

PSYCHOLOGY AND EXEGESIS.

MANY aids to the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures are being offered to-day, textual, linguistic, critical and historical; and in Germany, especially, the endeavour is being made very confidently and diligently to take Christianity out of the isolation as a religion which the mistaken zeal of its exponents hitherto is supposed to have imposed upon it, and to prove its resemblances to, and dependences on, other faiths. One illustration of this movement in its extreme form is Drews' dissolution of the historical Jesus into a Christ-myth. Another less evident, and no more plausible, has been very effectively dealt with by the Rev. Professor Kennedy in the series of articles recently concluded in the pages of *THE EXPOSITOR* on *St. Paul and the Mystery-Religions*. While the legitimacy of the method of comparison and correlation may be freely admitted, and the Christian thinker may even welcome every evidence of features common to the Christian and other faiths, and of relationships in history between the Christian and other religions, the student of this tendency, however sympathetic he may desire to be, cannot escape the impression of the externality of the whole procedure. In the interpretation of the religious life a knowledge of a multitude of data, and an ingenuity and even audacity in their manipulation and combination are not an adequate equipment for so delicate and difficult a task without a personal insight which only a personal experience can give. Here appearances of resemblance or dependence are generally deceptive; for the significance and value of religious beliefs or rites must be discovered from within by an apprehension and appreciation of the distinctive religious life of which these are the outward expression. When that religious life is under-

stood as an organic unity, the resemblances will be recognised as only apparent, and not real, because a new content has been given to what appears a common feature between two religions: and even when a historical dependence can be shown, the new context gives a new meaning to what has been borrowed. In the employment of this new method the standpoint of the objective observer of the phenomena of belief or rite must be supplemented by the point of view of the subjective participator in the noumena of the religious life itself. Psychology must be employed as an *organon* of exegesis.

I.

(1) In the modern study of religion this demand has been formally admitted. It is now recognised that as religion is neither an invention nor an imposture, but a distinctive, original and necessary function of mind in man, it must be as carefully analysed as any other such function, and the methods of the modern science of psychology are being applied both confidently and diligently to this new subject of so enthralling interest and of so commanding importance. It may be doubted, however, whether the science of psychology in its present stage of development is not still too much the superficial observer rather than the penetrative interpreter of the soul in its relation to God. Without at present turning aside from the immediate purpose into a discussion, less congenial to the pages of this magazine, of the defects inherent in the psychological method, as an attempt to treat mind as an object, when its distinctiveness is that it is a subject, this relevant consideration may be here insisted on, that the religious life, when it is an intimate and immediate relation to God, and not a formal and legal dependence on creeds or codes or sacraments, can be least adequately interpreted from the

still external standpoint of even the current religious psychology. This consideration, however, is not offered as a plea for an abandonment of psychology in exegesis, but for the development of the method of psychology toward a keener moral insight and a quicker spiritual discernment. It would be strange and lamentable indeed if, in the highest concerns and the deepest experiences of the soul, there were no prospect and no possibility of mutual understanding. The expositors of the Scriptures have not hitherto been altogether lacking in this qualification, the capacity to apprehend and appreciate in some measure the "inner life" of prophet or apostle, or even of the Lord Himself; and the value of any exposition of the Scriptures for religious thought and life has been determined by the degree in which such a capacity has been effectively exercised. When this moral insight or spiritual discernment has been developed and disciplined by the more exact methods of the science of psychology, we may hope to have in the hands of expositors a still fitter tool for their work.

(2) In a recently published volume, Dr. Tennant's *The Concept of Sin*, a distinction is made which is of crucial significance for the present purpose. "Any conscious process whatever," he says, "is capable of being regarded from two different standpoints. It is the distinctive characteristic of *conscious* process, that while taking place in an individual mind, it apprehends *itself*. Any particular conscious process, after it has taken place or been experienced by its subject, may, again, be apprehended by him in memory, and be made an object of contemplation at a later time; or it may be similarly apprehended by another subject or person and be reflected upon by him." This distinction has already been implied in the preceding discussion: it is the difference between the subjective experient and the objective observer, the actor and the spectator. "It

is only by scrupulously observing this all-important distinction," Dr. Tennant continues, " whenever it is relevant, that we can avoid what is called 'the psychologist's fallacy'—the fallacy, namely, which consists in regarding another subject's consciousness, *as it is for him while he is 'having' it*, from the standpoint of one's own consciousness, so as to read into another's consciousness what is in one's own mind concerning it, and to identify the other's consciousness, as it is for him, with that consciousness as it appears, at second hand, to oneself." For these different standpoints Dr. Tennant suggests the use of two distinct terms. "A conscious process as it is apprehended by itself, then, shall be said to be regarded from the 'psychical' standpoint; the same process, as apprehended by another subject, or by the same subject contemplating it as another person might, shall be said to be regarded psychologically" (pp. 211-3). The mere statement of this distinction must recall many instances of the "psychological fallacy" in the exegesis of the Holy Scriptures. These are ingenuous theories "made in Germany" due to this author treating John, Paul or even Jesus Himself as a German theological professor with the qualifications, but also limitations of such a vocation. The plea here offered for the use of psychology in exegesis is conditioned by the constant and consistent recognition of this distinction.

(3) But it may be asked, can we escape the psychological and reach the psychical standpoint; can we think and feel and work as John, Paul or James? Does not this seem an impossible demand, and so make this attempt a forlorn hope? There are three reasons why it need not be so regarded. *First of all*, word and deed are a revelation, and not a concealment of personality; we can from what we know of a man judge what he would be likely to say or do. A capricious person, the sport of whims and fancies, may

surprise us ; but the more consistent and sincere a man is the better can we understand him, and the more fully can we trust that he will not disappoint our judgment of him. The prophets, the apostles and the Lord Himself revealed themselves in what they said and did ; and so what we know of the outer life enables us to judge of the inner.

Secondly, for mutual knowledge, especially of moral purpose or of religious aspiration, there must be affinity of spirit and of character ; a bad man cannot understand a good man, and would blunder badly if he tried to describe his dispositions, motives and aspirations ; a godless man cannot enter into the experience of the godly, so as rightly to conjecture its content and character. But if the expositor is a Christian, his own inner life is the clue to the inner life of other Christian men. Doubtless, there was in the relation of Jesus to God an immediacy and an intimacy, such as we do not know in ourselves ; and yet as we are called in the Son to sonship, the ideal of filial communion with God which inspires us surely reveals to us also the reality as it was in Jesus. The consistency and transparency of the personality of Jesus make the knowledge of Him more accessible than that of a life which shows less constantly its purpose, and less sincerely its motive. As the revealer of God surely Jesus so revealed His sonship to men, that it could be apprehended and appreciated not as appearance, but as reality. Difference in capacity or character is not an insurmountable barrier to a mutual understanding, so long as there is a common moral and religious life. Accordingly, we can hope to understand prophet or apostle in the life in God that we share with them.

Thirdly, we may note that our relation to Christ and the writers of the Scriptures is not merely one of affinity, but of dependence. It is through the life in God of those whom we are seeking to understand that our life in God

has been mediated ; and it is not surely a fond fancy that, as the child can understand the mother's love, so our very dependence on prophet, evangelist or the Lord Himself is not a hindrance but a help to our moral insight and spiritual discernment. It follows then, from these considerations, that the Bible cannot be sounded in the depths by the plummet of a neutral scientific inquiry, a scholarship however exact, or a learning however extensive, which is indifferent to, or critical of, the moral duty or religious good which it discloses ; but that for this penetration into the sanctuary of the " inner life " not only must the expositor be Christian, but his success will depend on the measure in which he is Christian.

II.

The writer has ventured to explain and vindicate this method because he is convinced that there are some problems presented in the New Testament, which, without its application, cannot be solved ; and he hopes now to commend his conclusion to his readers by the discussion of a few instances. (1) In the treatment of the eschatological question in the Gospels there seems to have been too little attention given to the psychical process by the discovery of which the two aspects of the Kingdom of God, as presented in the teaching of Jesus, may have been harmonised for His own mind. It is too facile a solution to maintain that Jesus must have thought of the Kingdom as either a present, immanent, moral and religious process, or a future, transcendent, supernatural divine intervention in human history, but cannot have thought of it as both. It is neither an intelligible or credible solution to maintain that He held both views, unless we can show that their inconsistency or even contrariety is only apparent and disappears on a more penetrating scrutiny. When so many scholars are

at variance, it may seem a foolish audacity to suggest even that there is a way out of the seeming *impasse*. Is not the clue, not in Jewish apocalypse, or even in Apostolic eschatology, but rather in the distinctive quality of the inner life of Jesus? For a Christology which conceives Jesus as absolute deity only in the guise of humanity, the solution to be suggested will seem an offence; but such a Christology is imposed on, not derived from, the Gospels. Many years' constant familiarity with the Gospels has led the writer to the conviction that Christian theology does not lay sufficient emphasis on Jesus as the subject of faith towards God, as well as the object of faith to believers.

He is the author and finisher of faith, the most perfect example of faith. If faith be "the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen," then, for Jesus, not only was God as Father a present reality, but the Kingdom of God—the sovereignty of His truth and grace—was as present a reality. For Him with faith's insight and foresight—the future already present in God's eternity—the Kingdom of God did not, and could not appear, as it now does to us, as a distant consummation of a gradual progress of humanity, that "far-off divine event to which the whole Creation moves." He, indeed, saw all *sub specie aeternitatis*. But then, on the other hand, He knew that the Kingdom could come to men only as they had faith; and when He turned, as He was forced by His painful experience in His ministry, from the eternal to the temporal, from God to man, He saw the hindrances and delays that lack of faith might impose. And yet, so sympathetic was His attitude to, and so generous His judgment of man, as well as so dominant His faith in God, that the coming of the Kingdom could not appear so far off. This does not profess to be a complete solution of the problem, as there are other questions to be answered, such as the extent to

which the eschatological beliefs of the apostolic Church may have affected the representation of the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels, and also the extent to which Jesus deliberately used figurative language, borrowed from the prophets, to picture forth for the minds of His disciples realities which for Him were ethical and spiritual, eternal and divine; but the possibility of Jesus thinking of the Kingdom as both present and future, as both imminent and delayed, at least seems made somewhat more credible and intelligible by the psychical process here described. As Jesus Himself professed ignorance of the hour, it is not irreverence to suppose that His mind thus wavered according as confidence in God or disappointment with man was the dominant mood.

(2) It is in the same direction that we must look for fresh light on the miracles of Jesus. The writer does not believe that literary or historical criticism has destroyed the evidence, as Mr. Thompson in his two recent books on the subject too easily assumes: nor is he dissatisfied with the view that the miracles can be regarded as constituents and not merely as credentials of the revelation of grace in Christ, as Dr. Bruce used to insist; but he has felt the need of connecting the miracles still more closely than this view even does with the person of Christ Himself: and there has recently come to him a thought about the miracles in that relation, which, to him at least, appears to offer another reason for them, completing the truth about them. Jesus was the revelation of the saving grace of God towards men: in Him the loving will of God to bless mankind found expression and exercise, but under the conditions and limitations of a true manhood, in this connexion specially through His personal faith claiming that grace in obedience to that loving will. The demand of faith in the recipients of, or intercessors on behalf of,

others for the benefits He could bestow, does not bring us so near to the core of the matter as His declaration, after the failure of His disciples to cure the epileptic boy, and His rebuke of the lack of faith of the father (Mark ix. 19, 23, 29). "This kind can come out by nothing, save by prayer," and His confession at the grave of Lazarus, which it is difficult to suppose could have been put on His lips by the evangelist without some reminiscence as its justification: "I thank Thee that Thou heardest me" (the verse that follows may possibly be the evangelist's reflection on this reminiscence, John xi. 41-42). The miracles were wrought in the exercise of faith with or without articulate prayer; but ever in the attitude of prayer. Had the miracles been impossible to Jesus, had His sympathy with and compassion for man been hindered in its expression in these healing and helping acts, would that not have involved for Him a strain on His absolute faith in God, His confidence and certainty that God was indeed saving man through Him? Not for others only, but for Himself also, the miracles were proofs of the authority of the Son of Man to forgive sins (Mark ii. 10). Meanwhile we need not raise the wider question, whether in the measure in which any man's vocation might approach in its significance and value for the Kingdom of God the function of Jesus Himself, and he, in the fulfilment of it, exercised a like faith in God, the power might be given to him also; but the thought here suggested at least opens out the wide prospect of the possibilities open to man in the measure of his faith in God.

(3) A third instance of the application of the "psychical" method to the New Testament may be offered as bearing on the problem of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. A complete discussion of the problem cannot be attempted, as only one aspect of it is relevant to the present purpose.

After considering all the data of the question for many years, the writer is forced to the conclusion that, on the one hand, there are in the Gospel reminiscences of an eye-witness, but that, on the other, there are reflections developing those reminiscences which belong to the thought and life of a much later age. Thus to give only the simplest illustration, the report of the conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus (John iii. 1-21) seems to be reminiscence, at least, as far as verse 10, but from verse 11 to the end there is reflection, although some scholars would put the transition from the one to the other at verses 15 and 16. How a writer desiring to bear his personal witness allowed himself this blending of reminiscence and reflection, without any feeling of incongruity, is a problem which can be solved only as we can get a look into his mind.

(a) *First of all*, it may be remarked that an active mind cannot merely retain, but in occupying itself with its remembrances, spontaneously transforms them : a verbatim report of a conversation is more likely to be given by a dull than a quick mind. The very quality of mind in the beloved disciple, which led Jesus to trust him as a confidant for deeper truths than the company of disciples generally could receive, would evoke a quicker activity on what he received than those who have handed down the Synoptic record were capable of. In old age reminiscences are often vivid, but at the same time they present themselves in an alien context. By much meditation this disciple had gathered around his recollections the thoughts that, in his own mind, had grown out of the sayings of Jesus ; and it is altogether probable that he could not have himself distinguished where reminiscence ended and reflection began. Especially, if we have in the Fourth Gospel not the writing of the " beloved disciple " himself, but the record of his teaching about the Lord's teaching, which one of his disciples has given, is

the probability of such a blending without any intention or even consciousness of misleading increased.

(b) *Secondly*, this development cannot be regarded as without any historical occasion or stimulus. The "beloved disciple's" environment would raise questions, and offer objections, which, by his meditation on his recollections of the Lord's life, he would try to meet. It is not likely that even in Jerusalem Jesus ever adopted so polemic a tone as prevails in some of the discourses, or was so insistent in urging His own claims, or so vehement in denouncing those who would not acknowledge them. It does relieve a difficulty that the Fourth Gospel presents to us in its controversies not the self-assertion of Jesus, but the "godly zeal" of the disciple for his Lord.

(c) *Thirdly*, the sayings of Jesus regarding the gift of the Spirit, and the view of the function of the Spirit to unfold the further meaning of the things of Jesus, which we find in the Fourth Gospel, throws light on its composition. Even if, and when the "beloved disciple" was aware that reminiscence was passing into reflection, he had the confidence that he was under the Spirit's guidance, and so, what he offered in his teaching was not an alien addition to the teaching of Jesus, but the Spirit's unfolding of that teaching.

(4) A fourth instance of the application of the "psychical" method may be taken from the letters of Paul. (a) The writer holds, and the opinion seems to be gaining ground with scholars, that the Epistle to the Galatians is to be regarded as the first of the letters. The view that it must be placed after 1 and 2 Thessalonians rests on the assumption, forced on and not derived from the data, that there must have been in the interval between these letters a development of the Apostle's own theology. The view that because of its

resemblances to the Epistle to the Romans it must have been written about the same time, ignores the fact that the contents of these letters were determined by their historical occasions and consequent special purposes, and are no evidence as to the total content of the mind of the Apostle at the time. The Thessalonians did not need the instruction already given to the Galatians, nor did the Corinthians need the repetition of that instruction, which was necessary for the Romans. If we trace the "psychical process" in the apostle after his conversion as a clue to his consciousness of being called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, we are forced to the conclusion that his previous development and present experience alike would lead him very surely and speedily to the Gospel of free grace through faith apart from the law, which he unfolded as soon as the circumstances of any church demanded it. And historically, it seems more probable that the problem of the intercourse of Jew and Gentile within the church, involving the problem of the authority of the law over Jew and Gentile, would very quickly, and not only after a lapse of years, emerge when once Jew and Gentile had been thrown together in the Christian community.

(b) Although the writer is not yet fully persuaded that the Pastoral Epistles are to be regarded as Paul's, yet he would find a confirmation of the method here advocated in Dr. Bartlet's statement. "Paul the doctrinaire theologian, or at least the prophet of a one-sided Gospel, repeated with fanatical uniformity of emphasis under all conditions, has largely given place to Paul the *missionary*, full indeed of inspired insight on the basis of a unique experience, but full also of practical instinct, the offspring of sympathy with living men of other types of training" (*THE EXPOSITOR*, January, 1913, p. 30).

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