

# THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

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## Notes of Recent Exposition.

TIME brings its changes as well as its revenges. 'When we were very young' many of us can remember that the other-worldly view of religion was still prevalent. We sang hymns that voiced a longing for future bliss. Even children were taught to sing, 'I'm a little pilgrim, and a stranger here.' Our real life was beyond the grave. But this idea was fading away even then. We were re-acting against it in the name of reality. We were convinced that this world was good, and that we must justify our Christianity here and now. It may be said that to-day the this-worldly view of religion holds the entire field.

But Dr. Edwyn BEVAN has brought the older view back, and with no uncertain emphasis. This is the purport of his remarkable book, *Christians in a World at War* (S.C.M.; 6s. net). No one can have anything but respect for Dr. BEVAN's thinking and writing, and he has certainly issued a startling challenge to us all in what he calls his 'essay.' It is an attempt to see the present European conflict in its setting, so far as that is constituted by the obstinate hope which has characterized, throughout these nineteen centuries, the view taken in the Christian Church of earthly events. This obstinate hope is based on the belief that the real world is the eternal world, and that all problems are solved there, and that this world can only be rationalized by reference to the real world.

Men are asking whether the world process as a whole into which they are launched at birth has

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any meaning or purpose or goal, when it allows the occurrence of these shattering catastrophes that confound high-built hopes and show a vast power of destruction granted to the evil will. Can God be seen in history, if by 'God' we mean Someone in whom all good finds its complete realization? If we talk of a divine purpose or plan for the course of events on earth, we can only mean that it is somehow adjusted to secure that the values recognized by the spirit of man (moral goodness, truth, happiness) should be brought by the plan into actual existence to the greatest extent possible, and their opposites done away.

Do we see this in the course of these nineteen hundred years? Dr. BEVAN says 'No.' Newman said that when he looked at the world's movement, hoping to see God in it, he experienced the same unpleasant feeling as he would, if he looked into a mirror, expecting to see his face and saw no face there! And Dr. BEVAN agrees with Newman. He does not see God in history. Partially, perhaps. There are values that become actual—beautiful goodness, heroic courage, the genius of the artist. And in these we may recognize a manifestation of God. But, when we look at the earth as a whole, God's will is as far as ever from being done in it as it is in heaven. It is a world in which good and evil are so inextricably mixed that it seems a matter of subjective mood to pronounce whether the good or the evil predominates.

It is difficult to say that we can see any progress

in history as a whole, except such as depends on the advance of knowledge and power. And the problem for faith is : how are we in any sense to conceive of God directing or 'overruling' history, if He allows the evil will of men so largely to determine it ? And this other problem (or perhaps the same problem otherwise expressed) : to what end is God directing the process ? No doubt a just state of things has a better chance of enduring than an unjust state of things. But some unjust states of things have endured for hundreds of years, and some relatively just states of things have been brought to a speedy end by accidents of the environment.

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No doubt also any one who wills evil finds the result in the end disappointing and bitter, finds that he has in truth missed his true good by choosing it. It is a cardinal doctrine of Christianity that this is so. But Christianity only affirms that it is so because it extends its views of the individual's existence beyond earthly life. If the view is limited to earthly horizons it would be impossible to show that disappointment and bitterness always follow the choice of evil. Selfish or sensual men of a hale bodily habit may, when they draw near to the end of a long life, feel that they have had, on the whole, a good innings and as much enjoyment as should satisfy a reasonable man. It is hard to see how we could pronounce that evil, within the compass of such a life, has proved self-destructive.

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The Christian way of dealing with these facts is to affirm that man's life here is but a little bit of life. This affirmation holds a large place in our Lord's teaching. Dr. BEVAN gives two pages of quotations, from the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus to the judgment scenes and including incidental sayings. According to Jesus, well-doing and well-being are in accord in the other world. And this is in agreement with the intense conviction which is commonly held that God is just. The man who does right ought, we feel, to reap happiness, and the man who does wrong unhappiness. That at any rate was the conviction of Plato and Kant. They could neither of them make sense of the universe unless there was a life

beyond death in which happiness was attached to well-doing and unhappiness to evil-doing.

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Further : the process of man's history on earth is bound sooner or later to come to an end. Life cannot continue on this planet for ever. It may come to an end by a cosmic cataclysm ; it may peter out by degrees. And then the globe will continue to whirl in space, a dead world, like the moon to-day. If man has no future except on this planet, all the millions who have lived here will be extinct. This view is compatible only with atheism. If God, on the other hand, will exist as Eternal Spirit after the globe perishes, the human spirits with whom He has entered into communion will also live as undying spirits. If this is so it makes a great difference to the way in which we regard the course of the world around us—the national interests, the social movements, the achievements and losses of our generation, the wars and desolations.

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The direction in which to look for the future of mankind, Dr. BEVAN says, is not along the course of history on this planet. It is obliquely *across* the historical process, not along it, that the millions of human spirits are always streaming. This life is only a platform where they remain for a moment on their journey to the unseen world. The future for the streaming generations is out there. The groups which seem so permanent—the family, the society, the nation—are merely frames within which during their time on earth human spirits are brought together to be exercised in different kinds of fellowship. The spirits, when their time of learning here is over, pass on, and the frames when they have served their turn, will some day be broken up.

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There is only one society, partially manifested on earth, which is an eternal frame, which continues as a society, in the world beyond death ; and that is the Mystical Body of Christ. This (stripped of the temporal features) was the hope of the early Christians. It is obviously other-worldly—*jenseits*, as the Germans say, 'on the side beyond.' That is still the hope of the Church to-day. For the Christian this is not the important

world. This life is not life indeed. Our career is not here. They were right who sang the pilgrim songs. Even the children might well sing : 'I'm a little pilgrim and a stranger here.' For that is what we are. God will be vindicated on the other side.

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This is very much what Browning says in *La Saisiaz*. It is also what the Psalmists said who had glimpses of another and better world. For them the hope meant that the inequalities of the present would be rectified. It was the spectacle of the innocent suffering and the guilty flourishing that gave birth to the belief in a future beyond death. Job had a glimpse of it for a moment in the same context. But in modern times we have had few who have stated it so clearly and definitely and as a final conviction as Dr. BEVAN. He presents it as the real solution of an age-long problem, how to square the facts of life with the sovereignty of a just and loving God. He sees the world as a place of training for souls, all the fitter for this because of the hard conditions in it ; but their real destiny is elsewhere. And therefore the unseen world is the important one, not the seen.

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An interesting volume has been published by Messrs. George Allen & Unwin under the title *I Believe*. The price is 15s. net. It consists of the credos, in the sense of the personal philosophies, of twenty-three distinguished (surely only in some cases ' eminent ') men and women of our time.

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The essays are unequal in quality. Some appear to have been published a good number of years ago, but are now provided with postscripts. Their general trend is socialistic, and their socialism is grounded in science rather than in philosophy or religion. They reflect for the most part the situation created by an abandonment of classical metaphysics and traditional religion, and are shaped by the grave social and political problems of the hour. The democratic note is more or less clearly sounded, though one contributor thinks that two cheers are quite enough for democracy (because it admits

variety and permits criticism) ; there is no occasion to give three !

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Among the better known contributors are Albert Einstein, Havelock Ellis, Julian Huxley, Sir Arthur Keith, Emil Ludwig, Bertrand Russell, and H. G. Wells. There is one definitely Christian philosopher in the group, Jacques MARITAIN ; and express sympathy with Christian ideals is given by Thomas Mann and John Strachey. Sympathetic upholders of religion, as distinct from Christianity, are Lin Yutang and Beatrice Webb. While these both wait upon science, they are both persuaded that science is not enough.

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The former writer advocates a kind of mysticism, such as preached by Lao-tse : ' a kind of reverence and respect for the moral order of the universe, philosophic resignation to the moral order, and the effort to live our life in harmony with this moral order.' The latter writer apparently deplores the decay of religious faith, but sees one hopeful portent : ' Men of science endowed with the religious temperament are to-day re-interpreting the mystical meaning of the universe ; and it is they who may bring about a new synthesis between our discovery of the true and our self-dedication to the beautiful and the good.'

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But let us glance at MARITAIN's contribution. It combines a personal philosophy with acceptance of the Christian faith in its Catholic form. He is not of those who reject the doctrinal view of life, but for him the doctrinal view of life opens up a higher order of reality than the natural, and a personal philosophy is fortified by energies which transcend it. The philosophy which he here affirms he names ' integral humanism.'

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The term humanism figures not infrequently in the pages of this volume of credos, and not only in the cultural and individualistic sense which it possesses in the context of the Renaissance. Thus Lancelot Hogben says that ' scientific humanism ' is the creed he professes and the profession he tries to practise. And Thomas Mann believes in the coming of a new, a ' third humanism,' distinct from

its predecessors : for 'it will have stout-hearted knowledge of man's dark, daemonic, radically "natural" side ; united with reverence for his superbiological, spiritual worth.'

MARITAIN's integral humanism is in line with this but appears to go beyond it with its definite inclusion of the transcendent. This is seen in the other name, 'Humanism of the Incarnation,' which he uses in description of the view he would uphold. It is the view that considers man in the integrality of his natural and his supernatural being, and sets no limits *a priori* on the descent of divinity into him.

The position of this distinguished Catholic philosopher is more elaborately set forth in his recent volume entitled 'True Humanism.' There, in particular, he contrasts integral humanism with socialist or scientific humanism and maintains that any type of humanity formed apart from God and the climate of love, created by purely external and social or technical means, will but end in the bankruptcy of pharisaic pride : a pride in the collectivity of the means of production in place of the old bourgeois honour and individual enterprise.

Yet in integral humanism the socialistic emphasis remains. The distinctive character of the new Christendom which is here visualised will be that the transformation or transfiguration of man, which is from above, should extend really, and not only figuratively, to the social structures of humanity. 'It is vain to assert the dignity and vocation of human personality if we do not strive to transform the conditions that oppress these ; strive to deal so that men can live worthily and gain their bread in honour.'

Canon Peter GREEN in everything that he writes is clear, sensible, and interesting. In his most recent book, *The Path of Life* (Longmans ; 3s. 6d. net), he writes for the plain man, setting down some of his 'thoughts on the Christian life.' Each chapter is subdivided into short sections which might be used as daily readings, but there is a strong line of reasoning running through the whole.

His general aim is to make clear the meaning and the issues of life, and in the course of his discussion he deals with various doubts and difficulties which beset the average mind.

Perhaps the most apposite chapter at the moment is that which treats of 'times of trial and testing.' Such a time has manifestly come upon us and upon the nations of the world to-day. And there can be little doubt that it was needed if man was not utterly to lose his soul. For God was not in all his thoughts. 'Not disbelief in God but just plain indifference to Him and forgetfulness of Him, was the chief sin of the day.' Man had grown to be full of a sense of his own sufficiency. He was saying, as he surveyed his own magnificent achievements, 'I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing.' But now as he labours amid a sea of troubles he is made to feel the greatness of his need. Some happy souls find God in the sunny hours of life, but 'for most of us some trouble, a realization of the truth that we have indeed "no money," is needed to drive us back to God.'

At such times prayer becomes a necessity. It was when he was at the end of his resources and devoid of human help that Jacob wrestled at Peniel till he saw the face of God. It was with prayer that the Saviour met the troubles and crises of His ministry. 'St. Peter, and they that were with him, wondered that when all men were seeking Christ, and the ball of immediate success seemed to lie at His feet, He should rise up a great while before day, and go out into a solitary place, and pray. But when the final battle against the powers of evil drew near, when the time came when it was Christ on one side and Satan and all his armies on the other, and a world's salvation depended on the issue, then Christ turns to the place of many prayers, and we may be sure that His hours, His whole nights of prayer, there and elsewhere, were reservoirs of strength to Him.'

And by prayer through times of trial we attain to the full assurance of faith. Job lifted his head above his troubles to say, 'Though he slay me, yet

will I trust in him.' So did the prophet who declared that though all should fail, 'yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.' This is no unique experience unattainable by the ordinary man. On the contrary, 'any one who will open his eyes and look round him will find men and women who seem to have everything against them, and whose burden might seem too heavy to bear, who yet go joyfully on their way, upheld by a strength which is clearly not of this world, nor of man's giving.'

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But if the worst came to the worst could our faith stand the strain? We have seen countries overrun and civilized people suffering such barbarities as the brutal Assyrians inflicted on the Jews of old. If such things came upon ourselves, if all the supports of a civilized society gave way and whole classes were ruined and robbed of all hope in life, could we still trust in God and rejoice in His salvation? Christian experience gives the firm answer. Yes, it is possible. In the darkest night of trouble faith has often been found to shine most brightly, and the walls of dungeons have often echoed songs of praise. None may venture to boast, but it is the witness of many who have passed through fire and water that they found the grace of God sufficient for their need.

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To many, however, there are very serious difficulties in the way of faith. 'Every day heart-broken wives, heart-broken fathers and mothers are asking, "Why did not God prevent the war? Was it because He could not? Or was it because He did not care?"' These are questions that lead us into deep waters. It may suffice here to say that the omnipotence of God in some mysterious way leaves room for man's free will. At this point God has limited His own power, and left a sphere within which man is free to do good or evil. Why was so perilous a gift given? 'Because where there is no freedom there is no virtue and no possibility of love. God did not desire sons who would be like perfect machines, working well because they could not help it. He desires sons who would serve Him freely for love's sake only.'

But could He not in His overruling providence have hindered man's sinful plans and desires from issuing in war? Doubtless He could. Why then did He not do so? 'I fear there is only one answer to that question. It is that in His infinite wisdom and love He judges the war to be a less evil than the continuance of a world such as we have seen since the Armistice. I for one would say: "We deserved nothing better." If the worst come to me personally, if I died slowly under a bombed and burning house, should I still have faith to say that? I would not dare to say Yes to that question. But I pray that I might have faith even then to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

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It must never be forgotten that this is a fallen world, not the world as God made it or wills it to be. It is a world where man's sin, in revolt against God's love, can work dreadful havoc, and where God's love can indeed save, yet so as by fire. 'If we planted thorns we must not be surprised if we do not gather grapes; if we sowed thistles we must not blame God if we reap no figs. Surely the first thing this war is calling us to is deep national repentance. That is the necessary preparation before we or our government can set about preparing for a better world for the days to come.'

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But what of the innocent? What of the children? What of those who have had no control in public policy or social life? Why should they suffer? It is a bitter and mysterious thing, but we must beware of making ease and earthly comfort our standard in judging human life. 'Have we not made just these things, ease, pleasure and comfort our idols and forgotten God? . . . Perhaps we are now being called to learn and lay to heart the lesson that "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." And our wisdom will be to receive the worst that comes to us as the chastening of a loving Father. For the evil of the world must be very radical and deep-seated if the Son of God Himself died on the Cross to cure it.'