

MODERN THOUGHT ABLY DISCUSSED

(Continued from page two.)

entail conception of the great insoluble mysteries of life may be reared." Or thus, Eucken, in his latest work, "Life's Basis and Life's Ideals," whose very title is significant—"We must, with all our power, wage war against the merely human and imaginary freedom on behalf of one that is genuine and spiritual. . . . A way must be found by which, notwithstanding manifold dangers and complications, we may advance to a life that joins depth of freedom, stability with movement. . . . A more energetic concentration of life in itself is therefore, the first condition of transcending the chaos of the life of the present and of preventing spiritual degeneration in the midst of too intense an occupation with externals."

It is the same with Maeterlinck in the sphere of literature. Some one has called him "the poet of the subconscious," and he has accomplished poetically what Bergson has achieved philosophically. No one who knows the vision he has tried to make ours in "The Blue Bird," will deny his share in the movement of which we are thinking. "He wants to teach us," writes an appreciator, "how to soften the noise made by our reasons in order that we may catch the unspoken messages passing from the rest of life into our instincts and intuitions." For the rest, no one, I think, would call Mr. Wells or Mr. Shaw or Mr. Chesterton ultra-conventional; and in a related sphere the very name "problem play" gives the keynote to its character at once.

Proof in abundance is forthcoming from the departments of the arts before mentioned. Of the Post-Impressionists writes one who is apparently by no means convinced of their intimate artistic merits:—"Here is a deliberate effort to step back into the child's view of the natural world and to thrust away the lie of the photographic artist, which, rendering every detail, obscures the whole truth and sacrifices color and line to what is at bottom mere mechanism. . . . It represents a desire to get away from our sophisticated world to one simpler."

And in music, the Futurists may, to our minds at yet, be very much inferior to Wagner, though even here we might do well to remember the maxim that "All tastes worth having are acquired tastes"; but they undoubtedly represent a temper that laughs at all preconceived notions as to

what combinations constitute chords and what discords; while they audaciously recognize no bounds or limits in their search for the real, be it anywhere from the war chant of the microbes to the music of the spheres.

Again, in religion, which is nothing if it is not other-worldly, the spirit which as we have seen seeks for the real in the realm of the spiritual and the immortal, cannot ultimately be antagonistic or even useless. Here at least of all,—so long as men do not pay exorbitant toll to a false Zeitgeist, need the true spirit of freedom terrify. It is in the doctrine of the Cross after all that Nietzsche's maxim "To live dangerously" finds its fullest expression. And just because man is not merely a being of the moment but a spirit which endures this quest must always be a quest for reality. Development is therefore a law and need not frighten. In the words of Sydney Carton, it is "The only way." Eternal verities will be eternal still. And so long as the whole continue greater than its part, so long may we safely rest assured that the Spirit of the ages will not fail to assimilate and use for the common good the spirits of the age. "Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus" is still the standard, and as the Dean of St. Paul's reminds us, "Passing events are only important in so far as they are NOT 'passing,' but linked on to some great idea which is working itself out—some idea the beginning of which we did not hear, the end of which we shall not see, and the meaning of which we very imperfectly understand."

Need I seek among the fabrics of our social and industrial life for detailed proof of the synthetic ideal of this spirit we have been trying to trace? I think surely not. We may be too much a part of it to form fair judgments; but if it be true of modern civilization that "There is death in the pot," it is still undeniably true to any that have eyes to see, that it contains within itself the seed-plot of an abundant life. And toward that newness of life, which will be real because its foundations are solid, not with the false solidity of wood or mortar, but with the sacramental solidity of the spiritual which but expresses and realizes itself in the material, the civilization of our day is tending.

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NO IDEAL DREAM.

That this is no idle dream is shown clearly in the conditions of our wider social life, in the growth and development of our present political and constitutional unity. What do we find there but the making real in life of the spiritual and the ideal? How many men in Canada out of any given thousand have constructed a working hypothesis for imperial federation or even imperial preference or for the consolidation of empire? It does not rest on any such matured plans. It has far outstripped them and can use and be used without them. It is the ideal proving itself to be a real working basis, despite all the efforts of so-called non-sentimentalists to reduce it to terms of tariffs and percentages, and the present year is witnessing that in the fulness and reality of its life it is stronger than death.

So much for the evidence. "Credo quia impossibile" you may accuse me of having as my standard. Well, in a sense I do not deny it. He would be an obscurantist indeed today who would err on the other side. Water-tight compartments may mean life to the ocean liner but they mean death to the God-given mind and soul. It is along the open road that the trail lies. "Remember," says a great scientist who would be no means have said it a few years since, "that those who make denials are just as likely to be wrong as those who make assertions; . . . and microscopists may ignore the stars." Profound thinkers both were they who reminded us each in his own manner of the same great truth—one, that "Spiritual things are spiritually discerned," the other, speaking through Hamlet's lips

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Or, to express it still otherwise:—"Uno itinere non potest perveniri ad tam grande secretum."

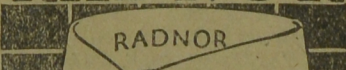
Therefore the clear vision, the strong faith, the open mind. No one, I think, would claim Sir Oliver Lodge as a sworn mystic; yet in his presidential address to the British Association on "Continuity," he can close his masterly survey thus:—"We are deaf and blind therefore, to the imminent grandeur, unless we have insight enough to recognize in the woven fabric of existence, flowing steadily from the loom in an infinite progress towards perfection, the ever-growing garment of a transcendent God."

One word more and I have done. Our cycle of thought, if it may be dignified by such a title, is completed. Of necessity the survey has been a partial one; and with regard to the evidence adduced in justification of our answers to our self-appointed questions it were easy to echo the reply of Dr. Johnson to Boswell, "Sir, I could wish for more." But perhaps enough has been said to prove the existence of a common co-ordinating strain throughout the different departments of thought and action starting from fundamentals and conducing to an ultimate spiritual basis and goal—that makes the modern situation so full of hope.

For the rest, because, after all, we are but dipping into the stream, we may say with Mr. Kipling:

"Only I cut on the timber—only I carved on the stone; After me cometh a Builder. Tell him, I, too, have known!"

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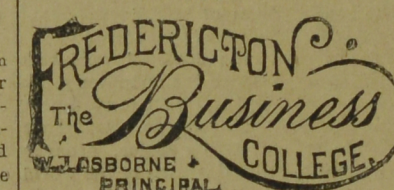
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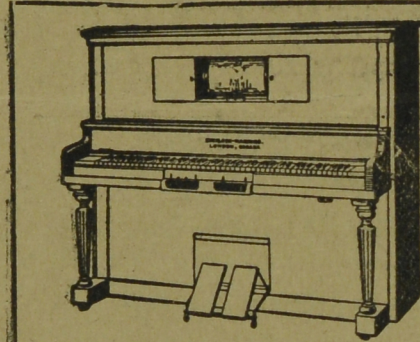
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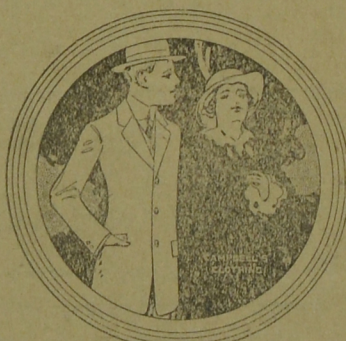
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