

CURRENT ISSUES.

THE Master of Selwyn College, Cambridge, has published the Hulsean Lectures which he delivered six years ago. He calls them "The Goodness and Severity of God." They are issued by the Student Christian Movement, which published lately a large volume called "The Lord of Thought," by Miss Dougall and Mr. Emmet, on the apocalyptic and eschatological element in the teaching of the New Testament. Dr. Murray does not always agree with Mr. Emmet's elimination of that element from the vital Christian message, and gives reasons for differing. He does not admit that the apostles and evangelists are discredited because they mistook the date of the Last Day; he thinks that their conviction, which went back to Jesus Himself, did not involve a literal fulfilment.

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But this is by the way. Dr. Murray's earnest thesis is that the salvation of all men is the everlasting purpose of God. He does not feel attracted by conditional immortality. And an attitude of reverent agnosticism does not satisfy him in considering the fate and future of mankind. He desires a view which does not leave us "dumb before the most paralysing fears and the most stimulating aspirations of the human heart." So he argues acutely in favour of a final triumph of good over evil. "I believe," he says, "that Jesus spoke out of the fulness of His own heart when He said that no true Shepherd could rest as long as a single member of His flock was missing. I believe, therefore, that He will go on trying one method of approach after another, until He wins an entrance through all the doors that are closed against Him." And this involves a probation after death.

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Dr. Murray realises that he has to argue this in the light of
VOL. II. NOVEMBER, 1924. 21

the Bible. He is not content to utter pious hopes. The first of his lectures is entitled: "The Bible a living fountain of light on the mind and will of God." That is, he approaches the subject as "a convinced believer in the authority of the written Word, and in the presence of the Spirit of God with His Church in all ages to guide us into all the truth little by little as we are able to bear it." Now this raises a problem. How are these two convictions to be held together? The testimony of the Bible and the intuitions of conscience, or of the Church's consciousness—how are they compatible?

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Dr. Murray reminds his readers: (i.) that "to deny the validity of the veto of conscience on all that claims to come to us from God is to cut at the root of all faith in the inspiration both of the Bible and of the Church." (ii.) The verdict of the Church needs now and then to be revised, and revised in the light of fuller knowledge of what the Bible really teaches. (iii.) There is fresh light to come from the Bible itself. Or, as he prefers to put it, there is a "tremendous store of spiritual energy that is latent in the pages that we handle so casually." Dr. Murray thinks that we to-day are living in an age when such a fresh revelation of light and power is to be expected, in a "last time" or day of visitation." And on what more vital subject than the doctrine of the Last Things? His lectures were delivered towards the close of the great War, and they naturally bear marks of the strained atmosphere of that period, when the thought of immortality assumed special prominence. Five or six years have made a difference, however, in the mental atmosphere. The judgment of men is less apt to be affected to-day by the emotional tension under which these lectures were composed, or at least delivered. But the fundamental question of method remains: how is a fresh re-statement of any theological issue to be related to the authority of the Bible? This means the discussion of such ultimate questions as those of inspiration and authority. And behind these, behind other problems too, like that of the re-union of the churches, lies the deeper question of what is meant by development? It is time that some of these were brought into the open and discussed afresh. They are or ought to be living issues.

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Does every one know what a serviceable book eightpence will buy ? Some do, but others, in the active service of the Church, may be still unaware of the small books issued by the S.P.C.K. called "Question Time in Hyde Park." The fifth series has just been published, edited by Professor Clement F. Rogers. Any one who has to deal with current religious difficulties ought to possess this pamphlet and its four predecessors. They give exactly the right answers to ordinary objections. The wisdom and knowledge which they put at the disposal of slower-witted Christians is something to be grateful for.

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This fifth series is devoted to questions about Christianity and Conduct. The questions are real. Now and then they are unfair, but they are invariably answered fairly. Sometimes the inquirer misunderstands because he has mistaken what was said by the speaker, and the result is amusing. Thus one man asked, after an address on the Divinity of Christ, "How can you say that the Iceni who fought with Queen Boadicea drew up the Nicene Creed ?" But as a rule the queries are honest, intelligent expressions of perplexity.

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Sometimes, even on economic matters, they are prompted by an acquaintance with the New Testament. Most of us have at one time or another been taken to task on the parable of the labourers in the vineyard, for example. Were they treated fairly ? Well, here is how this was dealt with in Hyde Park. One man asked : "Do you think it was fair that the labourers who worked all day in the vineyard should get no more than those who only did an hour's work ?" The answer given was frank. "Quite. They got the fair day's wage that they bargained for. It wasn't the fault of the others that they only got an hour's work all day, and even if it was, the first lot were no worse off because the others had a stroke of luck. It was very natural, of course, that they should feel aggrieved. I can quite sympathise with them. I often feel like that myself, but I am not proud of it. It is an element in fallen nature that has to be corrected. The feeling that you are injured by other people's good fortune is a very contemptible one, surely."

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This fifth series is the last of these small books. Professor

Rogers hopes that they will be circulated, and it is a reasonable hope. They ought to be in the hands of all ministers and clergy who are in living touch with the outsider to-day. It is all to the good that people should voice their perplexities instead of suppressing them, and it is needful that ready answers should be forthcoming, so far as answers can be given. A set of books like this provides material which is apt, candid, and satisfactory. They represent the sifted experience of eight years' work in Hyde Park, dealing with the objections and inquiries of all sorts of people, and Professor Rogers deserves the gratitude of many for the skill and neatness with which he has conveyed his methods to his fellow-Christians.

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When Jesus was arraigned before the Jewish Council, two witnesses declared that they had heard him say, "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days," or words to that effect. The charge was deadly, and it clung to the minds of the Jews. They taunted him with it as he hung upon the cross. But what did the words really mean? The Jews took the saying literally, of course. But according to the Fourth Gospel it referred to the resurrection. "He spake of the temple of his body." Some hold it really referred mystically to the new Temple or Body of the Church which he intended to found, but the likelihood is that the interpretation mentioned in the Fourth Gospel pointed to the risen body.

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In the *Journal of Theological Studies* for July, Professor F. C. Burkitt offers another view. Neither the literal nor the Johanne interpretation appeals to him. What Jesus had in mind, he thinks, was that "the requirements of true worship involve little material expenditure; if the Temple were to perish, the necessary arrangements for the sacrifices, for the services, for fencing off the Holy Place, for the organisation of prayer and praise, could be made in three days' time." In other words, all that Jesus meant was that the temple-organisation was needlessly elaborate.