

## CURRENT ISSUES.

No society is better served in the way of reports than the British and Foreign Bible Society. Its popular report for 1922-1923 is called *The Bridge Builders* (The Bible House, London), and costs only 6d. A cheap and good report, finely illustrated, and written with some imaginative power. The society is viewed as a bridge-builder, overcoming the divisions between races by means of the Bible. "The Great War," it has been said bitterly, "has turned bridges into chasms," and both in and beyond Europe there is an increasing need of the spirit which triumphs over prejudices of race and nationality and class. To foster this spirit is the function of the Bible Society, working under the Christian Church for the great end of reconciliation and goodwill.

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The hindrances are not ignored in this report. A colporteur in Portugal ruefully reports that he has had to shave off his beard, because he was tired of having it pulled so frequently. Another report from India admits that "the followers of Gandhi will often forbid the people to buy the colporteur's Scriptures, and will even get hold of copies and tear them to pieces before his eyes." But there are more encouragements than discouragements. "No man," says the editor, "who has measured the tremendous chasms which divide men can indulge in rosy expectations of an imminent golden age of harmony and peace. But it is a fact of deepest significance that a common Christian conscience is actually spreading throughout the world. The Bible is becoming the common possession of the nations, a common text-book of ethics and religion the world over." He adds: "As the work of the Church extends, old conflicting ideas of the Deity are giving way to a knowledge of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and morals are being built upon the foundation of the New Testament."

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Are they? One would like to think so. But at any rate the Bible may be trusted to make its own deep appeal to what is deepest in the human mind. It is a varied appeal. Yet the central element in it is the impression made by the portrait of Jesus in the Gospels. The editor reminds us that "what a well-known Roman Catholic writer said of his French fellow-countrymen is in general true about other peoples of Western Europe: 'The Christ is almost unknown among them.' The Child in His Mother's arms, the terrible Judge of the Sistine Chapel, the pitiful Figure of the Crucifix, one of the numerous *Cristos* that have their place among the patron saints—yes, but not the Lord of life and thought. Him they learn to know in the pages of the New Testament. Many people, to whom the Christ of the Gospels comes with the shock of a glad surprise, would echo the sentiment expressed by a Spaniard: *Me gusta el Jesus natural, no mortificado como lo presenta el clero* ('What delights me is the life-like Jesus, not the figure devoid of all vitality presented by the clergy')."

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The real Jesus is never more real than in His teaching. Professor Kennedy notes, in his article in the present number, some books which make this teaching intelligible. For it needs interpretation if it is to reach and sway our modern minds. Many people are familiar with certain words of the Gospels, and yet are unable to attach very much meaning to them. If something is not done to rouse their minds, they soon proceed to assume that there is not very much meaning in the words at all. Take, for example, the Lord's Prayer. No part of the Bible is more familiar, and few more require and repay thought. Yet I am surprised to learn, from correspondents over the country, what an amount of utter misconception there is about the petitions of the Prayer. One man wrote to me, in explaining his request for information, that he had never heard a sermon on the Prayer, though for thirty years he had been a regular church-member. I hope this is not normal. But the Lord's Prayer is one of the deep, simple passages in the New Testament which evidently are not preached upon as often or as accurately as they should be. When clergymen write to ask for a note of some modern books to show them how to preach upon it, I usually refer them to books like Father Tyrrell's *Lex Credendi*

or Dr. Gore's *Prayer and the Lord's Prayer*. Now there is another for the list.

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This is Mr. Studdert Kennedy's *The Wicket Gate, or Plain Bread* (Hodder and Stoughton, 6s.), the ripest book which he has written. His second title really explains the object of the eleven chapters. "We are seeking for the plain bread of religion, which a man must have in order to live; and we could not seek for it in a better place than in the Lord's Prayer. If the essence of Christianity is what all men, at all times and everywhere, have accepted as its sum and centre, the great Prayer would stand the test better than the great Creeds, firmly as I believe that the Creeds are implicit in the Prayer." It is with this purpose that Mr. Kennedy prints these eleven chapters of exposition. Slices of Plain Bread they might be called. He serves them up attractively. What makes the book valuable is the evident thought which lies behind it. Some books on the Lord's Prayer are weak and pious; others are arid and critical; others again are too rhetorical. Mr. Kennedy knows that the Prayer is unintelligible except to experience, but he also realises that it involves great dogmas, and his pages contain an admirable blend of dogmatic and practical Christianity.

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Mr. Kennedy's sub-title and some stories in the Bible Society's report about the effect of stray pages of the Bible upon individual lives, remind us of a story told by the Sadhu Sundar Singh. A man in the Central Provinces of India, who hated Christianity, one day opened a copy of St. John's Gospel when he was travelling in the train. In anger he tore it up and flung the pieces out of the window of the compartment. It happened that a plain seeker after truth was walking at that very moment along the railway line, a Hindu who for some years had been, like Justin Martyn before his conversion, trying to find the truth about life. This man picked up the torn pieces of paper. On one he saw the words, "everlasting life." On another, "the Bread of Life." Puzzled by these phrases he showed the bits of paper to a friend, who warned him not to read the papers; if he did he would be defiled. However, the man bought a copy of the New Testament for himself, and eventually became a Christian evangelist. "Really," as the Sadhu remarked, "the

torn pieces of St. John's Gospel proved to be a piece of the living Bread—the Bread of Life." Now, as Mr. Kennedy says, if anyone does not obtain the plain bread of life in his book, he may at least be helped upon the way to where it can be found. The best result of reading any book about the Lord's Prayer is to be sent back to Him who spoke the Prayer. And sometimes, by accident or coincidence or by any of the terms for what is really Providence, the New Testament becomes living bread for people in out-of-the-way quarters.

### *THE TEN BEST BOOKS ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS.*

THE field covered by our subject is an immense one, and it may be advisable at the outset to remind readers of the distinction between a treatment of minute details and the handling of fundamental principles. Of course, the one will often merge into the other, and it will sometimes be difficult clearly to separate them.

I place first in my list a book which has stood the test of a long life-history, the late Professor A. B. Bruce's *Training of the Twelve* (T. and T. Clark). It does not, indeed, profess to describe the Teaching of Jesus in the strict sense, but all students of the Gospels know that there is comparatively little in that Teaching which does not bear on the Training of the disciples. So the book, from its own point of view, includes a very wide range of material. It is true that an insufficient place is assigned to the transformation wrought by Jesus in the conception of *God*. And, curiously enough, the excellent paragraphs which do occur on the subject are found in a section dealing with the Fourth Gospel. But the book as a whole is epoch-making. The author is alive to the spring-like freshness of the Synoptic Gospels. The impression they have created on his mind has imparted what one may almost call a romantic flavour to his treatment. Its