THE GIFT: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies. By Marcel Mauss. Translated by Ian Cunnison, with an Introduction by E. E. Evans-Pritchard. (Cohen and West; 12s. 6d.)

'What shall we send the Jones's this Christmas?—last year they gave us such an expensive calendar': 'We must have the Robinsons to dinner soon, it's months since they invited us to dine with them': 'It's my turn, this round is on me'. These statements, or ones like them, are familiar to most of us, and they refer to particular cases of a very general type of situation, in which we have received something from somebody and are somehow conscious that it should be repaid. It is by examining this curious but universal sense of obligation that the French sociologist, Marcel Mauss, begins his famous *Essai sur le Don*, now for the first time available in an English translation.

This examination takes us a long way both in space and time, for the convention of gift exchange is not just a peculiar refinement of polite society, but rather a universal and vital social element, found in the most 'primitive' as well as in the more advanced societies, and assuming a wide range of forms. It is the virtue of those who make real progress in any branch of knowledge clearly to discern the universal in the conglomeration of particulars, to see the wood as well as the trees, and so, by a new synthesis, to enlarge and widen our understanding of what is most familiar. Thus, in this short essay, phenomena so superficially different as the North American potlatch, a public ceremony at which enormous quantities of goods are destroyed and consumed by rival groups of kinsmen, the Melanesian *kula*, in which a ritual exchange of valuables is carried on in two directions around a vast circle of remote islands, and the more familiar institutions of wedding gifts and marriage payments, are shown by Mauss to belong to one generic type, to have similar implications, and to serve the same kinds of social functions.

So comprehensive a synthesis is only possible when our notions of what gifts are and what their exchange implies are broadened, and this widening of view itself implies the skilled analysis of ethnographic material from a wide field. Certain of Mauss's key observations may be noted here. First, many other things besides economic goods may be given and returned. Prestige, status, power and authority; aesthetic, symbolical and magical values; all these may be involved in gift exchange and may far transcend merely utilitarian considerations. Secondly, there is always an obligation to return, or rather to make a return for, a gift, even though it may be conventionally denied that there is any such obligation. We are 'obliged' to send Aunt Mary a Christmas card in return for hers; if we neglect or forget to do so we feel badly about it. This is because, Mauss argues, to give a present is in a sense to give a

part of oneself; the gift is not 'inert', and many peoples believe that so to possess a part of another's personality may be dangerous to the recipient until a reciprocal gift is made. So habitually to exchange gifts is constantly to give onself, to put oneself as it were in the hands of others, and so to increase one's social interdependence and membership one of another. The conclusion, as Professor Evans-Pritchard points out in an illuminating introduction, is the eminently moral one that one belongs to others and not to oneself: this is a truth which can bear reaffirmation.

A brief review cannot do justice to this brilliant study, which is a classical example of the sociological approach which regards the particular social field with which it is concerned as a totality, an approach particularly associated in France with the name of Mauss's great teacher, Emile Durkheim. Much detailed ethnographic research has been carried out in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa, since Mauss's essay was first published in 1925, but it is safe to say not only that this research has amply borne out Mauss's main theses, but also that his study has in fact guided and inspired a significant part of it. And it may be surmised that its force is not yet spent.

Dr Cunnison and Professor Evans-Pritchard are to be congratulated for having made this work available, in very readable English, to students and all who are interested in the familiar social institutions of themselves and other peoples. On one very minor ground only does the present reviewer take issue with the translator. The compendious footnotes (more than four hundred of them) were printed on the text pages in the French edition. In the present work they are printed together at the end of the book, and the translator suggests (p. xi) that this may make for easier reading. It may do so, of course, if the reader omits all reference to the notes at all (in which case why print them?), or if he reads them consecutively and separately from the text when he has finished the book (in which case they lose half their significance and all their relevance). But if the reader desires (as this reader at least does) to refer to each note as a reference to it appears in the text, just in case it contains something particularly illuminating or vital to the full understanding of the passage to which it refers, it makes, on the contrary, for very much more difficult reading. It may be necessary for reasons of economy to print the text and its notes separately, but at least let us not attempt to make a virtue out of it. This, however, is a small defect in a well-produced and very welcome volume.

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CHRISTIAN REALISM AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS. By Reinhold Niebuhr. (Faber and Faber: 12s. 6d.)

The eleven essays which make up this book are arranged in an order