

## CURRENT ISSUES.

WHEN Professor Buchanan Gray died at Oxford he had ready his presidential address to the Society of Historical Theology. This has now been printed in the Proceedings of the Society for 1922-1923. The subject is Hebrew Monotheism.

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Dr. Gray does not believe in a primitive Hebrew Monotheism at all. He points out that down to the exile the Hebrews were not even a "monolatrous" nation; they did not, as a whole, worship one God. The worship of Yahweh was often combined with that of other deities. Even the first Commandment assumes that other gods, other national gods, did exist; it forbids Israel to worship them, and, as we know, Israel did not always obey the command. The first time that real monotheism is propounded is after the exile, by the great prophet who is unluckily called "The Second Isaiah." As Dr. Gray shows, "in almost identical terms with Muhammed the prophet asserts that there is no god but one; only with him, this one sole god is the god who had grown familiar to Israel as Yahweh, though not generally credited till now with this uniqueness; whereas to Muhammed the one god whose sole existence he proclaimed had lost practically all hold on the attention or affection of the Arabs."

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Now Xenophanes, the Greek philosopher, was a contemporary of the "Second Isaiah," and Xenophanes has been claimed as an exponent of monotheism. But the paradox is, as Dr. Gray remarks, that the first contact between Greek civilisation and Jewish life led to a temptation to abandon monotheism. He also declines to believe that the "Second Isaiah" owes much or indeed anything to Zoroastrianism. Indeed, he agrees with those who regard it possible and even reasonable "to explain

the figure and functions of Satan in Zechariah and Job as original Jewish developments."

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Such is Dr. Gray's thesis. In Hebrew religion, he insists, the moral or ethical element dominated the speculative. It even dominated speculation, till the question of evil was left unanswered. Religious experience always throws up the problem of sin and evil, as a source of moral dualism. How is the origin of evil, or how is a personal evil spirit, compatible with the one God? Does not the universe imply a moral disunity? Judaism in the Old Testament looks at this problem, and then looks away. Zoroastrianism postulated a sort of co-eternal Author of evil, but Israel clung to unity in the Godhead. "Job in the end," as Dr. Gray observes, "recognises the problem as insoluble; a moral disunity in life has been considered and is left unexplained; the intense reality and unity of God remains."

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In Dr. Gore's new book on *The Holy Spirit and the Church* there is a significant admission about immortality. He rightly argues that Jesus sometimes appealed to fear. "Fear him who after he has killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." Dr. Gore quotes this, adding that "the repudiation of this sort of fear seems to me to be one of the silliest features in modern religion." There is perhaps one even more silly feature, the sentimental tendency to regard God as a magnified parent, as if that embraced all the facts and factors in the moral situation of sin and guilt before the Divine Love. However, the wholesome emotion of fear and awe does need to be recalled. Dr. Gore's warning is sound on this point.

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He goes on to consider, in passing, the three alternatives with regard to the future of the impenitent. Universalism? That he regards as incompatible with the New Testament. Everlasting punishment? But "everlasting" is not an adjective of time, in the New Testament, but of intensity; the apocalyptic images have to be "translated into non-temporal ideas, if we are to understand them truly." Conditional Immortality? Well, Dr. Gore seems to incline towards this possibility. He points to language in St. Paul "which seems to identify the

## TEN BEST BOOKS ON THE FOURTH GOSPEL 243

ultimate issue of things with the absolute and universal triumph of good—when God shall be 'all in all'—which has made some thoughtful men conceive that the state of the lost may carry with it the ultimate dissolution of personality and personal consciousness." And he adds, "I cherish this hope, finding the idea of actually everlasting torment unthinkable."

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It is "an uncertain interpretation," he admits. But the recent tendency to query whether immortality is an essential quality of the soul has evidently impressed him. It is the theory of potential immortality, as worked out in Dr. R. G. Macintyre's book on *The Other Side of Death*, and, from the point of view of New Testament exegesis, it might be defended as a fair inference from the language of the Fourth Gospel. Probably, the emphasis on moral responsibility is enough. If we argue speculatively from that, contending that real life is life in accordance with God, then other life may be viewed as so unreal as to lose any quality of permanence. But the argument is a metaphysical inference, which will be a relief to some, just as it may be a horror to others.

### TEN BEST BOOKS ON THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

I FANCY even the truly learned, for whom, needless to say, I cannot speak, would find it difficult to choose from the extensive literature on the Fourth Gospel with the certainty that they had chosen what is best.

With two exceptions, which are specified below, I have set down in my list the books that have helped me most. I have done so in the humble hope that the experience of an old minister who wound up his pulpit work with a systematic course of lectures on the Fourth Gospel, conceived on modern lines, may be useful to some ministers in active service, who feel that they ought to do something educative for their congregations with a book, which the most devout of their people read probably more intently than they do any