

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

TIME and eternity in their nature and in their relation to one another present to the philosopher and to the theologian their deepest metaphysical problem. We speak of time flowing on. What does it flow through, or past? We can detect the smooth flow of a river by watching the banks. Must there not similarly be something, which is not time, by contrast to which we detect the flight of time?

Is the temporal or the eternal the more real? Some have assigned to the eternal the whole of reality. Time and all things that are in time amount to no more than a dream which has somehow flitted across the eternally real as a shadow flits across the face of the waters. Contrariwise philosophers of an opposite tendency have made time and its categories the supreme and only real, and have dismissed the eternal as unknown and unknowable.

It need hardly be said that this latter tendency is dominant in the science and in the general mind of our day. Even our religious thinkers appear to be unable to conceive of the eternal except as an indefinite prolongation of time. The world to come is envisaged as simply a continuation of the evolutionary process which is believed to be going on in the present world. The doctrine of eternal punishment is abandoned as unthinkable because it is conceived as simply an unending process of conscious suffering. It does not seem to be realized that eternity is in some incomprehensible sense

the negation of time, a state in which time shall be no more. If, as St. Augustine said, God created the world not *in* time, but *with* time, then time belongs to this present world only, and whatever survives or goes beyond that must, whether for weal or woe, bear upon it the stamp of the eternal.

In recent years this most baffling subject has repeatedly engaged the attention of religious and philosophical writers. One might mention among others the Bampton Lectures of 1936, and now we have the Forwood Lectures delivered by the late Professor J. L. Stocks. The title is *Time, Cause, and Eternity* (Macmillan; 6s. net).

In this very able and closely reasoned treatise the writer confines himself to one branch of his great subject, namely, cause, in its relation to time and eternity. His contention is that the cause of things is not to be found simply in their temporal antecedents but must be sought for in an eternal realm.

Plato, as is well known, found the reality and formal cause of things in eternal forms of which all that is temporal is the moving shadow. He makes Socrates in the *Phaedo* declare his belief that, in some way which he cannot understand, it is eternal beauty that makes all beautiful things beautiful. Pursuing the same line, Aristotle developed the notion of cause as fourfold. There is the material of which the world is made, together

with some dominant eternal form or essence which gives to it its character. Third, there is that which gives it motion, as we should say, the efficient cause. And, lastly, there is a principle directed to order and goodness, what we call the final cause, a divine purpose running through the whole.

Now it must be obvious to any one acquainted with modern thought that some of Aristotle's four causes have been practically ruled out. In modern science things are thought to be fully explained by their components and physical antecedents. 'Matter is no longer the destined recipient of appropriate form, and the source of movement is no longer the embodied form actuating the process which leads to a further embodiment of the same form. Both matter and motion acquire autonomy. Matter becomes equivalent to Body, and Motion is now an ultimate fact.' In a word, the scientist has become frankly materialistic, and when he philosophizes he finds no room for the operation of eternal and final causes, that is, for God and a divine purpose in the world.

At the same time, there is evidence of a growing doubt among scientists themselves as to the sufficiency of their own materialistic explanation. Physicists are brought to a halt before the mystery of the atom, and are more ready to concede the possible presence and action of some spiritual force. Science, as Planck the doyen of German scientists admits, must now surrender its fundamental assumption that 'the course of a process can be explained by means of an analysis of it into its spacial and temporal elements.' Under a similar constraint, biologists have begun to speak about 'emergence' and 'creative evolution,' indicating thereby that the whole is in some way greater than the sum of its parts, that there is a power behind the evolutionary process which causes new forms to appear.

This side of things is emphasized in the science of history, which must ever be opposed to the materialism of physical science. In history the dominant thing is not matter but form, that is some influence of a spiritual kind operating on and

shaping matter. History 'must necessarily involve making will and reason the universal directing forces of the world,' and the idea of progress 'involves an exaltation of man in the scheme of things which is quite foreign to the scientific point of view.' 'The *vera causa* for the historian is always in the end form, not matter—a powerful and outstanding personality, the pervasive character of an age or of a people, each regarded as drawing from the environment material or opportunity, rather than as resultants deducible by otherwise assured scientific principles from the ascertained nature of that environment.'

The question rises, Can the scientific and the historical view be reconciled? Any philosophy or world view that claims to be comprehensive must take account of both, and the Greek synthesis must be held to be more complete than any which the modern world offers. The modern world is trying to work with too narrow a conception of cause, and we need for a solution the reintroduction of something like the Aristotelian conception of a timeless formal cause. There must be a full and frank recognition of the material cause. All the physical elements in any situation can be entirely accounted for from this point of view. But 'just as a fixed alphabet and vocabulary do not prevent poets from continually enriching civilization with novelties in poetry, so with Nature, we may suppose, the element of sameness does not obstruct the continual appearance of difference.' Mere dead repetition would deprive the passage of time of all meaning. The ceaseless repetition which is characteristic of Nature 'for the first time acquires sense and significance when it is seen as the vehicle of life.' 'The recognition of the historical point of view has given life and mind an independent position and significance.'

Yet such a picture as this still fails to give complete satisfaction. Our minds instinctively seek for some means of grasping the universe as a whole, and of finding significance and value in it. This is fundamentally a demand for organic unity. The human mind 'is not satisfied that events on the world stage shall be shown as running on endlessly,

haphazard, a series of loose episodes; it will have its beginning, the creation of the world; its end, the day of judgment, so that what falls between may be significant. It will have also its Great Artificer, the omnipotent God, who is eternally the same.'

This supra-temporal view has great practical value for ethical life. 'A man can no more find his way through the complicated problems of personal and social life if he has no eyes but for them, than he can find his way across the sea if he keeps his eyes on the ship and on the waves. In navigation the stars provide the fixed point of reference which he needs, and for practical affairs similarly an external reference is the indispensable condition of security.' This principle could be formulated and defended on purely ethical grounds, but 'it has been the special service of religion to the practical life of man that it has consistently exerted itself to keep this principal alive, giving it at the same time new warmth and colour from the rich resources of religious enthusiasm.'

Dr. Francis UNDERHILL, Bishop of Bath and Wells, has published a popular monograph on *Saint Peter* (Centenary Press; 7s. 6d. net). He has succeeded very well in overcoming the difficulty presented by the fact that the New Testament material is so slight and the legendary material so vast. What he has done is this. He has expounded the New Testament material carefully and elaborately, and the legendary material he has treated compendiously.

Bishop UNDERHILL's standpoint in theology is essentially conservative. In his references, for example, to the miracles of Christ he notes that the wheel has now so fully turned that miracles, instead of affording any support to the truth of the revelation of God in Christ, are regarded by many apologists as positive embarrassments. But he goes on to point out that many of the miracles of Christ are to-day regarded as more likely than they were twenty-five years ago; and he adds that as we

come to understand better the movements of spiritual knowledge as well as scientific discovery serious thought will turn still further towards positive belief in 'some, at least,' of the signs which followed the ministry of our Lord.

His treatment of the incident of Christ's walking on the sea is in line with the standpoint above adumbrated. He is careful to mention that some scholars regard the story as a Christian Midrash rather than the record of an actual incident. On the other hand, he says that the phenomenon of 'levitation' occurs so abundantly in the histories of the Saints that it is difficult to doubt the fact of its occurrence; and that what can apparently be done by a Hindu or by an English medium is also possible for Jesus Christ and for Peter. Moreover, if what Christians believe about Jesus Christ is true, we should not expect His actions, any more than His teaching, to remain on the level of common experience.

But can an essential conservatism afford to be so accommodating as our author seems to be in the words that follow: 'Whether we regard the walking on the water as a pious tale with little or no historical foundation, or whether we believe it as a solid fact, the teaching involved is unaffected by the critical position we take up or by our acceptance of the incident as literally true. At the lowest we have here a parable pregnant with meaning; at the highest a searching test of the faith of Peter and his fellows.' On such principles it would not matter if all the miracles of Christ were resolved into parables; and yet, apparently, our author would not be content that this should be.

One is naturally interested in an expositor's treatment of Christ's words, 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.' From this sentence the Roman Catholic Church deduces in part her claim to be the only Christian and Catholic Church, all other Christian bodies being in heresy and schism and therefore excommunicate.

Bishop UNDERHILL admits that the passage, if genuine, strongly supports the position of Peter as

Prince of the Apostles, though he would not allow the claim. But he does not enter afresh into the controversy. He reviews, however, the arguments for and against the position that the words reported to have been spoken by Christ to Peter are a 'gloss,' added in the interests of the Roman claim. Let us set out these arguments in brief.

For the interpretation of the words as a 'gloss.'

(1) St. Matthew alone of the three first Evangelists has recorded the words, though they occur in a passage taken over from St. Mark. (2) The identification of the Kingdom with the visible Church presupposes a later, though still early, period in the history of the Church. (3) If Peter was declared to be the rock on which the Church is to be founded, why the later argument as to which of the disciples is the greatest?

Against the interpretation of the words as a 'gloss.' (1) The passage, if an addition, is only a little later than the original text. (2) Peter's outspoken witness to the truth would naturally meet with a strong commendation. (3) St. Matthew writing for Jews would be the more likely to recall such words; the other Synoptists wrote for Gentiles. (4) The language used in the whole passage (Peter addressed as 'Simon,' human nature described as 'flesh and blood') is characteristic of Christ. (5) The history of the Early Church confirms the words attributed to Christ, as Peter stands head and shoulders above the other disciples.

Our author adds, as against the Roman Catholic view, that nowhere in the New Testament, except in this passage, is any special office created for Peter. He remains one of the Apostles, as such occupying a unique position, having like the other Apostles no successor.

Perhaps the most striking part of Mr. BEZZANT'S book on *Aspects of Belief* (reviewed elsewhere) is the opening section which deals with the Christian doctrine of man. After, in his opening chapter, discussing the nature of personality, he goes on to explore the fundamental experiences of sin, forgiveness, and grace. These have been interpreted in

the past in the light of a traditional anthropology, based upon the early narrative of the Fall in the Book of Genesis, accepted as revealed truth. We now know, however, that that story dates from a time subsequent to the exalted monotheism and lofty moral teaching of the great prophets of Israel.

At first, and for long centuries afterwards, the story was not regarded as an explanation of realized sinfulness and of a consequent alienation from God; it was rather an explanation of the physical struggles of life, its trials and hardships, of the fact that life is not lived in a Paradise of pleasantness and peace. We know the story to be myth—an attempt to account for facts when the knowledge requisite for explanation was scanty. It is strange, but nevertheless a fact, that the famous story in Gn 3 influenced neither the theology nor the anthropology of the Old Testament, which contains no reference to it. The Old Testament was concerned with the fact of sin, which was not considered mysterious, rather than with any theories of the origin of sin.

The main lines of the historical Christian conception of man were laid by St. Paul and fixed by St. Augustine. The real origin of what they wrote was in their own experience, in their own inward conflicts. St. Paul accepted the Genesis story of Adam's sin as fact; and it came to be accepted not only as fact, but as the explanation of the inward moral struggle and of the strength of the passions, with which originally the story was not concerned. But the great passages in the Epistle to the Romans which deal with this question had very little influence in the Early Church. It was not until the text of Romans was made the basis of systematic comment and exposition that the significance of the passages dealing with human sin was realized.

Even now it is difficult to understand St. Paul's doctrine of human nature and of sin except as it comes to us through the mind of St. Augustine. It is true that the great African theologian's extreme views of the total depravity of human nature owing to the transmission of the supposedly corrupted seed of Adam, and the shocking implications which he

drew from 'this horrible doctrine' have never been fully or officially accepted by the Catholic Church as a whole. This unenviable distinction belongs to certain Protestant sects, and it has been often characteristic of evangelical theology. This fact, however, does not neutralize the historical effects of the belief.

Thus the ceaseless inward struggle between the ideal on the one hand and instinct and appetite on the other came to be regarded as contrary to the divine intention—the result of sin and itself sinful. Man, it was supposed, by reason of organic descent from Adam, could justly be held responsible for his instincts and passional appetites; merely to possess them, apart from what man did about them, was sin. It is clear, however, that Gn 3 itself contains no idea of original sin, and, as a matter of history, was not the source of that idea or of the doctrine of the Fall. The historical fact is that these doctrines only arose in late Judaism as the result of reflection on realized sinfulness. It was then, and not before, that the Eden story was appealed to as confirming and explaining what experience suggested.

Moreover, it is now recognized that no place for a Fall or for anything resembling it can be found within the known history of man. But that is not enough. The consequent and necessary adjustments should be made if a right estimate of sin and a true doctrine of man are to be attained. We inherit tendencies and appetites from a remote and subhuman ancestry. This state of affairs theology has called 'concupiscence' and often wrongly regarded as 'original sin.' But it requires no hypothesis of a fall from innocence to explain it, nor can we be regarded as responsible for it. The solidarity of the human race is a truth, but it must not be so interpreted as to mean that the individual is accountable for what happened before his earthly life began.

It is one of the commonest charges against a form of Christianity which frankly accepts modern knowledge about man that its conception of sin is superficial and deficient. But the evolutionary view of the world, and its consequences, afford no grounds

for any superficiality about sin. Pelagianism, or any other easy-going optimism about human nature and human sin, gets little support from modern knowledge. Evolution is a progress upwards, and sin is the rejection of that better and higher through which alone progress is achieved. And the consciousness of accountability for the rejection of the higher is a fact of psychology which cannot be reduced to any other category. Only a bottomless scepticism can pronounce it an illusion. The reason is that 'what ought to be' is never something we manufacture; it is always, as it were, *given*, waiting to be recognized and attained. The higher environment is always in front of our response to it.

It is this experience of failure that is the real and sufficient basis of man's need of forgiveness and of the grace of God. The doctrine of forgiveness is often said to be unethical on the ground that sin cannot be done away with. But the essential thing to remember about this doctrine is that it does not profess to wipe out the consequences of sin except by removing its causes. Its purpose is to enable men to accept those consequences in a new light and in a new spirit, and in so doing to rise above sins and consequences alike. It is only when we are unforgiven that we concern ourselves with escaping sin's consequences. Forgiveness itself does the work of punishment.

It is forgiveness alone which makes true progress possible and thus assists the growth of man's nature towards its highest possibilities. To be awakened to what is really demanded of us is to recognize that we cannot rise to it. Worse, past failures, sins and their consequences, have made us less able to rise to what we ought to be. It is this deep need that forgiveness and grace alone can meet. They meet it, not by pretending that our condition is other than it is, or by any easy condoning of it. They confer an insight, true insight, as to our real place, in a world that is God's, and in His family. Forgiveness transforms the world in which, with damaged sight, we have been living in sin, into the true world in which there is fellowship with God, and in which all things consistent with righteousness and love are possible.