

The World of Books.

KARL BARTH'S "CREDO."

THE appearance in English of Karl Barth's *Credo: A Presentation of the Chief Problems of Dogmatics with Reference to the Apostles' Creed*, translated by J. Strathcarn McNab (Hodder and Stoughton, 8s. 6d.), will be welcomed by all who are interested in theology. It is the latest work from the pen of the greatest living theologian, and consists of sixteen lectures delivered at the University of Utrecht in the spring of last year. The translator has done his work admirably. I have compared the rendering at many points with the original German, and can only say that Mr McNab has achieved something of a triumph. The version is faithful, and yet it reads freely in English. This means a good deal more than a superficial reader might think; for Karl Barth is by no manner of means an easy writer to translate, though his style is simpler here than in most of his other books—a fact to which he himself makes a half-amused reference. This is due in part, no doubt, to the circumstance of the spoken word. But in any case the translation is a fine feat. Only one criticism on detail suggests itself. Why does Mr. McNab quote Phil ii 8 in the utterly unjustifiable and misleading text of the Authorised Version?

There is much originality in these pages; but it is of the right kind, and indeed of the only kind that is permissible to a believing theologian. That is to say, it is not the originality of a reckless brilliance, but of a remarkable insight into religious truth. Here, for instance, is a passage in which there is a courageous recognition of a range of fact often politely ignored, or looked at askance, by the theologians of this generation—a habit which explains a good deal of inconsequence in modern philosophical theology.

"In spite of the *omnipotence* of God—or rather on the score of the rightly understood omnipotence of God—dogmatics must not at this place carry the thought of creation right to the end of the line.... Those possibilities (of evil and death) are to be taken seriously as the *mysterium iniquitatis*. The existence of such a thing, however, is not to be perceived from creation, but only from the grace of God in Jesus Christ."

Some utterance of that kind from a responsible theologian was long overdue.

The religious value of many of Barth's utterances in this book is extraordinary. I say the *religious* value; for there are many books on theology which have very little value for actual religion, though they may be perfectly justified from a more technical point of view. But here are many phrases and sentences which come right home to the believing soul; if they are concerned with doctrine they are concerned with it as the theory of a living faith. Take these sentences relating to revelation:—

"God does not reveal Himself through another. He reveals Himself through Himself.... So deep is the abyss—now it becomes clear how deep

it is—which separates us from Him, that to bridge it nothing less than God Himself will suffice."

"Even when the apostles and prophets used the language of human ideas and were looking at a human action, their intention was to speak of a divine initiative among men, something that was to be understood as such and not as human action and human idea."

"Revelation is a *hic et nunc*, once and for all and unique, or it is not the revelation to which Holy Scripture bears witness. Therefore *sub Pontio Pilato*. The man has his rightful place in the Credo."

Or take these sentences about faith.

"In believing, man obeys by his decision the decision of God."

"Faith in God, which is faith in God in His revelation and nothing else, has something of the specific gravity of the freedom, unchangeableness, and self-sufficiency of God Himself."

"Wonder, the wonder of faith, means standing still before that reality in which our legitimate questions as to its divine necessity and its human possibility are set aside."

Again, consider the sheer spiritual discernment which lies behind a paragraph like this:—

"The opposition of the Christology of the early Church to the heresies which it combated can be generally defined by saying that it summons to reverence and to worship; while the one-sided views of the Aryans and the Docetics, the Monophysites and the Nestorians are in the last resort to be understood only as coming from dread of reverence, and only as invitation to comfortable encounter with an all too near or all too far-off God."

That single passage is worth hundreds of pages of some books that have been written about the Christological heresies of the fourth and fifth centuries.

One might go on quoting endlessly, for there is something worth while on every page. Many sentences in this book are of the kind to "stab the spirit broad awake." Let us hope that they will do this for many readers, and not least for some dessicated theologians.

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