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FOREIGN IMPRESSIONS.

The Epistle to the Romans. By KARL BARTH. Translated by Sir Edwyn C. Hoskyns, Bart., M.A. Oxford Press. 21s.

Die kirchliche Dogmatik. I: Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes. von KARL BARTH. Erster Halbband. Kaiser Verlag. München. 1932. R.M. 14.

The Barthian Theology and the Man of to-day. By JOHN McCONNACHIE, D.D. Hodder. 7s. 6d.

Theologische Existenz Heute! von KARL BARTH. Kaiser Verlag. München.

It is now fifteen years since Karl Barth published the first edition of his Commentary on *Romans*. That first edition was the work of an obscure country pastor, and none was more surprised than he at the interest which his book created. It was, as Barth has said, as if a man climbing up the stairway of a church tower had clutched a rope for guidance, and found that he had pulled the rope which made the great bell of the church to ring. Of that first edition, as Barth puts it, nothing but the preface now remains. The second edition of 1921 was an entirely new book. Less violent and extreme than the first, to some of us who read it soon after its appearance, it seemed violent and extreme enough. The translation before us is of the sixth edition, but, apart from new prefaces, these later editions agree substantially with the second. The country pastor became in 1921 the theological professor, and Barth's chief interest since then has been in systematic theology.

When we read this book in its second edition we little thought that anyone would be bold enough to undertake its translation into English. Sir Edwyn Hoskyns has had not only the courage but the skill to complete this almost impossible task. If English readers find this translation hard to read, they may comfort themselves with the reflection that the English version is lucidity itself compared with the tortured German of the original, and Sir Edwyn has lightened his readers' task by explaining many of the unfamiliar allusions in which the book abounds. In gaining clearness, the translation inevitably loses something of the passionate intensity of the original. No English style—unless it be Carlyle's—could reproduce what Sir Edwyn rightly calls "the violent and explosive character" of the German.

It will be interesting to see what impression this book makes on those who now read it for the first time. The reviewer read the original when as yet Barth had published no other book, and when it was impossible to foresee in what direction the so-called Barthian movement would develop. It seemed to him then for all its perversity one of the most poignant and disturbing books that he had read. It was impossible to regard it as an adequate exposition of Paul's thought. At times it seemed rather to express what Paul may have thought of God just before his conversion than what he thought of Him when through Christ his terror of God had changed into love and trust. And Barth by the scorn he poured on Christian theology and ethics and on the activities of the Church, seemed to reduce the Christian message to silence and to permit to our faith nothing but an awed response to the awful and unintelligible Word of God. Since then Barth and his greatest associate, Brunner, have become professors of theology, and from Brunner have come clear and incisive books both on theology and on ethics, whilst the Barthian movement, which seemed at first to destroy the motive for the Church's social and missionary work, has proved capable of inspiring a deep, if humble and chastened, zeal.

This commentary on *Romans*, as Barth himself says in his preface to this English edition, "seems to have been written by another man to meet

a situation belonging to a past epoch". Yet, much as Barth has changed since he wrote this book, the book has not lost its value. It expresses, with a violence he would not now use, his abhorrence of the "Titanism" of much modern thought and of the sentimentality of that Christian teaching which dares to speak of love to God without first having trembled before His awful majesty.

If the teaching of this book were likely to become dominant in this country, there is much in it that we should feel compelled to criticize. But at present it is more necessary to learn from Barth than to criticize him, and even if we reject much of his teaching it is well for us to have our complacency shattered by his tremendous indictment of a self-centred or comfortable Christianity. It is impossible to give any short account of this apparently chaotic and yet fundamentally coherent book. It may be more useful to quote a few of his sayings.

Since power belongs only to God, it is the tragic story of every man of God that he has to contend for the right of God by placing himself in the wrong.

There is no such thing as mature and assured possession of faith: regarded psychologically, faith is always a leap into the darkness of the unknown, a flight into empty air.

In Jesus, God becomes veritably a secret; He is made known as the Unknown, speaking in eternal silence; He protects Himself from every intimate companionship and from all the impertinence of religion.

Love which obscures the distance between God and man and which is not grounded upon fear is, in the end, directed towards the No-God of this world and brings men under the Wrath of God.

Lutherans have spoken much of the comfort of religion, but

religion, so far from being the place where the healthy harmony of life is lauded, is instead the place where it appears diseased, discordant and disrupted.

Religion is not a thing to be desired or extolled; it is a misfortune which takes fatal hold on some men and is by them passed on to others.

Conflict and distress, sin and death, the devil and hell, make up the reality of religion.

Religion is the misfortune which every human being has to endure, though it is, in the majority of cases, a hidden suffering.

By "religion" Barth denotes man's approach to God. God's approach to man is expressed by the words "God sent His own Son". This is the word of freedom which religion is unable to discover.

To God

the human historical Jesus bears witness. But Jesus is the Christ: that is to say, the particularity of God is illuminated by His existentiality.

He sent Him "on account of sin".

And since the mission of the Son of God is the divine reaction against sin, it can be described only in weighty negations, preached only in paradoxes, understood only as that *absurdum* which is, as such, *incredible*. The offence which it occasions us is the reflex of the scandal which we are to God.

Were we to discover in Christ a road of faith which skirts round the edge of the final scandal of the Cross—then the relativity, the dissolution, the parabolic nature of the flesh would not have been set forth, the assault of sin could not finally have gone home, and neither would sin have been condemned nor men have been saved—existentially.

Those difficult chapters of *Romans* (9-11) Barth discusses under the three heads, "The Tribulation of the Church", "The Church's Guilt", "The Oneness of God".

The Church, situated on this side of the abyss which separates man from God, is the place where the eternity of revelation is transformed into a temporal, concrete, directly visible thing in this world. In the Church,

the lightning from heaven becomes a slow-burning, earth-made oven, loss and discovery harden into a solid enjoyment of possession; divine rest is changed into human discomfort, and divine disquiet into human repose.

The Church is the endeavour to make the incomprehensible and unavoidable way intelligible to men.

The Gospel dissolves the Church, and the Church dissolves the Gospel.

And yet we may not

hold ourselves aloof from the Church or break up its solidarity but rather, participating in its responsibility, and sharing the guilt of its inevitable failure, we should accept and cling to it.

This Commentary has to be read as a whole if it would be understood. It is a sombre and disturbing book and yet a book which puts iron into the blood.

In 1921 the country pastor became the professor of theology. In 1927 Barth published his *Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics* under the title *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. To the reviewer it seemed a disappointing book. From the Barthian movement came soon one great theological book, *The Mediator (Der Mittler)* by Professor Brunner, but Barth himself seemed to wear the professor's gown awkwardly and to have been more at home in the prophet's mantle. Barth in this book quotes at great length and often with little relevancy from the writings of the Protestant Schoolmen, but showed little sign that he had studied adequately that whole development of Christian theology, knowledge of which alone can save a theologian from provincialism and eccentricity. Barth himself has come to realize the inadequacy of this book. The volume before us, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, i, though described as a second edition, is really a completely new book. This massive volume of more than five hundred big and closely printed pages deals with only half the contents of the first edition. Another volume is promised to complete the *Prolegomena*. Then will follow four other volumes equally elaborate.

Barth has studied and learned much in the five years that separate the second from the first edition. His range of interest is now enormously increased. In particular, he refers often to the great theologians of pre-Reformation times and especially to Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas. Barth now recognizes the validity of many of the criticisms levelled against him. The whole conception of existential thought is abandoned. He tells us that he read with horror the criticism that he had built his whole theology on the basis of existential thinking and confesses that in his reliance on existential philosophy "he had shown reverence to false gods". Instead, *Christian Dogmatics* has for its sufficient basis the Word of God. "It can learn and should learn nothing from philosophy".

This half volume contains Barth's discussion of the Word of God and the first section of the division on The Revelation of God. That first section deals with the Triune God, for Barth still maintains—wrongly as we believe—that the Doctrine of the Trinity is to be treated not as an ultimate intellectual implicate of faith in God through Christ and in the Spirit, but as the first statement of Christian theology.

The gravest criticism some of us made of Barth's first edition was that in his reaction against the subjectivity of much modern theology he sought to make Revelation purely objective, whereas it must be experienced, if it is to be known. That criticism is no longer pertinent, for this second edition has sections on "The Word of God and Experience" and on "The Word of God and Faith". He permits us to speak of certainty, though that certainty is not self-certainty; it is created in the believer by the Word of God. Faith is experience; it is a man's act of recognition.

In faith we have an actual experience of the Word of God and no " *fnitum non capax infiniti* " and no " *peccator non capax verbi divini* " ought to prevent us from taking this proposition in earnest with all its consequences.

This is, indeed, an advance on Barth's earlier position. His teaching is now becoming less distinctive because more true. Yet man's act is not primary. As Barth puts it (referring to *Rev.* 3²⁰) :

it is, indeed, true that man must open the door but that is, in regard to act and power, the work of the Christ who stands outside.

We may well wonder if in these days theological books as long and elaborate as Barth's are necessary. Barth protests that a church catastrophically misunderstands itself if it think of theology as an occupation for theorists or a luxury for quiet days—a sort of luxury possible for the Church in times of peace but not in times of crisis. For a Church in peril there is no more pressing problem than inner consolidation, and that means theology.

This first half-volume of Barth's *Dogmatics* was published in December, 1932. Two months later Dr. McConnachie sent to the press his second book on Barthianism, *The Barthian Theology and the Man of To-day*. This book contains full references to Barth's second edition. It was an extraordinary achievement so soon to assimilate and describe Barth's massive volume. Those unable or unwilling to read Barth's book will find here a concise summary made by one who faithfully and uncritically reproduces Barth's teaching.

The fourth book before us, *Theological Existence To-day!* is a pamphlet written by Barth on the eve of the fateful Church election of 25th June of this year. What Barth calls "theological existence" is

the connexion with the Word of God and the validity of the special calling to the service of God's Word.

From the standpoint of one who seeks thus to serve God's Word, Barth boldly attacks the programme of the "German Christians" who seek to make the Church the tool of the Nazi party. Barth sums up his opposition to their programme under nine heads. He denies that it is the concern of the Church to do everything to bring the German people again into the way of the Church. It is the Church's concern that in it there should exist the command and promise of the free and pure Word of God. The German Protestant (*evangelische*) Church is the Church of the German Protestant people, but it serves the Word of God alone. The Church proclaims the Gospel in all the kingdoms of the world and so in the third kingdom (of the Nazis) but not in subordination to it and not in its spirit. The fellowship of the Church is not determined by blood or race but by the Holy Spirit and by baptism. If the German Protestant Church exclude Jewish-Christians, or treats them as Christians of a second class, then it will have ceased to be a Christian Church at all. These are bold words for anyone to write in Germany to-day. His ninth thesis appears thus :

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Evidently Barth concluded this section with words which his publisher did not dare to print.

This brave protest illustrates what history has often shown : those that have learnt to tremble before God need have no fear of man. It is those who know the sovereignty of God who can best withstand all human tyranny.

SYDNEY CAVE.