

CURRENT ISSUES.

THERE is an incident in the life of Jesus, where He had to rebuke His disciples for misjudging an outsider. They had seen this man expelling devils by using the name of the Lord; he was an exorcist, a successful one, but they had checked him because he did not belong to the special company of the disciples. Jesus, instead of approving their excommunication, told them, "Forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do a mighty work in My name, and be able quickly to speak evil of Me. For he that is not against us is for us." Professor Hogg of Madras, in the January number of *The International Review of Missions*, says that this incident always reminds him of Dr. Albert Schweitzer. Why?

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Well, when Schweitzer published his first famous book on *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, he did not seem to Professor Hogg to be "following" along with the disciples of Christ. In fact, he almost seemed to be "speaking evil" of the Master. He emphasized the eschatological element in our Lord's teaching so loudly that Jesus seemed to be left as a visionary enthusiast, out of touch with our modern life. Jesus mistook the cause of history; He imagined the end of the world was imminent, and His teaching is bound up with this creed. Now, as Professor Hogg puts it, "there must be many Christians to whom this will seem a degree of unorthodoxy almost amounting to blasphemy." Indeed Schweitzer's interpretation was hotly repudiated by many writers in the Church. They said as well as thought that he had no right to be speaking in the name of Jesus Christ.

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Yet Dr. Schweitzer has become a medical missionary in Equatorial Africa. He has shown heroic self-sacrifice, and his book

On the Edge of the Primeval Forest reveals him now as a man "animated by a passion of brotherliness and a deep and humble devotion to the Lord Jesus." Who can hesitate, Professor Hogg asks, to recognize him as a member of the real band of Christ's disciples? So the Professor now recognizes the essential reverence in Schweitzer's work, for all its radical and even disparaging estimate of the historical Jesus.

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But Schweitzer has also written a treatise on *The Philosophy of Civilisation*, and Professor Hogg is not prepared to agree with his conclusions. He will not abandon idealism and he will not base his hopes and efforts for the future upon such intuitions as Dr. Schweitzer employs. For this he gives reasons and reasons, of a philosophical character. Yet candidly he owns one debt to the book he criticizes. Many of us missionaries, he admits, "are so preoccupied by the toil of running complex missionary organizations which quite obviously have some effect in the way of social and spiritual uplift, that we incur real danger of imagining that the kingdom of God itself can be achieved by mere selfless labour." Dr. Schweitzer holds that this kind of expectation was not entertained by Jesus; human labour of this kind is only a sort of prayer to God that He will make the kingdom appear soon and suddenly. Jesus did not regard the kingdom as some end "to be achieved by skill of human endeavour or to be attained by way of social evolution." It is well, says Professor Hogg, that we should be reminded of the proportion and limitation of anything we can do, in the service of the Kingdom.

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Do people to-day think more about pain than about sin? And is this one of the differences between the mediæval and the modern spirit? Dr. Thouless suggests that it is, in his book on *The Lady Julian*. It is one of a series published by the S.P.C.K., called "English Theologians." Dr. Thouless claims that this fourteenth-century mystic and recluse at Norwich deserves to be ranked with Bishop Butler and Hooker, because by her writing she has contributed to the maturing of English religious life. It is a high claim, and even after reading the sympathetic exposition of Dr. Thouless one may remain convinced that Lady Julian belongs to English saints rather than

to theologians. However, it is with this issue raised in the chapter on her views of sin that we are concerned at present.

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The Middle Ages were not sensitive, whatever they may have been. Things were tolerated in manners as well as in morals that shock our modern susceptibilities. There was a strong callousness in most circles of society, which accepted pain as part of the order of things, if not for oneself at least for other people. "Mediæval institutions had not human happiness as their object," Dr. Thouless observes, "and they inflicted unnecessary suffering with a callousness which shows a totally different attitude towards the world from that of modern humanitarianism." But mediæval religion did concern itself with sin. Their theology, of penance in particular and of the sacraments in general, was a sustained effort to manage human nature in an environment of sin which might easily become fatal.

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Nowadays the emphasis has changed. The problem of pain engrosses people; it moulds religions, it stirs psychological interest, it leads to humanitarian activity and social reform. It is so real to us that, as Dr. Thouless humorously puts it, "churches can be filled when a preacher promises to say some new thing about it." If he is wise, he will not make any such promise. He need not. All he has to do is to promise to preach about it, and he secures attention if not an audience. For pain comes home to nearly every one, either as a fact of their own experience or as something observed in the life of others. Whereas sin does not. The average man of to-day, we are told, does not worry about sin. Swinburne once apostrophized Newman and Carlyle.

"Go honoured hence, go home,
Night's sightless children; here your hour is done,
Pass with the stars and leave us with the sun."

He meant that this enlightened age required no more prophets of repentance, no more reminders of dark moral evil.

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But Swinburne's neo-paganism was too hasty and shallow. Sensitiveness to pain is all to the good, provided that it does not become sentimental. Nevertheless, the sense of sin is a

permanent feature of religion, and, though we need not go back to all the mediæval theories about it, we moderns do not escape it by ignoring it. This may be a truism, but it is none the less true. To cast off warnings about sin is not to be "left with the sun" but to remain in darkness. This is sound New Testament teaching, which goes infinitely deeper than Swinburne's rhodomontade.

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An unexpected and powerful witness to this truth has just started up. In Professor Rait's *Memorials of A. V. Dicey*, a letter from Professor Dicey is quoted which seriously supports the doctrine of original sin. It was written in 1915 to Lord Bryce about the German atrocities in Belgium. These, Dicey said "with full seriousness to one who will understand me," are only explicable on the old doctrine of original sin—which, he hastens to add, "is of course with any educated Englishman quite unconnected with the belief in Eve and her apple." There are inherent vices in human nature, connected somehow with our inheritance from the lower animal world, vices which now and then burst through conventional civilization.

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This is not a popular doctrine. Professor Dicey tells us that when he once propounded it at the Athenæum, he was taunted with being a cynic. He was amazed to receive a letter from his friend President Eliot of Harvard, advising him to get rid of belief in original sin and to put faith in progress. The English scholar knew more about human nature as a jurist and a publicist than his optimistic friend in Boston, however, and argued correctly that belief in original sin is quite compatible with a belief in progress. "I am astounded," he writes, "at this easy optimism which overlooks the dark sides of human nature." Professor Dicey might not have agreed with Newman and Carlyle; indeed he cared little for Carlyle. But he would not have accepted for a moment the cheerful air of his old fellow-Oxonian, Swinburne.