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Reviews.

Civilisation and Religious Values. Hibbert Lectures delivered in 1946 by H. D. A. Major (George Allen and Unwin Ltd. 7s. 6d.)

The main theme of this slender volume (128 pages) of four Hibbert Lectures may be summarised as follows. Civilisation being "the humanisation of man in society" (Matthew Arnold) and Religion being "the inner side of civilisation" (Menzies), modern civilisation needs a religion which is a unifying force, creatively evolutionary, scientific in its insistence upon truth, experiment and freedom; simple and attractive, rooted in moral, spiritual and aesthetic grace; practical and theocentrically humanistic and philanthropic. These requirements are supremely fulfilled by the Christian religion in its original inwardness and spirituality, liberated from the artificialities of its legalistic and ceremonial burdens. Dr. Major denies that there was any apocalyptic prediction in the teaching of Jesus Himself, and he would bridge the gap between Christianity and the scientific humanists by conceding to the latter that it is unnecessary to believe in miracles or Atonement by expiatory sacrifice in order to be a Christian. The last lecture closes with some interesting hints on the teaching of religion in the schools.

We fear that Dr. Major's method of bridging the gap between traditional Christian doctrine and scientific humanism is one of over-simplification. One can hardly be a Christian without believing in the Incarnation; but if the Infinite and Eternal Son of God through Whom the universe is created, governed and sustained, really was born as a human babe, surely this is a miracle of the most supernatural, stupendous and amazing kind. We must win the scientific humanists, not by eliminating the supernatural, but by showing that the supernatural is not irrational. Dr. Major perfunctorily rejects the Virgin Birth, as based on the LXX mistranslation of Isaiah VII, 14. He overlooks the fact that this "prophecy" had no place in current Jewish expectations and that it was the birth of Jesus that made it famous, not vice-versa.

Dr. Major's theme is one of absorbing interest, and his book is lucid and readable; but his treatment of the subject is too superficial, sketchy, hasty, and even careless. There is no Index. In a footnote on p. 84 we are promised "Appendix II, the Parousia", but this promise remains unfulfilled. There is only one Appendix: "The Historical Sources for the Life of Jesus." On p. 27 the quotation from Plotinus should read "the flight of

(not *from*) the alone to the Alone". On p. 36 "decreased in influence" should (we suspect) be "decreased its influence". On p. 22 there is an obvious misprint of the Greek alternative title of Plato's Republic. But over and above these minor blemishes, Dr. Major's concessions to the scientific humanists would involve a re-writing, rather than an understanding, of the New Testament; and they certainly need more justification than they are here given.

Nevertheless, despite its weaknesses, this book is well worth reading for its thought-provoking quality, and there is much in it with which we would agree. It is enriched by many interesting and useful quotations, some of which are less well-known than others.

A. W. ARGYLE.

Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits by Bertrand Russell.
(George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. 18s.)

The author tells us that the central purpose of this book is to examine the relationships between individual experience and the general body of scientific knowledge. His contention is that philosophers, since Berkeley, have been unfair to science because they have been unduly influenced by epistemological considerations, and he is trying here to expound a theory of knowledge that will do justice both to modern science and to the thesis, which he accepts, that all our data are private and individual. The result is a modified form of empiricism which, as a theory of knowledge, is convincingly sober in both its methods and its conclusions.

In the first section of the book the goal is set for the investigation in a survey of the findings of modern science. Part II is concerned with the problems of language, but its particular interest is in its analysis of the concept of knowledge, which is found to be "a much less precise concept than is generally thought". This has cleared the ground for the main inquiry, and Part III is an attempt to disentangle the data with which experience begins from the mass of inferences and assumptions that are involved in even the simplest statement about the external world. Part IV then goes to work on the inferred world of science and examines the principles on which inference from data is justified. The last two parts are devoted to two questions of primary importance: the first is probability which is fundamental because it has by now been shown that the conclusions of scientific inference cannot be more than probable. Finally the author is concerned to show what assumptions are necessary anterior to experience, if scientific inference is to be justified at all.

The book concludes with a statement of the modified empiricist doctrine to which these investigations have led, empiricism being accepted as less inadequate than any previous theory of knowledge. The final words tells us of the doctrine "to which we have found no limitation whatever", namely "that all human knowledge is uncertain, inexact and partial".

With an account of knowledge that rests ultimately on unknowable characteristics of the world and habits which man has in common with the animals, and whose success is yet measurable by the achievements of modern science, one wonders what other conclusion could have been drawn, though it is worth noting that it is a doctrine which has as much, and probably more, in common with the usual conclusions of theology than those of science. Such a conclusion may well prompt us to wonder whether knowledge can really be considered in isolation from the other parts of experience such as human relationships, morality, response to beauty—or at least whether we should not go back now and seek from these further help in our understanding of the world. If the conclusion were the climax of the book, one might well ask whether the journey to it had been worth while, but the value is in the journey itself and the commentary it gives on the assumptions of modern science and the doctrines of empiricist philosophy.

G. ELWIN SHACKLETON.

BAPTIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE ANNUAL MEETING

will be held on

THURSDAY, 28TH APRIL, AT 4 P.M.

at

BLOOMSBURY CENTRAL CHURCH,
SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, LONDON, W.C.2.

Speaker :

REV. GEOFFREY F. NUTTALL, M.A., D.D.,
New College, London. Editor, *Congregational Quarterly*.

Subject :

"HISTORY AND THEOLOGY"

Tea will be served at a moderate charge.