

## *Blackfriars*

the other day: 'Materialism as a philosophy is dead as a door nail. No philosopher of repute defends it.' And Dr. Sheen, at the recent Pax Romana Congress (August, 1928) lamented that contemporaries go busily on refuting Descartes, Mill and Kant. 'Spencer's despair of Truth at last; Huxley's revolt against the cosmic order; Romanes when he denied God,' are interesting phenomena. But to a younger generation they are less interesting than Keith, Alexander, Bergson, Russell, James, Wells. And, unfortunately, the interest of the Canon's contemporaries of the past is diminished by the Canon's style, which—and we confess with all humility—we find hard to read.

The aim of the letters which compose this book is to 'prove that Life and Mind were not secondary, or accidental, or derived from matter and motion, but aboriginal and of necessity everlasting.' Most of the letters 'were written over twelve years ago.' Letter I is dated 1927.

T.F.

### LETTERS FROM BARON FRIEDRICH VON HÜGEL TO A NIECE.

Edited with an introduction by Gwendolen Greene. (J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.; 7/6 net.)

The von Hügel of these letters (some of which appeared in the *Selected Letters* published in 1927, while others are now printed for the first time) is the von Hügel of 1918-1924—that is, von Hügel at his best. 'Now that he is gone,' writes Mrs. Greene in an excellent introduction (p. xli), 'and one reads his books as a whole, it is impossible not to be deeply impressed by the lovely growth of his mind and soul within that great Communion. He matures and mellows quite clearly beneath our eyes . . . Those "drops of clear religious wine" he speaks of, have purified him of any imperfection and strain; he is full of a touching humility . . .' It is a point we dwelt on in reviewing here the former volume—his remarkable and refreshing growth in humility, his shedding of all fussiness and attainment of a radiating peace, not superficial, but passing understanding, all the fruit of what he calls in a letter in the present volume (p. 21) 'a sense of the presence, the power, the prevenience of God, the healing Divine Dwarf of our poor little man-centred, indeed even self-centred, schemes.'

'The first and central act of religion is *adoration*, sense of God,' of a God 'infinitely more than a mere assuager of even all men's wants.' This sense was the mainspring of his life, and he could not stand any teaching that watered down

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the idea of God, and obscured in any way this vital necessity for an utter and self-abandoning reverence of Him. He thus possessed a deep insight into two supreme things, or rather two aspects of one supreme thing, the glory and the homeliness of God's Will. His niece had found 'any, every church, very middling, hence dull, repulsive'; he writes to her (p. 9): 'The touching, entrancing beauty of Christianity, my Niece, depends upon a subtle something which all this fastidiousness ignores. Its greatness, its special genius, consists, as much as in anything else, in that it is without this fastidiousness. A soul that is, I do not say tempted, but dominated, by such fastidiousness, is as yet only hovering round the precincts of Christianity, but it has not entered its sanctuary, where heroism is always homely, where the best always acts as a stimulus towards helping towards being (in a true sense) but one of the semi-articulate, bovine-childish, repulsively second-third-fourth-rate crowd . . . . The heathen philosophies, one and all, failed to get beyond your fastidiousness; only Christianity got beyond it; only Christianity. But I mean a deeply, *costingly* realised, Christianity—got beyond it: Gwen will, some day, get beyond it. It is, really, a very hideous thing; the full, truly free, beauty of Christ alone completely liberates us from this miserable bondage.' Elsewhere, too, he warns us against the pride and complacency that come from 'patronage of the toiling, moiling Church folk by "superior" philosophical insight.' He recognised the Infinite in the finite, and the consequent necessity of the 'creaturely mind' at all times, of reverence towards God and all His works as well, and his holiness was a holiness reached in and through the Church and life's ordinary ways (p. 92).

Accompanying his insistence on this fundamental attitude of soul is found everywhere in these letters a penetrating practical wisdom which is at once its fruit and its support. 'Worldliness is a less dangerous foe of the spiritual life than is brooding and self-occupation of the wrong, weakening sort. Nothing ousts the sense of God's presence so thoroughly as the soul's dialogues with itself—when these are grumbings, grievances, etc.' (p. 43). What is more, 'to learn interior silence, the not talking to self—our little notions petted as our own, etc.—is fundamental in the attaining of the spiritual life' (p. 46).

Von Hügel perhaps learned more from Newman than he suspected. Like him he dwells much on the indispensability of asceticism, asceticism in life, thought, and emotion—the

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costingness of religion, the need of astringency, to use his favourite expressions. Yet with all that he insists on the avoidance of what he terms rigorism, on the duty of a full appreciation of the God of nature—*true* nature, that is to say, and he thus achieved a balance which at times Newman seems to miss.

It would be difficult to find elsewhere in modern spiritual literature air as wholesome and vivifying as the air we breathe in this book. We are grateful to Mrs. Greene for giving us these letters, and for her valuable introduction of forty pages in which she records something of the talks her uncle had with her.

L. W.

CHRIST AND RENAN. A commentary on Ernest Renan's *The Life of Jesus*, by M. J. Lagrange, O.P. Translated by Maisie Ward. (Sheed & Ward; 3/6 net.)

This work first appeared in 1923, the centenary of Renan's birth. Its purpose was to show once more the fundamental worthlessness of Renan's presentation of Our Lord. Père Lagrange did this none the less effectively because he frankly acknowledged the excellence of Renan's treatment of various points of detail. As *The Life of Jesus* is now to be had in *Everyman's Library* with a preface by Bishop Gore, it is well that the antidote should be as accessible to English readers as the poison. But the book is not only valuable as a criticism of Renan. It will serve another useful purpose. For Père Lagrange is not only our foremost Biblical scholar; he is of all Biblical scholars the most determined and consistently able to take us beyond words to things. No one can read carefully such chapters as those in this book on 'The Historical Method' and 'The Mission and Person of Jesus' without acquiring something of the author's own sense for realities. And we realise again that Renan's 'Life' was essentially nothing more than an attempt to hide from those whom he could entice to read him the reality that he himself could not or would not face, the tremendous reality of Christ.

L. W.