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## CURRENT ISSUES.

IN January (p. 4) we referred to a new study of the Koran and its interpretative Traditions. The subject of Islam is, for obvious reasons, exciting special interest to-day, and the interest is not confined to statesmen. Another book by a Western scholar has just appeared, which directs attention to the social ethics of the Koran. It is by Dr. Robert Roberts, and is called *The Social Legislation of the Qoran*. But Dr. Roberts includes a comparative estimate of some ancient codes, including that of Israel, a feature which invests his book with particular significance.

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One issue raised is in connexion with charity. It is a duty urged in the Qoran with special frequency, and Dr. Roberts points out, not only that the founder of Islam here "had in his mind the injunctions of the Jewish and Christian codes," but also that he taught, like the doctors of the Talmud, "that almsgiving makes atonement for sin." This latter doctrine differentiates Islam from Christianity. Yet it is only fair to remember that Muhammad qualified his doctrine. He warned his adherents, as Dr. Roberts shows, "against the thought that the fulfilment of this duty gives them a license to live unworthy lives. Rather it is only when this virtue is accompanied by such others as adorn human life that the giver has his reward."

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There is one interesting extension and application of this principle. In the Old Testament wounds might be punished by the infliction of similar physical injuries upon the offender; "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, etc." (Exod. xxi. 23). So in Islam, though Mohammedan law improved on the Qoran by admitting a money payment in the case of wounds. But the prophet himself taught: "wounds should be punished by retaliation; but whoso remits it (as alms), it is an expiation for him." That is, a man acquires saving merit if he forgoes his

right to retaliation. This is a remarkable proviso. As Dr. Roberts argues, "although we believe that the prophet could have done much more than he did in order to abolish the cruel custom of retaliation, still when we remember to what extremes the Arabs went in the fulfilment of this duty, it must be confessed that Muhammad took a step in the right direction. His attempt, as far as it goes, was praiseworthy."

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There are some indications that the tendency to depreciate Luke's historical value, in the Acts of the Apostles, has stirred a critical reaction. Eduard Meyer's rehabilitation of Paul's speech at Athens, against Norden's scepticism, is a sign of the times. And now Professor Burkitt enters an acute protest against the rather sweeping negations of Professors Lake and Jackson, in their *Beginnings of Christianity*.

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Professor Burkitt's own book is called *Christian Beginnings*. And in the course of it he draws attention to one point in favour of Luke as a historian. In the beginning of Acts we read that for forty days after the resurrection Jesus spoke to the disciples "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." Luke does not enter into details. He simply generalizes. Which, according to Professor Burkitt, should be counted to his credit in all fairness.

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Why? Well, anyone who knows the later sub-apostolic literature, both gnostic and catholic, is aware how much use was made of this episode in the tradition of the Risen Christ. Even at the present day one sometimes hears ecclesiastics maintaining that this secret teaching included episcopacy, sacramentarianism, and everything thrown up in the later changes of the Church. When New Testament evidence is demanded for such innovation, the reply is that they were handed down by tradition from this special revelation of Jesus. The text in Acts is a convenient receptacle, into which you can put any doctrine or practice. This was done at an early stage. "Strange as it seems to us, a good many early Christians felt no scruple about making the Risen Christ a mouthpiece for their views." And Luke abstained from this.

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It may sound a minor detail, in support of Luke's honesty, this abstinence from inventing revelations. But it tells seriously in his favour, and, as Professor Burkitt insists, it is one of the data which justify us in treating Acts as "an historical work, not a religious novel." Luke has left gaps in his story. He is not so interested, for example, in the internal life of the Pauline churches as we could have wished, and he drops Peter out of his story abruptly. Also, "the early part of Acts has in it something of the characteristics of a prose poem. But when we come to test it by the letters of Paul we find it to be historical, not fabulous." This has been often said before. But Professor Burkitt says it in full view of some contemporary criticism, and thus his opinion carries weight.

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Dr. Radoslav A. Tsanoff has written a book on *The Problem of Immortality*, which claims that our personality at its truest has elements of value implying immortality. But this can only be held, he declares, if we abjure any deification of the Absolute; we must have a dynamic conception of God. He would agree with Sir Henry Jones that "a God conceived as a static absolute cannot do anything, and is as little satisfactory as a God who is limited and imperfect."

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Dr. Tsanoff, like Sir Henry Jones, is the philosopher as preacher. His book contains chapters of historical retrospect, but it is the work of one who is conscious of a message. He sets all his hopes on the moral aspirations which belong to personality at its best—or, as he would say, at its centre. Unless there is personal immortality, the essential elements of value in human life are frustrated, and these elements must be conserved in personal lives, not in general abstractions, as Comte and others would argue.

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But what of those who seem to have very little aspiration in their insignificant personalities? Kipling speaks of

"The mere uncounted folk  
Of whose life and death is none  
Report or lamentation."

We turn over Dr. Tsanoff's pages, to discover how he deals with the problem of those who do not appear particularly qualified

for the immortality which he is describing. He faces the difficulty. You and I, he says, can understand our own immortality. But what of the man across the street, our undistinguished, unphilosophical brother? What, in all seriousness, of the swarming millions who breed and perish on earth, often un-moral, or apparently devoid of moral cravings?

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Here, it is interesting to notice, Dr. Tsanoff draws upon a Christian conviction. His book is not concerned with the Christian argument for immortality, but, when he comes to plead that the humblest of individuals has something which is of value to the universe, he buttresses this faith in the individual, in any individual, by an appeal to the gospel. For this faith is, as he declares, "a prime essential of the Christian gospel," this concern for "the least of these my brethren." Such a phrase as "these my brethren" is the clue to the problem; it shows us how we can appreciate the lasting value, not only of our own personalities but of other people. It is not to be confounded with a maudlin sentimentality. But it does posit worth in man as man. And to maintain it is a constant demand upon our faith. Philosophy may help the mind to see that this intuition is right, but, as Dr. Tsanoff quite frankly puts it, "if offhand scorn for the unchronicled multitude be a sign of shallow arrogance, the living trust in the eternal worth of each man can only be an act of faith."

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Dr. Keller desires to supplement the bibliography of his study on "A Theology of Crisis" by the following references to recent monographs and articles:—

Karl Barth's *Die Auferstehung der Toten* (C. Kayser's Verlag, 1924).

Karl Barth's *Der Römerbrief* (2nd Ed., 1922).

*Die christliche Welt*, 1920-23, Marburg (a series of articles by Harnack, Jülicher Bertram and others).

*Theologische Blätter* (1922/23), articles by Tillich, Gogarten, Hein, and K. Schmidt.

*Allg. Ev. Luth. Kirchenzeitung* (36-40, 1924), articles by Girgensohn.

*Protestantenblatt*, articles by Schubring and others.

- Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse* (1923), article by Strohl, S. 156 ff.
- Zwischen den Zeiten*, articles by Hirsch.
- Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie*, I, 4 (Althaus).
- M. Rade, *Glaubenslehre*, 1924.
- Erich Schaeder, *Das Geistproblem in der Theologie* (Deichert, Leipzig, 1924).
- Martin Werner, *Das Weltanschauungsproblem bei Karl Barth und Albert Schweitzer*. Paul Haupt, Bern, 1924.
- Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (1923), articles by Knittermeyer, Wunsch, and F. W. Schmidt.
- R. Bultmann, "Problem der Ethik bei Paulus," in *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1924.
- Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 1921 (an article by Bachmann, October 21).

### THE THIRD COMMANDMENT.

#### III.

An interpretation of this text which is often adopted is that which regards it as a command against general profanity. One commentator, for example, says: "Not only false swearing, but every sinful use of the name Jehovah in curse, blasphemy, charm, divination, and every other frivolous use is forbidden." It may be that we have warrant for using this commandment as a peg on which we can hang a sermon against any and every form of profanity, but that is vastly different from saying that the literal meaning of the text, as it was understood by Jews, warrants us giving such a wide interpretation of it. In fact, there are one or two facts which positively militate against this liberal interpretation. In the first case, to say the very least, this wide interpretation is imported into the text: it is not brought out of it. Then again, all these laws are directed against serious offences, offences serious