

## CURRENT ISSUES.

It is a hundred years ago, on the tenth of December, since Dr. George Macdonald was born. Dr. Macdonald was not an expositor, in the strict sense of the term, although he preached and published sermons. His real contribution lay along other lines. But there is no doubt that he exercised a strong influence during the latter half of the nineteenth century upon religious thought, especially by his interpretation of the Fatherhood of God. This was parallel to the emancipating movement fostered by the higher criticism of the Bible, and Macdonald's theological views are therefore to be acknowledged with gratitude; whatever may be thought of their implications, they were high and noble in aim, like the character of the man himself.

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Macdonald was a preacher. That is, he had the instinctive desire to communicate the truths he believed. Whether he wrote verse or novels, he had a purpose; even in self-revelations, like *The Diary of an Old Soul*, he was eager to show the world how much dearer and grander God was than could be imagined within Calvinism. He made his best characters in fiction live and move under a sense of God's gracious love, just at the time when the newer study of the gospels was insisting upon this as a vital element in the teaching of our Lord. He made everything depend on the idea of God, God the Father, "not an inventor of schemes or the upholder of a court etiquette, for whose use He has chosen to desecrate the name of justice."

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In the stress upon this, he was apt to be one-sided sometimes. One of his friendly critics protested that the school of thought which he represented was "not quite candid in its New Testament exegesis," and the criticism was partly just. Macdonald used the New Testament to illustrate his intuitions. He was never uncandid, but he failed sometimes to appreciate elements

even in the teaching of Jesus which were not quite consonant with his cherished opinions. Nevertheless, though sin is a more serious factor than he would have allowed, he drew the attention of his age to the divine Love in a singularly winning manner.

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It is his verse which appeals most to the majority of readers to-day ; our taste in fiction has swung away from the interest which made his novels a delight to the public in last century. But now and again he puts into his prose one or two choice expressions of truth. Here is one, for example, about the Bible, from his *Unspoken Sermons*. "Let us hold the Bible dear as the moon of our darkness, by which we travel towards the East ; not dear as the sun whence her light cometh, and towards which we haste, that, walking in the sun himself, we may no more need the mirror that reflected his absent brightness." One of the most characteristic of all his utterances is in Robert Falconer's prayer, where he makes his hero cry : " Lord, let me help those that are wretched because they do not know Thee. Let me tell them that Thou, the Life, must needs suffer for and with them, that they may be partakers of thy ineffable peace. My life is hid in Thine ; take me in Thy hand as Gideon bore the pitcher to the battle. Let me be broken if need be, that Thy light may shine upon the lies which men tell them in Thy name, and which eat away their hearts." This exactly represents Macdonald's aim in life, and he lived as he taught and wrote, in the desire to communicate what he believed to be God's truth, at any personal cost.

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The Bishop of Manchester has published a sequel to his *Mens Creatrix*. He calls it *Christus Veritas* (Macmillan). It is an essay which begins by positing a theory of reality, upon which, or rather, in terms of which, he endeavours to elaborate a philosophy of the Christian religion. The book is written out of a conviction that one of the reasons for the deficiency of cultured men in the ranks of candidates for the ministry is "that the intellectual atmosphere is dominated by a philosophy which leaves no room for a specific Incarnation," i.e. by an idea of God which precludes "His ever doing anything in particular in any other sense than that in which He does everything in

general." Dr. Temple believes that it is possible to state the philosophical ideas of existence and knowledge in such a way as to leave room for a genuinely Christian belief in the Incarnation.

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After he has elucidated his theory, he comes to its bearings upon theology. Let us assume, he argues, that "every grade in Reality finds its own fulfilment only when it is possessed by a higher grade, and that each higher grade uses those which are lower than itself for its expression." Now apply this to the supreme revelation, in which God uses human life in order to express His mind and nature. Jesus Christ is the perfect presentation of man as well as of God. He truly expresses what is man's real nature, for God in the Son shows how man is meant to be the self-expression of God. But how? Dr. Temple faces the problem of Christology and its varied solutions, and he rejects one of these solutions emphatically, the solution offered by the Kenotic theory.

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To Dr. Temple the attractions of the theory are obvious. He states them in the words used by Professor H. R. Mackintosh. But the difficulties seem to the bishop intolerable. He asks himself and his readers, "What was happening to the rest of the universe during the period of our Lord's earthly life? To say that the Infant Jesus was from His cradle exercising providential care over it all is certainly monstrous; but to deny this, and yet to say that the Creative Word was so self-emptied as to have no being except in the Infant Jesus, is to assert that for a certain period the history of the world was let loose from the control of the Creative Word."

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What then is the outlet from this apparent *impasse*? Dr. Temple is content to say that "God the Son did indeed most truly live the life recorded in the Gospel, but added this to the other work of God." He seems to believe, however, that the External Son in the Incarnate life did not exercise some of the divine functions, these being incompatible with humanity. That is, there were certain limitations; only, these limitations were God's means of self-expression through the Son.

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Later in the volume Dr. Temple has to meet the question of

life after death. Is it possible for a human soul to persist finally in refusing God's revelation? He thinks that it is possible, and agrees that the only course left open to the Almighty in such a case is to bring that soul to an end. This is one of the points at which he is in agreement with Dr. Gore. If it be argued that annihilation means a failure on the part of God, he answers candidly that "to deny the possibility of failure in God is also to deny the freedom of man to repudiate God." Why should we hesitate to say that perdition is impossible? Is it not because we entertain too abstract an idea of God's omnipotence? And also because we forget that "the doctrine of the Church has suffered at this point from the introduction of a belief in the inherent indestructibility of every individual soul, which has its origin in Greek rather than in Palestinian sources." Dr. Temple rejects dogmatic universalism.

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With this number of the EXPOSITOR the year's programme ends. It is gratifying to acknowledge the wide response of readers during the year, and we hope to cater more than ever, next year, for the requirements of those who desire to study the Bible practically and intelligently, in the light of the best available criticism. Among the features which it is proposed to introduce, for the first time, is a section called "Questions and Answers." The Editor finds that this is the only way to satisfy the numerous correspondents who write for information upon biblical data. It is hoped that every month's issue will contain this feature, and correspondents who write privately to the Editor are referred respectfully to it for answers to their queries.

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The series entitled "The Ten Best Books" has been so much appreciated that, in response to repeated demands, it will be continued for another year. The new series opens in January with an article by the Rev. Dr. G. W. Wade, of St. David's, Lampeter, on "The Ten Best Books on the Apostolic Age." Other contributions in the series will include articles by Dr. Sydney Cave upon the Atonement, Dr. J. P. Naish on the Book of Proverbs, Professor H. T. Andrews upon Christian Mysticism, Professor H. R. Mackintosh on the Holy Spirit, as well as discussions of Prayer, the Parables of Jesus, etc. These will

continue to offer guidance to students who are interested in knowing the most reliable and important works to be consulted.

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In the expository line, we shall publish some fresh articles upon the Sermon on the Mount, from the pen of our accomplished contributor, Dr. T. H. Robinson; also, some expositions of passages in the Gospels, and studies of the Pauline epistles. The criticism of the Old Testament in next year's issue will be notable for a series of five articles by Canon Battersby-Harford, who has been kind enough to prepare a survey of recent work upon the Pentateuch, which will enable readers to understand the present position of research. The movements in this department of study have been so numerous and intricate that it is invaluable to have them surveyed by a scholar who can speak with authority. In addition to this, we shall have another study from Mr. W. W. Cannon, this time upon the prophet Nahum, and also a fresh study of the Book of Job by Dr. J. P. Naish, of Mansfield College, Oxford, as well as essays from Professor Gressmann and Professor Gunkel.

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These are merely one or two items in the programme for 1925. There are others, but an Editor wishes to keep some surprises for his readers. No pains will be spared to make the *EXPOSITOR* more than ever a monthly source of inspiration and direction to all readers who desire to understand the spirit as well as the text of the Bible. As George Herbert once wrote,

“There is fruit,  
And thou hast hands.”

The aim of the *EXPOSITOR* is to point out the fruit upon the boughs of modern criticism of the Bible, and to bring it within reach of many hands.