

BOOKS AND THEIR WRITERS.

THE *Life and Letters of Sir William Robertson Nicoll*, by T. H. Darlow (Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., 10s. 6d. net), is an ideal biography, and its author is to be warmly congratulated on his success in giving us such a satisfying picture of one of the outstanding personalities of our time. The career of this great journalist was in many ways an amazing one. He was a son of the manse, and his father was a book lover whose immense library acquired by much self-denial laid the foundation of his son's devotion to literature. Born in 1851, he passed from Aberdeen University in 1874 to the charge of a church in the small village of Dufftown. He moved in 1877 to Kelso, and through a breakdown in health he was obliged to give up pastoral work and to migrate to the south in 1886. He suffered throughout his life from a weak lung and frequently had to struggle with ill-health. Yet in spite of this serious handicap he was a tremendous worker and, sustained by an indomitable will, he won for himself a unique position in journalism. In face of difficulties which would daunt most men his boundless energy led him to achievements of a rare character. In 1886 his lifelong association with Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton began, with results of an unusually satisfactory nature on both sides. His first journalistic enterprise was *The British Weekly*, which inaugurated a new era in religious journalism. It was well said of him that "he made popular journalism literary and he made religious journalism interesting." *The Bookman*, *The Exp-positor*, *The Woman at Home* and a number of other magazines were also founded and conducted by him. In 1909 Mr. Asquith recommended him for the honour of knighthood, and in 1921 the high distinction of Member of the Order of Companions of Honour was added. He was an omnivorous reader, and the rapidity with which he could get through a book makes the ordinary man envious. The average speed of the majority is said to be about 8,000 or 9,000 words in half an hour; he calculated that he could read 20,000 in that time, and in 1903 he wrote: "I think I average two books a day." At the same time he was keenly interested in men and affairs, and for a good portion of his life was in touch with leaders in religious and political circles. He was a generous helper of others, and especially of young writers of ability who were commencing their literary career. Ian Maclaren and Sir J. M. Barrie were among his discoveries. He had also the great gift of keeping his friendships fresh. One of the most charming letters is the testimony to their long friendship from Barrie which reached him on his death-bed. Although wide in his religious sympathies, his own views were thoroughly orthodox. He declared that "The historical Jesus is the article of a standing or a falling Christianity." Of the importance of theological study he had no doubt. His view was given in these words: "If there is one lesson which my experience has taught me it is the supreme importance for the

Church of theological learning. No Church is wise which does not recognize the necessity of setting its best men apart for study and for teaching, and of trusting and supporting them generously." At a time when many seem to regard "false theories and perverted creeds" as matters of little importance, it may be well to give a passage summarizing his views on several points of a controversial nature.

Mr. Darlow writes: "After all, as Bishop Butler said in his oracular way, religion is nothing if it be not true. Nicoll believed that sacerdotalism is not true, because it contradicts the whole genius and tenor of the New Testament. If Christ and His Apostles had intended to found a hierarchy of priests, the New Testament—in its affirmations and in its omissions—would have been a book altogether unlike the book it is. Nicoll utterly rejected the dogma of 'tactical succession' (as he called it) which makes a bishop's hands the sole covenanted channel of Divine grace, passed on from one generation to another. He found that dogma foreign to the primitive church and disproved by the facts of spiritual experience in every century since. . . . Although he held, as his letters show, anything but a low doctrine of the Christian Sacraments, he firmly held that those Sacraments are 'not exempted at any point from the law of moral action. . . .' He believed, indeed, that men degrade the Gospel to the level of magic when they put any outward forms on the same plane of importance with Christian faith and Christian character."

The chief result of his life-work was to give to the Free Churches a position in journalism such as they had never had before, to give their thinkers and writers a platform from which they exerted a world-wide influence, and to secure to the Free Church press a weight of authority and a massive dignity of scholarship that placed it in the first rank and made all sections of the Christian Church indebted to it and grateful for its work. To use a favourite expression of one of my friends, "he impinged on Western Christendom" with powerful effect.

For some years past the Bishop of London has arranged for the issue of "Special Books for Lenten Reading." He has secured the help of many writers of intellectual power and spiritual insight. Most of the series are useful contributions to our devotional literature, and can be used and enjoyed by Churchpeople of all schools of thought without hesitation. This year the book is called *Personal Religion and the Life of Fellowship* and is written by the Bishop of Manchester (Longmans, Green & Co., 2s. 6d. net). The Bishop of London describes it in his introduction as "a most powerful and convincing book," and adds: "The reader will find himself in the grip of a clear and strong mind which has thought out some of the most perplexing problems in the world, and gives us in well-balanced language his solution of them so far as they are capable of being solved." The subject of the book might perhaps be best indicated by saying that it is a practical explanation of the impli-

cations of Christian brotherhood as applied to the whole of life, and specially with reference to our present economic conditions and our social system. It commences with the Christian doctrine of God. Much needed emphasis is laid on the absolute necessity of a true conception of God. I am glad to see that throughout the Bishop stresses the importance of truth in every aspect. The constant effort at compromise in so many departments of life to-day seems to indicate a degree of weakness in regard to the necessity of maintaining truth, or it may be of doubt as to the possibility of attaining it. Indeed, in some quarters this seems to be taken for granted, with unfortunate results.

Upon a true conception of God depends our true relationship to our fellow-men. It cannot be said that the thought of God as Love has been as extensively applied as an inspiration in the affairs of life as it ought to have been. We seem to have reached a stage in Western civilization in which by the trend of circumstances we are being forced to think out this matter. Dr. Temple sets this thinking out as an appropriate task for Lent. He does not offer any drastic or revolutionary remedies for social ills. In fact he warns us that "the Christian remedy for the ills of society is fundamental and therefore it is scarcely ever possible to apply it as a solution to actual disputes when they arise." But the Christian principles of service, fellowship, regard for the sacredness of personality and the power of sacrifice, point the way to the Christian's duty. The closing chapter on conversion as the primary need makes a powerful appeal for the consecration of the whole of life, which will meet with a ready response from all who are in earnest in seeking to have the mind of Christ, and to deal with the sorrows and troubles of the world from His point of view.

Dr. Vernon Bartlet has brought out a revised edition of his *Early Church History; A Sketch of its First Four Centuries* (Religious Tract Society, 3s. 6d. net). This history was first written about thirty years ago, and the passage of time has brought changes of outlook and additions to our knowledge. Dr. Bartlet has considered it advisable to bring out the present edition with these facts in mind. The result is a book of great interest to students of the early ages of the Church. He emphasizes as one of the chief points in his plan the treatment of each generation apart, as "this gives play to the individuality of an age, and brings out the connection between the various aspects of its life; while it also enables us to see the development from age to age, going on, as it were, before our eyes." As far as possible the writers of each period are allowed to speak for themselves. The outlook and developments of later days are therefore excluded as much as can be, and thus one fruitful source of error in the interpretation of past times is eliminated. In fact the extracts from the early writings and the surroundings of the personalities enable us to realize the foolishness of some dogmatists who desire to use expressions of early writers as proving dogmas formulated much later.

Rhetorical and poetical passages have been pressed into service as formal statements of doctrine with unfortunate results, by writers whose historical acumen would have guided them aright if bias had not influenced their judgment. Here the spiritual side of the development of the Church is prominent. The organization receives due treatment, but its subordinate place is recognized. The rise of errors in regard to sacerdotal and sacramental teaching is indicated. The Apostolic Succession is shown to have had no connection with the idea of a special grace transmitted, but was an obvious means of guaranteeing the truth of teaching which came down in Churches which could trace back the succession of their bishops to Apostolic days. It is interesting to note that one of the earliest indications of teaching as to a change in the sacramental elements was among the gnostic heretics. "A certain Marcus has the notion of change in the elements themselves, when he secures by a trick the transmutation of the contents of the mixed chalice into the colour of blood; and the Valentinian Theodotus, as cited by Clement of Alexandria, says that the consecrated elements in both Baptism and the Eucharist are changed dynamically." Cyprian's novel theories of the Church and the place of the episcopate are carefully examined, and Evangelical Churchmen will agree with the judgment "Never was a theory in reality more subjective in its origin; never one less historical." This just estimate of the unfortunate influence of Cyprian on the thought of the Church is accompanied by a tribute to his personal qualities. The account closes with Augustine, of whose twofold influence on the development of Western Christendom a clear statement is given. In many ways this history stands by itself in the impression it gives of the literature and life of the first four centuries. It is of unusual interest, and represents phases of thought which are too frequently neglected.

The Rossetti family contributed much to the artistic life of England during the nineteenth century. The youngest of its members was Christina, whose religious verses are widely known from the inclusion of some of them in various collections of poetry. S.P.C.K. has issued a new edition of her *Verses* (3s. 6d. net) with a discriminating introduction signed W. K. L. C. It is a book to take up at odd moments, and in special moods. Her appeal is limited, yet there is a charm in her expression of her religious experiences which brings pleasure and gives help to those who have shared the same thoughts and feelings. Like many another to whom the world owes much she learnt in suffering what she taught in song. In the introduction we are told that her religious views were Tractarian and the explanation is added "that is to say Anglo-Catholic." This may be misleading to some who are familiar with the Anglo-Catholicism of to-day, which is widely different in tone and outlook from writers such as Keble. These verses breathe the spirit of the Bible, of which the authoress was a constant and devoted student. There is nothing in these verses such as we

should expect from a modern Anglo-Catholic of "Our Lady" or "Sweet Sacrament Divine" or other exotics from Roman sources which are of so frequent occurrence in the devotional verses of the latest type of Neo-Catholic. If anything there is the touch of old-fashioned Evangelical fervour which gave vitality to the earlier Tractarians, who were in many instances brought up in Evangelical homes and never lost the benefit of their early religious surroundings.

The religious article in *The Times* every Saturday has become a much-appreciated feature of our leading newspaper. It is evidence of the sincere interest taken in the spiritual side of life by numbers we may be sure far beyond the limits of organized Christianity. The articles are written by men of broad outlook and deep insight into the problems of the individual life and the principles underlying our social system and the foundation of our corporate relationships. To have a number of these valuable Saturday articles carefully selected and issued in handy volumes is a boon appreciated by many. A third series has recently appeared, under the editorship of Sir James Marchant, in a volume called *Visions and Strength: Problems of Life and Faith* (H. R. Allenson Ltd., 5s. net). It is pleasant to renew acquaintance with some of these essays again, and to have in permanent form such interesting and stimulating thoughts. The first portion of the volume deals with problems of life, and treats some practical matters of experience with psychological analysis. Self-love, Suspicion, Consistency, and Obedience are examples of the subjects considered. We do not profess to agree with all that is said. There is, for example, the difficulty of reconciling moderation in religion with the whole-hearted devotion which does not permit of compromise and compels controversy in the best sense of that much-defamed word. Yet the writer assures us that moderation "prevents short views, avoids controversy, and recognizes that truth is larger than our measures." The problems of faith may not be of equal interest to all, but they present matters which deserve careful thought from all who value the spiritual interpretation of life.

Christian conduct in relation to belief is one of the subjects to which we return again and again with fresh interest as the changes of thought are reflected in life and character. In a short but very interesting study of the subject, *Religion and Life* (Eliot Stock, 3s. 6d. net), Mr. W. Robinson, M.A., B.Sc., Principal of Overdale College, has dealt with some of the latest phases of thought and their bearing on life. It is a useful account of some of the more recent movements, such as Liberal Protestantism, as well as an estimate of their qualities and their defects. Pharisaism is the enemy of real religion. It divorces religion from life. Conduct, for it, is the observance of a code of ritual. He divides the Christian world to-day into four schools of thought—Orthodox Catholic, Orthodox Protestant, Catholic Modernist, and Liberal Protestant. His own sympathies are with the second of these. He says Chris-

tianity "must in every generation seek its guidance and inspiration in the New Testament, and particularly in the life and teaching of Jesus." He makes a discriminating examination of the Eschatological teaching of recent years, pointing out the defects of Schweitzer and his followers. He also deals with the modern revival of Gnosticism with equal care. His conclusion is that the eternal principle of Christianity is *active love*—not a thing of the emotions, but of the will. "The world needs to see in the Church and in Christians what it saw in Jesus, a complete absence of self-seeking, which absence the New Testament calls Love, and it needs to see this applied in every department of life." It is a book that will repay careful study.

Two smaller publications of interest deserve special notice. Mr. John Murray has published the Prime Minister's Presidential Address to the Classical Association under the title *The Classics and the Plain Man* (6d. net). Mr. Baldwin has been coming forward of late as a man of many hitherto unrecognized gifts. His versatility has shown itself in many ways, and not least in this remarkable address to the Classical Association. He shows his own love for the great authors of antiquity and a discriminating sense of their special contribution not merely to culture but to civilization and social order. As a statesman he naturally applies the teaching of the past to the needs of to-day. For him "the outstanding and peculiar strength of the Roman character lies in the words *pietas* and *gravitas*." He draws a significant lesson from the statement written when the Roman legions were leaving Britain that "the Roman word could no longer be trusted." His concluding story of the bell which he heard in Florence is a fitting close to a memorable address.

The other publication is of quite a different character. The name of Miss Marjorie Bowen is well known as a novelist who has dealt effectively with the life and times of William III. She has collected some of the results of her studies in connection with the writing of these novels into an essay which is published with the title *Luctor and Emergo: The State of England at the Peace of Ryswyck, 1697* (1s. 6d. net). She gives a vivid picture of the characteristics of the Stuart dynasty, and its malignant influence on the fortunes of England. She contrasts with them the honesty, courage and wisdom of William and the benefits which he won for his adopted country. His conflict with France closed with the Peace of Ryswyck, which marked the beginning of a new epoch in our national life. Of this she says in her concluding words: "Indeed, broadly speaking, the epoch of the Peace of Ryswyck lies like a sharp line between the ancient chaos of religious disputes, tyrannies, and social disorders, and the modern epoch of progress, order, industrialism, commerce and democracy." The booklet is of great interest and deserves the careful attention of students of history.