

Entre Nous.

W.R.N.

It is as an outstanding journalist, as a littérateur—‘to his facile and burning pen many owe their first entrancing vistas of the treasury of English literature’—that William Robertson Nicoll is best remembered. But it is perhaps as a devotional writer, the Rev. Harry Escott says, ‘that Nicoll would have wished to be remembered.’ And it is to his devotional books, especially ‘The Key of the Grave,’ ‘The Garden of Nuts,’ and ‘Reunion in Eternity’ that Mr. Escott has turned in preparing a delightful short anthology.

‘It is the golden threads of love which gleam through the mingled texture of our human life that sign in it the name of God,’ W.R.N. wrote, and from this Mr. Escott gets his title—*God Signs His Name*.

The anthology, excellently bound and printed, appears as one of the ‘Wayside Books’ (Epworth Press; 1s. 3d. net). In the same series this month there is *God’s Troubadour*, extracts from the devotional verse of George MacDonald. Mr. Escott, who is minister of the Congregational Church in the Parish of Rhynie in Aberdeenshire, has prepared this anthology also. On both anthologies Mr. Escott has spent thought and care. We cannot quote from both. In giving a few quotations from *God Signs His Name* we echo Mr. Escott’s hope that they will send readers back to their sources.

‘They were by the fire on the beach with Christ. That made all the difference. That is the parable of the spiritual life.’

As a passing mirror in the street

Flashes a glimpse of gardens out of range,
Through some poor window open to the heat,
So in our world of doubt and death and change
The vision of Eternity is sweet,
The vision of Eternity is strange.

‘He is like one in the valley searching with a telescope whether the wind blows on the mountain top. If he stood there and felt it on his face, he would doubt no more.’

‘You remember the sneer about Christians who talked of God as if He were a person in the next street. We are lost if He is no nearer than the next street, lost if He is not nearer than the nearest, nearer than the atmosphere we breathe.’

Do men dare to call Thy Scripture—
Mystic forest, unillumined nook?
If it be so, O my spirit,
Then let Christ arise on Thee, and look.
With the long lane of His sunlight
Shall be cut the forest of His Book.

Family Homespun.

‘Frances Balfour’s child, Ma’am,’ said Lady Salisbury many years ago at Hatfield when she presented the future author of *Family Homespun*, now Blanche E. C. Dugdale (John Murray; 9s. net), to her Sovereign. This child, who leaned from the balcony at Inveraray to hear the ardent talk of grown-up Campbells and their many friends in the hall beneath, who was frequently at Whittingehame in close contact with the ‘speculative Balfour mind,’ and sometimes at Hatfield where ‘respect for the liberty of the individual was too marked a characteristic of Cecil family life to escape the notice of the youngest visitor,’ had an upbringing in every way has qualified her to write memoirs of the most absorbing interest. A highly intelligent child she was, apparently, constantly in the company of her elders, and her book, she says, illustrates the power of family influence upon the individual members of big and united families.

Lady Frances Balfour has handed on her literary gifts to her daughter, whose *Life of Arthur James Balfour* is well known. In the present volume she has given us vivid pictures of many of the ‘personalities’ of that day. One in particular, Lady Victoria Campbell of the crippled legs and the soaring spirit, played an important part in the life of her niece. She had the passionate interest of her line in ecclesiastical matters, but ‘if she pursued some preacher of the “Free” or “Episcopal” persuasion, she did so as an outsider straying from her proper fold.’ She ‘could not conceive of being a member of any Church but the Established Church of Scotland.’ The Balfour mind was not sympathetic to this outlook. Dogma, which loomed so large to her mother’s family, was felt quite unimportant in her father’s circle. Church distinctions were irrelevant. Arthur Balfour was confirmed in the Church of England, and communicated when in Scotland in Whittingehame Parish Church, and this to him was natural and right. Lady Victoria’s enthusiasm was infectious and when her niece, in some pardonable confusion

between the '43 and the '45, asked her aunt ' what exactly happened ' in '43, Lady Victoria launched into the story of the Disruption in a manner so brilliant, so lucid, so exciting, that the child lived with her in the very atmosphere of that time and has never forgotten either the points at issue or the emotions they created. Lady Victoria's work among the crofters of Tiree is known, but the difficulties and adventures of her journeys are not often considered. ' Give me hold of a rope and throw my legs after me ! ' the intrepid woman would call to the boatmen ' who were her trembling slaves.'

The member of the wide family circle most beloved by the younger ones appears to have been A. J. B. They sought to please him and to copy him. He did not offer advice, he did not mete out praise or blame, and he rarely condemned. To pass any moral judgment was unusual in him and his niece can recall only one instance. The name of a relative long dead was mentioned. " " He was wicked," said Uncle Arthur. " I think he was the only really wicked person I ever knew. . . . He was wicked because he hated goodness. He did not fall away from it ; he attacked it whenever he met it, especially in a younger person ".'

Family Worship.

' On Sunday nights, after dinner was cleared, the bell rang in the courtyard, and five minutes later the gong in the corridor was sounded. At this signal conversation in the library stopped, and everybody went back into the dining-room. There the lights had been put out, except for two gas lamps turned low on one wall, and two candles on a small table in the middle. Round two sides of the room stood the servants, more than twenty of them, white caps and aprons glimmering in the half-light, and Fairy, in her black silk Sunday gown, at the end of the row of capless ladies' maids. At the other end was Mr. Baker [the Butler] heading the line of menservants. When we had walked in and taken our places, they all sat down with one movement. Uncle Arthur [A. J. Balfour] came in last, went to his chair by the table, drew the silver candlesticks closer, and opened the small Bible which he had brought in with him. Sometimes the passage he read had some connexion with the sermon at church. But, whatever it was, his voice compelled you to listen. It was not loud, or dramatic, but no shade of meaning seemed to escape him as he read.

' We all knelt, he read the Collect for the Sunday,

and " Lighten our darkness." Then everybody repeated the General Confession and the Lord's Prayer. After the blessing, all stood up, and waited till Mr. Baker got to the door. Then we went back to the library, and conversation was resumed where it had left off. Prayers only lasted about ten minutes, but they were a feature in our family life, perhaps all the more because they were not daily, nor a part of the morning routine of a busy household.' ¹

Dr. Peel on Some Prayers.

The Congregational Quarterly has an excellent variety of articles by distinguished writers, but it is to Dr. Peel's own editorial that we turn. It is always interesting and often provocative. In the last issue he writes first on the ' elementary and jejune philosophy of prayer ' among Christian people to-day. ' At Munich time it was distressing to find so many British Christians prepared to thank God for their deliverance from war, without stopping for a moment to ask what the disciples of John Huss, thus handed over to the tender mercies of Hitler and the Gestapo, would think of such a God, or of those whose prayers had wrought such a mysterious " deliverance."

' Then came the epic of Dunkirk. Responsible Christian leaders, who ought to have known better, recounted how, while in June, 1939, the seas were rough, in June, 1940, they were kept smooth *in answer to prayer*, and so hundreds of thousands of our men escaped the dread beaches and the pursuing enemy. It did not occur to them to stop to explain why the Day of National Prayer was immediately followed by the defection of Leopold of Belgium. . . .

' And sometimes, of course, glib and easy talk about answers to prayer becomes unintentionally heartless and cruel. In a vestry on the Sunday after the Armistice in 1918 a deacon rejoiced in the safety of his relatives and declared, " It is in answer to prayer," to receive from a colleague whose sons had been killed, the quiet, and we hope startling, reply which should have been felt as a rebuke, " I prayed too, Mr. X " . . .

' As an example of prayer at its worst, this effort of the M.P. for Weymouth in 1727 may be quoted : " Oh, Lord, Thou knowest that I have nine houses in the city of London, and that I have lately purchased an estate in fee-simple in Essex ; I beseech Thee to preserve the two counties of Middlesex and Essex from fires and earthquakes ; and as I have also a mortgage at Hertfordshire,

¹ Blanche E. C. Dugdale, *Family Homespun*, 94.

I beg of Thee also to have an eye of compassion on that county, and for the rest of the counties, Thou may deal with them as Thou art pleased. Oh, Lord, enable the bank to answer all their bills and make all my debtors good men. Give a prosperous voyage and safe return to the *Mermaid* sloop, because I have not insured it; and, because Thou has said, 'the days of the wicked are but short,' I trust in Thee that Thou wilt not forget Thy promise, as I have an estate in reversion which will be mine on the death of the profligate young man, Sir J. L.—g. Keep my freights from sinking, preserve me from thieves and house-breakers, and make all my servants so honest and faithful that they may always attend to my interest, and never cheat me out of my property night or day”.

British Ideals.

'The *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, of Vienna,' says the *News Chronicle*, 'on December 13th achieved a little masterpiece on British national character.

"No other literature," it wrote, "has such masterly descriptions of scoundrels as has the literature of England. Shakespeare's scoundrels, of course, differ from those of Dickens or Wilde. But you will search in vain in any other literature for anything similar to this whole gallery of scoundrels. Only an English poet could have invented Iago.

"Of almost every other nation one can say that its great literature expresses its ideals. Nothing of this sort can be found in the literature of England, and the reason for its absence can only be that the British feel absolutely no urge towards higher things”.

An Anthology of Comfort.

'In these troubled times,' writes Mr. Sidney Dark, 'it has seemed worth while to put together this volume of encouragement, in the hope that the legion of the troubled and the burdened may be nerved to persistence and a stout heart by being reminded of the goodness of God, the wisdom of the wise, and the fine deeds of those who have successfully climbed the Hill Difficulty and have gone to their reward.' All the extracts in *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Eyre & Spottiswoode; 3s. 6d. net) have been chosen by Mr. Dark because to him they have a special significance. But readers will not find anything new or modern here, in the colloquial sense of the word. The quotations are generally from the Bible and well-known devotional literature. Some idea of the range may be got from the four quotations on the first page. They are from

the Psalms, St. Anselm, Milton, and end with Giles Fletcher's four lines:

Christ is a path—if any be misled;
He is a robe—if any naked be;
If any chance to hunger—He is bread;
If any be a bondman—strong is He!

Miss Dallas Kenmare.

We know Miss Dallas Kenmare best as an essayist. Her subject is poetry, especially modern poetry. We now welcome a small collection of her own poems with the title *Four Words* (Ed. J. Burrow & Co., 125 Strand, London; 2s. net). Some of the poems have already appeared in 'The Poetry Review.' Among those that are now printed for the first time we choose for quotation:

STIGMATA.

Russian Church, London. July 1940.

How came these wounds, these fiery nails burning
into the soul's flesh? . . .

The shadow of a bird flies across the window,
clouds of incense rise in praise to God,
the voices of the choir rise also . . .
'Alleluia!'

Shadow of a bird. . . Shadow of the Comforter . . .
but the Christ hangs crucified—
once only in Time, perpetually in Eternity,
no end, no respite—always the cruel nails and the
dripping warm blood on the brow—
'Were you there when they crucified my Lord?'
None, none can escape—all are there,
taunting, tormenting, driving new nails into the
sweet flesh—
envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness—
Eternally the nails tear and the blood drips
slow tears of blood shed for the world's relentless
sin . . .

Pour wine of love into the throbbing wounds,
comfort Christ with love—
heal, heal with love the world's malignant ill,
pour, oh pour balm of love on the vast growth
sapping the world's soul,
on the throngs of men still crucifying the Christ.

Printed by MORRISON & GIBB LIMITED, Tanfield Works,
and Published by T. & T. CLARK, 38 George Street,
Edinburgh. It is requested that all literary com-
munications be addressed to THE EDITOR, King's
Gate, Aberdeen, Scotland.