THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

MOTHER Church, like the modern parent, has to endure much from her children in the way of criticism. She is continually being shown her faults and instructed what she must do if she is to maintain her influence in this new time. Doubtless she is able to bear these criticisms with the patience of the ages, and to profit by them when they are wise and helpful. She has sufficient humility to say with the Psalmist, 'Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness; let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head.'

There is a plentiful supply of this oil, much of it excellent, in a recent book by the Rev. B. C. PLOWRIGHT, B.A., B.D., entitled *Our Gospel—or His?* (James Clarke; 3s. 6d. net). It is a book full of suggestions, and, however much it may lie open to criticism at various points, its intention is to be helpful and constructive.

The writer, after describing in general terms the religious situation of to-day, finds that 'at bottom the movement away from the churches is not an intellectual movement at all, rather it is a case of unconscious drift.' There are special groups who know why they have consciously discarded religion, and their significance is that they supply the larger and less thoughtful mass with ready-made if not real reasons for their unbelief.

The vast mass of men are alienated from religion through an emotional bewilderment. Man is bewildered with himself, wondering whether his ancestral heritage from the beasts that perish dooms him to share their fate. He is bewildered with his world, finding it immensely more vast than he had before imagined, and himself a puny creature beset with manifold evils in a universe which seems indifferent to his well-being. He is bewildered concerning his duty, finding, as it seems, the bed-rock of the ancient moral law crumbling beneath his feet and himself driven to and fro upon tides of conflicting opinion. The situation is such as is pictured by our Lord in the three Parables of the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep, and the Lost Son. 'Men were lost through the carelessness of those who should have cared for them, through their own blind piecemeal wandering, through their own deliberate choice and act. . . . Even better would it be if we could think of them not so much as sinners who by their conscious rebellion against God have put themselves outside the circle of His people, but as men who have lost their direction and way of life, and having lost themselves, are lost for the moment to the power and purpose of God.'

Now, the Church is naturally inclined to read the present situation in terms of an apostasy, of a great falling away from God. But what if that reading is wrong, or at least partially wrong? It may at least be a more wholesome exercise for the Church to criticise herself before she begins to judge the world. 'What if the world is waiting for a larger, truer Christianity? What if, lying unused within

the store house of the treasure of the Christian faith there are conceptions, emphases, and interpretations of life which are precisely those which the world is needing? What if the Church be in truth attempting to handle the modern situation with a conception of Christ and His work, which was gloriously effective in an older day and had amazing redemptive power, but which does not deal with the real need of our own?'

In a word, the question which Church leaders and teachers should ask is the question of the Pharisees, 'Are we blind also?' To that grave question the writer would give an affirmative answer. In two respects he charges the Church with blindness. First, the Church in accordance with a venerable tradition regards the human situation as essentially a guilt-situation. This reading of the situation the modern man regards as incomplete. His contention is that there is more in the human situation than sin and its guilt, that 'he lives in a fear-situation as well as a guilt-situation and that the fear is as radical an element in it as the sin; nay more, that fear is often the deep-seated cause and origin of sin, its tap root and spring.'

The second charge is that the Church devotes its energies too exclusively to the individual. It does not deny that Christianity has a social message, but it tends to see society and social action almost solely as the result of innumerable individual moral decisions. The modern man regards this analysis as incomplete. He urges that the individual is as much a product of the community as the community is the product of the individual. In view of this 'the churches cannot make it too explicit to their own minds that an evangelism, which does not deal radically with the problem of fear as well as with the problems of sin, and with the evil of society as well as with the evil in the individual, is doomed from the start.'

The writer goes on boldly to claim that the modern man's reading of the situation is in full accord with the teaching of Jesus in the Gospel. There is abundant evidence that Jesus was aware of, and dealt with, the fear-situation. He bade men take no anxious thought for the morrow, but cast upon the Heavenly Father all their cares about food and drink and clothing. He reassured them by pointing to the birds of the air how they are fed, and to the flowers of the field how they are clothed in glory. On the basis of this teaching the argument is put forward that it is a primary duty of the Church in giving full expression to its gospel to deal effectively with the fear-situation in the way of removing permanently the causes of fear by the establishing of more secure social and industrial conditions.

Now it would seem that this involves a somewhat glaring *non sequitur*. Jesus teaches His disciples to find deliverance from fear through simple trust in their Heavenly Father. He seems even to go to the extreme in counselling them not to worry about the material conditions of life. It does not seem possible to deduce from that by any direct link of logic that the Church's duty is to deal with housing and unemployment and such things. Without for one moment denying that efforts along that line are excellent and fully in harmony with the mind of Christ, it is not along that line at all that our Lord's mind is moving when He dealt with human cares and fears. This becomes evident from the criticism so widely made to-day that religion is 'dope.' What does that criticism imply? It is an accusation that the Church has dealt with the fear-situation so effectively that it has lulled men to sleep, benumbed their energies so that they have been content to lie down under intolerable social and industrial and political conditions. How then, in face of that criticism, can it be said that the Church has ignored the fear-situation? It may not always have held the balance rightly between the material and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal, but in every age it has bidden men in God's name 'Fear not.'

In regard to the other criticism that the Church has dealt too exclusively with the individual and given too little heed to social salvation, it is argued that Jesus in harmony with the modern man's view put the emphasis on social salvation. He came preaching the Kingdom of God. 'The idea of the coming of the Messianic kingdom was part and

parcel of current Jewish thought; almost invariably it was thought of as having to do with a community. Anything more unlike our modern Christian attitude that we must get the individual right and then we shall get the community right, it is impossible to conceive. He never thought of the kingdom-community as simply the result of individual conversion, etc. God gave to the community with the same directness and immediacy as that with which He gave Himself to the individual.'

While cordially agreeing with the plea that the social implications of the gospel need to be continually emphasized and kept to the front, one finds it hard to conceive any real sense in which God can give Himself as directly and immediately to a community as to an individual, or how it can be possible to save a society, in the sense of making it Christian, except by saving the individual members of it. Is there any record of Jesus having attempted anything directly in the way of social salvation? Is His message of the Kingdom to be interpreted simply in terms of Messianic prophecy, or is there something original and more profoundly spiritual in it? One might go further and ask, Is there record of Jesus having ever discussed any problem in the abstract and apart from its immediate bearing upon the individual? There were problems in His day of which He must have been fully aware, the problem, for example, of Jewish nationality and political liberty, the problem of slavery, the great and complex problem of the Roman Empire with its immense influence both for good and ill upon the destiny of the human race. Jesus seems to pass all these problems by without formal discussion and without framing any policy or programme of action. When we see the churches so busy with the discussion of problems, the framing of policies and the drawing up of programmes it may be pardonable to wonder at times if this is quite the Master's way, and there rises before the mind a vision of Him sitting by the well side and giving of the water of life to a single thirsty soul.

The long-drawn tragedy of the Jew is at the moment passing through a major crisis. It is little less than a miracle how that people have been able to maintain their existence through so many persecutions and oppressions. It is still more wonderful that they should have maintained their faith. One would have supposed that hope deferred through so many ages, and showing no signs of coming to fulfilment, would long since have died within their breasts.

What has kept the faith of the Jewish people alive? What exactly is their faith, and how does it support them in the overwhelming sorrows of to-day? Some answer to these questions will be found in *Judaism*, by Rabbi I. EPSTEIN, B.A., Ph.D., D.Litt. (Epworth Press; 2s. 6d. net). The writer is a well-known Anglo-Jewish Rabbinic authority, and his book is neither controversial nor apologetic, but calmly expository, and written with a clearness of style which makes it most instructive and interesting.

Rabbi EPSTEIN emphasizes the fact that 'along with the pronounced nationalism, which enabled the Jewish people to construct out of their religion a way of life sufficient for their needs, there was ever in Israel a deep-seated universalism that made Judaism a missionary religion, and which runs like a golden thread throughout the variegated pattern of its history.' Its ethic was essentially religious. God rules the world, and in pursuit of His purpose for the world He has given a law to Israel and through them to all mankind. 'To become a co-partner with God in the development of the human race towards righteousness is the immediate task which Judaism sets before every individual of whatever race or creed.'

Judaism, while based on certain great doctrines which give it significance and value, attaches no importance to beliefs as beliefs. 'Faith was never regarded by it as a consecrated act on which salvation depends.' It is held to be of value only in so far as it leads to rightful action. To Judaism all beliefs are submitted to the practical test: Do they serve as a means for fostering righteous conduct and moral life? This accounts for the comparative absence in Judaism of a systematic

theology. 'While insisting on the definitive establishment of doctrines, it refuses to be bound by any particular form in which these doctrines are to be understood.' It is claimed that this absence of dogmatic formulation, apparently a weakness, has been in reality the strength of Judaism, for it allowed from the earliest times for the adaptation of all kinds of systems of philosophy to the Jewish faith.

The interest of Judaism in affirming its doctrine of God is not speculative but supremely religious, and related to His purpose. 'God is a reality; how exactly He is to be conceived is a philosophic, not a religious problem, which, strictly speaking, does not concern Judaism.' His unity is axiomatic: His eternity is a sure guarantee that His purpose, however delayed, shall in the end prevail; His omnipotence carries the assurance that none can circumvent the ultimate realization of His will. Together with His holiness Judaism affirms the divine attributes of Mercy, Justice, and Love without attempting to explain the mutual relations of these attributes. 'God's love is all-abundant and all-embracing, embracing the whole of Creation, Israel as well as the rest of mankind, the righteous as well as the wicked, extending even to brute creation. Side by side with divine love is divine justice, distributing to each man according to his works. These two attributes are by no means regarded as conflicting, but complementary aspects of the divine character dealing with men.'

Judaism teaches that the knowledge of God's will is derived from personal revelations, especially by the giving of the Law through the mediation of Moses whom 'the Lord knew face to face.' This Law is the supreme guide for the individual and collective life of the people, interpreted doubtless by a long line of prophets and teachers but retaining supreme authority. It lays on man a tremendous responsibility, demanding of him conformity to the holy will of God. All wrong-doing, therefore, is sin against God and causes alienation from Him.

Yet the relationship between God and man is indestructible. 'It can be strained and marred, but cannot be severed entirely and broken beyond repair, not even by transgression and sin.' Penitence and well-doing can repair the ravages of sin and restore perfect harmony between the sinner and God. 'The repentance and consequent rejuvenation of the sinner is thus primarily made dependent on himself. He himself must will to cast off his evil deed. He himself must will to be delivered from sin; he must feel he has sinned; he must hate sin and repent and resolve not to repeat his offence. Through his penitence and confession he makes for himself a new heart and new spirit, and then he is reconciled with God, who in His loving kindness vouchsafes unto him His forgiveness and pardon and recreates him in spirit and life.'

It is thus evident that 'for the restoration of harmony between man and God Judaism denies the need of a mediator.' This unqualified assertion appears surprising in view of the statement made elsewhere that the Torah was given through the mediation of Moses. Why should the possibility of a greater mediator be dogmatically excluded? Here is the point at which the Christian will feel that Judaism fails. To the burdened soul that cries out with St. Paul, 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?' it has no sufficient answer. Vain to say he must himself cast off his evil deeds, must himself will to be delivered from sin! It is precisely this power and this will which he finds himself unable to exercise. Yet without doubt there are even in Judaism such intimations of the goodness and mercy of God as have sustained many souls in faith and hope.

The Messianic hope still plays a great part in the religion of the Jew. It is very variously conceived. To the liberal Jew it does no more than give a religious colouring to the idea of the inevitability of human progress. To the orthodox Jew the Messianic Age will be ushered in by a descendant of the Davidic dynasty, although to some this personage is not deemed essential to the Messianic hope. Judaism regards the salvation of the individual as indissolubly linked with the salvation of his people, and through his people with the salvation of the

world. 'To have a share in the future golden age of the nation as the prophets depicted it, "the days of the Messiah," and the universal reign of God, was ever what the Jew craved for.'

To this hope Judaism clings with deathless tenacity. The cruel sufferings endured are regarded as the 'birthpangs' of Messianism. 'Anti-Semitism from which Judaism derives its most acute agony is but symptomatic of the low ethical and moral level of the nations and peoples from which spring all the social evil, economic wrongs, international hatred, rancours and wars.' So long as that is the spirit of the world the Jew must continue to bear the heavy burden of his sufferings and sorrows. It would appear as if in his highest moments he feels that the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all, and doubtless in such moments he is sustained by the dim thought that in some way it is God's burden he is bearing. Would that he might also have the assurance that in heaven he has a High Priest who can be touched with the feeling of his infirmities seeing that He was in all points likewise tempted!

In the Messianic hope Jew and Christian are at one. It is only through a moral and spiritual regeneration that man can rid himself of his present sins and miseries, and such a regeneration demands the recognition of the supreme rule of righteousness and justice which is the kernel of the Messianic ideal. 'Thus it is that in Messianism, and in Messianism alone, will the world find salvation and the people of Israel redemption and rest. The Messianic goal may yet be distant and far off. Humanity still has to traverse many devious and winding paths ere it will be able to detect the flaming ramparts of the City of God. Nevertheless, come what may, Israel will not despair of the ultimate triumph of Messianic righteousness. It is this conviction which helps the Jew in averting the danger which threatens to-day more than ever to undermine completely the morale of the Jewish people. . . . Whatever setbacks and depressions civilization may experience these are but passing phases in man's steady and upward advance under divine providence towards the Messianic goal. And with this conviction the Jewish people faces the new dispersion and the unknown future with confidence, with spirit unbroken and eye undimmed, never surrendering its hope in the fulfilment of the Messianic vision, of the "last days" when

> The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established
> In the top of the mountains,
> And shall be exalted above the hills;
> And all nations shall flow into it.'

The prayer for peace is on many lips to-day. Not so much for that inward peace which Christ bestows upon His disciples as for outward peace, freedom from war and strife. But there is a searching saying attributed to Thomas à Kempis which we might well bear in mind in these days: 'All men desire peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace.'

What, let us ask, are the things that make for outward peace? The fundamental Christian answer surely is, They are the things to which neighbourly love is fundamental.

The meaning of the great Christian principle of neighbourly love, brotherly love, charity—as it was called in Western Christendom—should not be misunderstood. Charity does not demand of us a lively personal affection towards all with whom we have relations. That would be, psychologically speaking, an impossible demand; and the attempt to fulfil it would be attended with not a few embarrassments. A lively personal affection towards some, sympathy and goodwill towards all, such is —as Christian moralists agree—the demand of the Christian principle.

It does not detract from the value of the principle of neighbourly love that it may have found clear

expression in ancient times, in philosophers such as Seneca or Marcus Aurelius. Nor need it detract from its value that it has been sharply challenged in our modern times.

There are moralities current among us which would have us revert to pagan ideals: sometimes exalting æsthetic culture above humanity and charity, sometimes (and this is the sharper challenge of our day) glorifying selfishness and self-assertion and minimizing, even laughing to scorn, love and self-sacrifice. To-day, as in Nietzsche's day, the doctrine of the rightful dominance of the strong is loudly proclaimed.

Those who acknowledge Christ as Master are bound to maintain, as against all neo-paganisms, the supremacy of neighbourly love as the basic principle of all true morality. And it should encourage them to do so to recognize that it is more than a merely ethical principle.

The source of neighbourly love, as embodied in Christian teaching, lies beyond the plane of merely human relationships. It possesses, as some say, the dimension of depth, or, as others say, the dimension of height. Like the City of God which John the Seer beheld, it comes down from on high. As Luther expresses it in his own homely way, the Christian is merely the tube down which God's own love flows.

Undoubtedly, if all men were to become what they are meant to be, tubes and channels of the Divine love, then the things that make for dispeace would disappear, and justice and goodwill prevail on the earth.

Bergson has declared that there is no natural way from the closed society of race or nation to the open society of all men of goodwill. That may be so. But there appears to be a spiritual way. Here is how a contemporary Indian thinker, Radhakrishnan, has recently put it: 'The world commonwealth has been on the agenda of mankind, but the soul that can shape the body is not there. Religion itself must be reborn.'

But those who believe in the future of the Christian religion would say, Religion must be—not reborn—but renewed and revived among us. It must catch again the freshness of its morning, the energy of its spring-time. With a mighty insurging of the Holy Spirit into the stagnant channels of our world, Christian love would once again become a real force within human society, breaking down the barriers of race and nation, and opening up that spiritual day which alone makes for peace on earth.