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Entre Nous.

SOME TOPICS.

Dr. Rendel Harris.

Dr. Rendel Harris has collected a number of devotional addresses, and these have been published by Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, with a title which has been taken from the first address—*As Pants the Hart* (6s. net). In the course of the Foreword, which is addressed 'To my friends at Woodbrooke and elsewhere,' the phrase occurs 'you want the book.' It is certain that Dr. Rendel Harris does not know how many friends he has. We all want to be included under this 'Elsewhere,' for we all want this book and are in want of it. The meditations are their own best commendation, and so we shall quote from them rather than say anything more. But remember that to catch the flavour properly each address should be read in full.

'As Pants the Hart.'

'This, then, is our theme, this portrait at the beginning of the second book of the Psalter. Clearly it strikes a deeper note than the opening of the first book. We have got beyond the religion of the successful godly man, whose trees always bear fruit and are never parched or frost-bitten. If God is on any one's side in Psalm xlii., He is on the side of the hunted. We find ourselves here in a deeper region of human experience. I should not like to charge the author of Psalm i. with shallow optimism; but I should be grateful to higher critics if they would prove that the same man wrote Psalm i. and Psalm xlii.; or to students of spiritual psychology if they were to tell us that he could be the same person. For we want to combine optimism with reality, and not merely to say in cheery tones, "This is the best of all possible worlds, for the person who can succeed in it." If it is a good world, it must be a good world to be hunted to the death in. One reason why we admire St. Paul is that he is an optimist with both eyes open. He is a stricken deer withal; sometimes he too has tears day and night; he strains his leathern coat almost to bursting. But in his escape from the optimism of a successful career in the Sanhedrin and at the Jerusalem College, St. Paul found a higher optimism. . . .

'Now let us carry this matter a little further than the argument has yet reached. When we suffer from hunger and thirst—which mean the insufficient satisfactions of life; or from wounds met in the chase—which mean the disappointments and failures of life; we want to know something more about the sense in which God stands upon the weaker side and enters into the conditions which make His creatures to be suffering creatures. If we simply hear that Someone, not ourselves, has appeared upon the weaker side in which we are included, there are two ways in which we may interpret the access of such a One to our ranks. He may have come with reinforcements of overwhelming strength to outface and put to flight the intolerant, contemptuous crowd, who are shouting across to us as we crouch in our trenches and saying, "Where is thy God?" On the other hand, He may have come as one more starving soul into a camp of besieged souls, to augment the company of the miserable and the helpless from a number n to the next number $n+1$. Now clearly it is possible that God might appear in the former sense. Providence might be capable of a decisive intervention with big battalions; and every conflict between good and evil might find itself appropriately ended by the sudden arrival of twelve legions of angels to put things finally right. If we had been in God's place, and had found ourselves face to face with want and pain and injustice, this would almost certainly be the solution that we should have adopted. We should have moved up the big battalions, and given ocular demonstration, not only to a select inner circle with peculiarly illuminated eyes, but to everybody who has any eyes at all to see with, that "they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Nor am I prepared to say that God never does appear in this way as a majestic Afterthought upon the top of the perplexed reasonings of men, or as an unexpected intervening Force for which those who examine problems of dynamics had never made any allowance. Such, however, we may confess, is not the normal Divine method. No Angels appeared at Mons, either on one side or the other—any more than the Heavenly Twins appeared at the battle of Lake Regillus.

'When we consider the other form of God's inter-

vention, according to which He comes as a poor man to the company of poor men and as a weak man into the circle of the weak, we recognize the Divine Man who has attached Himself to us for the purpose of sharing our human conditions. One of the traditional sayings of Jesus tells us: "For those that are sick, I was sick; and for those that hunger, I suffered hunger; and for those that thirst, I suffered thirst." We thus come face to face with the problem of a suffering God, and we have to frame our theology out of the story of His weakness and the tale of His Passion.' [1]

Merit and Mercy.

'All the true saints talk the same language. Merit may live from man to man; but it never climbs into the martyr's chariot of fire with him. Indeed, the doctrine of merit that lives from man to man is easily overdone, and passes on to the verge of caricature. In our own day, we have actually instituted a public Order of Merit: it is saved from ridicule by the limitation of its numbers. We need to destroy pride, not to manufacture it. At all events, it is clear why we must erase from our thought the last two letters of the word Merit, and replace them with the last two letters of the word Mercy.

'Let us venture into the region of the grotesque and look at our subject from that point of view. As the meritorious person, sooner or later, is always reduced to a grotesque, there can be no harm in taking a picture of him from modern literature. We will take Tennyson's *Northern Farmer*. When the farmer lies dying, he recalls two facts: the first is, that there are "Thurnaby hoälms to plow"; the second, that he had "stubb'd Thurnaby waäste." From the first, he concludes that the Almighty must be making a mistake in taking him away just then:

"A mowt 'a taäen owd Joänes, as 'ant not a 'aäpoth o' sense,
Or a mowt 'a taäen young Robins — a niver mended a fence."

From the second fact it appears that if he has to die, he at least will, at any rate, enter the next world accredited. . . .

'Tennyson meant this farmer to be grotesque; but are not most men cursed with an optimist prospect of getting into heaven at the cheapest possible rate? The librarian of one of the great American libraries told me that the catalogue which he had prepared was to be his passport to Paradise. I replied that he was doing it very cheap! He, also, was a spiritual grotesque. I remember once hearing an old Scottish minister remark that "it would be tremendously interesting to know how many of the people who insist on getting to heaven at the cheapest possible rate, ever get there at all."

'Some will answer: Yes, but is a man's whole life-work to be reckoned of no account at last—most of all when it is the artist's work wherein life bursts into flower, as in the pride of Raphael or the passion of Milton? Life-work is not sufficient. Judged by the Divine standard, there is not enough either of life or of work to form a justification for living or for working. "Life piled on life were all too little." The hymn makes this catholic confession:

"Not the labour of my hands."' [2]

Force.

'One of the finest passages in the Old Testament describes a tiny Hebrew army surrounded and ringed about by a Syrian host, and a young man who serves the prophet cries, "Alas! my master, what shall we do? Providence is on the side of the big battalions." "Open his eyes, Lord," prays the seer (so called because he sees—in modern language, the clairvoyant); and when the young man's eyes are opened, the mountains are full of armed motor-cars and armoured-trains around the prophet. What of the big battalions now? Thus the Hebrew heaven is a camp, the heavenly habitants are a military company, and Yahveh is Yahveh Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts. This conception is fundamental to the Old Testament. It is too great an idea to ignore or despise. The conception which can make a man or a people say in the moment of extremity,

"Sufficient is Thine arm alone
And our defence is sure,"

does not need much apology. There are some persons whom it will impress so strongly as to make them exclaim, "Blessed is he that hungers and thirsts after militant Puritanism: for he shall

[1] J. Rendel Harris, *As Pants the Hart*, 10.

[2] J. Rendel Harris, *ibid.* 20.

be saved." I feel the attraction of it myself; and I sometimes say that if I had lived three hundred years ago, I should have fought at Naseby—and joined the Society of Friends *afterwards*.' [1]

Pulpit Preparation.

The Warrack Lectures for 1923 were delivered by Mr. James Black (now Dr. Black) of St. George's, Edinburgh. He has just published them—*The Mystery of Preaching*—but the book has come in too late to be reviewed this month. We opened it by chance and found this excellent story—'A noted evangelist once came to address us at Glasgow College. As a piece of solemn and considered advice, he recommended us sometimes to go into the pulpit, find our text on the spur of the moment, and preach, trusting in inspiration for our message. Professor Denney was in the chair. I shall never forget that white face and that wagging finger as he turned to the speaker, and said with his incisive passion, "We are here in this College, set aside by the Church, to tell these men that there is no preparation too sacred or solemn for the ministry of Jesus Christ, and you come now and try to undo our work with these students. I think, sir, you confuse inspiration with desperation!" And I might add on my own, "with perspiration."'

What is wrong with the World.

Among a number of notable articles in the current number of *The Hibbert Journal* is one by Sir James Marchant, K.B.E. Sir James Marchant is Director of the National Council for the promotion of Race Regeneration, and the article bears on this. We are not, however, immediately concerned with the body of the article, but with its conclusion. Sir James Marchant was a friend of Alfred Russel Wallace, the co-discoverer with Darwin of the principle of natural selection. 'One day, near the end of his long life,' he says, 'he had the writer as his guest. We had discussed many topics in which we were mutually interested, from life in Mars to the return of the dead. It was on his 92nd birthday, and towards evening he fell into a reminiscent mood which prompted the question to him, as he looked over the world from his vantage-ground of years, what was chiefly wrong with it. Instantly his eyes brightened, and he spoke gravely: "This is the fundamental weakness: our knowledge, our science, has outstripped our moral development."'

[1] J. Rendel Harris, *ibid.* 156.

The war, Sir James Marchant holds, has demonstrated the truth of Dr. Wallace's statement. What is to be done? Not to stop scientific investigation, but 'to correct our false standard of values and to promote a moral revival throughout our lands.' We want high ideals, and we want the power to transform our lives in accordance with them. The ideals and the power are to be found, Sir James Marchant says, in the religion of Jesus Christ. 'Political no less than religious leaders are preaching the gospel, that to serve the world we must renew the right spirit within us.'

The Attraction of Christ.

The following incident was related by a preacher before the University of Cambridge: 'Not long ago, some of the best and ablest of the students at a women's college had opened an evening class for men in a poor and neglected neighbourhood. They were stirred by an impulse to do what they could for their less fortunate brothers. They read to them, sang to them, taught them to read and write; and the men came in increasing numbers. After a few months they asked them whether there was anything in particular they would like to hear more about. There was a silence, and then a low and scarcely audible voice was heard. One of the women went up to the speaker. "What was it you wanted specially to hear about?" "Could you tell us," was the man's reply, "something about Jesus Christ?"' [2]

TWO TEXTS.

Gen. xl. 13-15.

The right handling of the Old Testament has not been a problem to scholars—although it was once a very acute one—for many years now. But it is still a problem to the man in the street. No, to be more accurate, the latter is out of touch with the Old Testament, and has ceased to trouble about it. Here is a book to arouse his interest. And, quite as important, it will stimulate inquiry by the ordinary church member who has been uncertain where study of the Old Testament might lead him and has preferred not to make it. The

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volume contains a number of very readable essays on famous Old Testament stories—the last being 'The Sign of the Prophet Jonah.' The author is Mr. Lewis Johnson, and the publishers are Messrs. Allen & Unwin (7s. 6d. net). The essays are popular, but they are couched in clear, pleasant English, and for the most part they represent the standpoint of accepted criticism.

Below is an example, not of Mr. Johnson's critical quality, but of his homiletical.

'We are set upon an earth capable of staggering frightfulness. Hurricane and earthquake, flood, famine, and pestilence make our life here a very precarious venture. And in our heavy troubles we are quick to upbraid the Creator of so dangerous and painful a planet. Well! we cannot pretend to an adequate understanding of it all as yet; but if we keep our courage and sanity we can see that this hard training-ground is educating man toward the mastery of nature, and developing his powers as no soft lotos-eating world could do. Man is not a doomed creature. Along with the peril there is a promise of escape. He sees not yet all things put under him; but he is on the road to conquest. And his advance has come just through that necessity of struggle with grim natural forces which were inexplicably dreadful to him in the childhood of the race. Now he can afford to view them more serenely. He begins to see that the discipline of earth is not meaningless or wantonly cruel. It has served a purpose—a purpose which, when fulfilled, may completely justify the process. And to-day we can look back with a pleased surprise, as we look upon courage in a child, to the brave hope of those early fathers who, amid flood and tempest, saw in the rainbow a token of divine covenant that the purpose of the world was good. . . . Let us have courage to trust this world then—a world flashing with rainbows amidst its clouds and glooms, physical and spiritual wonders standing out of the most black and bitter circumstances to dazzle us with revelation of the grace enshrined at the heart of things. Let the magic rainbow be to us, as to old Israel, a symbol of God's covenant with humanity. This brilliant ethereal creature born of the marriage of light and water; this fairy tapestry hung in heaven; this sudden elusive apparition which our hearts leap to behold, is a sign from the Almighty, a promise of the ultimate beatitude of life.'[1]

[1] Lewis Johnson, *The Legends of Israel*, 32, 36.

Mt. xi. 28.

In his peculiarly pleasing way, Mr. Boreham has written another series of short addresses on men and women who have made Christian history —*A Casket of Cameos* (Epworth Press; 6s. net). As before, each story is woven round a text. We have George Moore's text, 'He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life'; Sir Ernest Shackleton's text, 'If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me'; W. M. Thackeray's text, 'I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.'

Perhaps the least known name to us on this side is that of Robert Lamb, M.B., Ch.M., and B.D., of the University of Edinburgh, who spent several years as a missionary in the South Sea Islands, and then, a man of just over forty, he had to return to Australia broken down in health. He devoted the time left to the gipsies of the south—the swagmen—lavishing his medical and religious knowledge upon them. He sat by the roadside day after day making friends with them. And when too ill to leave his bed his indomitable spirit found a way of influencing them. 'In order that death might not deprive him of the privilege of repeating his text, he designed his own tombstone. That tombstone of his is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. It is one of the most eloquent and one of the most pathetic monuments to be found in the southern hemisphere. It stands at the corner of a tiny bush burying-place, tucked away among the giant mountains of New South Wales; yet, by means of that roadside memorial, Robert Lamb goes on repeating his text every day of his deathless life: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, for my shoulder-gear is easy, and my swag is light.'

Printed by MORRISON & GIBB LIMITED, Tanfield Works, and Published by T. & T. CLARK, 38 George Street, Edinburgh. It is requested that all literary communications be addressed to THE EDITOR, Kings Gate, Aberdeen, Scotland.