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THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

In all the range of duties that have to be undertaken by the Christian minister there is none that is more imperative than the duty of Adaptation. Some of the best and especially the most recent books on preaching give it great prominence. It is the subject of the first chapter of Professor Jackson's volume on *The Preacher and the Modern Mind*. It is the subject of the whole of Principal Forsyth's book called *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind*. And when Professor Johnson comes upon it, in his admirable book entitled *The Ideal Ministry*, he prints the word in large capitals, and returns to it again and again.

It is as difficult as it is imperative. In some cases, says an American writer, 'It may be accomplished by a sort of instinct, but most men under most circumstances will attain it only because it is deliberately and even laboriously sought.' And Henry Ward Beecher, being demanded by an anxious student 'How one could get the power of adaptation,' could only answer, 'Practice—practice—that will do it.'

It has been imperative always, and it has always been difficult. But never was it more necessary than now, and never was the difficulty greater. In many a letter from the trenches which dealt with Religion or the Church there was the demand, more or less urgently expressed, for a doctrine and worship in touch with the times. And in most of the military chaplains' summaries of observation this was set in the very front and emphasized with every device of type and iteration. The preaching, and not the preaching only, but every part of the Church's activity, must be brought up to date.

Two books, both published by Messrs. Macmillan, have appeared in which an attempt is made to adapt the Christian Faith to the modern mind. The one is entitled *Religion behind the Front and After the War* (2s. 6d. net). It has been written by the Rev. Neville S. Talbot, M.A. It is a small book, but it contains no waste paper. We do it a certain injustice to separate one example of Adaptation from its context. That, however, will be atoned for if any considerable number are thereby driven to read the book.

The example is St. Paul's doctrine of Sin.

But, first of all, let us see quite clearly where we are. Go back for a moment to an older book. Go back to Principal Selbie and his volume of sermons called *Aspects of Christ*. 'The two main foci of Christian thought,' says Dr. Selbie, 'are the historical Person of Jesus on the one hand, and the experience engendered by faith in Him on the other.' Now the Person of Christ stands.

It stands for all time and for every age. Criticism has only made it more secure as a historical and utterly unique fact. But the interpretation of Christ's Person varies with every age. The Person of Christ has the religious value of God—take that and hold to it. All is there. But the fact of Christ, this Christ with the value of God for us, has to be interpreted to-day in the light of our knowledge, our knowledge of the character of God and His ways of working in the world.

Come then to Mr. TALBOT and St. Paul's doctrine of Sin. Mr. TALBOT cannot accept St. Paul's doctrine of sin. It was possible and even necessary in St. Paul's own day. In our day, he says, it is not necessary and it is not an acceptable doctrine.

In his doctrine of sin St. Paul starts at once with sin in its relation to God, the reality of it and the universality of it. There it is. It is the inexcusable fault of man, and it deserves the wrath of God.

Now in being able to begin so, Mr. TALBOT holds that St. Paul had an advantage. He asks leave to use a figure from golf. St. Paul 'starts off with a clean tee-shot.' We cannot start so fairly to-day. We have, as it were, to begin by playing 'out of the rough.' For we are troubled about God. We must begin, not with our sin against God, but with the God against whom we are said to sin.

'Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself.' That is what we feel. We felt it before the war, but the war drove it into our very souls. Is God really both good and great? Is He highest holiness and fullest power, or is He only one of these, or none? We cannot acknowledge our sin against a God who cannot vindicate Himself. We cannot feel it as sin against a God who may never have cared for us. God must be known by us as both able and willing to save us to the uttermost. Then, but not till then, can we say, 'I acknowledge my sins unto thee.'

Mr. TALBOT sees in our attitude to-day a return to the position of Isaiah. First Isaiah saw the King 'high and lifted up,' and then he cried out, 'Woe is me, I am unclean.' But we have the advantage of Isaiah. We have a clearer vision. The knowledge of God is found by us in the Cross of Christ. Says Mr. TALBOT, 'It is not the vision of offended majesty so much as the terrific vision of wounded love and profaned holiness. The light which shines from the Cross is a terrible light because it shows men what they have done. They have crucified God. They are, as it were, like one who unknowingly has hit his mother in the face. That is what men found that they had done in contriving the death of Jesus, in consenting to it, and in forsaking Him in it.'

Then we rejoin St. Paul. And we rejoin him with a vengeance. 'Once we have any sight at all of what sin does to God, we know that no jot of St. Paul's gospel can be abated, that no spark of his exultation in the free gift of God's forgiving love towards sinners, immeasurably outweighing their sin, is to be extinguished. We are to-day, compared to St. Paul and to many former Christians, far less certain (with an inherited certainty) of God apart from Christ, and therefore we are far less sensitive to and jealous for the divine holiness and righteousness. Yet when once we have seen in Jesus Christ the light of what God is and suffers, then we can go to school with St. Paul *con amore*, that we may be overwhelmed with that which overwhelmed him—the good news of God reconciling the world unto Himself.'

Here then is the difference. St. Paul began with sin, we begin with God. We both go straight to the Cross of Christ. But St. Paul goes to find salvation, we go to find illumination. It is only that we have a step to take which St. Paul with his inheritance did not need to take. The moment we have found illumination, we proceed to find salvation.

For illumination, says Mr. TALBOT, quite

unreservedly, 'illumination by itself can never save men. What is wrong in them is something far deeper than can be cured by being shined upon. The shining upon us of the blinding light of the Cross—blinding because revealing the holiness of God and His unmitigatable antagonism to evil—is but mockery and torture if it stops short there; if there is no way of approach to Him Whom we have pierced: if Christ made no free and perfect offering of responsive love, from man's side and for man, to the Father; if we cannot identify ourselves with His propitiation; if there is no cleansing and renewing energy of His Spirit to enter into our inmost hearts and there to restore, maintain, and perfect our sonship. This is the old Gospel in summary. But there is indeed no Gospel for the world but the old Gospel, when once it has been put into a new setting. The radical tragedy of life is sin, and only that which can deal radically with sin can be salvation.'

The other book is entitled *The Faith of the Apostles' Creed.* Its author, is the Rev. J. F. BETHUNE-BAKER, D.D., Lady Margaret's Reader in Divinity in the University of Cambridge. It is not one whit less modern, and it is perhaps even more weighted with the experience of life than Mr. TALBOT'S book. The example of adaptation that we take from it is the Ascension of our Lord.

Dr. BETHUNE-BAKER does not believe in the Ascension as St. Luke believed in it. Why not? Because he is Copernican in his conception of the Universe, while St. Luke was Ptolemaic. Dr. BETHUNE-BAKER is a teacher of New Testament doctrine. He does not teach that Jesus was taken up into heaven and a cloud received Him out of the disciples' sight. That is a representation of the return of Jesus to the Father possible only to one who believed that heaven was higher than the earth, and the Father's throne, at whose right hand Jesus 'sat down,' a definite locality 'above the clouds.'

What, then, does Dr. BETHUNE-BAKER do? Let us hear. 'By the words "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of GOD the Father Almighty" we mean to declare our belief in the triumphant issue of the discipline through which He passed (cf. Heb. v. 8) and the completeness of the victory which the world regarded as defeat. And, as we regard Him as the representative of Man, in the victory He won we see the promise of the ascent of redeemed Humanity to GOD and the surety of the fulfilment of the Divine purpose in the creation of Man. To be seated "on the right hand of GOD" means to have attained to the highest place in the sphere of the things of the spirit. The metaphor expresses primarily the idea of honour, the highest recognition of worth. But early teachers were concerned to show that "sitting" did not imply inactivity. Kings and judges sit while they exercise their functions of rule and judgement. So, in the faith of a Christian, Christ is King in the spiritual sphere; His will and His ideals rule there, at the very centre of spiritual wisdom and insight and power.'

But what does Dr. BETHUNE-BAKER do with St. Luke's language? He uses it. 'Copernican in my conception of the universe though I am, I have no difficulty whatever in expressing my belief in the Ptolemaic language of the Creed. It is a terse and picturesque way of saying what I mean. It is, no doubt, a popular way rather than a scientific way: it presents the spiritual reality which I believe in the form of a quasi-physical occurrence. But the clause in its place in the Creed is intended to denote a spiritual valuation of the Person of whom it is affirmed; it is part of the whole appreciation of His significance which the Creed as a whole is intended to express; and in using its words I intend to make the same affirmation of Faith about Him that the Church has always intended to make. No question of "science," no physical theory of the universe, comes into my mind at all. I cannot avoid the use of spatial metaphors—some kind of "movement" seems to "belong" to every manifestation of life and reality. But the religious conviction I mean

to express is what I believe was brought home to the minds and hearts of the earliest disciples of Jesus, and realized and expressed by them, under forms and in terms which were congruous, as such forms and terms always must be, with the intellectual culture of their time.'

It is now quite clear that the effort to found a League of Nations for the purpose of bringing war to an end will be met with opposition. What will the argument be? That also is now quite clear. Sometimes it will be that 'human nature is what it is,' sometimes that 'man is a fighting animal'; but however it is expressed it will always be the same: God has so made man that he will delight to go to war as long as the world lasts.

One discovery has yet to be made. What is to be the strength of the opposition? Surprise awaits us. Who would have expected to find there Clement WEBB, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford? Yet, there he is, and with the familiar argument in his mouth.

Mr. WEBB has issued certain addresses which he delivered *In Time of War*, and he has given the volume containing them that title (Blackwell; 2s. 6d. net). They are all addresses by a Christian to Christians. One of them has the courageous title of 'The Permanent Meaning of Propitiation.' And yet, in the first address of all, Mr. WEBB tells his hearers that, in spite of what Christ is, and in spite of what He intends to accomplish in the world, they need never look for the end of war.

His argument, we say, is the familiar one. But he puts it in his own way, and his way is so peculiar that his own words must be quoted. 'The prophets speak of a time when men shall learn war no more; and we are told that in heaven there will be no marrying or giving in marriage. But this world would not be a better world than it is without marriage; it would be a very much worse. And, although one would not say but that a world without war *might* be far better than a world with war, yet the mere absence of war, if it meant an absence of the patriotism and the sacrifice of self for one's country that are the redemption of war, would not of necessity make a better world. Nations in this world would not of necessity be better without armaments any more than individual men in this world would be better off without fists.'

Those are his very words. We must have armaments, he says, just as we have fists. And he sees very clearly that if we have armaments we shall want to use them, just as we want to use our fists because we have them. But who gave us fists? Mr. WEBB'S answer is that God did. Did He? God gave us hands, but it is we ourselves that form them into fists. To say that God means us to fight because He has given us fists is to say that He means us to worry because He has given us wrinkled foreheads.

More astonishing is the argument about marriage. Because Christ said that in the other world 'they neither marry, nor are given in marriage,' the prophets were mistaken when they said that in this world men should 'learn war no more'!

Very few are the preachers who know how powerful an instrument God has put into their hands in the popular appreciation of poetry. Fewer still know how to use it. There is no interval, they seem to think, between mumbling and mouthing. And that no one may find them guilty of mouthing they are content to mumble. But mumbling is the greater sin.

Dr. F. Homes DUDDEN must know how to repeat poetry in the pulpit. He certainly repeats it. In a volume containing twelve short sermons which he has published under the title of *The Delayed Victory* (Longmans; 4s. 6d.), he quotes three hundred and nine lines of poetry. That

gives an average of twenty-five lines to the sermon. Has he overdone it? Hear him read the poetry.

In one of the sermons in this volume Dr. Homes Dudden declares his mind on the life after death. He does not approach the subject light-heartedly. He recognizes its difficulties. But he has come to definite conclusions about it, conclusions which are 'in accord with the doctrines of religion, with the principles of philosophy, and with the highest ethical teachings,' and he is convinced that it is his duty as a Christian teacher to make these conclusions known.

Well, first of all, he is convinced that there *is* a life after death. 'Aristotle once observed that "death is of all things the most terrible, because it is the end." But we have gone a long way beyond Aristotle. We cannot believe for a moment that death is actually the end. It does not destroy men. It does not merge them into the All, so that they lose their individual life. It simply transports them into a new environment and state of being.'

We agree. We do not all agree, but they are few now who deliberately deny it. For the greater number it is perhaps no more than a probability with which they think they must be content. For some however it is a tremendous reality, recognized for the first time in their lives with something of its significance.

What then? Dr. Homes Dudden proceeds at once to tell us what the life beyond is to be.

Now you will notice that in all discussion of the future life it is the first five minutes after death that are decisive. What is the immediate result of death? What does death do? Dr. Homes Dudden holds that death does nothing—and all the rest of his conclusions follow.

Death does nothing. 'I hold that a man, in all the essential qualities that go to make his personality, is no more changed by death than he is changed by sleep. He comes out of it just the same. He begins over there exactly as he left off here. He is no better and no worse; neither wiser nor yet more foolish. He is not in any way different, save that he has shuffled off the body with its physical limitations. He is simply himself, the same essential man, the same real person, just as we have known him here—with the same kind of character, the same original way of adjusting himself to life, the same predilections and aversions, probably even the same little personal singularities and peculiarities. That which he was five minutes before his death, that, and no other, is he still five minutes after his death.'

What are his authorities for that? He refers to Swedenborg. Swedenborg 'contended that often a dead man does not immediately realise that he has died. He feels the same as ever; how should he know that he has died?' This somewhat precarious footing he tries to make firmer by quoting some quaint lines entitled "The Quiet," that he came across recently in a volume of war poems:

I could not understand the sudden quiet—
The sudden darkness—in the crash of fight,
The din and glare of day quenched in a twinkling
In utter starless night.

I lay an age and idly gazed at nothing,
Half-puzzled that I could not lift my head;
And then I knew somehow that I was lying
Among the other dead.

It is not very convincing. Why does not Dr. Homes Dudden quote Maeterlinck? He quotes Maeterlinck with much effect on the fact of life beyond death. Why does he not proceed to quote him on the nature of it? Maeterlinck does not agree. He is in direct contradiction. He believes that death makes a great difference. Maeterlinck believes that you cannot measure the difference that death makes. 'For it is certain,' he says, 'that, when the body disappears, all physical

sufferings will disappear at the same time; for we cannot imagine a spirit suffering in a body which it no longer possesses. With them will vanish simultaneously all that we call mental or moral sufferings, seeing that all of them, if we examine them well, spring from the ties and habits of our senses. Our spirit feels the reaction of the sufferings of our body, or of the bodies that surround it; it cannot suffer in itself or through itself. Slighted affection, shattered love, disappointments, failures, despair, betrayal, personal humiliations, as well as the sorrows and the loss of those whom it loves, acquire their potent sting only by passing through the body which it animates.'

The trouble in the way of those who hold that death makes no difference is Purgatory. They cannot escape it. Dr. Homes DUDDEN does not escape it. He is careful not once to mention it by name. But it is there.

It is so emphatically there that nothing is there but itself. Dr. Homes DUDDEN does not believe in Hell and he does not believe in Heaven. He believes in Purgatory, and in Purgatory alone.

He does not believe in Hell. For Hell is a fixed state and final, and he does not believe that the state of any man is fixed and final. 'I am well aware,' he says, 'that many people hold a theory that a man's state is fixed at death; that there is no opportunity for repentance, no opportunity for amendment, in the world beyond the grave. But the weight of the available evidence is against that view. Let me remind you of the verdict of one of our leading Biblical scholars, Dr. Armitage Robinson, Dean of Wells. He says, "I cannot believe the theory—for it is but a theory—that the moment of physical death is the moment in which a man's state is eternally and unalterably fixed. I cannot find that in my Bible. All nature, all analogy is against it. It cannot be." With that conclusion I confess myself in complete agreement.'

And he does not believe in Heaven. That is not so evident. Perhaps he will say that the Purgatory which he believes in leads to Heaven at last. But he certainly does not say so in this book. And he does not seem to think so. His idea seems rather to be that, as we all begin there just where we end here, we shall *begin* by making progress and shall go on making *progress*, but at the last we shall still only be making progress. There is room for progress in Purgatory, but it is Purgatory still.

What has become of the men who have given their lives for their country? That is the question to-day. No other can compare with it in urgency or in poignancy. It is to answer that question that Dr. Homes DUDDEN preached his sermon.

It is not a question about the Heaven to which the righteous go. Sir W. Robertson NICOLL has published a book on *Reunion in Eternity* (Hodder & Stoughton; 6s. net). His subject, he says frankly and at once, concerns only those who are in Christ. For there is no other doctrine of the future. He does not mean to say that nothing is said in Scripture about those who have not accepted Christ before they die. What he means to say is that their fate is not followed. 'These shall go away into eternal punishment'; 'he went to his own place,' and the like. That is all. Only the dead who die in Christ do the writers of the New Testament follow into the world beyond.

But Sir W. Robertson NICOLL is not indifferent to the fate of those who have fallen in the War. His hope is in the moment of death. 'We do not know what may pass of a sudden in the very moment of dying, between the soul and Christ. All the great Christian teachers have told us that the very slightest recognition on the part of men of the Divine Sacrifice is enough to secure salvation.'

This is Browning also. It is the belief of the Pope in *The Ring and the Book*. 'The sudden "shock" and "surprise" of Death may be

sufficient to awaken the capacity for eternal life that is latent in every man who is made "in the image of God," and so we may

see, one instant, and be saved.'

But Sir W. Robertson NICOLL goes for confirmation to a safer source than Browning. He goes to Spurgeon. 'In his two sermons on the penitent thief Mr. Spurgeon refuses to admit that he is dealing with a solitary, or at best an exceptional case. He says that if the thief was an exceptional case there would have been a hint given of so important a fact. "A hedge would have been set about this exception to all rules. Would not the Saviour have whispered quietly to the dying man, 'You are the only man I am going to treat in this way'? No, our Lord spoke openly, and those about Him heard what He said. Moreover, the inspired penman has recorded it. If it had been an exceptional case it would not have been written in the Word of God."'

But there is another way. What does the supreme act of sacrifice itself do for the soldier? It is Dr. Homes DUDDEN'S belief that it transforms him into a Christian. 'So there is hope, you see, great hope, for our soldiers who have fallen. They will start—who can doubt it?—in a high place in the other world, and every possible chance will be given them of rising higher still. And in saying this, I do not forget that many of them, when they were here, lived lives that were pretty low down, and had they ended their lives in the ordinary way they would doubtless have found themselves yonder in a place that was pretty low down. But whatever their life may have been, the manner of their death has ennobled and exalted them. At the finish they proved themselves Christlike. They did not, perhaps, know much about Christ. But they did know enough to venture all they had for Christ's ideals and principles. They did know enough to take up Christ's cross of heroic self-denial and carry it after Christ to Calvary. They did know enough to sacrifice themselves to the uttermost, as Christ also sacrificed Himself, for the welfare of others, for the redemption of the nations, for the salvation of the world. And therefore I cannot doubt that, when the last feeble breath flickers out of the broken bodies, and the tired eyes see no more, and the ears are for ever deaf to the reverberations of the battle, the King whom they served, though they knew it not, even to the death, will be waiting to greet His soldiers, and will lead them to places of refreshment, where their stains will be cleansed away and their ignorance illumined with the light of heavenly knowledge.'

Dr. Homes DUDDEN has his authority also. His authority is Cardinal Mercier. 'If I am asked,' said Cardinal Mercier, 'what I think of the eternal salvation of a brave man who has consciously given his life in defence of his country's honour and in vindication of violated justice, I shall not hesitate to reply that without any doubt whatever Christ crowns his military valour, and that death, accepted in this Christian spirit, assures the safety of that man's soul. "Greater love hath no man than this," said our Saviour, "that a man lay down his life for his friends." And the soldier who dies to save his brothers, and to defend the hearths and altars of his country, reaches the highest of all degrees of charity. He may not have made a close analysis of the value of his sacrifice; but must we suppose that God requires of the plain soldier in the excitement of the battle the methodical precision of the moralist or the theologian? Can we who revere his heroism doubt that his God welcomes him with love?' And he ends with a very strong sentence. 'This is the virtue of a single act of perfect charity—it cancels a whole lifetime of sins; it transforms a sinful man into a saint.'