

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

THE Oxford Group has many critics. That is to be expected. For it has life, and life is a ferment. Jesus warned us that new wine cannot be put into old wineskins without doing damage. That is a parable to be kept in mind when we are up in arms against anything that threatens established conventions, especially in religion. It may be said in defence of some of the criticism, that the Group has not been well served by its literary interpreters, with one or two notable exceptions. A good many might revise their judgments if Canon Streeter or Professor Emil Brunner would take this task in hand.

The latest addition to Group literature is *Life began Yesterday*, by Mr. Stephen Foot (Heinemann; 5s. net). It will not be surprising if this book meets with some rough handling, for Mr. FOOT seems to write as if the Oxford Group form of Christianity were the only real form of it that had ever existed since the days of the New Testament Church. But this kind of limitation has always accompanied any form of religious revival. The merit of the book is that it does fix our minds on the world's primary need, which is the conversion of men and women, both inside and outside the churches, to vital Christianity. The new world begins in new people. It is what it is because of what we are. Therefore the world's condition challenges our individual lives.

Much criticism would be avoided if it were under-
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stood, by both Groupers and others, exactly what the movement is. It does not aim at producing a new theology. It does not seek to form a new sect with a peculiar life of its own. It is an evangelistic movement. Its aim is to bring men and women into vital touch with God. Most people can give a diagnosis of the ills from which we suffer to-day. Thousands instructed in the churches believe that in Christ alone we can find the solution for the world's problems and the power for its spiritual life. But where most people fail is to demonstrate just how the solutions of Christ can be practically applied to the individual situation, and just how His power, which at the moment is only static, can become dynamic in the life of the individual. That is the unsolved problem which is frustrating the efforts of thousands of people both in the pulpit and in the pew. It is just there that the Oxford Group has found its sphere. And that may be the reason why its published literature is not better than it is. Volumes that are rich and satisfying to heart and intelligence can be written about religion. But books about how conversion happens have a narrower field.

Mr. FOOT's story of his own conversion is not very dramatic. It was a change of motive, which is all conversion is, though that is everything. 'The little more and how much it is.' It meant doing the old things from a new centre. He follows this by chapters showing how the new spirit works in business, politics, education, the home, etc.

The poorest chapter, curiously enough, is that on Education, which is his own subject. The illustrations he gives could be paralleled by others in the lives of schoolmasters who never heard of the Oxford Group but have a reasonable understanding of psychology, a real religion and a good fund of common sense. In his chapter on Business he speaks of the Holy Spirit being Chairman of a commercial company. This language may be chosen to give point to his plea for the guiding of the Spirit. But it jars. It jars for the same reason that the phrase about 'dictatorship of the Holy Spirit' jars. Dictators are not attractive figures. Christ definitely refused, in His temptations, to take the position. God's method is not dictation; it is persuasion. That is why the Kingdom of God is so slow in coming. He refuses to force the will. He seeks to win its consent through awakening our insight into what is true and right. He draws us from a cross. He will not make a beautiful world at the cost of submerging our own insight and reason. A man may begin by surrendering to the compulsion of conscience in some direction or other. But till love has won his heart he is not saved. He is a bondsman, not a son. It is here perhaps that the Group outlook has been in need of amplification.

There are two points on which many people are critical. One of them is on the subject of guidance. On this point those who seek for light will find little in this book. We are only told that it comes through listening to God. Mr. Foot rightly suggests that some criticise this method because they are afraid of what guidance might ask. This is true, and the critics should ponder it. But there are others who fear it for another reason. They are afraid of the irrational. They suspect that what they may be induced to think the voice of God is only the suggestion of their subconscious minds. It may be a will o' the wisp. It may be a caprice, quite irrational and quite wrong. It is true that in other quarters it has been stressed that guidance comes through reason, through conference with others, through a conscience instructed in the Scriptures and conversant with all the facts of the situation—the mind working, of course, in the atmosphere of utter willingness to do the will of

God. This is not made clear in this book. And a good deal more thinking needs to be done about it. But the Groups have done us this service—that they have brought into light the absolute necessity of being willing to do the will of God, and in that willingness of being ready to listen to God's voice. The supreme medium of the guiding of the Spirit is the mind of Christ. There is a difference between the quality of the guidance of the Spirit in the Old Testament and that in the New. That difference was made by the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The other point of common criticism is sharing. It is no doubt true that this practice has its dangers. But here the Groups have done the Church a real service. A good deal can be said for the practice. It is a way of release, for one thing, to open the heart to the right person. It is good to tell some other our sins. It marks our willingness to be real about them and to come off the pedestal of reputation, which is often a refuge from reality. Sharing is the most effective means of helping people, because the most convincing way of making God real is by the story of personal experience. It is, moreover, a real part of fellowship in Christ. The Group has four standards. But, as Mr. Foot shows, the cardinal challenge is to honesty. This goes deeper than appears. Was not Christ's one demand the demand for sincerity? If a man is sincere, which just means honest, he will find God. All truth will be open to him. The chapter on the Home in this book reveals what honesty has achieved in the healing of unhappy homes. The most difficult barriers to get down are often those between parents and children, and sometimes between husbands and wives.

This book will help many people if they want to be helped. These will take what helps them and leave the rest, which is exactly what they do with any other book. For whatever the critical may say about some of the things to be found in it, one thing remains clear. All is not well with the Church. All is not well with the ministers. We need many things—a much bolder affirmation of the way of Christ in this mad world of fear and hostility. But this also we need—to know for ourselves the way to God and to help others to find it so that

Christ can become a life-changing Power. With all its weaknesses the Oxford Group has on this matter a word of God for our day. It will be tragic if the churches refuse to listen.

Few problems are more difficult and more persistently troublesome than that of the relation of Church and State. It sprang to the front as soon as the Church was born, and we are yet far from seeing a solution of it. 'Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's,' said our Lord, but that principle does not determine for us what things are Cæsar's and what are God's.

History has seen a variety of attempts to solve the problem. In the first Christian centuries Cæsar with his claim to divine honours plainly usurped the place of God, and the Church was forced into resistance even to the death. In the Middle Ages the Papacy claimed that Cæsar's authority was secondary and derivative, and must always be exercised in obedience to the dictates of the Church. This claim was naturally resisted by the State. At the Reformation in Protestant lands the State gained a very considerable degree of control, particularly in England where the King was the acknowledged head of the Church, and in the German states where the principle was adopted, 'Cujus regio, ejus religio.' In Scotland, where the battle was fought out with great tenacity and ability, the principle was maintained of 'co-ordinate jurisdiction with mutual subordination.' It was a fine sonorous phrase which aimed at holding the balance even between the spiritual and the temporal, but it gave no help in defining the boundaries of the two jurisdictions, and it was found in practice that they were inextricably intertwined. English Nonconformity in recent years has favoured the watchword, 'a free Church in a free State,' which rests on the dubious assumption that Church and State can each live its own life in single blessedness.

This age-long problem has once again come to

the front as one of the vital issues of the day. Since the War the spirit of nationalism has been greatly stimulated, and in forms which are frequently narrow and intolerant. There is consequently a prospect that Christian missions will be denied the freedom of action which they have hitherto generally enjoyed in the heathen lands of the East. Still more urgent has the problem become in Christian lands where the emergence of the totalitarian state, as in Russia, Italy, and Germany, threatens to absorb and control every activity of human life. The Church in these lands is either in danger of being exterminated or of being fettered and enslaved. 'The perilous condition of Continental Protestantism in relation to the Governments has led the *Universal Council for Life and Work*, the continuation of the Stockholm Conference of 1925, to decide that the special subject for study and consideration at the next Conference in 1937 shall be *Church, Community, and State*.'

In view of this Dr. A. E. GARVIE has issued a book on *The Fatherly Rule of God* (Hodder & Stoughton; 5s. net), in which he surveys the whole field in a masterly way and offers suggestions for a solution of the problem. It hardly needs to be said that there are few writers, if any, more competent to handle this most difficult subject than Dr. GARVIE. His grasp of Christian principle; his wide knowledge of Church history and comparative religion, his mastery in the fields of economics and sociology, together with his intimate acquaintance with the situation on the Continent both religious and political, give unusual weight to his views, and will doubtless secure for them the most careful consideration.

Dr. GARVIE realizes that the problem of Church and State is part of the wider problem of God's Fatherly rule of the world, and that it must be approached in the first instance through a consideration of God's relation to man as an individual. Emphasis must be laid on this, because the present danger is that the individual may be swallowed up by the community. This is a very grave and imminent danger indeed. A Russian cartoon

Christian life began. Every man's creed, however many may be the clauses in it, is, after all, but as a tiny circle of light in the vast, encompassing darkness. In my own case the darkness has encroached still further on what I once thought was light: I am not so sure now of some things as I was forty years ago. Somebody once remarked, rather acidly, of a group of Christians whom I will not name, that they lengthened the Creed but shortened the Commandments. I have no wish to shorten the Commandments; I have just as little to lengthen the Creed. Even the Apostles' Creed and, still more, the Nicene are too long for me; there is more in both than I can fight for, more in both than I need to live by.'

Some time ago a group of ministers was gathered on the shores of a Scottish loch for the purposes of a retreat. The meeting lasted about a week, and towards the end, at one of the conferences, some one asked the question: What would we concentrate on in our minds if we knew we had only five minutes to live? It was suggested that each one of the twenty or thirty men present should make a personal statement. They were all well known to each other, and there was the most complete frankness in all cases. The interesting thing about these personal confessions was the ultimate ground on which each rested his faith and hope. In some cases it was God, the encompassing love of the Father; in other cases it was Christ.

We have the same interesting phenomenon in these essays. Dr. ROBERTS, for example, begins with God, whom he reaches by diverse ways. He finds God in everything, and above all he finds love. 'It is to our human life what sunshine is to the physical world, the spirit of health and healing.' And then he comes down to Christ, as it were, from this eternal reality. 'But why healing? Because physically, mentally and morally somehow things have gone wrong, or at any rate they are wrong. Where love meets ignorance and sin, of necessity there is a cross. The significance of that cross depends on the quality of the love, and where the love of God meets the utmost sin of man, there the life of God is in the form of a cross. Once there dwelt among

us One who accepted these facts so completely and unconditionally that He was led to Calvary.'

And so to the Church. 'He calls us to a fellowship of saviourhood. This is the *raison d'être* of the Church, which may be truer to its function when it is a small community of great souls than when it congratulates itself on being a large community of little souls. Two symbols set forth, in the familiar acts of washing and feeding, the cleansing from defilement and the life of fellowship. Like all symbols they tend, unless carefully watched, to usurp the place of the spiritual realities which they represent.' It is clear that in Dr. ROBERTS' case there is a good deal in the outer circle!

In the case of Dr. George JACKSON, who has the gift of always being interesting, the inner circle is, as he himself suggested, very small. He quotes with appreciation a letter from Dr. John Kelman to himself: 'I am leaving to-day for Edinburgh, where I preach twice to-morrow. May I pass on my subject to you? The morning one is Faith, and the message is: never mind about details, and that deceptive thing called orthodoxy. Get down to the heart of things and stake everything on that. There are a few central things—very few—which mean everything to the soul. Loyalty to these is the essential saving faith. I want to simplify the idea of faith to the very simplest thing—loyalty to a Friend. No other questions matter at all.'

And this is Dr. JACKSON's creed—Christ. Nothing beyond this, and nothing less. 'What do I believe? A single sentence will suffice to tell. "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." That is my creed; in a very real sense it is the whole of my creed. . . . Nothing less will suffice, nothing more is necessary. Then, some one may ask, can I not repeat the first words of the Creed? Do I not believe in "God the Father Almighty"? Indeed, I do, but I do because, and only because, I believe in Jesus. The first word in the Christian's creed is not God, it is Jesus. In order that I may be able to say: "I believe in God the Father Almighty," I must first learn to say: "I believe in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord!"'

Is this correct? In the full Christian sense, certainly, because the full Christian belief in God's Fatherhood is only reached through Jesus. But were not the prophets believers in God? Are not the good Jews believers? And men like Dr. Martineau? It is true that St. Peter says: 'Ye who through Him (Jesus) are believers in God.' But is it not also true that faith in Jesus Himself is reached most easily through faith in God? We have many reasons for believing in God. We may reach that belief, as the psalmists did, through experience of life. And to the soul that has such a faith in God it is not hard to see the fulness of His grace in Jesus Christ. Let us not abate in the least the significance and necessity of Jesus for the full belief in the redeeming grace of God, but let

us not belittle the faith of those who reached God before Jesus, or those who reach Him apart from Jesus.

But with that said we come back to Dr. JACKSON'S concentration on Him, and gladly hand on the words he quotes from a Japanese Christian to Dr. Estlin Carpenter, the well-known Unitarian scholar: 'I am more and more drawn to Jesus and the power of His word. . . . I submit myself to Him as my brother, Lord and Saviour. And I go further. . . . Jesus Christ is nearer to me than the Father. When I get despondent in regard to my faith in God, it is Jesus who brings God back to me. . . . He represents to me, so far as I am concerned, all the Divinity I can understand and He is God to me.'

Some Outstanding New Testament Problems.

XII. The Problem of Aramaic Sources in the Gospels.

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THERE can hardly be any problem in New Testament study offering more room for difference of opinion than this. And wide difference there certainly is. Most scholars would now agree that the authentic pieces of the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and the earliest stories about Jesus were originally formulated in Aramaic whether or not they ever took written shape in that language. That is the minimal hypothesis. Few, however, would be prepared to follow Professor Torrey in the view that all four Gospels are translations from Aramaic originals. Between these two extreme views all kinds of solutions are possible, and very little is certain. In what follows I do not propose to do more than set forth the view that seems to me most probable.

The simplest way will be to begin with the two Gospels which are clearly dependent on written sources. Matthew and Luke both make use of Mark, and the Mark they use is in Greek. In addition they have as a common source the document Q. (For reasons which would require a paper to themselves I am unable to accept Bussmann's division of Q into two documents, R and T.)

The amount of verbal agreement between Matthew and Luke in Q passages is so great as to exclude the possibility that we have here two independent Greek versions of an original Aramaic Q. On the other hand, it can be shown that the verbal differences can often be explained as translation variants. This situation is almost exactly parallel to that presented by the two Greek versions of the Book of Daniel. There we have the same curious mixture of agreement and difference; and I am inclined to think that the explanation is substantially the same in both cases. We have a Greek version of Daniel in the LXX, and the Greek version revised with reference to the original in Theodotion. Similarly in the case of Q. Here I think that the earlier form of the Greek is that offered by Luke, and the revised version is to be found in Matthew. It is, of course, true that both the Matthæan and Lucan forms of Q are revisions in the sense that both Evangelists made alterations of the text from dogmatic or stylistic motives; but we are not here concerned with such editorial activities, but only with such alterations as appear to arise from reference back to the original Aramaic.