THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

In his recent book, *Thoughts in War-Time* (Macmillan; 4s. 6d. net), the Archbishop of York includes an interesting essay on 'Theology To-day.' He is concerned about the divergence between older and younger theologians which was already acute and has been intensified by the outbreak of war. The essay is intended as a kind of eirenicon. It is important, he thinks, that efforts should be made on both sides towards a mutual understanding, so that a loss of spiritual fellowship may be avoided.

Accordingly he is moved to attempt a diagnosis of the situation and to offer his own theological confession and apologia. He proposes to avoid generalizations and to be shamelessly egoistic. The situation in his own earlier years was this. He and his contemporaries grew up in a stable world, a world that at any rate professed Christianity. Its standards were a Christian heritage. And even the Victorian agnostics thought it would be possible to retain Christian ethics while discarding Christian doctrine. They wished to retain Christian ethics, and took it for granted that all men of goodwill wished it also.

Along with this went a most un-Christian belief in automatic progress, an inheritance from the rationalists of the eighteenth century. Christian principles provided the standard of life; education and scientific discovery would of themselves produce increasing conformity to that standard. Evil was regarded as a survival from a passing age. There was no need for redemption, or even for God, except as the 'tendency that makes for righteousness.'

That situation constituted the problem. What they (Dr. Temple and his contemporaries) had to do was to persuade people possessed of this outlook that they needed a Saviour, and that God is something more than a diffused essence of amiability. And this was difficult, because people were all alike sunk in a sense of security. They were dominated by a philosophy which left no room for a specific Incarnation. The idea of God was such as to preclude His ever doing anything in particular.

Dr. Temple himself approached the problem from the side of philosophy. And in *Christus Veritas* he wrote two sentences which he now quotes and underlines. One is: *I believe that a very slight touch to the intellectual balance may make the scales incline the other way.* The other is: *What is needed is the exposition of the Christian idea of God, life and the world, or, in other words, a Christo-centric metaphysics.* These sentences seem very remote to-day. The first was untrue. The second is true, but presents a task of which we now see the impracticability in anything less than many generations.

Now turn to the world in which the younger theologians have formed their habits of thought. Christian standards of conduct are challenged as radically as Christian doctrine. Society rests on no ascertainable principles, but is rather in its structure an accidental resultant of blind forces, which is in process of undermining what they have produced. The Christian view of life is repudiated by a philosophy which is far more obviously effective than Christianity; for if a young man becomes a

Communist or a Fascist he is told very plainly what to think and do, whereas the Church leaves him with principles so general as to afford no actual guidance.

When the older theologians offer to men, fashioned by such influences, a Christian map of the world, these rightly refuse to listen. The world to-day is one of which no Christian map can be made. It must be changed by Christ into something very unlike itself before a Christian map is possible. Our task with this world is not to explain it but to convert it. Its need can be met, not by the discovery of its own immanent principle in signal manifestation through Jesus Christ, but only by the shattering impact upon its self-sufficiency and arrogance of the Son of God crucified, risen and ascended, pouring forth that explosive and disruptive energy which is the Holy Ghost.

With the war in his mind Dr. TEMPLE recalls an argument from two of his books to the effect that evil, *when overcome*, is justified, and that no justification for any one instance of evil is possible until that evil is overcome. We ourselves have to maintain our faith in God under the shadow and shock of a great evil, the war; and facile generalizations on such a matter are an affront. We must start from the fearful tension between the doctrine of the love of God and the actual facts of daily experience. When we have eliminated war it will be time to discuss whether its monstrous evil can then be seen as a 'constituent element of the absolute good.' Till then we had better get on with the job of eliminating it by the power of the gospel, which we must present, not as the clue to a universal synthesis, but as the source of world-transformation.

Theology to-day has two main tasks. They are one at the root, and those engaged on each should be concerned also with the other. But they are very different. First, there is the thinking out afresh what are the standards of life to which a society must aim at conforming, if it is to be in any sense a Christian society. We lack, and desperately need, an ethic of collective action. All the perspectives are different from those of individual relationships. But we offer no guidance whatever. And in the modern world half the decisions that men have to take are on behalf of some collective unit (like a trade union, for example). This problem appears in its acutest form in the Pacifist controversy.

But, behind and beneath all this, is the need to recover our apprehension of the gospel alike in its essence and in its impact upon ourselves and the world. We have to face this tormented world, not as offering a means to its coherence in thought and its harmony in practice, but as challenging it in the name and power of Christ crucified and risen. We shall not try to 'make sense' of everything; we shall openly proclaim that most things as they are have no sense in them at all. We shall not say that a Christian philosophy embraces all experience in a coherent scheme; we shall declare that in the gospel there is offered to men deliverance from a system of things—'the world'—which deserves the destruction that is coming upon it. We proclaim, not general progress, but salvation to them that believe.

We must dig the foundations deeper than we did in pre-war years, or in the inter-war years when we developed our pre-war thoughts. And we must be content with less imposing structures. One day theology will take up again its larger and serener task and offer to a new Christendom its Christian map of life, its Christo-centric metaphysic. But that day can hardly dawn while any who are now already concerned with theology are still alive. The task that claims our labour now is far less alluring, to light beacons in the darkness rather than to illuminate the world, but we shall be enriched by it if we are more dominated in thought and aspiration by the redeeming acts of God in Jesus Christ.

The second volume of a series on 'The Teaching of the Church' deals with *The Assurance of God*, by the Rev. Patrick C. A. CARNEGY, M.A. (Longmans; 7s. 6d. net). This is a subject of living interest, for 'it would be idle to pretend that it is easy to be assured of God in these days.' Very rightly, therefore, the bulk of the book is devoted to a survey of the certainties of God made sure through revelation, and of the reasonableness of faith.

But while, therefore, the believer must look outwards and upwards for that which will give assurance to his faith, he must also look within. For there is a witness of the Spirit in the heart, as well as the witness of the Spirit in the Word. Accordingly Mr. CARNEGY gives a chapter to 'The Mystical Experience of God' in which this obscure and somewhat controversial subject is treated with sympathy and good sense. A few notes on this aspect of assurance may be of interest.

The present century, and especially the period since the Great War, has seen a marked revival of interest in Christian Mysticism. This revival of interest has not been without its dangers. For one thing the term 'mysticism' has been applied indiscriminately to many types of experience, some of which are by no means Christian. As Dean Inge says, 'No word in our language—not even "Socialism"—has been more loosely employed than Mysticism.' Mystical experiences, therefore, must be subjected to careful scrutiny and critical study to see how far they are in accordance with Christian truth. It is also most necessary to study the methods by which the mystics attained their great objective. 'Part of the trouble has been that men have coveted the rewards of the mystics without being willing to submit themselves to the discipline which the mystics regarded as essential to achievement. This can only result in disaster. Where men want the sweets, but not the ardours of spiritual experience, they often pretend to an experience which is not really theirs because they have not paid the price.'

The core of the Christian mystical experience is the sense of an intense intimacy between the soul and God. This exalted and happy state is regarded as graciously given rather than being achieved or willed from the human side. But they who would attain to that experience must learn to seek God's presence within their own soul. The true Christian mystic holds the transcendence and immanence of God in perfect balance. As St. Augustine says, 'Thou art more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest.' Further, this joyous intimacy 'results in a conviction which bears witness to its reality by producing a certain quality of life.'

There can be no doubt that the mystics have much to support them in the teaching of the New Testament and the experience of the Apostolic Church. While in the Old Testament the emphasis on the transcendence of God is so overwhelming that His indwelling presence is hardly recognized except in some notable passages in the Psalms, it is different in the New Testament. With the Incarnation there is born a new and wonderful sense of God's nearness, and the heart of the believer becomes pre-eminently His dwelling place. 'So we find that St. Paul never tires of proclaiming the mystical union of the soul with God through the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ.' Nor does he regard this mystical experience of his as in any wise exceptional. On the contrary, he evidently looks upon it as the normal Christian experience, and his continual aim and prayer is that his converts may all attain to this experience.

At the same time the mystics have laid themselves open to serious criticism. John Wesley was a determined opponent, going so far as to say, 'the mystics are the most dangerous of Christianity's enemies. They stab it in the vitals.' He took exception to their phraseology as being 'unscriptural and affectedly mysterious,' to their spirit as being 'reserved and unsociable,' and in general to the fact that they inclined to set so little value on the fellowship of the Church and the fulfilment of the plain duties of everyday life. There is undoubtedly substance in these objections. Many mystics have sought to be 'wise above what is written,' have wrapt their experiences in cloudy verbiage, have withdrawn from fellowship and seemed strangely indifferent to 'the trivial round, the common task.' But this does not apply to the best of the mystics. 'In reality their waiting upon God is intensely active, and involves all the substance of their souls in what is at one and the same time an act of surrender, insight and love. . . . This "holy idleness," this "rest most busy," as the English mystic Walter Hilton calls it, is not apart from the active life. The contemplation of God is not an emotional luxury to be enjoyed in isolation, but a purifying experience which results in positive and practical virtues.'

How far is the mystical experience normal to the

Christian life? The mystics do not regard themselves as exceptional beings, and the New Testament assumes that believers will enjoy the indwelling presence of Christ, yet it is obvious that such experience, in any rich degree, is rare among Christian people. Perhaps not so rare as would appear from an outward survey, for many are very shy about unveiling the inner secrets of their soul's life; yet sufficiently rare to call for explanation. And the reason why so few attain to any high degree of mystical experience doubtless is that there is a price to be paid.

And what is that price? It is to tread the 'Mystic Way' through purification and illumination to union with God. 'It is at the stage of purification that the real costliness of the Mystic Way makes itself most felt. The first step of all must be the cultivation of the spirit of detachment. Man cannot come to his true self, or discover the meaning of life, until he has learnt to stand apart from those things which entangle him and prevent him from understanding the nature of his existence.' But this is no easy task. To mortify sinful desires, impulses, and passions seems to many as bitter as a death in life, and the Mystic Way seems to lead into a barren wilderness where all life withers and where 'no birds sing.' But this is a complete misapprehension. The Mystic Way leads to life through death, not to a death in life.

It is here particularly that the mystics have a message for the world to-day. They stand for the truth that 'pain and purification go hand in hand.' Only a shallow view of God's holiness allows us to think of sin as being easily and painlessly purged. 'The mystics are realists. Whatever path a man follows, sooner or later he must face the sin and sorrow that are in the world. The mystics do not pretend that the problem does not exist; they do not run away from it and make their religion a refuge from reality. They know that no man can be dead to sin unless he shares God's hatred of sin and love of goodness. They face with unflinching gaze the causes of the world's disorder and their own sinful share in it. They desire to suffer because they are lovers and refuse to shrink from the sufferings which their Beloved has endured, and they face the pains and penalties of love with the conviction that on Calvary the redeeming power of suffering was revealed.'

Professor William Ernest HOCKING, of Harvard, is well known on this side of the Atlantic for his interest in the ultimate problems of the world and of human destiny, and in particular for the original development he has given, from a standpoint of mystical idealism, to the philosophies of William James and Josiah Royce. But he is not so well known, on this side of the Atlantic at least, for his interest in the subject of Christian missions.

During 1931–32 as chairman of the 'Commission of Appraisal' of the 'Laymen's Inquiry' he went to India, China, and Japan in order to study the working of certain Protestant missions. The Report of the Commission was published in the autumn of 1932 under the title, 'Rethinking Missions.' Dr. HOCKING'S special field of investigation was the indigenous religions, and in his recently published Hibbert Lectures there are many specific illustrations which are the outcome of his experiences in the Far East.

The book to which we refer, *Living Religions and a World Faith* (Allen and Unwin; 10s. net), contains chapters on 'Religion and Religions' and 'Some Characteristics of Oriental Religions,' and enquires in what sense a world-faith is to be sought for, to what extent it now exists, and what ground there is for considering that Christianity is now, or may become, such a faith. But the chapter to which we here call attention is that on 'Ways to a World Faith,' or the various methods by which a world faith is promoted.

The first is 'The Way of Radical Displacement.' This is the natural method of the missionary consciousness. It bids the convert be done with the old allegiance and take on the new one. The attitude towards the old allegiance is not one of compromise but of conquest. The new religion may be unable to conquer except in love, but in love it intends to conquer.

This is a logical and necessary method if we presuppose (1) that there is a special revelation, an explicit word of God to certain persons; (2) that this word reveals what could never otherwise be known, a particular act of God's will announcing a plan of salvation; (3) that the alternative is eternal punishment or eternal death for all those who do not take this way; (4) that God has referred to us as human messengers the task of warning mankind of its danger and of its one way of escape.

Dr. HOCKING dwells on the great advantages of this method, but in the handling of its presuppositions he shows himself to be largely out of sympathy with it, as readers of 'Rethinking Missions' would anticipate. However, presuppositions (3) and (4) are laid down by himself, and do not appear to be vital to 'The Way of Radical Displacement.' As for his presuppositions (1) and (2), he is hardly justified in holding Barthian irrationalism to be the necessary basis of the doctrine of special revelation, or hardly accurate in describing the idea of a divine plan, wholly unimaginable to man, as an 'ingenious invention' of St. Paul.

The second is 'The Way of Synthesis.' Here certain elements of other religions are incorporated with one's own religion. It is an aspect of Liberalism, as being unwilling to condem as evil what is good in other faiths.

This method has dangers, such as compromise through over-accommodation or purely romantic appreciation, but has not truth its imperative 'both-and' as well as its imperative 'either-or'? There is a legitimate synthesis, and its criteria are individuality, organic unity, consistency. The religion which grows by accretion must retain its individuality; what is added must become a part of the organism of the living religion; it must also be consistent with what was there before it. In short, what is added must be true.

The attitude of our writer appears in the statement under this head that no religion can become a religion for Asia which does not fuse the spiritual genius of Asia with that of Western Christianity; and not alone the genius of Asia, but that of each of its major great religions.

'The Way of Synthesis' leads inevitably to the third way. It may be called 'The Way of Reconception.' Just as in the natural order of experience broadening is preliminary to deepening, so is it in the spiritual order; and we are at the dawn of this new stage of spiritual deepening. 'All our judgments of the essence of Christianity contain an element of certainty, and also of uncertainty—an ingredient of hypothesis. On account of this factor of uncertainty there is a call from time to time for further induction based on wider groups of facts and on better insight into their nature.'

How does this method make for a world faith? As Synthesis is mutual, so is Reconception. At present, in the Far East, Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism are all attempting to restate their own essences, and at the same time to include what they regard as significant in the others. This makes for a growing resemblance among religions—that is, among the conceptions of the essence of Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism that emerge.

The process of the search for essences needs a new institution, according to Dr. HOCKING. Though Reconception is always going on, it requires for its favourable pursuit an institution widely different from the usual type of Protestant mission—not to supplant that mission, but to supplement it. The mission is set for teaching and activity; this institution must be set also for learning and leisurely study, for give and take with the thought and feeling of a nation and a world.

There seems to be little doubt but that the views of this American thinker, if endorsed by the Christian churches, would cut the nerve of their missionary effort, but he is confident that the new institution here proposed has a great future before it: 'In time, I foresee a chain of such centres set round the world, hospitable to qualified enquirers, and contributing—as centres of art contribute to the life of art—to sustain the continuing enterprise of reconceiving religion through world culture, and world culture through religion.'