religion.' It deals with Christ our Example, and a slight outline of it may be given.

It is the peculiar glory of Christianity not merely to set up a lofty ethical ideal but to provide the means to its attainment, 'to say, not simply you *must*, but you *can*, and to show how that "can" may become an accomplished fact. And Christianity achieves this by laying emphasis not so much on a standard to be reached or an example to be copied, as on a life to be shared.' In approaching this life two points are emphasized. First we are on firm ground historically. 'The battle of the documents has by now been fought out to what is, from the Christian point of view, a victorious conclusion.' Second, it was a real human life. In accepting Him as God Incarnate we at the same time affirm that Jesus was genuinely and really man. Otherwise it is meaningless to speak of Him as our example.

In seeking to penetrate to the inner springs of His life we must not be content with a study of His virtues one by one. We must go deeper, for the most arresting thing about Him is the spiritual climate in which He lived, the sort of ultimate attitude of soul, the quality of spirit, which made not only possible but inevitable the words which He spake and the things which He did. 'When Jairus' servants met Him with the news that the little girl was dead and that therefore it was useless for Him to go any farther, what strikes one is less the bare record of what He proceeded to do, amazing though that is, than the implied state of His own mind—the utter buoyant certainty that death itself was conquerable and would be conquered.'

This spiritual climate was the result of unclouded communion with God. 'To Jesus God was everything. For Him, in every circumstance, God came first; not as one of the factors in the situation, but as the supreme factor which determined the nature of every thought, every motive, every decision, every relationship.' This was not intellectual certainty but genuine faith, not ready made but won and held in the face of unbelieving men and of blackest circumstance. It was a faith active and infinitely daring. 'Once He saw clearly that a certain course of action, or a certain needed benefit, was really good, that is, was completely in line with what His Father willed, He did not stay to consider whether or no it was, as we should say, possible (that is, "intelligibly attested by previous experience"), but straight away made His claim upon God, and God *responded*.'

The other great secret of His inner life was His attitude towards men. It is difficult for us in any adequate way to appraise what He felt towards other people. 'Think of love as we know it at its very best and highest: the tender, protecting love of a mother for her child, the wise and understanding love of a father for his grown-up son, the happy, easy, taken-for-granted love of brothers and sisters, the rich comradeship of friends, the glorious, selfless, if need be forgiving, love of man and woman, the redeeming love of him who goes to spend his life with and for the outcasts and the poor—take all this, and blend it and see it filling the heart of, and ever pouring forth from, a single human personality, and then we shall perhaps

realize something of the way in which Jesus regarded His fellow-men.' This love did not come easily; He won it as He won His faith in God. What He felt about God naturally and inevitably determined what He felt about men, for He always saw them in God. And He learnt to love them in the same way as He knew that His Father loved them. 'Perhaps this is the greatest thing about Him, that He went on loving them even when they thought Him a fool or a madman; yes, even when they betrayed Him and spat on Him and crucified Him.'

One thing remains to be said. It is that Jesus Christ evidently entertained a deep-rooted conviction that what He felt about God and about man should be and could be the normal way of thinking for ordinary men. So He set out on the task of helping men to share His certainty of God and to treat one another in a way that befits members of the great family of a Father-God. Thus there is imported a rich and wonderful meaning into the phrase 'Christ our Example.' 'That phrase ceases to be, what many phrases heard in church actually are, touched with unreality. It is just sheer truth to say that there is no reason in the nature of things why the writer and the readers of these lines, and any other quite ordinary people, should not be "made like unto Jesus," provided, of course, that the one condition be fulfilled, that of humble, continued, conscious personal contact between Him and us.'

Religious Education in the Day School.

By the Reverend Frederick J. Rae, M.A., Director of Religious Education, Training Centre, Aberdeen.

In any treatment of this subject there are two points that obviously call for discussion. One is the place of the religious element in the school curriculum. The other is the training of those who are to be responsible for this particular task.

1. *The Place of Religious Education in the School.*—There are special reasons to-day why this question should be faced. There are all kinds of influences militating against the religious factor in education. It is not a grant-earning subject in the 'public' elementary school. The day is already so crowded with compulsory subjects that there is a great temptation to push the Scripture lesson aside. And teachers have, in addition, one reasonable excuse for this. They have been trained for their job generally, but this is the one thing in their job they have not been specially trained to do. There are other reasons. But the ones mentioned are sufficiently serious. And the fact that they have not really displaced the Bible lesson, and that (at least in Scotland) it is given on the whole with great faithfulness and care, only goes to show how loyal our teachers are to the best ideals of their calling. All the same, the current running against us is so strong that a brief statement on the point may be excused, more especially as some practical considerations follow from our conviction.

The fundamental place of religion in the day school is clear, first of all, from the nature of education itself. Education is not instruction. It is the development of personality. It is the discipline under which a child grows to be what (and all) he is capable of being. But this means the growth of the whole personality; not one element in it. To develop the body at the expense of the mind and to develop the mind at the expense of the body are equally serious errors educationally. Now the place of religion in this discipline depends on your view of what man is naturally. If he is a 'child of wrath,' wholly inclined to evil and wholly incapable of good, no amount of 'developing' will make him a religious being. But if (as I believe) he is naturally religious, if there is a Divine element in him, a spark of the Infinite, if, in short, we are made in the image of God and are therefore naturally children of God, at least in the sense of being 'His offspring,' then education is the developing of *this* as well as of mind and body. It is the process