

Editorial

WITH its preaching, asserts P. T. Forsyth¹, Christianity stands or falls. And he adds, "With preaching Christianity stands or falls because it is the declaration of a Gospel. Nay more—far more—it is the Gospel prolonging and declaring itself". For the Gospel, as Forsyth goes on to explain, is not a mere doctrine or statement or promise. "It is an act and a power: it is God's *act* of redemption before it is man's message of it. It is an eternal, perennial act of God in Christ, repeating itself within each declaration of it. . . . The gift of God's grace was, and is, His work of Gospel. And it is this act that is prolonged in the word of the preacher, and not merely proclaimed."

In a sense, these words may be said to represent the burden of Forsyth's masterly book, now republished, comprising originally the Yale Lectures on preaching for 1907. As we should expect, the author's approach to the subject is essentially theological. His concern is not for the preacher's art but for the preacher's message. In particular, he pleads for "positive preaching", which can only emerge from a "positive theology". The work was written, of course, at a time when theological liberalism was in the ascendancy; that fact plainly underlies the whole of his argument. Yet what he has to say is no less relevant to our own day when, although liberalism is in decline, it is just as necessary for preaching to find its centre in the historic Gospel of the Cross, and for the preacher to distinguish between good news and good advice. "Positivity" means therefore for Forsyth, among other things, historicity. It means likewise the primacy of the "given", that is, a Gospel of free, unmerited grace.

"The Gospel descends on man, it does not rise from him. It is revealed, not discovered, not invented. It is of grace, not works. It is conferred, not attained. It is a gift to our poverty, not a triumph of our resource. It is something which holds us, it is not something that we hold. It is something that saves us, and nothing that we have to save. Its Christ is a Christ sent to us and not developed from us, bestowed on our need and not produced from our strength, and He is given for our sin more than for our weakness." In clear, incisive words such as these, Forsyth is constantly calling the preacher back to the Gospel as the final and decisive "deed-word", spoken by God in the life, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. He sees so clearly, and helps us to see clearly too, the futility of a merely "social" Gospel which is man-made and man-centred. The only powerful Gospel is the Gospel that is rooted in a theology of experienced grace. "We can never fully say 'My brother!' till we have heartily said 'My God'; and we can never heartily say 'My God' till we have humbly said 'My guilt!'"

Perhaps sufficient has been said to indicate that this is a big book, big in every sense of the word. It grapples with big themes: it faces big issues. No one who is called to the ministry of the Word could

¹ *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*. Independet Press, 10/6.

fail to read this work without gaining fresh insight into the nature of his calling and the content of his message.

Another book on preaching has been re-issued in a revised edition, *The Mystery of Preaching*¹ by Dr. James Black of Edinburgh, whose death was so recently announced. It has this in common with the previous work, that it originated in a series of lectures on preaching, namely, the Warrack Lectures of 1923; but in almost every other respect the book presents a striking contrast to that of Forsyth's. Whereas the approach of the one is theological, that of the other is technical. Dr. Black sets out with an eminently practical purpose in view: to offer guidance and advice to men training for the ministry with regard to the preparation, construction and delivery of their sermons. And almost without exception what he has to say is genuinely helpful, being characterized by an abundance of common sense, good humour and shrewd judgment. Its value is enhanced by the fact that it is based upon the writer's own life work as a preacher and freely illustrated from his personal experience. Perhaps one quotation may be permitted, if only to show that in the fundamental matter of theology Black is very much of one mind with Forsyth. "Use fear, gentlemen, healthy fear: and preach 'sin'. Sin in its protean forms is the world's big fact. It is so big that it takes a Cross with a Christ to measure it. You will never save a man by making his sin a casual thing, something a little regrettable, or as an ordinary process through which, by experiment, a man climbs to higher things, a thin gospel of 'good in the making'—mankind falling upwards. That may be fashionable to-day, but its condemnation lies in the fact that it leaves the world untouched and unredeemed."

Among the articles that follow in this issue, dealing with the subject of Preaching, we are particularly glad to welcome contributions from two distinguished American scholars. Dr. T. O. Wedel is Warden of the College of Preachers, Washington Cathedral, and Dr. Andrew W. Blackwood is Professor of Homiletics in Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey. The other articles on the same theme consist of a brief devotional study by the Rev. W. Leathem; an article by the Principal of the London College of Divinity on Expository Preaching, dealing with the modern background of the expositor's task; and a challenging call to Evangelistic Preaching, by the Rector of Birmingham. The article by the Bishop of Sodor and Man on "Evangelicals and the Holy Communion" is the substance of a paper read earlier in the year at the Oxford Conference of Evangelical Churchmen.

¹ Published by James Clarke, 6/.