

Contemporary Portraits

Contemporary Portraits, third series, by Frank Harris. New York: Frank Harris, 40 Seventh avenue.

FRANK HARRIS is a man of genius, one of the few men of genius living. By those swift and free movements which are possible only to the winged, by instant ascent to sweeping radiant vision, he is enabled to comprehend the pertinent realities toward which most of us plod, grub, and dig—usually in the wrong direction.

His genius, however, seems to me to be trammelled. With all his intuition, with superb muscle and will, Harris does not command his empire. He is, he says, a rebel. That is true. But what he most rebels against is not the external but the internal. He is not domesticated in his own soul. He talks mournfully of martyrs, with one eye on himself; he dreams Don Quixote. But the truth is that with all his sense of real quixotism and martyrdom and unpopularity, the division is in himself.

The source of this division I do not know, or fancy I know. I only feel that this man of genius transfers to the world a conflict which exists mainly in his bosom. And scarcely ever, for this reason, is his mind free of the problem in human domestication which is Frank Harris.

I could imagine him, with his flaming eyes, his fighter's moustache, his lion's voice, the leader of any renaissance crew. He should, perhaps, never have been a man of letters, but a tiger of adventure, framed with fearful symmetry—not, as he says, "dreadful" symmetry. But mysterious chance has made him a writing man. A real tiger, not the stuffed cat which is Clemenceau, he has all the same spent his life and subdued his nature in the sober harness of literary self-expression. In such harness he inevitably looks untamed, wild, disreputable. And no rebellion, no violence, no recklessness of statement, can ease such a man of action. He, like Cellini, should have had priceless jewels to play-with and bombs to fling, to realize the rich, eager nature that came to him straight from the steaming earth.

Instead he wrote, significantly enough, *Montes the Matador* and *The Bomb*. He wrote that marvelous jewelled book, *The Man Shakespeare*. And, in his uncommon and brave subordination of great gifts, he has produced sixty *Contemporary Portraits*.

This third series is as valuable as the earlier ones. Whatever the division in his nature, here he is sublimated and elicits from himself an amazing sweetness and tolerance. His intelligence is broad enough to hold men like Chesterton and Galsworthy whom his temperament alone could not accommodate. Many of his portraits flash with temperament. Some are deliberately gracious and in a few the reservations, especially as to sex, are plain. But you cannot read these sixteen sketches without feeling the warm romantic insight, the spiritual energy, the power to catch the soul in motion, the just perspective of fine taste. Take one line on John Morley, "The bleak face lighted up with a glint of wintry sunshine." Take one bit of the penetrating account of H. G. Wells: "Nothing arresting or peculiar in the face, save the eyes: eyes that grew on one. They were of ordinary size, a grayish blue in color, but intent, shadowed, suggesting depth like water in a half-covered spring; observant eyes, too, that asked questions, but reflection, meditation the note of them; eyes almost pathetic in the patience of their scrutiny."

With a flair of his own he sees Cunninghame Graham, Gaudier-Brzeska, Augustus John, Coventry Patmore.

These he sees with an eye for differences, but with his constant love of gallantry. He is sympathetic to, rather than with, Arthur Symonds, Upton Sinclair, Louis Wilkinson, W. L. George. He is no sweeter than a just witness should be. He is not cruel, even to Winston Churchill. And with glowing color he paints Huxley and Alfred Russel Wallace.

No one knows better than Frank Harris himself that in this book his wine is sometimes served in a chipped cup. It is a weary hand that writes: "Wilkinson has the heart of the matter in him I am persuaded and so I bid him gird up his loins and give us his very best." This is English without dignity. But the deeper laziness, laziness of perception, is not here. Frank Harris has not whittled, like Whistler, rather he has painted with full imagination, but his keen drawing, his ultimate fidelity to structure, is clear to the examining eye. When he comes to his *Autobiography*, which he now promises, we should have a masterpiece. Meanwhile the master's hand is to be seen in these *Portraits*. To read them is "to warm both hands before the fire of life."

FRANCIS HACKETT.

A Defender of the Faith

Divine Personality and Human Life. Being the Gifford Lectures (Part II) delivered in the University of Aberdeen in 1918 and 1919, by Clement C. J. Webb, Fellow of St. Mary Magdalene College, Oxford. London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd.; New York: The Macmillan Co. \$4.00.

SINCE the appearance of these lectures, of which the first volume was reviewed in these pages last year, their author has been appointed to the newly founded Oriel Professorship of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at the University of Oxford. Alike the appointment and the work by which it was earned are symptomatic of a revival of Theism in contemporary English thought. "Back to God" is the watchword of the latest philosophy of religion. In this there is a significant change of tone and temper. Twenty or thirty years ago, the handling by philosophers of the concept of God, and of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, was either severely critical or else timid and apologetic. Naturalism represented religion as effete superstition, vanishing like the shades of night before the rising sun of science. Comtists in all lands preached the religion of humanity. Those philosophers—and they were of many different schools—who tried to save something of religion in the traditional sense, yet thought it necessary to jettison most of it as mythological. With Bradley, they could declare that God is "riddled by contradictions". With Hoeffding, avoiding the term God altogether, they would define religion as "faith in the conservation of values". With Royce or Taylor, they might identify God and the Absolute. With Bosanquet, on the other hand, they might distinguish between them and rank the Absolute above God. With Bergson, they might deify the cosmic élan vital, or with S. Alexander, the English Realist, speak not of God but of "Deity", as a quality of perfection yet to be achieved by a universe in evolution. It was inevitable that from all these experiments the pendulum should swing back to a re-examination of the old orthodoxies, and that these, weighed once again, should this time not be found wanting. This return to a Personal God—not, be it noted, to the

Absolute of philosophical Idealism—has hardly as yet begun to touch American philosophical thought, but when it does, American students will appreciate, as they do not appreciate now, that in Professor W. E. Hocking, of Harvard University, the movement already has a representative on their side whose work does not need to fear comparison with the best on the English side.

All forms of this new Theism have one thing in common: they appeal directly to the religious experience as evidence for the belief in a Personal God, i. e., a God with whom a personal relationship is possible for his worshippers. Such an argument is obviously not demonstrative in the sense that it can compel the unbeliever by sheer force of reasoning to acknowledge God. The argument is helpless except where it can appeal to actual, first-hand religious experience. The reality of such experience is its fundamental premise. Where that is lacking, God is bound to be an empty phrase, just as beauty is a meaningless word to those wholly devoid of aesthetic experience, or color to those congenitally blind. An open-minded critic must at least concede that, granted religious experience, the orthodox position, sympathetically interpreted as it is by Mr. Webb, can be made to appear extraordinarily plausible and reasonable. It has its difficulties, and perhaps they are even insuperable. But in this respect Theism is no worse off than any other philosophical system. And the unprejudiced critic will bear in mind that in sensitiveness to difficulties we all, without knowing it, are the victims of the Time-Spirit which triumphantly restores in one generation the views which the preceding generation prided itself on having laid to rest forever.

In this volume, Mr. Webb has set himself the two-fold task of showing, first, that only in the context of belief in a Personal God can the typical activities of man find an adequate interpretation; and, secondly, that such a belief forbids that depreciation of human personality as transient and of subordinate value, upon which Naturalism and Absolute Idealism appear to agree. The chapters (VIII-X) in which Mr. Webb discharges this second task are by far the best in the book. The criticisms of Bradley and Bosanquet in chapter IX are excellent, and his discussion of immortality in chapter X is admirable in tone and substance. Like Royce, Webb infers immortality from the unique value of human individuality which is implied in personal relation to God. This positive conclusion undoubtedly gains very much in impressiveness from his own frank confession of a "prejudice against a belief which jars upon and distresses my imagination and from the consideration of which my mind has an instinctive tendency to turn aside."

In the interpretation of human activities—economic, scientific, aesthetic, moral, political, religious—through the belief in a Personal God (chapter II-VII), Mr. Webb seems much less successful, though perhaps this impression is due only to the fact that we have got out of the habit of considering economics, or science, or art from the religious point of view. The economic life, thinks Mr. Webb, has religious value in supplying that friction between the flesh and the spirit without which the religious life would be impoverished. Again, scientific determinism teaches the vanity of human life and induces humility far more effectively than the old eschatologies. The chapter on Art discusses, on the basis of the theology of William Blake, the religious value of the general tendency on the part of artists towards polytheism rather than monotheism. But the most debatable chapters are those which offer a

"theonomic" theory of morality and a "theocratic" theory of political obligation. The former amounts to the contention that the sense of duty is best derived, not as by Kant from the autonomy of reason, but from the will of God. Similarly, "the true ground of preference of free and popular institutions over despotic law lies not in this: that no one is really under *obligation* to obey any authority but one which is ultimately *his own*; but in this: that only where he has himself a say in appointing or accepting the vehicles of that authority can he be counted upon to acquiesce in that authority as—not his own—but the best representative he can find of God's." Now, leaving aside the divine right of kings and other historical applications of this principle, it is, of course, a possible interpretation of that patriotism which is the only form of genuine religion that many modern men know. Their nation or country is their God, and its rulers are God's vicars. But, it cannot be emphasized too emphatically that this God is not the God of Christ's teaching. There is little in the politics even of democratic peoples which a genuine Christian can possibly "reverence." Moreover, as Lord Acton reminds us when he claims that in the Middle Ages freedom reigned because the church, as a society based on spiritual standards, successfully withstood domination by the political state, religious obligation has often conflicted with political obligation. The history of Nonconformity is full of instances.

Mr. Webb puts us before the choice: either political obedience is a form of obedience to God, or else it rests on nothing but self-interest and fear. Most of us would prefer the former view, could we but convince ourselves of its truth. But such conviction is difficult to achieve so long as Mr. Webb fails entirely to apply his theory either to conflicts of church and state or to present-day tendencies in politics and in political theory. The war has left us with few illusions about the quality or the purposes of those who govern us. It is not really plausible to say that in Harding or Lloyd George or Lenin we perceive in an eminent sense "the presence of God."

R. F. ALFRED HOERNLÉ.

The Translator's Art

Niels Lyhne, by J. P. Jacobsen, translated from the Danish by Hanna Astrup Larsen. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co. \$2.00.

Ditte: Daughter of Man, by Martin Andersen Nexø, translated from the Danish by A. G. Chater. New York: Henry Holt & Co. \$2.00.

J. P. JACOBSEN, although he had much in common with Gautier and Flaubert, was also part of that Scandinavian self-questioning time which brought forth Ibsen. Perhaps Ibsen recognized this kinship when he called Niels Lyhne the greatest novel of the nineteenth century.

Niels was the battleground of the drifting romantic temperament of his mother, and the earthy sense of reality he inherited from his father. The former usually won, but he was always uncomfortably aware of the scorn of the latter. "There was in Niels Lyhne's nature a lame reflectiveness, child of an instinctive shrinking from decisive action, grandchild of a subconscious sense that he lacked personality . . . How he envied the audacity that rushes