

Book Reviews

A PROPHECT OF THE SOUL : FYODOR DOSTOIEVSKY
*by Zenta Maurina, translated by C. P. Finlayson from
the Latvian. (James Clarke & Co.) 6s.*

Is Dostoievsky also among the prophets? Karl Barth says, yes; and links him with Abraham, Jeremiah, Socrates, Grünewald, Luther and Kierkegaard (Romans Eng. trans. p. 117). Prince Mirsky says, No; "the real Dostoievsky is food that is easily assimilated only by a profoundly diseased spiritual organism" (History of Russian Literature p. 358). Miss Maurina agrees with Barth: Dostoievsky is "a prophet of the soul."

Her book finely translated, is a real charisma from Latvia to England. Miss Maurina is inside her subject; but she can see the wood as well as the trees. Her sympathy with Dostoievsky not only makes her portrait a living one; it also inspires her readers to go to Dostoievsky himself to see "whether these things are so," few people could have so clarified the vision or given such real clues to the understanding of the agony of Dostoievsky's struggles in his search after truth.

Compared with what she has achieved such blemishes as a possibly misplaced first chapter, the lack of a table of dates and the cover of the book seems insignificant. The influence of Dostoievsky upon European thought might have come in better as an appendix and could well have shown more clearly its effect upon its theology as well as its literature. For example, and significantly, in Barth's great commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (Eng. trans.) there are far more references to Dostoievsky's than to any other extra-Biblical writer.

As the title of her book suggests, Miss Maurina sees Dostoievsky's greatness pre-eminently in his understanding of human life in all the range of its manifold experience. His characters, grouped by her into (1) the criminals, (2) the rebels against God and (3) the apostles of Christ (p. 121) show his ambition to get at the soul or "inner face of a man" (p. 113). She shows clearly that it is people that

Dostoevsky knows and is interested in—almost to the complete exclusion of nature, times and seasons—and if the tragic element preponderates, we must remember the author's grim experiences not only of personal moral failure, but also of Siberian exile and its legacy of epilepsy.

Dostoevsky loved children—but his characters are always city children, pale, nervous and highly strung (p. 155). That after all is not surprising, in view of his own childhood, the spirit of which Miss Maurina has so wonderfully caught in her picture of the dawn. "There is sadness in the dawn. Such is the feeling of every man who has seen the bleak, silent, prelude to the sun's rising, of every man who does not go through life as a dreamer unawakened" (p. 36). This is not just Baltic flatland, Russian tragedy or jaundice: it is Job and Jeremiah; it is also a part of Gethsemane and Golgotha, for Mary, if not for Jesus too.

There is truth, if not the whole truth, in Oswald Chambers' remark that "the basis of things is not rational, but tragic: if it were rational, the Cross of Christ would be much ado about nothing." Could it have been found finer expression than in this interpretation of Michaelangelo's "Morning"?—"A powerful woman with sluggish ponderous limbs is already awake, but hesitates to raise her heavy eyelids, loth to admit the harrowing kaleidoscope of life. Her shoulders are broad, yet she shrinks from taking up the day's burden; her half-open lips are all too conscious; along with life's honey they must draw in its gall. And nowhere is there any escape" (p. 36).

Miss Maurina shows us that it is against such a background that Dostoevsky's religion of Life takes meaning, not many miss the ringing triumph of Christus Victor; not many miss the glorious challenge, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light." But from Siberian exile we get the picture of a man with "ruined digestion, epilepsy, rheumatism, and nevertheless—feeling well" (p. 61). Significantly enough the only book allowed him at this time was his Bible. We may miss, despite pp. 215 ff., something of that heroic ethic on which von Hugel set such store, but against the grim and sombre Russian background of his own experience it is no small achievement to have portrayed in living literature, if not altogether in personal life, the picture of religion as

"perpetual development and active love, with no trace of asceticism nor yet of compromise, a religion of freedom with the personality of Christ at its centre" (p. 210).

Here, whether from Dostoievsky or from Miss Maurina, is a clear challenge. Either the Evangelical doctrine of freedom in the spirit springing from the experience of free forgiveness finds expression in freedom of life or it is nothing but orthodox hypocrisy. Because our faith is too shallow, our roots too worldly, our outlook too fearful, have not many of us fallen into the pathetic Galatian *via media*? "Having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect in the flesh?" (Gal. iii. 3). "If we ask who inspire us most, those who shun the cruel touch of life and shut their eyes to its horrors or those whose hearts are full of the arrows of Saint Sebastian and who nevertheless raise their hands to bless life? There can be only one answer" (p. 222). Here is shown to us all "a more excellent way"; here is "living water"; and, very humbly may I suggest, here is a tract for these times—and not least for us Evangelicals.

J. E. FISON.

THE CONFLICT OF THE CROSS

by O. E. Burton. (James Clarke) 3s. 6d.

The Rev. O. E. Burton has been for many years one of the most striking figures in the somewhat motley religious life of New Zealand. The winner of a Military Cross during the last war, he is now propagating a pacifism of an unusually thorough-going kind. In theology his mind is at least a very independent one. In the present work he dismisses as "unethical" many aspects of the Old Testament conception of God; but he is no ordinary modernist, and insists that the prophets so plainly predicted the Messiah's coming that their supernatural inspiration cannot be reasonably doubted. He regards the idea of evolution as decidedly overdone, and sees traces of a supra-historical "fall" in the cruelties of animal nature as well as in human sin. A burning devotion to Christ crucified inspires the whole book. But one cannot help wishing that his thought were governed less exclusively by his own inner fire, and more controlled by that written Word which is, after all, the one primary means by which Christ rules His Church from age to age.

ARTHUR N. PRIOR.

READINGS IN ST. JOHN'S GOSPEL

Second Series : Chapters XIII—XXI.

By William Temple, Archbishop of York. (Macmillan & Co. Ltd.) 8s. 6d. net.

Those of our readers who were so fortunate as to read the first volume of these Readings in St. John's Gospel will rejoice to know that the second volume, which completes the Archbishop's study of the Gospel, is now available. It is a long time since the religious world was given the opportunity of acclaiming a great commentary, for such this fine study of the Fourth Gospel can well be styled. Not that the work is a Commentary in the strict sense of the term. It is not, as the Archbishop states in his original Preface, which he reprints at the beginning of this volume for the benefit of those readers who do not possess the first volume, "a systematic commentary or exposition; nor is it intended for scholars or theologians. . . . Again, it is not a series of devotional imitations, though it contains some of these. It has no distinctive and consistent character. But it is an attempt to share with any who read it what I find to be my own thoughts as I read the profoundest of all writings." Such is the Author's own modest description of the work. But in whatever way the work may be described, everyone will agree that we have here a most valuable study on the Fourth Gospel which will enrich the spiritual life of countless average Christians. For it is for the ordinary Christian that the Archbishop writes and he steadfastly adheres to the aim throughout.

This second volume deals with St. John xiii to the end. The Archbishop has divided the Gospel into a series of Acts—five to be precise—which serve to indicate very clearly the various distinctive sections of the Gospel and provide an analysis both helpful and illuminating. To give an example. Chapters xviii and xix represent Act iv. "The Conflict of Light with Darkness," and contain four sections styled successively: "The Arrest," "The Ecclesiastical Trials," "The Trial before Pilate," "The Crucifixion." Such is the kind of framework into which the Archbishop fits his observation on the Gospel. Incidentally so helpful are such analyses of New Testament writings, that we wish more writers inserted them.¹

¹This is one of the satisfactory features of the edition of the New Testament issued by the Lutterworth Press under the title *The Book of Books*.

It is very tempting in a book of this kind to make quotations to show the style and the method adopted by the author. The volume is full of sound expositions which time and again light up the meaning of the author of the Fourth Gospel, which, by the way, the Archbishop believes to have been not actually by John the Apostle—a view to which he inclined until recently—but John the Elder “who was an intimate disciple of John the Apostle.” But he adheres to the view “that he records the teaching of that Apostle with great fidelity; that the Apostle is the “Witness,” to whom reference is sometimes made, and is also the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” He concludes his slight discussion of the problem—a full discussion he rightly regards as out of place—by stating that “It is not possible to say which sections of the Gospel come direct from the Apostle; but I am sure that we are near the truth in maximising than in minimising these.

The Archbishop in his Introduction has a good deal to say that is extremely helpful on the nature and character of the Fourth Gospel. To those who for example find difficulty in the obvious contrast in our Lord's method of teaching as represented by the Synoptists on the one hand and St. John's Gospel on the other will find the Archbishop's words in the section headed “Historical Reliability” most illuminating. And with that Section must go that on “The Johannine and Synoptist Picture of Christ,” for in it the Archbishop is emphatic that “the themes were actually handled by our Lord, and that the Gospel gives to us what His utterance was afterwards known to have contained.” And he proceeds to give a fine illustration on the difference between a mere fact of history and an historical fact interpreted.

These are days when we are all anxious for a revival of the study of the Bible. We could not conceive of a better way to encourage such a highly desirable revival than by a perusal of these two volumes. We would only add a request in conclusion. There are naturally many references in the text to the Johannine Epistles. Is it too much to ask the Archbishop to give us a third volume containing his thoughts on these writings?

C. J. OFFER.

THE NAZARENE

by *Sholem Asch*. (George Routledge & Sons Ltd.) 8s. 6d.

Any sincere and competent attempt to portray the life and ministry of Jesus Christ is assured of the interested sympathy of those who have found in Him the way, the truth, and the life. Sincerity and competence are evident throughout this volume, the work of a Polish Jew, who has given us the fruits of a generation spent in travel and study.

Mr. Asch's skill is to be seen, for example, in his use of psychological device to produce the framework of the story. A twentieth-century "theologian," victim of an anti-Semite monomania, finds himself in fellowship with a Jew whose excellences he grudgingly recognizes as marking him "the exception that proves the rule." From this association, by the medium of awakened "memories" and deciphered manuscript, there results the threefold telling of the life of Jesus. Cornelius, Roman Hegemon and Ciliarch of Jerusalem, begins the story. With sure and vivid descriptions he recalls the distant land and days of Jesus as a self-consciously superior but spiritually sensitive Roman must have known them. One of the finest chapters in the book describes the inward and emotional experience of one who, under the spell of the Rabbi of Galilee, so far forgot himself as to throw, for a moment, reserve and decorum to the winds. Judas Iscariot, still loyal, enthusiastic and hopeful, takes up the tale, his experiences revealing both his inward uncertainties and his Master's sympathy. The grand and awful climax of the story comes to us from a young disciple of Nicodemus, with whom we live in an atmosphere of realism and reverence.

From the point of view of Christian orthodoxy this book may not add much to our knowledge of the Incarnate Word or of "the Mind of Christ." But for two other reasons, it deserves warm welcome and gratitude. To read it is to know the world into which Jesus came. And to know that is also to understand the relevance of the Incarnation to human history and to human need. Secondly, it is a sign of our times, and a cause for special gratitude, that this so sympathetic and far-seeing account—at times it is almost an interpretation—of the life of Jesus should come to us from the pen of a modern and cultured Jew.

T. W. ISHERWOOD.

THE EPISTLE OF CHRISTIAN COURAGE

Studies in the First Epistle of St. Peter. By the Very Rev. E. G. Selwyn, D.D., Dean of Winchester. (Mowbray & Co.) 2s.

This volume is based upon that Letter which is closely packed with doctrinal and ethical teaching as relevant to-day as when it was written.

1. THE CHURCH AND THE WORD. The call is to holiness and also to the discharge of social and civic obligations. The Church is called to be world-renouncing, but it is not world-despairing (p. 33).

2. TROUBLE, HOPE AND DUTY. Christians were "strangers" and living "in complete lack of security, being exposed at any moment to slander, defamation of character, boycott, mob-violence, drastic action by the police, and even in some cases death" (p. 42). But the Christian "philosophy of trouble and how to meet it" is contained in the Apostle's statement "you *rejoice* in that you have now been somewhat distressed and troubled it may be by trials of many kinds."

The author speaks in high appreciation and rightly of Archbishop Leighton's comments in a former age. The Archbishop, however, most certainly was mistaken when he made the Hebrew of Isaiah liii. 6 mean "all their guiltiness *met together* on His back upon the Cross."

The third lecture is upon THE IMITATION OF CHRIST. Dr. Selwyn has some excellent things to say about the Apostolic doctrine of the Atonement by Christ the "sin-bearer". Christ is unique and alone but St. Peter urges his readers to copy the spirit of Christ in so far as the way lies open to them now to exhibit meekness. If converted and changed men can imitate Christ then they will do something towards winning the world for Him.

The volume before us is the work of a scholar with a knowledge of to-day and its needs. We gather that it is, as it were, the firstfruits of a larger production. Such a commentary will be most welcome. In the words of Dr. Selwyn "No Epistle has a more timely message or is more closely concerned with the things that go to make up the golden quality of Christian courage."

R. S. CRIPPS.

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER BOOKS

Here are five books edited by Dr. Oldham and published at 1s. each by the Sheldon Press. In various ways they suggest the Christian remedy for the spiritual, political, industrial, educational and ethical diseases of our age. The titles and authors are :

1. THE RESURRECTION OF CHRISTENDOM

by Dr. J. H. Oldham, in which he seeks to provide a programme for all Christians.

2. EUROPE IN TRAVAIL

by the well-known broadcast speaker, Mr J. Middleton Murry, which is an examination of totalitarianism. The author believes that it has come to stay.

3. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

by Professor Fred Clarke, is an English interpretation of the changes necessary in cultural, religious, and technical education if English Society is to hold together.

4. THE MESSAGE OF THE WORLD-WIDE CHURCH

by Dr. W. Paton, deals with the rapid progress of the Christian faith outside Europe.

5. CHRISTIANITY AND JUSTICE

by Canon O. C. Quick, Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford, which is concerned with the ethical side of the present situation and inter alia has some wise words about pacifism.

The general teaching of these books is that the regeneration of human life might be accomplished by a body of men and women who believed to the last fibre of their being in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is, of course, much more in these volumes. There is much that is challenging about freedom and unemployment; democracy and security; education and totalitarianism. We earnestly commend these books to all who are thinking for themselves and not merely adopting mass opinion.

A. W. PARSONS.

THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH :**A Study of Distortion and its Remedy.***By Charles E. Raven, D.D. (Hodder & Stoughton.)*
8s. 6d. net.

Anyone acquainted with modern religious literature knows the kind of writing to expect from the Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. His books are always learned, as we should expect from a professor, but, what we do not always get from professional sources, written in an attractive and vigorous style. And the present volume proves to be no exception. A subsidiary title indicates that the book is "A Tract for the times in preparation for the new Reformation." What exactly is to constitute the new Reformation we must leave our readers to discover for themselves. It is, however, obvious from the sub-title that Professor Raven regards historic Christianity as being very largely a progressive distortion of the original religion of Christ, and the book is an effort first to indicate in what ways the distortion is evident in history and then to attempt to make plain in what directions the Church of the future may emancipate herself from tendencies which modern life have proved disastrous to her influences.

Most of us would no doubt agree with a good deal of what the Professor maintains. We are all in varying degrees only too conscious of the deficiencies of the modern frustration of the Christian Religion by the churches of Christendom, with the possible exception of the Roman Church which, so far as outward signs give any clue, present to the now Roman world the appearance of complete satisfaction with his interpretation of the original Gospel. Dr. Raven regards the core of his problem as "the confusion between the dynamic faith of the Apostles' age, and the developments, accretions and distortions by which our presentation of it has been affected. In seeking a remedy for these historical results he rejects both the Catholic standpoint which denies or ignores their existence, and the Protestant which would advocate re-laying a foundation for Christianity *de novo*. He appears to desire to evolve a kind of *via media* or an Erasmian reformation of the existing institutions developed in the process of centuries. In embarking upon his task, Dr. Raven divides the present work into three parts, "first

to examine the characters of Apostolic Christianity ; then to show how the character suffers by distortion . . . and finally to examine the extent to which the distortion if admitted can be rectified." Needless to say the writer deals with each section of the subject with great thoroughness, and with a mastery of apostolic and pro-apostolic literature which he reveals by many generalizations illuminated by flashes of real historic insight. These make entertaining reading, but many will disagree with the writer's judgments, especially those in which he criticizes one or two of the books of the New Testament in trenchant, and somewhat dogmatic fashion. On the other hand, on more than one important problem many readers will be disposed to accept the Professor's guidance. It is good to see the importance of history to Christianity vindicated so forcibly. It is equally satisfactory to observe the stress laid on the incompatibility of pessimism with Christianity. Dr. Raven is disposed to maintain that the future of Christianity in the face of dominant ideologies depends very largely on a recovery of the due place of nature and history in the official presentation of Christianity. Some may feel that so simple a solution of the great and pressing problem of the estrangement of the masses from the Churches is hardly likely to achieve the desired results. No doubt much that the Professor says on this subject is extremely relevant to the existing situation. But a careful perusal of the third part of the book in which one is encouraged to look for indications of the way in which the main contentions are to become actual in modern religious life is somewhat disappointing.

For in spite of much distortion, obscurantism and ineffectiveness the historic faith of Christendom has still its ancient force. Christians can still draw on the unsearchable riches of Christ. The power of recuperation and revival is always present. There are not wanting signs that even within the moribund institutional Churches—if we are so to regard them—a new spirit is at work. But to achieve the Professor's aim of a new Reformation will demand in every quarter intensive prayer, study and practical devotion in addition to that re-orientation which he so ardently desires. Nevertheless, this is a valuable contribution to the life of the Church of the future.

C. J. OFFER.

RELIGION AND THE ENGLISH VERNACULAR

by R. R. Williams. (S.P.C.K.) 4s. 6d.

This is a useful little volume. It is an endeavour "to study a phase of English religious history from a new angle"; and the author traces the movement by which the English Bible replaced the Vulgate in the life of the Church, with special reference to the religious experience that lay behind it. The opening chapter on the mediæval background gives a vivid, and one would say faithful, picture of religious life in the fourteenth century; and in the chapter devoted to the New Learning and the Reformation there is a fine tribute to the work of John Colet. If, in a later chapter, we are not told anything fresh about William Tindale it may be because there is nothing fresh to tell. Mr. Williams makes his point that the Scriptures in the mother tongue have had an important influence on the development of spiritual experience.

JOHN A. PATTEN.

**THE HEREAFTER IN JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN
THOUGHT**

with special reference to *The Doctrine of Resurrection Moorhouse Lectures*, 1938. By Charles Venn Pilcher, D.D. (S.P.C.K.) 7s. 6d.

In his six Moorhouse Lectures the Bishop-Coadjutor of Sydney set himself the task of investigating New Testament teaching on the hereafter "in the light of that Jewish thought-world which forms their background"; in some cases he has thought it necessary to look at that thought in the light of the thought-world of the Ancient East. The final object of this comparative study is to "form a judgment as to what is the husk, what is the kernel of the teaching of Scripture." To those who accept Kraemer's dictum in "The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World" that "The origins of Christianity are irreducible," in other words, that it is useless to "seek to explain it as the outcome of religious development in the Jewish and Hellenistic world," this work will have little attractive in it. Even a purely objective reading of it, however, will find it distinctly disappointing.

The work's chief claim to notice is its treatment of rabbinic thought about the hereafter. The author has made

large and on the whole adequate use of Strack-Billerbeck's *magnum opus* on the Talmud, which is unfortunately only available to those who know German. When a comparison with Christianity is being made, a statement of facts is not sufficient; they must be interpreted as well. Here the three fundamental errors made by most recent writers on the subject are repeated. There can be no reasonable doubt that Judaism was profoundly influenced by the teaching of Christ and His apostles. This influence was both positive and negative. The fact that it is chiefly seen in the intensification of an already existing trend and that the rabbis took good care to hide the fact ought not to lead us to deny it. Then the author seems to ignore the effect on Jewish thought caused by the destruction of the Temple (A.D. 70) and the perhaps even more catastrophic suppression of Bar Cochba's revolt (A.D. 135). It is really meaningless to compare New Testament teaching with rabbinic teaching after the latter date. Then—we were tempted to write, of course—he has fallen into the pitfall so few Christian writers on the Talmud have avoided; he has not distinguished between *Halakah* and *Hagadah*. The former dealing with the interpretation of the law can always be taken at its face value; the latter gives us an insight into rabbinic thought and fantasy and normally needs to be taken with a pinch of salt or even the whole cellar full. One must be very careful in using *Hagadah* to establish doctrine. In fact, we very much doubt that the rabbis had any doctrine about the hereafter and the resurrection except the simple affirmation that they would be.

The author's treatment of the New Testament must be considered even more disappointing. In considering the *When* and the *How* of resurrection he discovers two self-contradictory strands in the teaching both of our Lord and His apostles. Any theory which has to be based on self-contradiction in Paul and above all in our Lord Himself must be suspect. This suspicion is strengthened by the author's finding the Empty Grave a difficulty and by his suggestions about the resurrection body, for which no word of support can be brought from the Scriptures.

Yes, this is a disappointing work, the more so as it contains so much valuable material, especially from apocalyptic and rabbinic sources.

H. L. ELLISON.