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THE ENGLISH EDITION OF THE WORD OF GOD AND THE WORD OF MAN*

By KARL BARTH

*The Editor to his Friends in the
Ministry.*

"A book," said Walter Pater, "is fortunate or unfortunate in the circumstances in which we first encounter it."

I am prepared to concede that this may be the explanation of the quite unprecedented influence upon my own mind of the reading of a great book first in the American edition, and now again in the edition as published by Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton. Its appearance in English amongst us is an event of the very first importance for all who hold a Christian view of God and the world.

I am not concerned for the moment with the difficulties which Barth's teaching might be shown to lead to if that teaching is not qualified by the pull of some interest equally profound and inalienable to men. I am only saying that in my own view, and with the present welter of subjectivity in every region of the spiritual life, the teaching of Karl Barth has the authenticity of a word from God to the Church.

Not the least efficacious part of the book for the spirit of any man whose function it is to preach the Gospel are the chapters in which Karl Barth deals, say, with "The Task of the Ministry," or, again, "The Task of the Reformed Churches," or, again, "The Christian's place in Society."

Here, for example, is a way of writing which is surely not too common; a way of writing which like a ray of light will enable us all, if we have the courage, to discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

"What is our aim? Even ministers should be able to answer this question. Why did we take up this work, and why do we keep at it? What do the people who support us—or at least tolerate us—really expect us to do? They have no answer for this question of questions" (as to the meaning of life), "but are naïve enough to assume that others may have. So they thrust us into our anomalous profession and put us into their pulpits and professorial chairs, that we may tell them about God and give them the answer to their ultimate question. Why do they not themselves seek to master it, as they have sought to master everything else? Why do they come to us, when they must long since have made the discovery that they cannot expect the same service from us as they do from an attorney or a dentist, for instance, and that, if the truth must be told, we can answer their question no better than they themselves? One may well ask. Their coming gives evidence not so much of their hope for an answer from us as of their inability, shared with all man-