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## Books that have influenced our Epoch.

### Canon Streeter's 'Reality.'

BY THE REVEREND CANON OLIVER C. QUICK, M.A., CARLISLE.

WHETHER or not we agree with the main argument and conclusions of Canon Streeter's *Reality*, at least both its publication and the general welcome it has received are exceedingly healthy signs of the times. Modern thought is in grave danger of being submitted wholly to the dominion of the technical expert. An occasional protest is heard such as that contained in the epigrammatic definition of a specialist as 'one who knows more and more about less and less.' And more than twenty years ago I remember hearing an impressive speech in which the specialist was compared with a man who digs a pit in the earth, and sinks down in the pit he is digging until he thinks that he has a horizon before his eyes. But such protests are no remedy. The physicist, the biologist, the psychologist, and the theologian himself each pursues his own line of inquiry in comparative isolation, and in order to facilitate his own work gradually formulates a special language, which makes his conclusions become often obscurer to others in proportion as they are clearer to himself. The twentieth century brings back the curse of Babel in a new form. The layman in the street hears the experts in every subject, religion, science, art, economics, each talking his own foreign tongue; and even the metaphysician, who might claim to act as general interpreter, can only escape the charge of mistranslating by becoming unintelligible himself. Indeed the world of modern thought presents such a chaos of conflicting 'points of view' that it is easy to excuse those who abandon as futile any attempt at unification.

It is no doubt partly due to the same cause that reason has been so largely discredited as a weapon of religious apologetic. Reason, if it means anything at all, is a principle of universal harmony and order; and the conviction, if it still survives the advent of psycho-analysis, that man is a rational animal, suggests that this harmony or order, if it exists, must be capable of being rendered intelligible to the general mind of man. Oddly enough it is the mathematical philosophers who have dealt the shrewdest blow at this kind of rationalism, by maintaining that the esoteric symbols of mathematics are the only adequate medium of true thinking, and that thought expressed in human

language is already more or less vicious. But, be that as it may, it is of the potential intelligibility of all things that the religious man, like his neighbour, has grown sceptical; and certainly many apologists prefer to defend their faith by retiring, with James and Otto, into a special department of experience where the critics, as they claim, are disqualified, rather than by challenging all and sundry to provide a more reasonable account of the universe than theirs.

But Canon Streeter, himself a leading expert in New Testament criticism as well as a distinguished amateur of science and philosophy, takes an opposite view. And surely he at least deserves our thanks 'for not having despaired of the commonwealth' of reason. He still has the temerity to believe that there are general conclusions about the nature of the universe which are not only to be whispered by professors in the ears of their colleagues, but can also be made intelligible when proclaimed from the house-tops. The claim of his book to greatness lies in its combination of depth with clarity. Some readers no doubt will think that occasionally Canon Streeter's metaphors and illustrations fall beneath the dignity of his theme. But even an occasional jar to our sensibilities may serve to remind us of the gratitude we owe to him for maintaining that, because reality is a commonwealth under God's common law, there can be nothing in it which is really commonplace. Since when, after all, has it become offensive to suppose that a hunt for a lost pound note can illustrate the deepest mystery of the Divine nature?

From the philosophical point of view Canon Streeter claims to give us a correlation of science and religion. It is evident at the outset that such a synthesis may be attempted along two different lines. Either it may be contended that scientific and religious knowledge are concerned with different or distinct objects, or else that science and religion deal with the same object from different points of view. Now, it seems obvious on the face of things that religion is more concerned with the value or goodness of what is presented to us in our experience, than is science which is bent on discovering bare facts and the general laws which control them, no matter whether they be in our ultimate judgment

good, evil, or indifferent. Many thinkers have recognized this distinction, and have at once proceeded to the inference that the characteristic aim of religion is rather practical, that of science theoretic. Thus they have supposed that religion and science approach the same object-reality from different points of view and with different interests. And, since it would appear that the activity of knowing, strictly so called, must be theoretic, not practical, there is forthwith bestowed upon science a sovereign authority in all questions of knowledge. No doubt it is a subconscious fear of such a conclusion, which has led many religious thinkers to make all synthesis impossible by arbitrarily fencing off for themselves a certain domain of mystical experience on which all scientific trespass is to be prohibited.

Yet surely nothing could be more fallacious than the underlying assumption that knowledge which has for its object *value*, or, to use Canon Streeter's term, *quality*, is any more practical, or is in principle any less truly and purely knowledge, than the coldest acceptance of bare fact. There is here much danger of confusion. My conscience apprehends that one line of action is right, another wrong. My æsthetic judgment acknowledges supreme beauty in one work of art, and dismisses another as worthless. In both cases the object of knowledge is a value or quality, and of course my judgment is fallible; but in no intelligible sense is it practical. If it is right, it is simply the truth, just as much as if I had asserted that William the Conqueror landed in England in A.D. 1066. And this statement stands, however justly it may be urged that the truth about questions of value is harder to reach or to establish than about questions of fact. To have quality for its object does not make knowledge practical, nor is the coldest study of fact necessarily theoretic. The general practitioner in medicine is a severely practical man. Practical knowledge is his need, when he has a difficult and unusual case to deal with. Does he then seek aid from the preacher, the artist, or the moral philosopher, all of whom might have something to tell him as to the aim and value of medical work? No, he is a practical man; he wants to learn not about ends, but means; and so he has recourse to the coldly scientific volumes which line the shelves of his consulting-room. Practical knowledge means knowing how to change existing realities in a desired direction. Theoretic knowledge is that which does not seek to alter what exists. Judged by that standard a religious knowledge which adores the unchangeable perfection of God,

is, if it be true at all, the most purely theoretic knowledge in the world. What we need to clear our minds here is to go back from Kant to Aristotle.

Canon Streeter therefore seems to be convincing when he maintains both that religion is specially concerned with the value or quality of reality, and also that the object of religious knowledge is really distinct from that of scientific knowledge. If so, he seems to be justified also in his inference that the religious attitude towards reality resembles rather that of the moral and æsthetic consciousness than that of strictly scientific inquiry. There are two genuine elements or features of reality to be known, namely, that which is measurable by some kind of quantitative standard, however refined and delicate and abstractly mathematical such quantitative standards may become, and that, on the other hand, which is in principle not susceptible of measurement, because, like the beauty of a tune or the heroism of self-sacrifice, its essence is quality and not quantity at all. To suppose that our sense of quality in things is 'subjective,' so that quality is not an objective feature of the reality to be known, is an unwarrantable assumption which a sound philosophy does not support. Our general theory of the universe therefore must be as much concerned to account for the genesis of the objective qualities which it reveals, as it is to explain and bring under laws the play of those mechanical or quasi-mechanical forces which determine the structure of what we used to call the material world. Generally speaking, it is the function of religion, morals, and art to deal with the aspect of quality and value; it is the function of science to deal with everything that can be measured in terms of quantity of any kind. This general division of labour will hold good, even if, with Canon Streeter, we acknowledge that from this point of view biology and psychology are found to be less pure sciences than chemistry and physics.

So far I feel myself to be generally in accord with Canon Streeter's splendidly lucid argument. But I am not sure how far I can follow him when he proceeds to further definition of the limitations both of science and of the method whereby religion must express what it knows. Science, according to Canon Streeter, is limited not only in respect of its dealing with quantity, not quality, but also, and in consequence, because it brings all phenomena under general laws, and therefore is obliged to ignore the unique individuality of each particular thing. Religion on the other hand, like art, grasps real individuality, which is seen to be closely connected both with the essence of life and with quality. Our fundamental knowledge of real

individuality springs from our own immediate consciousness of ourselves, and we legitimately infer its existence also in the world outside us. In principle, therefore, religious knowledge is not less direct than that of science, but rather more so, since, by the intuitive sympathy of a life commonly derived and shared, it takes us into the very heart of individual being, while science stands at a certain distance, classifying specimens. But, while religious knowledge is thus essentially *direct*, Canon Streeter tells us at the same time that it can only be expressed in language akin to that of art—symbol, poetry, myth. It would seem therefore that its method of expressing itself is more *indirect* than that of science which baldly states facts and laws. This sounds paradoxical. Again, in what terms is the synthesis of science and religion to be effected? In terms of religion? Then, it seems, the language of synthesis must be symbolic and poetical, akin to that of the Platonic myth. But Canon Streeter's book is undeniably philosophical and argumentative. Should we then say that the synthesis must be philosophical? If so, do we not give to philosophy a priority over religion, which, Canon Streeter says, it ought not to have?

These difficulties and questionings do not necessarily indicate any inconsistency in Canon Streeter's thought; but they certainly invite us to examine it.

Let us start from the assertion that science, in its essential and characteristic work of generalizing, is obliged to ignore the uniqueness and individuality of each particular thing which it studies. In what sense is this true? Confront a botanist and a painter with a vase full of rare blooms of different kinds and colours beautifully arranged. It will probably not be the man of science who ignores the individual flowers in order to admire 'the general effect.' 'Quite so,' Canon Streeter may reply; 'but that is only because the botanist is interested in each bloom as a specimen of a kind, whereas the painter is struck by the uniqueness or individuality of the scheme of form and colour regarded as a whole.' The answer is very just; but it leads to further considerations. The individuality for which the artist cares is not the negative uniqueness which makes this group of flowers just different from all others, but the positive harmony of shapes and shades which makes the group a satisfying whole to the æsthetic eye;<sup>1</sup> and a whole must be

composed of parts. In other words, what matters to the artist is not the individuality which *excludes* other things by bare difference from them, but rather that which *includes* its own component parts in a proper order and balance. This is the individuality which alone gives value; and it can only exist not in a simple particular, but in a composite structure which is, so to speak, a miniature universe. And what is true of the æsthetic judgment, is true also, *mutatis mutandis*, of the moral and religious. A moral act can only be appraised and appreciated in relation to a whole context which exhibits it as the appropriate expression of a certain personality in a certain set of circumstances. And the presence of God can only be acknowledged in some plurality of events or impressions which, considered together in their mutual relations, indicate spiritual being as their cause. Life, as Canon Streeter truly observes, is an individualizing principle. But it individualizes, not because every living organism is different from its fellows—true though that may be—but because each, in being alive, is a complex and organic whole. If every sparrow is deemed worthy of God's remembrance, it is not because two sparrows are more unlike one another than are two peas, but because each embodies in its own mode and measure the complex harmony of infinite life. If, then, science ignores the mere uniqueness of simple particulars, that matters not a jot; religion, art, and morals can well afford to do the same. The real limitation of science is this, that in assiduously analysing phenomena it ignores the manner and significance of their grouping in those wholes which express real quality or value. There lies the blind spot in the vision of scientific research. It can study an agglomeration of classified complexes, but never a mind. It can expose the constitution of the human being, but never discover the man. It is not that an elusive particle of uniqueness always slips through the meshes of the scientific net, but that the wholeness of an individual reality cannot enter them unbroken.

The foregoing reflexions help us to determine why and in what sense it is true that, as Canon Streeter maintains, the native language of religion is in a special way symbolic. Of course (though the obvious is often forgotten) *all* language is necessarily symbol. There can be no such thing as strictly literal truth. For letters in themselves are simply tortuous marks on paper, and merely as such they are meaningless. The very assertion that something is 'literally true' is itself both symbolic and metaphorical. Nevertheless, certain

<sup>1</sup> What makes such a whole appear *beautiful* is ultimately the fact that it gives expression to a unity after which the human soul itself is striving. Compare our Lord's discourse about the lilies.

uses of language to express truth are symbolical in a special sense ; and we shall readily agree that this special kind of symbolism belongs rather to art, whether in prose or verse,<sup>1</sup> than to science or philosophy. But we shall make the distinction clearer if we turn to forms of expression which are not literary at all. Suppose a beautiful building to have been erected.<sup>2</sup> Suppose the most complete and elaborate specification to be drawn up of all its measurements, materials, features, and contents, together with figures giving the exact slope of the ground in the immediate neighbourhood, and perhaps a catalogue with measurements, or a plan, of the main objects surrounding it. And suppose again that a good artist makes a sketch of it from the best angle of vision he can find. Compare the sketch with the specification. Both are symbolic presentations of the building. The specification tells you infinitely more about it. It is complete and exhaustive. The sketch gives very little information at all. But the sketch tells one all-important thing which the specification cannot give—namely, what the whole building was meant to look like. The completeness of the specification omits the wholeness of the building. The sketch, in indicating the individuality of the whole, omits the specification of the parts. In a very analogous way an exhaustive psychological study of the character and life of Julius Cæsar would differ from Shakespeare's tragedy which bears his name. And not wholly otherwise does the scientific study of the universe differ from the vision of it which we catch from the records of inspired religion. Science makes a use of linguistic symbols which approaches the mathematical. Religion makes a use of linguistic symbols which approaches the pictorial. Science aims at the complete specification of parts ; religion at the individuality of the whole. Compare a large volume on the scientific study of the Gospels with that single affirmation of the Creed, ' Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven.'

But what of philosophy and theology ? These are neither precisely science nor precisely religion, and where do they come in ? Again, the foregoing

illustration may help us. When we have the specification and the sketch, there still remains the problem of their correlation. Why did the artist see what he saw from that particular point ? Go to the specification, and, if you understand it, you will construct an answer. Why does the specification indicate these particular measurements and materials ? Go to the sketch, and, if you appreciate it, you will be able to explain. Very roughly speaking, these questions and answers are analogous to the tasks of the philosopher and the theologian respectively. The philosopher, in so far as he deals with religion, is primarily concerned by the help of knowledge derived from science, to find, as it were, the place of religion on the map, to show how it is that it sees the world in this particular perspective, and how far other knowledge may be said to support or conflict with the truth of its vision. Naturally the philosopher is very ill-equipped for his task, if he cannot appreciate religious values. But he does not start his inquiry, so to speak, from the religious end. On the other hand, the religious end is exactly the starting-point of the theologian. In so far as he deals with science, he is endeavouring to show how the structure of the universe and its events, which science discovers and specifies, does enter into and make possible the religious view of the world, which finds the presence of God precisely in that glimpse of a whole effect of goodness necessarily hidden from the scientific eye. There can therefore be no question of ranking religion, science, theology, and philosophy in any order of absolute priority. Religion and science, each after its kind, give a direct and distinct knowledge of the universe. Philosophy and theology, each according to its own method, endeavour to harmonize the two. To religious faith ' the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handywork.' The astronomer ' has no need of that hypothesis,' and brings us very different news. Theology and philosophy show us how or how far both may be right ; the former by a doctrine of creation which takes full account of natural law operating in space-time, the latter by a theory of natural law which leaves room for the apprehension of Divine values. A Christian holds that the best theology starts from the Christian revelation, and the best philosophy finishes in acknowledgment of its truth.

I have no idea how far Canon Streeter would assent to the foregoing reflections and inferences which the main thesis of his intensely interesting volume has suggested to my mind. The one point that I desire to urge in criticism is that he has not sufficiently

<sup>1</sup> I think it was Coleridge who said that the opposite of prose is verse, and the opposite of poetry is science.

<sup>2</sup> I am well aware that my analogy begs an important question in favour of religion, by taking a building made to be beautiful, instead of, e.g., a motor-car made for mechanical use. In the latter case the specification would have much greater relative importance, the sketch much less. Fully to justify the choice of analogy would take us too far afield.

distinguished between the negative principle of uniqueness and the positive principle of individuality in things. I felt that the results of this omission appeared particularly in the chapter on our Lord's life. In spite of all Canon Streeter's magnificent belief in the Incarnation and in all it means to Christian theory and practice, yet somehow, whenever he writes of the historic Jesus, the picture of a unique man, a hero and teacher immeasurably greater than any other, is all that his language succeeds in bringing before my eyes. Now, it seems to me to be a radical confusion to suppose that, by emphasizing our Lord's uniqueness as a man, or even by emphasizing His sheer uniqueness in any sense, we can make any progress at all towards thinking of Him as Incarnate God. By such emphasis we might indeed make Him appear as some angelic being or superman, but Godhead would be as far from Him as before. Godhead stands revealed, not in the uniqueness which makes Him different from all other men, but in the supreme individuality which in Him achieves the harmony of all the jarring elements of human nature, and even points the way to the final reconciliation of the awful strife between good and evil in the world. To you and me Jesus Christ is God, not just because He is different from us, but rather because in Him we dimly discern ourselves made new, as we might be; and so has every faithful Christian since He came to earth. His earthly life and teaching are the

mirror which ever transfigures and yet truly reflects every man and his world. It is when men have seen themselves in Christ, that they can also forget themselves in Him. And the words, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and I will give you rest,' if they are true at all, are the clearest declaration of Christ's Deity which man can hear. So St. Paul was inspired to proclaim that Christ Himself is the individuality, the whole perfection, the controlling harmony, of the Church which is His Body. Father Thornton has lately been teaching those who can still read difficult theology that God Himself in Three Persons is the one absolute and perfect Individual.<sup>1</sup>

But if I have suggested that Canon Streeter's treatment of individuality is from a certain point of view defective, I would conclude by recording my debt to his two chapters on the Defeat of Evil and on Religion and New Psychology, where he has illuminated and helped me in a way which can only be achieved by theology which, at least to me, is great—and I think this is particularly true of the former chapter. I do not want to comment, or to spoil by summary. But I would ask all whose minds need help in religion to read and ponder. And after all it is by its treatment of the problem of evil that Christian theology must be mainly judged.

<sup>1</sup> See *The Incarnate Lord* (Longmans). The treatment of the idea of individuality is one of the most impressive features of the book.

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## Literature.

### DR. BERNARD'S COMMENTARY ON THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

THE most recent addition to the valuable series, 'The International Critical Commentary,' appears under the title *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, 2 vols. (T. & T. Clark; 30s. net). The author of the Commentary is the Most Rev. and Right Hon. J. H. Bernard, D.D., who had fortunately completed the manuscript of both volumes before his death in August 1927; so that Dr. A. H. McNeile, who has edited the work, has been responsible only for seeing it through the Press.

It is a Commentary for which many have been eagerly waiting, and we make bold to say that it

will fulfil expectations. For in Dr. Bernard, as it appears to us, we have not only a capable guide in all questions relating to the Fourth Gospel but a wise and cautious one as well. One thing that will appeal to readers of a conservative turn of mind is that he does not lightly abandon traditional standpoints in favour of novel theories. For example, while allowing that there was a Jewish mind behind the Fourth Gospel, and that an undertone of Semitic ways of thought and speech may be discerned in its language, he does not allow that, as Dr. Burney urged a few years ago, the Fourth Gospel is of Aramaic origin and its Greek only translation-Greek, betraying its Aramaic base at every point.

On the question of authorship Dr. Bernard is