THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THERE is a constant output of books on the *Origins of the Gospels*, but on so rapidly growing a subject a constant output is as desirable as it is inevitable. We offer a special welcome to a book recently written under this title by Professor Floyd V. FILSON of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Chicago. For it is all that it is claimed to be, a readable, non-technical, and up-to-date survey and evaluation of recent trends in the study of Gospel origins.

As Professor C. Grant of Union Theological Seminary says in his Foreword, the book surveys the whole range of modern Gospel research, and gathers together in brief compass its chief results during the two generations just past. In addition to this, the author writes from a standpoint of earnest personal faith, which leads him to point out the concrete application of 'critical' results, and to show their value in preaching and teaching.

We shall here take account only of the first chapter or lecture, which treats of the subject of 'The Minister and Gospel Criticism.' The author begins with an analysis of the reasons for the minister's failure to follow developments in Gospel criticism. These may be tabulated as want of time, his consciousness of being primarily a preacher, his feeling that the results of critical research are a hindrance rather than a help to his work, his observation of the lack of agreement among scholars, and the difficulty of finding a clear statement of the present situation in Gospel criticism.

None the less, an effort should, it is urged, be made to close the gap between research and practical ministry. One reason for this is that if the minister reveals himself an utter amateur in Biblical research, his last area of specialized competence is challenged: to-day technical competence is looked for in each profession. Another reason is that, if the minister has learned to catch the original import of the Gospels, he will not be tempted—or at any rate much tempted—to twist a passage for homiletical or doctrinal purposes. A yet further reason for pursuing the detailed study of the Gospels is that thereby positive results are achieved which are essential to clear thinking and sound faith.

The first result of critical study often appears negative, and an instinctive resentment against 'the surgery of criticism' is evoked. Such is sometimes felt, for example, when textual criticism is found to refuse the doxology of Mt 6^{13} as a part of the Lord's Prayer, or when literary criticism is found to refuse the claim of independence made for, say, the first or third Evangelist (a claim demanded by older views of inspiration). Readjustment in face of such critical conclusions is often painful, and arouses fear that what has proved deeply satisfying in past religious experience, in general, will be lost.

But new insights call for adjustment; and adjustment, honestly made, is an intellectual release from error or limitation and a spiritual approach to God. As F. J. A. Hort said, 'In respect of the Bible especially, it remains true that whatever helps our understanding helps also in the long run our praying and our working.'

The technical scholar can help to bridge the gap between research and pastorate, and so to do something in the cause of an adequate ministry. One way in which he can bridge that gap is by participating in the practical work of the minister in his preaching, teaching, and pastoral activities. The New Testament writings are all practical in intent, and contact with the practical phases of a minister's work promotes a deeper and truer understanding of the 'key documents' of Christianity.

Another obligation resting upon scholars is that of working toward the largest possible agreement among themselves. Exchange of views and mutual criticism is a constant task of scholarship. If this task were to be more diligently pursued, the minister would not have so long to wait in order to observe the reaction of other scholars to some promising or provocative book.

It cannot be gainsaid that the moral confusion of our age is extreme. Morality is now attacked at its very roots. The question now is, not of how to conform to an acknowledged standard of conduct, but whether there is any such standard at all.

In this connexion the present unrest and dire distress among the nations is profoundly significant to the moralist. Plato says somewhere that if we are too short-sighted to discern the truth about human life on the small scale of the individual, we have only to look at the community or nation and we shall see the same truth written in large letters. That is confirmed by what we see in the world to-day. It cannot be without deep moral meaning that in an age when men have played fast and loose with moral standards, the affairs of the world have got into a desperate state as the result of human sin.

Christian moralists have to take account of the present moral confusion and begin to build from the very foundation. No longer can they take for granted that the Christian moral standard is universally accepted. Probably it really is accepted in the deep and secret places of most men's hearts, as they would be bound to acknowledge if they were honest with themselves. Hence an appeal can yet be made to the still small voice within. But there is also something in the heart which objects to the commands and restraints of God's holy law, and which will therefore eagerly welcome anything which will support or justify rebellion.

In the task of relaying the foundations of a moral system the preacher will find helpful suggestions in a recent book, *Right and Wrong*, by the Rev. William P. KING, D.D. It treats first of 'the factors that obscure the distinction between right and wrong,' and secondly, of 'determinative tests by which we may know right and wrong.' It illustrates, without expressly dwelling upon the fact, how far man is from being a purely intellectual or rational being. The old idea that reason sits in the seat of judgment ready to pronounce impartially upon the evidence is entirely fanciful. Man's thinking is wishful thinking. The scale is turned, not by the weight of the evidence, but by the strength of the desires and passions which tip the beam. The distinction, therefore, which the sceptic is so fond of making between faith as credulity and unbelief as impartiality has no foundation in fact. The will rather than the intellect is ultimately the decisive factor in determining both belief and unbelief.

If we may not appeal to any divine or authoritative moral standard which will be universally acknowledged, we can still make our appeal to reason and experience as not dubiously indicating the right path. It is asserted that man should be free to follow his instincts as the lower animals follow theirs, that to repress desires may produce a complex harmful to life and health. In reply to this, the fact must be stressed that in man there is a continual conflict of desires, a conflict between what we have been wont to call his lower and his higher nature. 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.' It is significant that when men bid us follow our desires it is the lower or animal desires which they have in view, and it is these same desires of the flesh which they tell us are so hurtful when repressed. Here is wishful thinking with a

vengeance. Plainly it is irrational and unscientific to ignore all the higher human desires and instincts. It is impossible to follow the desires of the flesh without repressing the desires of the spirit. Is there then nothing hurtful to well-being when a man represses his better instincts, his instinct to be clean and reverent and faithful and self-forgetful? Surely human personality must be taken as a whole, with its spiritual affinities as well as its lower instincts.

Another obvious consideration is that the conduct of the individual is to be judged by its effects upon the community. 'No man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself.' Is the man who has tired of the marriage bond, and whose sensual instincts prompt him to another union, entitled to leave the wife and children whom he has made to be dependent on him? No social order could exist for a day if it allowed the individual to follow his instincts without restraint. Kant gave it as a moral test to consider what the consequences would be if everybody acted as I act. And doubtless that is a valid test, for none of us has a right to act as if he were alone in the world.

Then there is the time element to be considered. It takes time for the fruits of conduct to appear. You sow the seed to-day but the result of your sowing will not appear until the harvest. Life is to be viewed and judged as a whole, and any line of conduct which simply grasps at the bubble of present pleasure without regard for permanent well-being stands self-condemned.

Further, there is a wealth of moral guidance to be derived from the accumulated experience of the human race. We are richer by the fact that the generations who have gone before us have been experimenting for thousands of years and have found out, often at bitter cost, many things which are helpful or harmful. It would be the height of madness to despise or cast away this wealth of experience. For the most part we gratefully accept it. Nobody proceeds to taste all fruits and herbs to discover for himself which are wholesome and which are poisonous. Nobody puts his hand into the fire to see if it will be burnt: nobody throws himself over a precipice to test the law of gravitation. Yet to-day there are those who think it clever to play with fire, who despise the wisdom of the past and assert their independence, saying, 'Why may I not try it out for myself?' They need to be warned that some experiments are too dangerous to be tried out.

Of course we may err at the one extreme by too blindly accepting the traditions of the past without testing them for ourselves. But that is not the danger that besets this age of ours. Manifestly the danger for us is that we fly to the opposite extreme and count nothing to be fixed and settled. The truth, however, is that some things have been settled beyond peradventure. The moral experience of the generations of the human race has not all been in vain. Every possible line of conduct has been tried out, times without number, and out of myriad experiments certain truths have emerged. A consensus of opinion has been arrived at which no man should lightly despise, indicating that there are ways which lead to life and health, and contrariwise there are ways which lead to loss and ruin.

In general, without falling back upon revelation or any divine authority, we may confidently say that the moral law stands the pragmatic test. It may be said of moral systems, as of individuals, that 'by their fruits ye shall know them.' Judged by this test the 'good life' as Christians understand it can challenge comparison with any other scheme of conduct. It brings in an ever-increasing degree of satisfaction and rest of heart such as no other way of life can bring. When put to the proof it is self-authenticating. It is optimistic and invigorating, whereas the sensual life is debilitating and finally pessimistic. So obvious is this that it strongly suggests the conviction that the moral law rests on a divine sanction and is in harmony with the order of the universe. He, therefore, who sets himself against it, however he may seem for a time to prosper, cannot in the end succeed, for he is fighting against God.

The Twenty-fifth Annual Conference of Modern Churchmen was held at Loughborough College,

Leicestershire, in September. Its theme was 'Modern Christian Education,' and the papers read at the Conference are published in the October number of *The Modern Churchman*. The programme covered most aspects of the subject, and there was in many of the papers an evident sense of the urgency of the problems involved. As interesting as any of the contributions was the address by Sir Cyril NORWOOD, President of St. John's College, Oxford, and President of the Modern Churchmen's Union, on 'The Christian Teacher and the Modern World.'

The President began by saying what needs to be said with great emphasis, that only by Christian education can the modern world be saved from an abyss of which no man can see the bottom. The danger is created by our increasing command of enormous material forces, and the coincident decline in our moral standards. We are driving a vehicle of high power, the brakes of which are not working well, and the steering-wheel is defective. In these circumstances there can be no subject of graver importance than that of Christian education.

In dealing with his own aspect of it—'The Christian Teacher and the Modern World'—the President raised first the question: What is the Christian teacher? There are so many kinds of Christians in the world, and so many kinds of Christianity, some of which so overlay the original figure of the Founder that it is hard to see Him at all. Men and women are turning away from conventional presentations of Christianity which seem to be irrelevant to the needs of the modern world. How much does the ordinary man believe to-day? When Tennyson was asked what he believed he said: 'I believe in God, and I believe that my personality endures. That is my faith, and that is all my faith.' It is doubtful whether the ordinary man to-day would do more than affirm the first part of that declaration.

But take that affirmation, that God is, and let us ask what Christianity has to teach us about *what* God is. Well, said Sir Cyril, as I see it, Christianity teaches us that God is good and wishes us to be good. Further, that God is truth, and all truth, all knowledge is in accordance with His will. Further still, that God is in all beauty, and revealed in all beauty. And once more, and this is the specifically Christian thing, God is love. In the words of Dr. Barnes: 'God's universe is shot through and through with goodness that shall in the end triumph. In Christ we see goodness triumphing over pain and evil. By this triumph we are led on to the certainty that His example and His gospel, if men would only accept them, would bring the world to God: and therein, for me, is the Incarnation.'

That, then, is the Christian teacher: one who believes and is prepared to teach these things. And the modern world in which his teaching is to be given? The President warns us against painting it too black. But his own colour is pretty sombre. There are certain things, he said, in the modern world which constitute a threat to Christianity. Perhaps the strongest threat comes from Totalitarianism in all its forms. True: it has conferred great benefits in every country where it prevails. But at a great price, at the cost of freedom of the value of the individual, whose duty to the State is absolute self-surrender. This is fundamentally at issue with Christianity, for to the Christian the State exists for the individual, and as individuals we are the sons of God and heirs of eternal life. This is familiar ground and need not be further explored. But Sir Cyril NORWOOD is certain that there is far more Totalitarianism in our own country than we think. For Materialism is rampant, and materialists (whether in the right or the left) have no use for freedom in other people.

A serious position from the point of view of the Church is revealed in the indifference of the mass of the laity to its institutional life. It is not a pleasant task to find fault with the Church, said Sir Cyril. But there is little good in burying one's head in the sand, and there are criticisms of the Church widely prevalent and widely believed which are not without foundation.

There is—to take one—a decline in the quantity and quality of ordinands, and nearly half of them lack a university degree of any sort. A field of this

kind is not a good soil for producing leadership. The interests of a large number of the clergy to-day are quite foreign to those of the laity. Congregations are said to be not more than a quarter of what they were before the War, and young people drift rapidly away from institutional Christianity as soon as they reach the years of indiscretion. The clergy as a whole overestimate sacramentalism, ritual, and dogma, and they underestimate learning, culture, and example. They are suspected as obscurantists and rightly deprived of leadership, because the idea of a faith once for all delivered in a remote period of past time runs counter to every instinct of the modern mind. All this is said reluctantly and is subject to modification in two respects. It is too sweeping, and it leaves out the shining examples of clergy who are real scholars and leaders. 'But taking the whole indictment into consideration, if I were on a Grand Jury I should return a True Bill.'

There is another thing in our modern world which may be considered evil or partly evil. 'If I were asked to describe what most differentiates the present time from the period in which I grew up, say the nineties of last century, I should not dwell first on the wonders of wireless communication and all the miracles of applied science which we enjoy, but the presence of fear now, when it was absent then. That fear may be conscious, it may be subconscious, in the mind of the individual, but it is there.' About the eternal future we may not know, but we do know that forces we cannot control may reduce our life's savings to nothing, may reduce the cities we have built to ashes, may poison the air we breathe, or blow all to fragments. In what should be a period of profound peace and profitable labour we arm ourselves to the teeth, and prepare like moles our burrows underground. I take this comfort from the present need and distress of the peoples, that once before Christianity cast out fear from the world, and if its spirit can be recaptured the same gift which it brought before of love, joy, and peace may return.

Considering all this, Sir Cyril is certain that the main battle is to be fought in the ordinary schools of the country. He believes that the right policy of the Church is to hand over all its schools to the State, and to concentrate all its efforts on the training of teachers, so that there will enter the educational services a steady supply of teachers who will come to their work not as a drudgery but as a vocation, as a means of bringing the children to God. He laid great stress on the fact that it is between the ages of twelve and sixteen that young people can receive a stamp that will not lightly be effaced. These are the dangerous years but also the hopeful years. And on these years the Church should concentrate its efforts.

It is a great task to which these teachers will be called. At present many profess their incapacity when asked to teach Scripture. In most cases it is a perfectly honest sense of inability. But with proper training this should disappear. 'Experience has led me to believe that a determined effort must be made to recover the knowledge of the Bible which formerly existed, and the influence for good which it exerted in the national life.' But it was never more possible to do this, thanks to scholarship and a gradually broadening view of what revelation means and how it has come. But there are questions and problems raised, and raised just at the age of adolescence, to which reference has been made, which require competence on the part of the teacher to deal with. And for this there is needed a class of specialist teachers who have had special and thorough training. And here the Church could help the great cause of national education by providing such specialists.

It is not by one expedient or another, however, that the Christian teacher will convert the modern world. The greatest need is a new dedication by the teacher of himself to the task of training the youth of our land for true and worthy living. This spirit, the conception of a school life dedicated to spiritual values, is alive in the schools to-day, and is becoming commoner. There are many teachers who are dissatisfied with humanism and realize its impotence in face of the perilous problems of modern life. And there is reason to hope that this is an attitude that is spreading in the educational world. And so there is no need for pessimism. The modern world has much in it that is sound and healthy. And the Kingdom of God lies always in the future.