

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE latest science is the Science of the New Birth. There was a time when such a science seemed out of the question. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.' But the Rev. Horace Emory WARNER, M.A., D.D., has written a book on *The Psychology of the Christian Life* (Revell; 6s. net), and it is neither more nor less than an exposition, conscious and deliberate, of the Science of the New Birth.

'What may be positively known in Christian experience? How do the inner states of experience relate themselves to the outer states of character?' Christian psychology, says the author, sets itself to answer these queries. 'The psychology of Christian life thus holds in its purpose the clarification of what assumes to be a systematic process of the grace of God in the soul.'

Does the Science of the New Birth reject the Supernatural? Science usually does. Perhaps it would be correct to say that the science of psychology usually does. But the Science of the New Birth, as expounded by Dr. WARNER, does not. Should any one hesitate to open the book on this suspicion, the introduction by Mr. John R. MOTT, LL.D., is surely sufficient assurance. But the author himself is perfectly frank

about it from the outset. He says, 'An intelligent study of all the facts embraced in the field outlined leads to one inevitable culmination: the postulation of supernatural Origin to specific psychical processes involved in Christian experience, constituting the experimental Christian life a distinctively supernatural life,—it being expressly understood that this supernatural Origin is not disorderly or capricious, but evidently acting under some spiritual order well beyond all range of the natural order with which we are familiar.' It is probably the first time in history that the attempt has been made to reduce the Supernatural to the rules of an exact science.

Dr. WARNER divides conversions into two classes, the progressive and the cataclysmic. We shall understand the Science of the New Birth best if we pass over what he has to say about progressive conversion and come to cataclysmic—or, as it is called by the unscientific, sudden—conversion.

There comes a time in a man's life when his consciousness, hitherto quiet and normal, is disturbed. The disturbance often shakes his whole being, and usually takes the form of an acute sense of personal sin. Even communities are occasionally wrought upon by this conviction of sin. And it is not always possible to say what is

the origin of it. A sermon is pointed to, a text of the Bible is remembered, an event in life, such as a bereavement, is recalled. But the strange thing is that sermons, texts, and events have all been present before without the least disturbance.

In the conviction of sin the Science of the New Birth discovers three 'focal points.' These are the heinousness of sin, the burden of guilt, and the fear of sin's effects. The focal points are not all felt by every person who is convicted of sin, or at any rate not all with equal poignancy. But however they are felt, it is always in the choice of the sinner to encourage or discourage them, one and all. If he discourages them, his life 'swings away to an irreligious career'—and the Science of the New Birth is done with him. If he encourages them, his life 'swings upward to a religious career,' and the Science of the New Birth accompanies him with interest.

For this state of conviction is then, and invariably, followed by repentance. In the scientific language of Dr. WARNER, 'Permit genuine virile conviction for sin unresisted place in consciousness, and prompt repentance for sin follows as its immediate product, as naturally as daylight follows dawn.'

Now repentance, like conviction, is composed of three elements. These are sorrow for sin, the abandonment of sin, and the return to God. And again, these elements, if not equally evident, or even equally existent, in every individual, are nevertheless existent in every individual who truly repents, and will be sufficiently evident to enable even the ordinary onlooker to see that a work of grace is proceeding in the soul. But what is of more importance for our science, these steps do actually, and do always, follow one another in the history of a cataclysmic conversion, and in that order. That is to say, whether (theologically) a sinner can or cannot abandon his sin before he feels genuine sorrow for it, the fact is (and it is facts that science takes account of) that he never

does. And he never makes a definite resolution of returning to God until he has resolved to give up his sin.

Is the return to God the end? Is the sinner saved? Is the Science of the New Birth completed? That cannot very well be. For, thus far, all is natural, after the very first shock of conviction. How it comes to pass that a man falls under conviction was left undetermined, the suggestion being that it was due to some supernatural intervention, some activity perhaps on the part of the Spirit of God. But after that the steps in conversion, as we have seen, are normal, natural, scientific. If that is all, if the end is repentance in its three elements of sorrow, abandonment, and return, how can we speak of a Science of the New Birth?

In the Science of the New Birth two processes occur immediately after, or it may be even simultaneously with, repentance. These are the forgiveness of sin and cleansing. And these two processes introduce the Supernatural. For they are not the acts of the sinner himself, nor are they the acts of any of his fellows. It is God that forgives; it is God that cleanses from sin. But where do these processes occur? In heaven? No doubt God is in heaven, and in heaven He pardons and purifies. But how can the sinner know that he is forgiven and cleansed, if nothing takes place in his own personality? 'Forgiveness,' says Dr. WARNER, 'is not merely an abstract enactment of a government at some remote heavenly seat of executive action; it is an act of the immanent divine Presence in the soul.' And it is yet more evident that cleansing from the stain of sin cannot be wrought outside the sinner's own life, but must take place somewhere within the 'psychical area'—to use once more the exact language of our science.

Now it is here that the Science of the New Birth is most severely tested as a science. For while every one who has been pardoned and

cleansed comes some day to know it, no one knows it at the time that it takes place. How is it possible that it should take place within the man's own personality and yet without his consciousness? The answer is that it takes place in that region of his life, in that part of the psychical area, which is now commonly called the region of the subconscious.

And the man of science at once admits that what takes place in the subconscious cannot be matter of observation, and therefore cannot strictly lie within the range of science. But it is a first principle of science to argue from the known to the unknown. That new life which the sinner enters upon after his last conscious act of return to God is more than can be accounted for by all that has consciously preceded. It is more than sorrow for sin, deliberate rejection of it, and dedication to God could have accomplished. Science is therefore bound to take into account some process or processes which have taken place in the sinner's personality. For the names which it will give to these processes science is not ashamed to be indebted to Scripture; for their reality it trusts to the universal after experience of sinners. And since they did not take place in consciousness, it concludes that they were wrought by the Spirit of God in the region of subconsciousness.

Nor are forgiveness and cleansing all the processes that take place in subconsciousness. 'Forgiveness, in its psychical aspects, is a change in the divine attitude from condemnation to favour. Cleansing is the purging away of the pollution of sin's contact. But these saving processes do not, in any degree, touch the fundamental disorder and structural distortion that have been fastened upon the psychical being by continuous sinful action. In the profound depths of the subconscious life, the Holy Spirit, in response to saving faith, lays upon the crippled, deformed, perverted powers new impulses and capacities, and reconstructs them.' In other words, and to

use a familiar expression, He *regenerates* the entire spiritual being.

Is this the end now? This ought to be the end. Or at least from the state of regeneration the new-born soul ought to make steady progress by regular steps, through peace and joy to that fulness of filial affection in which he cries 'Abba, Father.' But it is not so.

At this stage there occurs what is known as backsliding. We need not stay to account for it. The fact itself is our concern. And the fact itself is familiar. So familiar is it that Dr. WARNER assures us that only in rare cases of regeneration does backsliding not take place. 'Indeed, such instances are so exceedingly infrequent that their existence requires merely to be alluded to here'—those are his words. Sin gains a foothold again in the renewed heart. Old habits, impulses, tastes and appetites return. And then? Then either the will rises up and asserts itself, or else, disheartened by repeated failure, it gives up the struggle. If it gives up the struggle, the life remains under the dominion of sin; Dr. WARNER says that 'the Christian experience is brought to a positive termination, for the experience of the back-slidden heart is no longer Christian.' But if the will asserts itself, the struggle comes to an end, the soul passes into a new possession of power, and lives henceforth in the light of God's presence.

Dean ARMITAGE ROBINSON has made a contribution towards the solution of the eschatological problem. He has delivered three lectures in the Abbey on that problem as it exists in the Epistles of St. Paul. These lectures are published under the title of *The Advent Hope in St. Paul's Epistles* (Longmans; 1s. net cloth, 6d. net sewed). And along with them he has published a sermon which he preached before the University of Cambridge as long ago as 1893.

The sermon was preached seventeen years

before the lectures were delivered. Yet there is a sense in which the lectures are preparatory to the sermon. For they are exegetical, while the sermon is hortatory. They elucidate the language which St. Paul uses about the Future. They trace the progress of the Apostle's thought, a progress that seems to be due to the pressure of his experience. And thus Dean ARMITAGE ROBINSON enables us to understand, perhaps as savingly as anybody, how that great eschatological problem has arisen for us. For that reason, we may suppose, he has placed the lectures before the sermon.

Yet in another sense, and a deeper, the sermon prepares the way for the lectures. Without the thought, the single all-embracing thought, which the sermon contains, the lectures would be nothing. The problem they consider would not exist. There would be no appearance of inconsistency in St. Paul's thought because there would be no progress. Without the thought which gives the sermon its greatness there would have been no Future for the Apostle worth speaking about.

The text of the sermon is taken from the Parable of the Vine. The words are: 'Without me ye can do nothing' (Jn 15⁵). Dean ARMITAGE ROBINSON calls that parable the most striking parable of the Fourth Gospel. Is it not much more than that? Is it not the parable round which all the other parables gather? Does it not illustrate the central truth, of which all the other parables in the Gospels illustrate only portions?

That central truth is the incompleteness of the individual. It is not simply that the individual is incomplete because not yet perfect. It is not that he is imperfect here, and waits his individual perfection there. It is that the individual is always incomplete, is imperfect in heaven as well as on earth. It is that the individual, as an individual can never be a perfect whole, never more than a fragment, the more fragmentary the more individual he is; and that his perfection

is found in contributing his share to that larger personality which is known as 'Christ Jesus.' 'I am the vine, ye are the branches.'

It is not a new thought. Seventeen years ago it was not new. It is not even understood to be a particularly Christian thought. Is it not rather due to the fierce selfish pressure of industrial competition that the individual is growing less and less, the race more and more? Division of labour, specialization of study—they may be acquiesced in as inevitable results of the demand for quick effective production, or even the invention of machinery. But who does not deplore the atrophy of the individual's faculties—that an able-bodied, sane-minded man should now be compelled to spend his days sharpening the point of a pin? And yet, what does Dr. ARMITAGE ROBINSON say about it? He says that it is 'the peculiar revelation of Christianity, and in some sense its most characteristic revelation.'

It is, he says, the peculiar revelation of Christianity that a man finds himself only when he loses his separate individuality in the general life of mankind. Nay, not losing it, but consciously contributing it to the perfection of the whole, as if he found that the making of a pin was the meaning of all existence, and his work was done, his life lived, his glory found, just when he faithfully wrought at the sharpening of an infinitesimal part of the point of it.

Have we cheated ourselves, then, with our belief in the sacredness and worth of individual lives? Is the individual nothing after all? That is not so. It is only that our conception of the place and purpose of the individual has been a faulty one. We have been claiming for him independence, self-sufficiency, the separate roundness of a perfect whole; and that is more than he has a right to. For the individual, says Dean ARMITAGE ROBINSON, is not the Man; but merely an integral part of the true Man.

The Man (keep the capital for the uses of identification), the true Man, is that larger whole which is the organized sum of all the parts. It is creation's final goal. The Consummation is to consist, not in a mere total of millions of monotonously perfect units, but in the developed completeness of one Perfect Man, made up of countless individual men, who have reached their ultimate attainment in that limited perfection which is the perfect adaptation of a part to the performance of its function as a part, not as a separate and independent whole.

Of this truth the chief exponent is St. Paul. To him it is the truth of truths, the central message of the gospel committed to his trust. Once the champion of exclusiveness, of distinctive Jewish privilege, he received a revelation which laid upon him the duty of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. And in what form did the revelation come to him? It came in a vision of the person of Jesus, and in the words, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?' That is to say, Jesus identified Himself with those whom Saul was persecuting. He identified Himself with them. In persecuting them Saul was literally, not metaphorically, persecuting Him. For they are parts of Him, as the branches are parts of the vine. Without Him they are nothing—that we know. But also, without them He is nothing—that is the new thought we must assimilate.

It was a new thought to Saul of Tarsus. Jesus of Nazareth had not only actually risen from the dead, but also, and as actually, He stood in so close a relation to those who had thrown in their lot with Him that in deed and in truth to lay hands on them was to lay hands on Him. St. Paul never forgot it. How could he? To forget that was to forget his conversion; it was to forget Christ.

He never forgot it. 'Everywhere and always,'

says Dr. ARMITAGE ROBINSON, 'the same truth breaks forth in his writings, or lies close beneath the surface. His whole fabric of theology is built up on this as its foundation. His conception of atonement and redemption everywhere implies it as the eternal and essential idea. His hope for the future of mankind consists in its ultimate realisation.' To false-tongued Greeks in Asia he appeals for the social virtue of veracity on the ground of the One Body: 'Put away falsehood; speak the truth each with his neighbour; for we are limbs one of another.' To the quarrelling Corinthians he expounds at once their folly and their sin. They are rending the Body; they are dividing Christ. And it is to the Corinthians that he develops his great metaphor of the Body and its members 'with a felicity unparalleled before or since.'

So attractive is the brilliant rhetoric with which St. Paul draws out his conception of the Body and its members, and so readily does the metaphor lend itself to a practical application to common social needs, that at times, says Dr. ARMITAGE ROBINSON, we are inclined to regard it as far more impressive than the image from still life which Christ Himself adopts to figure forth His relation to all who belong to Him—the image of the Vine and its branches. But there are two things to be taken into account which will modify our first impression.

One thing is that, whatever element of truth may underlie the assertion that Christianity, as a system of thought, is the product of the mind of St. Paul, yet here at least, in his most fundamental conception, he has no claim to be original. The development of the metaphor in which he loved to express the great thought of the unity of all human life was wholly his own; but the thought itself was given him by his Master.

The other is that the Parable of the Vine and its branches possesses an element which renders it more marvellously adapted to its purpose than

even the attractive image of St. Paul. To St. Paul's thought we are the Body, of which Christ is the Head. To the completeness of the Body, to the performance of its tasks, every limb is necessary. This man lends an eye, that a hand, another a foot. And the joint result is far more than the sum of the efficiencies of individual parts. But, after all, the whole of the truth is not expressed. Christ is more to us than the head is to the body. St. Paul himself knows this, and now and again, at the risk of confusion in his metaphors, he speaks of the whole Body, head and limbs together, as 'the Christ.'

The Parable of the Vine escapes this imperfection. But we must see that we read it aright. 'I am the vine, ye are the branches'—that does not mean, 'I am the stock of the vine, and ye are the branches that grow out of the stock.' It means, 'I am the tree, ye are branches of the tree; I am the whole, ye are the parts which make up the whole.'

What follows? There follow some of the most momentous things that can occupy our thought. There follow the things that are likely to occupy the thought of the next generation of earnest seeing men more than all things else. First this, that in some mysterious way Christ is incomplete without us. We know that those who fell asleep before His coming are in some way imperfect without us. This is more than that. The vine cannot be a complete tree without its branches. Christ cannot be complete without us.

Next this, that it is not the followers only who are necessary to His completeness, but all mankind. Dr. ARMITAGE ROBINSON lays stress on the title which Our Lord gave Himself, the title

Son of Man. St. Paul knew that title, whether he knew the Parable of the Vine or not, and that title gave him his great metaphor of the Body and its members. Mark its comprehensiveness then. Because Christ called Himself the Son of Man, it is clear to Dr. ARMITAGE ROBINSON that every human being is by his very creation and constitution so related to Christ—whether as yet he knows it or not, and whether he believes it or not—that without him Christ is not complete.

And then, finally, this follows, that there is need of a new definition of the Church, a new conception of what the Church is and what it is for. Dean ARMITAGE ROBINSON sees that and faces it. His definition is that 'the Church is the nucleus of that regenerated human society which is to grow out of the recognition and realisation of the true human constitution.'

The definition is scarcely so sharp as it might be. For the difficulty of a sharp definition is very great. The Dean of Westminster was bound to feel the difficulty of it. He surrenders so far to the difficulty as to speak of 'the present necessities of exclusiveness and limitation.' He explains his surrender by saying that exclusiveness and limitation are the very conditions of a strong and effective society. But he declares that the present necessities are not to be mistaken for eternal barriers, and that the grand mistake which the Church has made, and is making, is to think of herself as the favourite of Christ rather than as one with Christ. And then he says very courageously that 'she has wondered at goodness outside her own bounds, and sometimes has dared to deny it, instead of recognising all goodness in all men as a fresh pledge that they are Christ's, and must be claimed for Him.'