

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

PERHAPS the most remarkable thing about the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion is the great variety of views put forward by the lecturers, a variety which would have surprised and in some cases deeply grieved the Founder of the lectureships. In earlier days we had Professor Pfeleiderer's lectures which stirred a ferment in Edinburgh by their direct attack on the Gospel records, and raised the natural comment that it was strange to have in a professedly Christian university a lectureship under which it was legitimate to attack the Christian faith but not to defend it. On the other hand more recently we have had Karl Barth's Gifford Lectures in which without an apology to Natural Religion he expounded the Scots Confession of 1560. We have had James's 'Varieties of Religious Experience,' in which man is treated as a religious being, and now we have Sir Charles SHERRINGTON'S *Man on his Nature* (Cambridge University Press; 21s. net), in which man is dealt with as a marvellous conglomeration of cells. 'There is nothing in us except cells. The cell is a unit-life, and our life, which in its turn is a unitary life, consists utterly of the cell lives.'

As one would expect from so eminent a physiologist the descriptions here given of the human body in its constitution and functioning are masterly. In addition to fullness of knowledge Sir Charles SHERRINGTON has the gift of lucid and pictorial description. The mechanism of the human eye has

been often described, but never more exquisitely than here, while the simple act of waking from sleep is told in language so laden with imagination and wonder that it reads like a fairy tale. From this point of view the whole book is most informing and delightful to read.

But when we begin to ask such questions as we expect to be dealt with in a lectureship on Natural Religion the answers we get are less satisfying. The lecturer is strongly inclined to reduce everything to terms of physics and chemistry. The gulf between the living and the dead is bridged over. 'There is between them all no essential difference. The difference is not one of ultimate nature but of scheme and degree of complexity, nothing more. The elementary parts and elementary patterns are not novel. The atoms and sub-atoms are among Earth's commonest. "Living" becomes a name for certain complexes of them, arrangements of which it may be said that they are organized integratively, *i.e.* to form a solidarity, an individual.'

When we inquire how this wonderful process of differentiation and integration came to be, and how it continues, we are bidden simply accept the fact that there it is. Evolution does it; Nature does it. Of one thing we may be certain that it is of the earth, it is wholly from beneath. 'Let us not disown mother Earth; rather let us rejoice to call her "mother." Earth's nature is our nature. We

owe to earth the entire gamut of our mind's wonders, whether of joy or pain. Life's story has been an unfolding of germinal powers of the planet bringing emergence of mind. Let us give thanks where thanks are due. We are, in biological phrase, reactions. The situation creates the life that fits it. The dry land created the feet which walk it. Our situation has created the mind which deals with it. It is an earthly situation.'

One would fain subject some of these phrases to a Socratic cross-examination to discover if possible what it really is that is at work. Perhaps the best answer that can be given from the point of view of pure science is, in Sir Arthur Eddington's phrase, 'something unknown is doing we don't know what.' But we cannot be finally satisfied to throw everything back upon the cell and the atom. To quote a profound utterance of Principal Rainy in the first heat of the Darwinian controversy, 'The more you succeed in showing that the processes of Nature rise simply out of the permanent properties of elementary bodies, the more will you lodge in these elementary bodies an increasing complex of capacity and force. And if any one will assure us that the time is coming when all Nature, including all life and all mind, shall be resolved into and explained by the demonstrable properties and forces of the atoms of elementary bodies, we, not the least believing his prophecy, will reply to him, that if it is to be fulfilled, then we shall have atoms—and indeed short of that we already have them—so wonderful in the precision and in the capacity of their properties, that the one thing which people will *not* rest in, is the belief that these are so many eternal and necessary existences, whose reason and cause, in the case of each of them, is in itself.'

Strangely enough, after having belittled the distinction between the animate and the inanimate, Sir Charles SHERRINGTON stresses the uniqueness of mind. It is a thing *sui generis*; it cannot be expressed in terms of energy, though it can influence action. We are faced with the mystery of two systems, the physical or better named the energy-system, and the mental system, closely related and intricately intertwined. To the energy system

belongs the whole world of action, to the mental system belongs the world of ideals and values. But these ideals seem insubstantial and for these values there is no standard. 'Sunrise and sunset *are* beautiful if one child feel them so.' Then are we to say, 'Tyranny and cruelty have value if Hitler feels it so?' By 'values' we have been accustomed to mean something of enduring worth, but if all is transient and doomed to the oblivion of eternal night it seems idle to speak of values.

What of Natural Religion? There is nothing left that could be called by that name. The concept of a personal God is an anthropomorphism. There is no higher mind than man's, and mind is earth-born and earth-bound. 'To attribute to it immortality while at the same time identifying it with the sum total of the activity of a body in itself notoriously mortal, involved certain contradictions.' So man finds himself standing on the lone summit with no 'higher mind and higher personality than himself to lean on and to seek counsel from.' And looking around him he sees Nature 'red in tooth and claw,' for his sensibility to pain and suffering is continually on the increase. It is a situation which has in it, as Sir Charles confesses, 'an element of enhanced tragedy and pathos.' It is a dreary creed which might well raise the question of race suicide, whether man should consent upon the rack of this tough world to be stretched out longer, or should not rather use his increasing control of the evolutionary process, if possible, to bring this sorry and meaningless play to a speedier end.

But Sir Charles is optimistic and ends on the note of responsibility and an appeal to the heroic in man. The situation, as he reads it, 'transforms the human spirit's task, almost beyond recognition, to one of loftiest responsibility. It elevates that spirit to the position of protagonist of a virility and dignity which otherwise the human figure could not possess. It raises the lowliest human being conjointly with the highest-Prometheus-like, to a rank of obligation and pathos which neither Moses in his law-giving nor Job in all his sufferings could present. We have, because human, an *inalienable* prerogative of responsibility which we cannot

devolve, no, not as once was thought, even upon the stars. We can share it only with each other.' One wonders to whom, in such a situation, we are responsible. But the plain man, conscious most of his own frailty, will feel that he is not cut out for the part of a Prometheus or God-defying Titan, or to take like mighty Atlas the whole burden of the world upon his back. Rather he will thankfully ask help from on high and feel it most fitting to walk humbly with his God.

When the author of 'Green Hell' (which is an account of a journey through the Bolivian Chaco) reacted in his youth, as did so many of his contemporaries in the 'twenties, from the intransigence of ecclesiastical orthodoxy; and even when, under the impulse of the examples of Sir Wilfred Grenfell and others, he sought to retrace the road that had led him from faith to agnosticism, he could hardly have anticipated that one day he would be joined to the company of Christian expositors. Yet so it has come to pass. At any rate, we venture to cite him in these columns.

In *I Am Persuaded* (Cape; 10s. 6d. net) Mr. Julian DUGUID has given us an account of a spiritual search which has brought him out of agnosticism and back to faith, so that he can now 'echo the words of the tent-maker who, in spite of his fear of women, had a wisdom not granted to many.'

The record of the actual search might have been told in many fewer pages, but we would not have it otherwise. There is much that is merely autobiographical, and much that seems otherwise irrelevant, but the whole constitutes by the author's artistry an engaging and impressive unity. Though the style is marred sometimes by carelessness, and is not devoid—to our ear at any rate—of rhythmical mannerism, it is fresh, vivid, arresting, and pervaded with a delightful quality of surprise. It is the sort of book that one would like to read from cover to cover at one sitting.

In our view the least satisfactory chapter is the last. Perhaps we entertained too high a hope as

we approached it, and had thought that Mr. DUGUID, having travelled the way from anti-religious agnosticism to faith, would have gone further and emerged from that religious agnosticism, in whose twilight he appears still to move, which may go hand in hand with faith. Or it may be that we were prejudiced against a chapter that fails to show a due appreciation of Christian doctrine. It appears, for example, to confound Virgin Birth and Immaculate Conception, predicating the latter of Jesus instead of Mary. But this is a by no means uncommon error.

The publishers provide us with a good summary of this 'travel-book,' which explores 'the imperfectly charted and limitless territory of human consciousness.' Referring to the author they say, 'Using his own experience as a starting-point, he probes into the part played by heredity in the formation of the mind, and analyses the layers of conscious and unconscious thought behind the simplest action. He discusses with humanity and knowledge the problem of suffering, the bitter conflict between intellect and faith, the past failures of the Church, and her hope in the future.'

But this account does not give any impression of the strong human interest with which the author invests his pages, nor of the topical nature of many of his references, such as those to hypnosis, faith-healing, spiritualism, and schizophrenia. His spiritual experience, as one might guess, is of a mystical flavour; and he has relied in many places upon the co-operative partnership of his Helper, as he names certain influences, welling up from the unconscious depths of being, whose seat or locus is—as he would say—in the thalamus rather than the cortex. (No doubt the physiologist would as such demur to this speculative extension of the functions of the thalamus.)

This is a book from which one is tempted to quote freely: there is so much sincerity and eloquence in its treatment of the two cardinal subjects of a personal and loving God and human immortality. For the author those two beliefs are now *de fide*, and one will not readily forget how

they were re-awakened in his mind through the two simple and homely incidents of the 'lamp' and the 'desk.'

Here is a picture of his resistance to the belief in a loving God: 'The battle was a physical strain, no less deadly for being silent. I tasted something of the agony of Jacob when the angel touched his thigh. It is hard to write of this time, because so little happened physically: it was a struggle between layers of the mind. The cortex was hard and dictatorial, forbidding me to listen to the thalamus, who was emotional, womanly, unpractical. What a price we English pay for our condemnation of the emotions! The thalamus tried every trick, cajolery, threat and persuasion, but the cortex would have none of her arguments. God could not be a god of love in any rational meaning of the word, and that was the end of the matter.'

Two years later he attained to Christian conviction as to the character of God, and here is how he defends the use of the human analogy in the search after God: 'How else can we view the Creator than through human spectacles? The force in an atom is so blasting, the balance of electrons so exquisite, that an attempt to encompass the whole appears to me time-wasting foolishness. "The Lord is my shepherd" or "The Lord is a power-house": does it matter which we envisage, provided we acknowledge the link? Both are the ideas of children, the one of a pastoral age, the other of an industrial. When oppressed by the hugeness of it all, the blackbird in my garden helps me. As he runs, wormward bound, past my writing-desk I look at these complicated scratches on a white, ruled substance and wonder what he would make of them. Many millions of years lie between us, and his way will never be my ways; but the ink-formations are not meaningless, whatever his bright eyes think of them. They can be read and digested by my equals, even though the blackbird rejects them as unfit for avian consumption.'

But in another place he can say: 'Each Age should adjust itself to truth in the language of

current affairs. Up to quite a short while ago, the idea of a heavenly Father was the only possible conception. Having experienced a little of the glory, a faint gleam from the ultimate, I still think it is the best description. It is actually truer to say: "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want," than: "The Lord is a power-house to which I can plug-in." It is more accurate because the feeling is personal. One really is helped to face life with a heightened vitality and courage.'

In the references to human immortality the following characteristic passage occurs: 'For myself, I am willing to acknowledge the mastery of Jesus Christ. Whenever I have followed His teaching, it has shown itself literally accurate. I cannot explain the laws which seem to govern His suggestions, but it would be untruthful not to proclaim their immediate practical results. If He was right about asking and receiving, about the Kingdom of Heaven within, is He any less likely to be informed on the question of personal survival? Some say, yes: some, no. The gulf is inescapable, it must either be leaped or refused. Yet, His cortex and thalamus were balanced to a degree not recorded elsewhere, and I prefer to place trust in this balance, rather than in an unbridled intellect. A runaway, carping cortex can be almost as dangerous to its owner as a loosely hysterical thalamus. It can isolate a man from the eternal, out of which he has grown and developed.'

We have found this to be a very attractive book; and, thanks to the publishers, it has been an unusual pleasure to handle it. We could, however, wish that Mr. DUGUID might some day carry his story farther. With the aid of modern theology, which is cultivated in the light of evolutionary science, and which emphasizes the ethical as distinct from the metaphysical in the approach to Christ, he might be able to align himself more definitely with essential Christian doctrine.

In a thoughtful little book, *The Night is Far Spent* (Allen & Unwin; 5s. net), Mr. Kenneth INGRAM has made a brave effort to correlate the

Christian religion with the coming 'revolution.' He is, quite frankly, a Socialist, but he is convinced that what Socialism aims at cannot be achieved without a religious inspiration, and in this book he sets out to describe both what Socialism aims at and what religion is. Let it be said at once that, with all its defects, the book is the work of one who is both able and very much in earnest.

Mr. INGRAM sketches the background of the coming civilization and insists everywhere on the personal aspect of the revolution which will be required if the new world is to be the creation of the will of the people, and indeed of the peoples of other lands. As to the former, he insists that our outlook must no longer be determined by a class-sense. Under the new order there must be a re-orientation of social values. The affinities between ourselves and our fellows will be cultural rather than economic. The professional man will no longer look on the shopkeeper or the clerk as a being of a different species.' (No wonder Mr. INGRAM insists on personal conversion as one condition of the new age !)

All will be given the same opportunities of entering the professions, and so the caste basis of society will be abandoned. Also, a man's importance to society will no longer be measured by his wealth. It will be determined by what he puts into the pool, not by what he takes out. In short, the success or failure of the new civilization will depend upon the building up of a new culture, and this, once again, is an essentially religious task.

Mr. INGRAM everywhere uses religious language. He insists that the approaching revolution in human affairs is a religious event, and, if we are to take full advantage of the opportunity which it offers, there must be a corresponding religious awakening within ourselves. He even speaks of the need of a revival, of the urgent need of repentance, of conversion. He insists that we must become the conscious vehicles of a spiritual force, and that we must possess the faith and enthusiasm which religion alone can provide.

It is at this point that we begin to be somewhat disillusioned. Mr. INGRAM uses religious language because he is not prepared to hand over Christianity by implication to 'a monopoly of conservative and orthodox interests.' By his calculation the wrong sort of people have captured the formal strongholds of Christianity. He wants to call into action the spiritual force which is outside the enclosure of the Christian ecclesiastical system. But he is not abandoning Christianity. He is re-interpreting it. And specially, he is re-interpreting Jesus.

Mr. INGRAM fears he will be disliked and misunderstood both by conventional Christians and by atheists; by the former for selling the pass, by the latter for serving up the same old religious soft sawder. It is unlikely, however, that he will be misunderstood by either. He has taken pains to make his position clear. His attitude to Christianity is perfectly simple. He cannot be said to follow Jesus, because he does not believe in following anybody. But he stands where he believes Jesus stood. He shares what he believes were the convictions of Jesus.

But he is firmly convinced that our Christianity will have to be revolutionized as radically as our social system. For example, we must give up the idea of imposing doctrines, such as the divinity of Christ, on anybody. And we must cease insisting on the duty of attendance at public worship. Worship will always be the habit of a religious person, but the form of it does not matter. Communion also will be characteristic of the new Christian, but not necessarily the Holy Communion. Conversion is one of the basic needs for the new time, but it is the dedication to social duties.

And so the realities, on which we are accustomed to rely, seem to be slipping away. But, to do Mr. INGRAM justice, he does range himself with Jesus. And he sums up what Jesus stood for, as he understands the Gospels. First of all, Jesus believed in God and called Him Father. And that has a deep social implication. For it means that we are all brethren in a universal community. But that implies a recognition of the rights of others and this

will sweep away all inequalities. No social system which prevents the right to equal opportunity of each person can be Christian.

Then secondly, Jesus was not a moralist but a prophet. That is to say, He announced facts; He did not lay down a law. He was not an idealist but a realist. And therefore He did not try to coerce people or to impose His authority on them. He left them free. And as a consequence we do not accept His teaching because He gave it, but because it is true. It is not necessary to assign to Him a divine status. We are Christians because we find by experience that what Jesus taught is in accord with reality.

And thirdly, the outlook of Jesus was Jewish, and Jewish religion was 'unified.' That is to say, it embraced all life. Jewish religion was not sectional; it was not departmentalized. All aspects of existence were religious. There was for the Jew no separate realm of the material, the secular, the political. Hygiene, the ordinary social duties, the Kingship, the Day of the Lord, were all equally religious. And in this respect we in our European outlook have tragically fallen short.

We instinctively divide the spiritual and the material, with the result that we regard religion as a sectional interest, something which has a very indirect bearing on political and economic affairs. Which of us, without an exacting mental effort, could suppose that going off the gold standard, the conquest of France by Hitler, or the construction of a planned world-state had anything to do with religion? At most, Christians believe they should apply Christian principles to those social, secular problems. But in their minds there is a deep dissociation between the spiritual world to which

religion belongs and the secular world of everyday activity.

This dualism is one of our deep-rooted mental habits. And it is wholly foreign to the mind of Jesus. He drew no boundary between religious and non-religious history. For Him God's will is revealed in history. For Him God's will is to be done in the hard realities of ordinary 'secular' life. And because we have failed to see this we have failed to realize what Christian duty is in the problems of our social system. It is one of the hopeful suggestions of the present crisis that we may be jolted out of our religious complacency and be compelled to look at life and social duty as Jesus did.

These are the main features of Jesus' teaching. And the religious 'revival' Mr. INGRAM hopes for is the acceptance of these truths by Christian people. The revolution he expects can only come through personal 'conversion' to this way of thinking and living. It is the faith that Jesus had, His devotion to God's will in the plain duties of social life, His outlook on the world as full of God and on all life as the sphere of religion, that we need if the true welfare of mankind is to be achieved.

We have drawn attention to this book because of its frank contention that the new 'order' after the war must be a Christian order, and that it can be realized only by a real religious faith. Mr. INGRAM thins away 'dogmatic' Christianity till little is left of that belief which was the heart and soul of the original Christianity that turned the world upside down. He does not perceive that what Christianity achieved, its 'revolution,' it achieved by just that faith which he considers 'unnecessary.' But those who do perceive that will supplement his forceful argument with the truth which will give vigour and life to the motive which lies behind it.