

Entre Nous.

What We Believe.

I found myself lately on a visit to a house where nine books stood in the spare room. The first one I took up was the autobiography of Augustine Birrell—*Things Beyond Redress*—in which I came across a chapter explaining how it was that the very sensitive writer, who had so much profited by intercourse with good folk and true, nevertheless could not bring himself to believe in the hope of immortality. The next book was the late E. V. Lucas's life-story. Here, to my surprise I found the genial author confessing to no sort of belief in religion. He wrote that he could never at any time feel drawn to the Faith, and added that for this reason—because one side of life seemed to him so miserable—he had tried to write of pleasant things.

These two books made me curious as to what sort of outlook I should find in the remaining volumes. From F. L. Lucas's *Decline and Fall of the Romantic Ideal*, which stood next to E. V. L., there was this sentence—'It is the dead that must help us to keep life living, the grace of Mozart and Ronsard . . . the courage of Hardy.'

But there was more, much more in my next book, the life of that fine young doctor John Melly of Ethiopia. There I came on a declaration of faith—one reads it wistfully, when one remembers how he died so young, in the Abyssinian conflict—'All things work together for good to them who love the Lord—that's not a banality, but an eternal truth. What's left of this life is at most an unimportant prelude—and there's all Eternity!'

Next, I read *A Wanderer's Way*, by Canon Raven. It is full of Christian confidence. 'To believe not merely that human society might be recast nearer to the heart's desire, but that God's eternal purpose, revealed in the whole process of evolution and supremely in Christ Jesus, is coming to its fulfilment, is to find at once an infinite scope for service and an infinite inspiration to serve. . . . We have only to lift up our eyes and we shall see here and now the King in His glory.'

It took me a considerable time to go through the vivacious recollections of the novelist, W. B. Maxwell. At the very end he speaks of his faith in the power of Kindness. 'In youth and age,' he writes, 'I have been given the same lesson from life. It all seems to fit together convincingly. If I had to say it with absolute plainness, I could but repeat it in increased strength, and say thus:

"Kindness. Be kind to people. And then, when you have been as kind as you possibly can, be a little kinder still."

The last three books on the shelf were all, as it happened, by brilliant literary people who had been ill constantly. They were all highly unconventional. Was any testimony of faith, I wondered, to be found in the *Letters of Anne Douglas Sedgwick*, she whose delicately etched stories were once so delighted in by many of us? She had a hard time of it, getting, we gather, slowly more and more helpless. 'You know,' she wrote from her sick-bed to a friend, 'though I can't accept orthodox religion, I think it symbolizes truths; for instance, that the Spirit, in which we all live and move and have our being, must be—thought—feeling—will—therefore a Trinity. And this Spirit incarnates itself in the world. Other dogmas of the Church seem to me to have great truth—if one divests them of their narrower interpretations and looks upon them as truths, and not facts.'

In Tchekhov's *Letters*, his confession of faith is strictly of this world; he wrote it when trying to fight consumption in Yalta in the Crimea, this man whose plays to-day command so attentive an audience—'I don't believe in our educated class, which is hypocritical, false, hysterical, badly educated, and indolent. I don't believe in it, even when it's suffering and complaining, for its oppressors come from its own entrails. I believe in individual people. I see salvation in individual personalities scattered here and there all over Russia—educated people or peasants—they have strength; though they are few.'

There remained Kathleen Mansfield's *Journal*. Her brilliant short stories are not forgotten, especially the set published under the title, *The Garden Party*. She, too, was a great invalid.

'I should like this to be accepted as my confession,' she wrote in her Diary in 1920, '. . . I do not want to die without leaving a record of my belief that suffering can be overcome. For I do believe it. One must submit. Do not resist. Take it. Be overwhelmed. Accept it fully. Make it part of life. Everything in life that we really accept undergoes a change. So suffering must become Love. This is the mystery. This is what I must do. I must pass from personal love to greater love. . . . Sorrow shall be changed into joy. It is to lose oneself more utterly, to love more deeply, to feel oneself part of life—not separate. . . .

Oh Life, accept me, make me worthy . . . teach me.'

Orthodox, and unorthodox, all the writers of these nine books, placed by chance on a shelf together, stated their attitude to religion and life.

CONSTANCE MILES.

T. S. Eliot.

It is doubtful if Mr. T. S. Eliot's new play, *The Family Reunion* (Faber & Faber; 7s. 6d. net), will ever have a tearing success upon the stage, but if there is to be a real movement towards the development of poetic speech in popular drama, this play will at least have important experimental value. The form, a kind of elastic iambic blank verse, goes into harness with the mood of the speaker, at times it may be a succinct, elegant prose, modern to the bone, at times poetry. Perhaps the passages with most charm and freshness of all lie in between those two regions:

The spring is very late in this northern country,
Late and uncertain, clings to the south wall.

The gardener has no garden flowers to give me
for this evening:

I had rather wait for our wind-blown blossoms,
Such as they are, than have those greenhouse
flowers

Which do not belong here, which do not know
The wind and the rain, as I know them.

If Tchekhov had been an Englishman he might have written like that.

But we are preachers and theologians, and here are burning pages we should not neglect. They will be freely read by those who are our readers. The drama is one of the inner life, and it is so real a reflection of a life lived in a tangle of different values that at first sight we are apt to call the play itself a tangle. The setting is elegant, but there is a distortion of form, as if one listened to strings playing on different keys. So we suffer because we are reading a tract which smites upon our conscience; there is the same dissonance in our own life, hide it as we may.

Here, in one drawing-room assembled, are those who pretend they do not see, or do not suspect, their own spiritual destiny, and those others who dare to brood, with staring eyes, upon their tragic fate, upon the tragic fate, stained with sin and retribution, which is the portion of mankind.

And it is in the *present*, that only eternal life which is the agony and ecstasy of the knowledge of God, it is in that present moment alone that sin and

retribution and forgiveness meet. But in Mr. Eliot's play only the two bitterest sufferers—Harry, who returns for a few hours to the home and people of his childhood; and Agatha, who had loved Harry's father and should have been his mother—are aware of this.

Everything tends towards reconciliation
As the stone falls, as the tree falls. And in the
end

That is the completion which at the beginning
Would have seemed the ruin . . .

What we have written is not a story of detection
Of crime and punishment, but of sin and expiation.
It is possible you have not known what sin
You shall expiate, or whose, or why. It is certain
That the knowledge of it must precede the
expiation.

It is possible that sin may strain and struggle
In its dark instinctive birth, to come to con-
sciousness,

And so find expurgation. . . .

When Harry believes this, a sense of peace comes to
him—

I feel happy, for a moment, as if I had come
home.

One may regret that Mr. Eliot introduces the Eumenides at this point. Possibly he did so from a theological impulse. One suspects that he wished to show that the fundamental truth behind the Greek conception and the Christian is identical. That may be true, but the inevitable artistic disturbance which we have already suffered, though with acceptance and understanding, was about as much as we could bear. The strain becomes almost too great. A certain simplicity which all great drama demands is forfeited. And this anachronism in so essentially modern a work might so naturally have been avoided, and the moral effect heightened, by the use of that Christian symbolism which would have been nearer to Mr. Eliot's own outlook. For, even if the world is rapidly donning the garments of neo-paganism, the mass of playgoers and play-readers are still more amenable to Christian images than to Greek. And though there may be interest for the theologian in finding likenesses between Greek and Christian thought, Mr. Eliot knows that for this tragic situation Greece alone cannot suffice. More than that, the form and matter of the play is far more Christian than Greek.

Where does one go from a world of insanity?
Somewhere on the other side of despair.

To the worship in the desert, the thirst and deprivation,
 A stony sanctuary and a primitive altar,
 The heat of the sun and the icy vigil,
 A care over lives of humble people,
 The lesson of ignorance, of incurable diseases,
 Such things are possible. It is love and terror
 Of what waits and wants me, and will not let me fall.

EDITH ANNE ROBERTSON.

Life Has Taught Me.

Writing in the *Forward Movement* of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America, Sir Wilfred Grenfell of Labrador says: 'Life has taught me to love her with all the zest of a game in which I am permitted to play. To-day, at well over seventy years, I am just as keen for life as ever I was. I have always believed that life is eternal, for my conscious spirit so ardently hoped it, and such a universal, instinctive desire in normal life cannot be doomed to disappointment. 'When his friends asked Socrates, about to drink the lethal draught, where they should bury him, he replied: "Anywhere you like if you can catch me." In the words of the late Sir William Osler, "I would rather be wrong with Socrates than right with Plato."

'Life has taught me to regard my body purely as a link between my spirit and the material world. It warns me continually not to damage my carcass by either swallowing or breathing in toxins, or by letting any of my physical assets atrophy through lack of care or exercise.

'Life has taught me that one reason my pennies were given me is to guard the welfare of my bodily machine; but that if we look to that machine for final satisfaction we are bitterly undeceived. When control passes from "me" to my body, from the spiritual to the material, shipwreck is inevitable. On the other hand, life teaches me that to those led by honour, love and unselfishness is given the laurel wreath.

'Life has taught me that I can be of worth to God. One of the many irrefutable evidences of the Divine nature of Christ to me has always been His insistence that the light of life can only be obtained by experience. He never set an examination paper that we must answer correctly. His was a challenge to action. He wanted not wise men to understand Him but brave men to follow Him.

'Life has taught me the menace of any man's claims to infallibility. The claim to infallibility is as stultifying to progress as it is dangerous. The most encouraging aspect of science of to-day is its

growing modesty. The wisdom of to-day is the folly of to-morrow. If I were to practise medicine as I was taught it in the sacred Lecture Halls of London and Oxford, I would land in the penitentiary.

'Life has taught me unfailing optimism in spite of our poor presentation of Christianity. We of the twentieth century are no longer cave men. If righteousness, joy and peace are prizes to be won, education is not meant to fill buckets with facts but to light candles for the darkness of the world. The hope of bringing the Kingdom of God to earth does not depend on politics or law or force, but on the conquest of ourselves. The true *joie de vivre* is not in getting, but in giving, not in indulgence but in control. There was only one class which Christ condemned to the "place prepared for the devil"—the unprofitable, those indifferent folk who did nothing.

'I have heard it said that the world is divided into two classes: those who try to do things for others and those who spend their time criticising them because they do not work in some other way. The perfecting of this world is our human problem, and in that lies our dignity in life, our joy and our justification.'

The Bible and the Koran.

'The Koran itself bears clear testimony to the Bible. Other sacred books have no reference to the Gospel or to Jesus Christ. But Mohammed could not escape Him. This is one of the most remarkable facts in the study of the non-Christian religions. Sir William Muir has collated all of these references [to the Bible] and commented on their character and significance. There are 131 passages altogether, 65 of the Mecca period, and 66 of the Medina period in the Prophet's life. The Old and New Testament are highly spoken of as God's earlier revelation and as "containing light and guidance for the pious."

'On the cover of an Albanian translation of the Koran there is a reproduction of an old German picture of Christ and the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. But the title reads: "Mohammed, Abu Bakr and Ali on Their Way to Mecca"! So even Christian art is being adopted by Moslems!'¹

¹ S. M. Zwemer, *Dynamic Christianity and the World To-day*, 158.