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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

ONE of the urgent questions of to-day is this: Is Christianity the final religion? Can it be confidently regarded as absolute? 'Art thou he that should come? or do we look for another?' Various causes contribute to the raising of the question. One is the idea of evolution applied to religion. Can we possibly have a perfect religion midway in man's career? Another is the way in which the results of comparative religion have extended our knowledge of the religions of the world and our appreciation of their value and merits. Troeltsch contends for the 'absolute validity' of Christianity, but (he says), 'be it noted, only its validity *for us*.' These and other reasons have given rise to a theory of relativity in religion. Is this in any sense true? Is there a sense in which the Christian religion can be said to be absolute and final?

The question is discussed in an extremely interesting book just published—*The Christian Religion and its Competitors To-day*, the Hulsean Lectures for 1924–5, by the Rev. A. C. BOUQUET, D.D., Vicar of All Saints, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press; 6s. net). We must say a word of strong praise of the style of these lectures. They are simply expressed, unconventional and direct, in the style of a scholar and thinker who has never lost touch with the world of plain men and women. One is thankful that the old, bad, academic fashion of writing theology is being left behind. There is no reason why the profoundest truth should not be put into words that any educated person can understand. Philosophers and theologians have too long maintained a kind of close trade unionism by their use of language which gave even ordinarily intelligent people a headache. The thinking in this volume goes deep, the scholarship is sound, but there is not a sentence which is not clear in its meaning.

Dr. BOUQUET discusses what he considers the four substitutes which are put forward to-day in place of Christianity—Secularism or no religion at all (a very admirable statement), Pantheism or nothing but God, Traditionalism or popular paganism under a Christian veneer, and finally Relativism or a kind of provisional faith held until the absolute religion, which is still in the womb of the infinite future, comes along. This is a curious selection. No mention, for example, is made of spiritualism, which is by far the most powerful competitor of Christianity, at least for the moment. But the selection gives the lecturer the opportunity of discussing several topics of burning interest, such as the claims of materialism, the policy of Anglo-Catholicism, popular forms of pantheism and the question with which we started this note—Is Christianity final?

The lecture on Relativism is badly arranged. The same point comes up in different parts of the lecture. For a second edition, which ought soon to

be demanded, it should be re-written in a more orderly fashion. The argument is helpful because it singles out the thoughts that are in many minds. There are, in particular, three suggestions mentioned in support of the idea that Christianity has merely a temporary value. First of all, there is the difficulty of believing that the absolute can be revealed in an historical personality. Then there is the difficulty of believing that the perfect religion comes midway in the evolutionary process. And, finally, there is the difficulty of conceiving that the absolute truth should have been imparted nineteen hundred years ago when of all things else we have so largely grown in knowledge.

What has Dr. BOUQUET to say to these three difficulties? Well, as to the first, the question whether the Absolute could be revealed in an historical moment, Dr. BOUQUET points out that the Absolute *does* reveal itself in such moments. There are decisive moments which determine lives when eternity is held in the compass of a single experience. Augustine's 'Tolle, lege' was such a moment. Any man's conversion is such a moment. There are mountain peaks in life when all heaven is revealed. This is true not only in religion. Think of the golden age of Athenian art and philosophy! That has never been repeated. The great Greek thinkers are shaping the thought of to-day, and Lord Haldane declared in his Gifford Lectures that we have not advanced beyond Aristotle in our philosophy.

The second difficulty connected with evolution contains the suggestion that the perfect religion can only be found at the end of the evolutionary process. The answer to that is various. For one thing the human best is not usually a last but a middle term. Senility is not the highest point of life. Further, the great creative period of religion has long passed. The progress of religion is not a chronological series. The great religions did not come one after another, but are really a cluster lying together on a great plain. They are not successive solutions of the world problem but alternative solutions. And, lastly, if the perfect religion is to be expected, at the end it will come when no one can profit by it. 'The last man (says Dr. Matthews) will be tottering to his frozen grave' when the will of God is completely revealed!

If it be asked why God revealed Himself perfectly just at that time when Christ came, we can at any rate answer that that revelation was made in a central period of the earth's history, when the creative forces of religion were at their strongest, and that it came therefore 'in the fulness of time,' *i.e.* when things were ready for it.

As to the third difficulty, that we know so much about everything else and therefore it is hard to see why the final truth should have been imparted so long ago in religion, Dr. BOUQUET trenchantly says that we have no reason to assume that a community which uses wireless and can make long excursions in motor-coaches is in a better position to know the will of God than a peasant who drives a bullock-cart. Revelation can hardly depend on the presence or absence of coal or oil, and there is no reason why the decisive event in the history of religion should occur in London or New York rather than in Nazareth.

Sometimes this third objection is put bluntly thus: 'How can you put your faith in a religious system which is closely associated with all the beliefs which growing knowledge has discarded, a flat earth, a solid sky, a subterranean "Hell," a geocentric universe, the cosmogony of Genesis, miracles and magic as evidence of Divinity,' and so on? The answer is simple. There is not one of these things involved in the revelation of Christ. The whole trend of modern science is in sympathy with the essential doctrines of Christ. New knowledge is not new religion.

After all, the real ground for our belief in the absoluteness of Christ and His gospel is just Christ Himself. His revelation of God and truth and duty is the supreme thing in religion, and experience in all its human breadth and fulness has sealed its truth. The reasons which gave to Christianity its

first great triumph are just the reasons which commend it to men to-day. And they are its sufficient witness as the final and absolute gift of God—His ultimatum.

It has been widely assumed since the War that Pacifism of the most absolute kind is taught in the Sermon on the Mount, and that all war is un-Christian. Bernard Shaw has said, 'The Pagans were more logical. When they unsheathed the sword they closed the Temple of Peace. We, instead, have transformed the Temples of Peace, the churches, into Temples of Mars. Instead of protesting against this monstrous paradox, the churches organise it.' This is a matter that requires seriously to be faced, for if the position be as maintained, the Christian Church must, in loyalty to her Lord, do what she has never done before—declare all wars to be morally indefensible and exclude all soldiers from her communion. If the Church is not prepared to do this she must give a clear statement of her position, and show that that position is not merely tenable on scriptural grounds but is firmly based on the teaching of Christ. If she fail in this, she will not only leave the field in possession of the pacifist, but she will earn for herself contempt.

A striking treatment of this vital question is to be found in '*Perfect*' *Man*, a study in the Sermon on the Mount, by the late Rev. F. W. SMAILES, M.A. (Skeffington; 6s. net). The style is at times rugged, but the thought is singularly fresh and original, and the writer shows at once great insight, sympathy, and courage. It is deeply to be regretted that his recent death cuts off the hope of further fruits of so competent a Christian thinker.

Mr. SMAILES believes that the Sermon on the Mount contains the supreme law of the Christian life, that it is sheer disloyalty to speak of its precepts as 'not practical politics,' for they are obligatory and of universal application, affording the Christian man complete guidance in all the relationships of life. The Church's most pressing duty at the present day is to expound and practise the teaching of the Sermon. In the first millennium the great question was as to the person of the Saviour, 'Who art thou, Lord?' in the second as to the way of salvation, 'What must I do to be saved?' Now, on the threshold of the third millennium, the Great War has challenged the Church to pronounce definitely the Christian answer to the question, What *is* salvation? 'Is it only from its consequences hereafter, or from sin now? And if the latter, what, in conduct and character, *is* the sin from which the Saviour-king came to save those in His Kingdom, and what are the essential qualities in the character which He empowers and requires those whom He is saving to exhibit? . . . Christendom's catastrophic moral failure surely suggests that the time has come when Church and soul should concentrate their thought upon the positive moral teaching of Christ; not only acknowledging in theory, but recognizing, by their professed and practical attitude towards the Great Sermon that codifies it, that the moral life of the Christian must be shaped by no rule less, or other, than that of the sayings in it of Him, "Who has the words of eternal life."'

But the Sermon needs to be understood. A rigidly literal interpretation of isolated precepts leads to absurdity. 'The very precepts (*e.g.* Mt 5^{39-44}) that are assumed—even by many Christians—to forbid the Christian's serving in war at the command of the magistrate, taken literally, really command that. They, explicitly, bid him not merely "resist not the evil man," give him his way, but *go* his way, *obey* him, and that readily, ungrudgingly, generously. "Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."' The whole teaching of the Sermon is a living unity. The Christian character is a tree, which *fruits* into good deeds. 'The Commandment can be obeyed only by one who, receiving it into the good ground of an honest and good heart, transforms it there into the tree of the moral spirit from which the prescribed deed naturally grows. Only the good tree, the right character, the appropriate emotion, can bring forth the fruit of good deeds, of any good deed.' Moreover, the

Sermon is to be understood in its relation to the Law, which our Lord said He came not to destroy but to fulfil. 'Therefore His first care was to *resay* what was "said by them of old time," so as to *unsay* the unsaying of the Scribes who had "made the Word of God of none effect by their tradition"; to sift and correct and supplement the current conception of what the Law said, so as to ascertain the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth concerning the seed-precepts of the Law.' And still further, while the Scribes interpreted Scripture by Scripture, the old by the old, the most striking feature in His interpretation of the Law is His appeal to the moral teaching of Nature. He illuminated what God had said by the sunlight of His acting in Nature. All this must be kept in view in dealing with any single precept of the Sermon.

Dealing with the so-called law of non-resistance, Mr. SMAILES pours a flood of light upon it by setting it in relation to the ancient Law and to the working of the Heavenly Father as seen in Nature. The Law which limited revenge and forbade hate was never intended to take from the community the right to restrain and punish the evil man. On the contrary, it 'was to do this so rigorously and impartially that the individual might, and was to, leave all his wrongs to its judgment; to trust it to redress them adequately, and so feel himself free to bear himself brotherly to every one, even to the stranger, or the evil man who wronged him.' But the duty of the peacemaker is not merely passive—neither to give nor take offence, but active—to maintain and defend peace. 'Turning his cheek to the smiter,' like his Master, he will yet give way only in the degree in which one may do so without breaking the law of love, without injustice to all or even to another.

So the true peacemaker does not *necessarily* acquiesce in injustice to himself, still less in either lawless or law-permitted injustice to another. 'The peacemaker is never non-resistant to the theft of his neighbour's cloke or purse or freedom. In the case of injustice to others the law of peace allows him no choice, but bids him come to its help against the evil-doer; condemns acquiescence as "consenting" to his evil-doing, and commands him to make for peace by maintaining, as well as by abiding by, the law.' In the realm of international affairs this may mean war, 'and in such war the peacemaker whom Christ blessed will serve. . . . The "pacifist," slave of the subtle selfishness which makes him willing to save his own soul at the cost of his neighbour's welfare, is no true peacemaker; but only he who, seeing that the only love pure and wide and strong enough to save one's soul is that which would lose it did the peace of the earth demand that, is ready not only to lose his life rather than disturb, but to offer it to defend and maintain in just war, that peace on earth to bring which God died.'

Endurance of wrong may be rooted in cowardice or selfishness; championing the rights of others may be, subjectively, combativeness or self-seeking. But in the combination of patience under persecution with resolute resistance to the wrongs of others men recognize that real love of mankind, which can only be a reflection of the Divine Love. 'And there can be little doubt that the divorce, in Christian practice and teaching, of these two correlative duties is the secret of the Church's comparative powerlessness for peace. It has stressed too much, or at any rate too little intelligently, the duty of personal patience; too little the corresponding duty of defending the cause of the wronged and oppressed. It has preached too much meekness to the meek; too little to the masterful; siding too readily with the rich, and only relieving, when it should have defended the poor. It has silently consented with the thief and the robber, passing their victims by on the other side, like the priest and the Levite of the parable; and so its peacemaking salt has lost its savour, and the Great War and its following of political, economic, and social "wars and fightings" in Christendom has been made possible.'

Some one has said that a rut and a grave differ only in depth. That is a truth that needs to be

earnestly laid to heart by those whose business is to use their minds or to move and guide the minds of other people. If such people get into ruts, let them beware lest they may, at no distant time, be getting into their intellectual graves, and then their power to stimulate other minds will be gone for ever. The best thing that could happen to some of us would be to get a good shock—a shock powerful enough to heave us out of our ruts.

Those of us who need such an experience will get it in Karl KAUTSKY'S *Foundations of Christianity: A Study in Christian Origins* (Allen & Unwin; 16s. net). It is a very interesting and a very competent book, informed, alive, and challenging from end to end; but it is very subversive of much that among Christian people is supposed to be secure. It is not to be summarily rejected on that account: nothing is to be rejected that throws us back upon an earnest reconsideration of the things by which we live.

The literature of the Old Testament, of the New Testament, and of the early Christian centuries, is thrown into the crucible and subjected to a merciless fiery test. 'It is impossible,' we are told, 'in view of the scantiness and unreliability of the available sources, to draw an accurate picture of ancient Israel. Protestant Bible criticism, as practised by the theologians, has already proved that much has been forged and invented, but far too much is still accepted at its face value, merely because it has not yet been revealed as a manifest forgery' (p. 188).

Now these are not the words of one who has sympathetically related himself to the modern critical movement. We know well enough the Biblical facts upon which they rest, but stated thus bluntly, they are bitter and provocative words, and they remind us of words used by KAUTSKY elsewhere of those critics who 'attempt to subtract from the personality of Jesus so far as possible everything that is noble.' 'Forgery' is assuredly not the key which will open to us the secret of the greatest religious movement of the ancient world.

Again, 'we may assume,' we are told, 'that the Jewish priesthood probably acquired from the highly developed Babylonian priesthood, not only popular legends and customs, but also a higher and more spiritual conception of divinity, even though we have no direct evidence to this effect.' This is indeed an assumption as ludicrous as it is huge. It is a refreshing admission that there is 'no direct evidence' for it, for indeed the evidence is all the other way. Without in the least depreciating the real religious greatness of Babylon, we have to record it as the deliberate opinion of practically all of those most qualified to judge, that Israel had an experience of God, seen at its highest in the prophets, to which there is no real parallel in Babylon. This is the conclusion, *e.g.*, reached by Heinrich Seeger, after a very careful comparison between the two religions, in his 'Triebkräfte des religiösen Lebens in Israel and Babylon.'

When we come to the New Testament, the language is equally depreciatory. We are solemnly assured that 'the Evangelists were extremely ignorant men, their ideas on many subjects concerning which they wrote being quite erroneous.' Doubtless, as Lecky has pointed out, those were ages in which educated men could be strangely credulous; nevertheless, this remains a hard saying. And equally hard is this other: 'There is practically not a single element in the Christian literature concerning Jesus that will bear the test of examination.' And this other: 'It is impossible to say anything definite of the alleged founder of the Christian congregation. We may add that it is really not necessary to know anything about him,' for the reason that all the modes of thought commonly designated as characteristically Christian are products in part of the Roman-Hellenic, and in part of the Jewish tradition.

As an illustration of this indebtedness of Jesus he takes the Lord's Prayer. Pfleiderer, whom KAUTSKY seems to respect much more than he does Harnack, has pointed out that an Aramaic prayer bears a certain resemblance to it. It is true that other Jewish prayers contain individual petitions

that recall petitions in the Lord's Prayer; but—was it Wellhausen who once said to a challenge of this kind?—'Yes, and how much more!' So we shall not be too much disturbed by KAUTSKY's naïve dogmatism that 'we can place no faith in the speeches of Jesus, in the early history of his life, and surely not in his miracles,' or by his other statement that 'the historical value of the Gospels and of the Acts of the Apostles is probably not of higher value than that of the Homeric poems or of the Nibelungenlied.'

Such, then, is KAUTSKY's attitude to the historicity of the Gospels, with their 'hodge-podge of moral maxims and miraculous deeds, full of impossible and obviously fabricated material' on a level with the Book of Daniel, which he characterizes as 'an audacious invention.' He has no use for the impressive argument of Harnack that the Gospels must, on the whole, represent at the very least the impression and intention of Jesus: he would probably have, if possible, still less use for such an argument as was conducted by the late Principal Denney in 'Jesus and the Gospel.'

With such an attitude to the historicity of the Gospels, naturally the whole material they present is dissolved or transformed beyond recognition. Jesus, it seems, had a contempt for work. When He speaks of labour, 'he does so in the most disdainful terms,' and the proof of this is the noble passage beginning, 'Be not anxious for your life,' and ending, 'But rather seek ye the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you'—words which, by an almost unbelievable perversity, are interpreted to mean that 'Christians are to strive *for their own rule*, and then they will have everything they need.'

One of the most wonderful perversities of interpretation, though it is presented with much plausibility and skill, is concerned with the treachery of Judas. It seems that what Judas betrayed was not Jesus Himself, but the *coup d'état* which Jesus, who was 'a rebel' and who was not in principle opposed to the use of force—else why did He call for swords?—had carefully planned, after He had successfully driven the bankers and sellers out of the Temple. The gospel narrative is vulnerable at all points, and apparently most vulnerable of all at those points which have written themselves deepest into the heart of the Christian Church.

The New Testament is marked in places by 'a savage class hatred against the rich.' This is conspicuous in Luke, who sends the rich man to hell just because he was rich: it is almost more conspicuous in James, who 'even fumes against the rich in his own ranks,' and whose famous words in 1^{9-11} 2^{5-7} draw from KAUTSKY the following caustic comment, 'Few are the occasions on which the class hatred of the modern proletariat has assumed such fanatical forms as that of the Christian proletariat.'

The same bias is evident in KAUTSKY's treatment of the attitude of Christianity to slavery. Christianity, it seems, 'never in any way undertook to combat slavery as a system and never exerted any influence toward the abolition of slavery.' We must do KAUTSKY the justice of stating that he guards himself by adding, 'at least in the form under which it became the state religion.' But is it quite fair to ignore the fact that while, for the best of reasons, slavery was for long not formally combated, its death-knell is already sounded in the Epistle to Philemon?

While, however, we differ *in toto* from KAUTSKY in his attitude to the Biblical sources, we gratefully acknowledge the rich suggestiveness of his whole discussion, which, in a truly fascinating way and with an abundance of information drawn from many recondite sources, analyses the economic forces at work during the Jewish and the early Christian periods.

We shall let KAUTSKY state the conclusion of the matter in his own words: 'We have seen that Christianity did not attain victory until it had been

transformed into the precise opposite of its original character; that the victory of Christianity was not the victory of the proletariat, but of the clergy which was exploiting and dominating the proletariat; that Christianity was not victorious as a subversive force, but as a conservative force, as a new prop of oppression and exploitation; that it not only did not eliminate the imperial power, slavery, the poverty of the masses, and the concentration of wealth in a few hands, but perpetuated these conditions. The Christian *organization*, the Church, attained victory by *surrendering* its original aims and defending their opposite.'

Profoundly as readers may differ from KAUTSKY in his attitude to the whole problem or in his treatment of detail, all must admit that his book is written with knowledge, passion, and sincerity.

Religion and Healing.

BY THE REVEREND A. T. CADOUX, B.A., D.D., GLASGOW.

FROM many sides Christian ministers are being urged to resume a ministry of healing. They are told that it is a dishonour to the Church that the miracles of the New Testament are not repeated to-day. More than one institution claims to have recaught ancient and potent truth that rids its votaries of all bodily ills. And here and there in Christian Churches we hear that healings have taken place.

What is the ordinary minister of religion to do about it? He sometimes wonders whether he ought not to walk into the sickroom and say, 'Arise and walk.' He asks himself whether it is lack of faith that prevents him or presumption that prompts him. He thinks that such a proceeding might succeed in some cases, but doubts whether it would do so in all; and how is he to discriminate? And he shudders to think that he might say, 'Arise and walk,' and nothing would happen.

The difficulty of the problem seems to lie mainly in the failure to distinguish the nature and significance of two distinct classes of facts:

(*a*) There is no doubt that the state of mind affects bodily health, and that religion affects the state of mind. Religion can and ought to give courage, cheerfulness, and inward peace, and these things make for the health of the body.

(*b*) It is equally certain that specific disabilities, pains, and other bodily symptoms can, in some cases, be removed by direct and specific suggestion and that religion can give force to suggestions of this sort.

Many people, of course, will claim that healings occur by the direct action of God in answer to the prayer of faith. But we may ask, If God acts directly thus, why does He not cure all disease in this manner? And the answer must be that faith is the needful condition. But unless we accuse God of arbitrariness this means that He works through our faith. And faith, in so far as it is directed to the cure of specific maladies, is the religious equivalent for suggestibility and suggestion. So that the above division is fairly inclusive of the facts with which we have to deal.

The first class of facts involves no special difficulty: the trouble lies with the second class. Facts show that religion can be used effectively to strengthen suggestions for the removal of specific bodily evils. Do these facts indicate that such cures ought to be sought as part of the work of the Church?

The difficulty of answering the question can be met only by a further canvassing of facts. And it will be best to begin on the simplest relevant level.

Amongst the higher animals any bodily ill is met by a twofold reaction:

(1) By involuntary and largely unconscious processes, such as modification of secretions and of the amount and constituents of the blood-supply and of cellular activities, etc. This action implies the existence of a highly organized and adaptable machinery under delicate nervous control, by which the resources of the whole organism are automatically applied to remedy injury or to overcome effects produced in the organism by deleterious substances or microbes.