

still instructive. So we welcome a very small volume entitled *The Secret of the Cross*, published by Messrs. Morgan & Scott (1s. 4d. net).

A series of Daily Study Notes on *The Gospel of Mark* by the Rev. G. Currie Martin, M.A., B.D., has been issued separately through the National Adult School Union (6d.). In eighteen days' study and within forty-five pages a clear understanding is made possible of the leading features of the Second Gospel.

A Translation of the Treatise Taanith (On the

Public Fasts), from the Palestinian Talmud, has been made by A. W. Greenup, St. John's Hall, Highbury, and has been published at the Palestine House, Hackney, London (6s. 6d. net).

On the subject of *Bishops, Priests, and Deacons*, Mr. W. Hoste, B.A., has published his opinion at some length and with some confidence (Pickering & Inglis; 3s. net). On the subject of *The True Church* he has collected the opinions of others and published them—fifteen opinions by fifteen persons, and he has given his own opinion also (Pickering & Inglis; 3s. net).

A Theology of Experience.

AN ADDRESS TO STUDENTS IN DIVINITY.

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EVERY man who enters the Ministry has before him the task of constructing for himself a theology of experience. Of course to endeavour such a task presupposes acceptance of the evidence for the historic truth of the Christianity presented in the New Testament—in the record of the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the experience of His apostles as witnesses to Him. It presupposes acceptance of Scripture as, not only the revelation of what Jesus Christ was and did when on earth, but as the means by which He reveals and manifests Himself to the souls of men who desire to know Him. The task may be aided and no doubt is so in the case of those brought up in the society of those whose lives are indubitable witness to Christ living in them; but it is every man's own task. What our Confession sets forth in the well-known words of its first chapter is more briefly put in the Larger Catechism. 'The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts and the scope of the whole, which is to give glory to God; by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation; but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that

they are the very word of God.' Such an experience alone can enable men to say to-day, 'We have heard for ourselves, and know.' This is the *testimonium spiritus sancti internum* which the early Protestants proclaimed as the way in which a certain persuasion of the truth must be reached by every soul for itself. Calvin, after describing the certainty of knowledge which comes through the teaching of the Spirit,¹ says: 'I state only what every individual of those who believe experiences in himself, save that words come far short of a proper setting-forth of such experience' (*Inst.* i. vii. 5).

It is of such experience I wish to speak as furnishing the material wherewith every one may build up a theology that is in truth his very own. Lest I should be misunderstood, let me point out that I do not in any respect depreciate the powerful evidence to the heavenly service and power of Christianity manifested in the lives of those who have been born of God, which has been effectively

¹ The words of Calvin defining this 'certainty' are:

'Talis ergo est persuasio quae rationes non requirit; talis notitia, cui optima ratio constet, nempe in qua securius constantiusque mens quiescit quam in ullis rationibus; talis denique sensus, qui nisi ex coelesti revelatione nasci nequeat.'

used by apologists from the days of Aristides and Justin to this day. The man who has the witness in himself cannot but become an evidence to others round him. Every living Christian proves a living Christ—and every worldling knows it. To the man himself such an experience is a vital fact; and repeated and accumulated experiences of such direct contact of the soul and the Saviour cannot but build up a theology, a knowledge of God, as by the prolonged intercourse of two souls in intimate fellowship they come to know one another. On His side this is wondrously taught in our Lord's farewell discourse to His apostles as when He said, 'I know mine own, and mine own know me; even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father'; on the side of disciples by the writings of apostles, as Paul and John, and the long roll of the fathers and martyrs and saints down to the Christ-filled lives we ourselves have seen and known.

We live in an age of inductive science, and men are impatient of authority claimed for ancient writings. They demand facts, severely tested facts, sufficient to establish what is claimed for them, and which every competently equipped scientist may put to the proof for himself. Let every Christian minister accept the challenge. It is reasonable, and it will be well for the man who demands it if you are prepared to meet his challenge, provided he is prepared on his part honestly to accept the facts you present. But I wish to speak more specially of how good it will be for you to be ready to meet the man of inductive science on his own terms.

In his instructive and charming Gifford Lectures on *The System of Animated Nature*, Professor Arthur Thomson says (vol. i. p. 9): 'The aim of science is to describe natural phenomena and occurrences as exactly as possible, as simply as possible, as completely as possible, as consistently as possible, and always in terms which are communicable and verifiable.'

It is a matter in the first instance of supreme concern for yourselves: that your belief should have the attestation of such practical experience of its power. I certainly do not suggest that acceptance of a Scripture doctrine is to be withheld till some definite *experience* attests it. Every one to whose heart the word of God has, by His Spirit, evidenced itself as His word, receives His teaching therein. But there is our Lord's word, 'If any

man willeth to do his will, he shall *know* of the teaching.' That speaks clearly of experience following on the obedience of faith. Nor by experience of the power of truth is meant some startling and unusual event in your spiritual life. It may come so; but rather is it to be looked for in the course of calm meditation on the Word and in the intimacy of prayer. As a well-attested fact such experiences do visit men's souls. In his interesting volume on *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James says truly: 'The real witness of the Spirit to the second birth is to be found only in the disposition of the genuine child of God, the permanently patient heart, the love of self eradicated' (p. 238).

It is well, therefore, to be a student of God's Word, with the abiding desire and expectation of such personal experience of the *reality* of what you read, for that means the very presence of Him who speaks. Nothing short of this is promised in our Lord's word, 'If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' And because this knowledge comes by experience it is limitless as that which is to be known. Not all the creeds and the endless volumes written on the Person of Christ tell as much as the seven brief words of the apostle—'Ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ Θεός μου'—'My Lord and my God' (Jn 20²⁸). Every truth of the gospel invites you to explore for yourselves and know its unsearchable riches—tempts you with the promise of a lifelong pleasure. Only thus indeed can any one attain to a satisfying knowledge. Take, for instance, the doctrine of the Atonement. It cannot but be a perplexity to one who seeks to learn it from the writings of men to find such diverse statements, even such contradictory, if not antagonistic, 'theories' and interpretations of it. You don't find these in the Scriptures. There are different views indeed, but there is no controversy or contradiction there, though it is written of now from one aspect, and again, as the writer's purpose demands, from another: now to manifest the love which purposed and performed, and again to demonstrate the righteousness it fulfilled, the guilt it expiates, the bondage it breaks. Experience will preserve most men from one-sided views, for at one time the guilt-troubled conscience will ask how God can be just and justify the ungodly; and again the heart will long to rejoice in the assurance

of God's love to it. So Newton says in one hymn :

I saw one hanging on a tree,
In agonies and blood,
Who fixed His languid eyes on me,
As near His cross I stood.

Sure never till my latest breath
Can I forget that look ;
It seemed to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke.

My conscience felt, and owned the guilt
And plunged me in despair ;
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,
And help'd to nail Him there.

Another look He gave which said,
' I freely all forgive ;
This blood is for thy ransom paid,
I die, that thou may'st live.'

And the same pen wrote that other hymn :

Hark, my soul ! it is the Lord ;
'Tis thy Saviour, hear His word ;
Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee :
' Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou Me ?'

Lord, it is my chief complaint,
That my love is weak and faint ;
Yet I love Thee and adore ;
O for grace to love Thee more.

Experience alone can discover how Christ's giving of Himself for us satisfies the measureless demands of heart and conscience. Then when you leave your study to go out as a physician of souls among your people, you will give a sympathetic ear to the various cases of religious experience which will appeal to you, able to understand and so to help. They will seek your help because somehow they *feel* that you are understanding ; and your words will have for them the strengthening of your experience.

Many years ago a stranger entered the room of a young missionary in a country district, and told his story of agony and shame for ill he had done and how he had sought help and failed to find it. The missionary spoke plainly of the grievousness of the sin in God's sight, and pointed the stranger to what God's word said of it, and how the same word assured the penitent that there was forgiveness and cleansing through the blood of Christ.

The words proved fitly spoken. As a result the young man attached himself to the mission as a devoted worker, and sometime afterwards told

the missionary how he had consulted others who made light of his trouble. 'But,' said he, 'the first light came to me as I left your house, and I said to myself he must know about this or he wouldn't have understood me—and if he has been through it there's hope for me.'

But you will gain for yourself thus far more than you give. Others will tell you of their own experiences of Christ. Bright young souls will tell with simple words of convincing reality experiences that will refresh and stimulate your own heart ; and saints far down life's journey will make rich contribution to your experience as you hear from themselves indubitable facts of their experience. Passages of Scripture which may have been obscure or meaningless to you will be illuminated for your after use.

And in your Bible class or pulpit you will find continually how much, both for yourselves and for them that hear you, depends upon how you speak. In the life of John Brown of Haddington it is told that on one occasion David Hume heard John Brown preach. It was a public function at which a young clergyman delivered his message first, in an eloquent style typical of the age. Brown followed in a sermon marked by his usual simplicity and earnestness. 'The first preacher,' remarked Hume to his friends, 'spoke as if he did not believe what he said ; the latter as if he were conscious that the Son of God stood at his elbow.' So true is it that though no man can define personality every one *knows* when it touches him.

No man can imitate continually the realism of the witness who 'cannot but speak the things he has seen and heard.' The knowledge of experience grows from more to more, so that no man who is always gaining it can be a mere repeater of his own past. You may have noticed with what fresh zest the man of science is always ready to discourse on his special theme ; the latest contribution to it—his own or others'—renews the ardour of his novitiate. He is always bringing out of his treasure things new and old. There are no new truths of the gospel to be discovered, but there are infinite discoveries to be made of the contents of the old gospel, and of the fulness of Him whom it brings to our knowledge. If any one should make the mistake of setting off to repeat the stock phrases of theology which he has learnt, he will soon run dry enough and be a weariness to bear. But he who realizes that he is

to tell of Christ's redeeming love, and realizes that love for himself, 'will find eternity too short to utter all its praise.' That is why I would earnestly pray you to address yourselves to the ministry for which you have been preparing in the spirit and with the devotion of the man of science who is always seeking *facts*, and more facts, by which to check, and assure, and yet more confirm what he believes, that you may so learn Christ as to be able to declare the truth as it is in Him, 'as exactly as possible, as simply as possible, as completely as possible, as consistently as possible, and always in terms which are communicable and verifiable.'

The one secret for this is that of which He

questioned His disciple when He re-commissioned him; for love alone can bind a man in willing bondage all his life long, and love alone can keep a man's heart for ever set on the constancy of such inspiring fellowship with Jesus Christ.

The apostle closes his Epistle to the Ephesians with a great benediction—'Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruptibility.' There will never be wanting assailing influences from within you and about you to seduce or scare you from your whole-hearted first love to Him, but may that benediction of the uncorruptibly loyal lover of Jesus Christ our Lord abide upon every one of you.

In the Study.

Virginitibus Puerisque.

How Old are you?

'How old art thou?'—Gn 47⁸ (A.V.).

THIS is a question we are all thinking about just now. Last month father received an important-looking document called a census paper, and in it he had to write the name and age of every person who was living in his house on the 19th of June.

But a census is taken only once in ten years, and this is a question we are asked very much oftener than once in ten years. Very few of you can remember the last census; some of you were not even born then, yet you can all remember being asked this question, not once, but many times. When you make a new friend, one of the first things you ask him is, 'How old are you?' And if you discover that you are almost the same age as he is you probably feel more inclined to be friendly with him. When you first go to school, the teacher asks you, 'How old are you?' And your answer helps to decide which class you are fit for. Later, when you go in for public examinations, it is one of the questions you must answer, and later still, when you apply for a situation or wish to enter a profession, it is one of the chief questions. So you see it is a very important question indeed.

But this very important question may be answered

in many ways, for we can grow old otherwise than just in years.

And the first question we would ask is—'How old are you in usefulness?' There was a great botanist, once, who had his garden laid out like a clock face. The flowers that opened at nine o'clock formed the hour figure nine, those that opened at ten o'clock the hour of ten, and so on. And when the botanist walked round his garden he could tell at a glance by the flowers that were open and the flowers that were closed what hour of the day it was.

Now sometimes people are able to guess your age by the things you can do or the things you have left off doing. Are you beginning to toddle about the floor? Then one year must be past. Are you trying to put little words together? Then it must be two o'clock in the timepiece of your life? Have you just begun to learn lessons and go to school? Then you must be five. Are you able to read story-books all by yourself? Then you must be seven or eight. Have you given up playing with dolls? Then you must be twelve or fourteen.

But suppose any one were to count your age by the kind and useful things you had done! How many days or years old would you be in helpful and loving deeds? If years were to be counted in this way we should find that some people whose hair was grey hadn't begun to live at all, and some