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Recall what it meant to our Blessed Lord in His strenuous days on earth. How it relieved the pressure of toil and anxiety, and brought Him gleams of joy! We do well to emulate His example in appreciating the beauty of common things around us.¹

¹ R. E. Roberts, *The Christian Character*, 76.

The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.

The angels keep their ancient places;
Turn but a stone and start a wing!
'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

Pessimism and Humanism.

BY THE REVEREND J. G. RIDDELL, M.A., GLASGOW.

ONE of the features of modern thought is the prevalence of theories which, however their detailed expression may vary, can broadly be described as pessimistic or humanist in their general outlook. Pessimism and humanism, it would seem, have their own appeal to different types of mind. Each can be supported by arguments apparently cogent, and the attractiveness of both has been reinforced by the happenings of our own time. It may not be without interest, therefore, to notice that, while their conclusions are widely divergent, and indeed contradictory of one another, both depend upon one common assumption, the validity of which may well be questioned.

If we consider, in the first place, the position of the pessimist, we must recognize that he is able to claim the support of many who, in very different circumstances, have looked sadly at what seemed to them the vanity of life, the darkness of death, and the utter uncertainty which they believed to surround all human effort and thought. From the remote and from the nearer past alike, as well as from the opinions of to-day, pessimism can claim a wide support for its conclusions. Thinkers of many lands and writers of different ages can be quoted to show how persistent the belief has been that 'life at the best is but a name.' The sacred books of the East and the literature of Greece and Rome were deeply tinged with sadness; but the reader of Matthew Arnold and Ibsen, of Meredith or Thomas Hardy, finds a no less sombre picture of humanity and its destiny. The events of recent years, moreover, and the very achievements of men themselves, have led to disappointment and disillusionment, and have brought not a few to believe that long-cherished hopes were foolish after all.

Thus the pessimist cites the discoveries of contemporary science in support of his point of view. It was easier, we are told, to escape the conclusion

that all our life is insignificant and meaningless when men could believe that the earth was the centre of all things. But now, all we can discern is the littleness of our own being and the seeming indifference of the universe to the values that we cherish. We are no longer haunted so much by the unfriendliness of Nature, which led Philo and Demea, in Hume's *Dialogues*, to compete in painting the misery of life in the darkest colours, as by the sheer immensity of stellar space, into which we gaze bewildered. Is it not impossible to avoid pessimism if, in Jean's well-known phrase, life is 'an utterly unimportant by-product of the forces at work around and about us,' or, as Santayana puts it, our world is merely 'a little luminous meteor in an infinite abyss of nothingness'?

But what is man's own record? Is not the verdict of history itself our condemnation? Have we not to confess, the pessimist persists, turning to a further argument, that men have spent their strength erecting towers of Babel which have fallen in ruins and destroyed their builders? 'We do not want your sermons on success,' writes Mr. A. P. Herbert, in *After the Battle*—for failure, and not success, is written over human achievements in letters of fire. The story of man's endeavour is a tangled, thwarted, disappointing tale. The prodigality of Nature cannot surprise or distress us more than the waste of moral and spiritual values among men who are unable even to use aright the bounty that Nature supplies. 'We remain confronted,' it has been said, 'with a world travailing for perfection, but bringing to birth an evil which it is able to overcome, if at all, only by self-torture and self-waste.' The narrow limits of our knowledge, which the philosophy of pessimism has always emphasized, are being brought home to us, it is maintained, in new ways; making more apparent the blindness of will which drives men on to seek what brings only unhappiness, as well as

the strange perversity of beings who can measure the velocity of the stars, and wrestle with problems of Time and Space, and are yet unable to overcome disastrous economic difficulties created by their own ingenuity and inventiveness.

Thus the pessimist draws evidence from literature and science, from history and economics, and comes finally to an ethical argument based on the sheer depravity of human life. 'Except for a few favoured natures,' wrote Plato, 'we cannot be trusted to do our duty unless temptation is removed out of our path and we are barricaded into virtue.' The spirit of hopelessness which long ago led men to separate themselves from an unholy world, or to declare that the times were so evil that only catastrophe could be in store for a race, so persistent in its wrong-doing, is invoked by the pessimist still. The sweeping onslaught of the Theology of Crisis on all that is human seems at first sight but the corroboration of such ethical pessimism. It is the assertion that the triumphs and achievements of man, his loftiest desires and deepest experiences, are all to be condemned as worthless. We delude ourselves, the pessimist will say, in attaching significance to any of these, for they are all attained within an indifferent universe, and however important they may seem to us, they are of no ultimate value. Reality apparently cares for none of these things—and we are driven to the philosophy of Thomas Hardy's 'God-Forgotten.'

The Earth, sayest thou? The Human race?
By me created? Sad its lot?

Nay: I have no remembrance of such a place:
Such world I fashioned not.

The various arguments of pessimism, thus briefly indicated, may, of course, be met individually in various ways. It may be maintained, for example, that it is the human mind which has made possible the discoveries that seem to dwarf itself. Thus Sir Arthur Eddington reminds us that 'It is because we ask the question, "Is it true?" that it will not do to say that we are mere puppets that strut and talk and laugh and die meaninglessly, as the hand of time turns the handle underneath.' We may, with some confidence, believe that it is no small thing to be parts, however insignificant, of so great a universe, and Hardy himself, with all his pessimism, gives us just this thought in the Chorus of Pities, in 'The Dynasts':

Strange that we, creatures of the petty ways,

Poor prisoners behind those fleshly bars,
Can sometimes think us thoughts with God ablaze,
Touching the fringes of the outer stars.

Further, it may be argued, the very statement of our discontents and the utterance of gloomy thoughts and sad forebodings imply something better glimpsed, at least, as a possibility—an ideal in the light of which the actual is condemned. So Daniel, in the midst of Belshazzar's feast, can discern the signs of an enduring power: so John, in the hour of Rome's triumph, has a vision of a kingdom that shall remain: so men of faith, in ages of darkness, have been seekers after a city whose builder and maker is God. Again, there is a corrective to ethical pessimism in the recognition that the darkness of evil must be made manifest if the light of the good is to shine forth. Emphasis on man's separation from God may lend impressiveness to the telling of a love that can break through the barrier of sinfulness to redeem and save.

But such individual considerations are ultimately aspects of one fundamental criticism of pessimism. This may be directed against the assumption that humanity can be separated from the universe within which men find themselves. For the pessimist there must always be a dualism at the heart of things. All that is of ultimate meaning and value lies beyond our reach: God, if God there be, can have no care or love for this weary soiled earth: the Universe goes on its relentless way, indifferent to our joys and sorrows, our hopes and prayers, for, to use Mr. Bertrand Russell's words, 'its greatness is more wonderful, and its destiny more brilliant than man can possibly attain to.'

It is necessary, at this point, for our purpose, to notice that precisely the same dualism is assumed by humanism, which, in its varied forms, appears as a rival to pessimism—an alternative welcomed by many, as a way of escape from sadness and despair. But for humanism, all that is precious lies within, and not beyond, the boundaries of our humanity. While pessimism disparages all that belongs to men, humanism is the exaltation of man as the 'master of all things.' It is thoroughly optimistic in its hopeful view of the possibilities that lie within our reach here and now. Let us deliberately accept this separation from all that is beyond: let us acknowledge with thankfulness the dualism which the pessimist, perhaps reluctantly, finds to be inescapable: let us make the best of everything, finding the highest values within our own lives, created indeed entirely by ourselves. Such is the answer of humanism, to the suggestions of pessimism. The two stand, as it were, upon the same ground, but the one claims to see the glory of the sunrise, while the other looks towards the darkness of the night.

One expression of the optimistic outlook of humanism, was the religion of humanity—the positivism of Comte, which has its followers still, and which insists on a dualism between humanity and the universe which cannot be overcome. Swinburne, as Professor Pringle-Pattison has pointed out, is the poet of this way of thought :

I that saw where ye trod
The dim paths of the night,
Let the shadow called God
In your skies to give light ;
But the morning of manhood is risen,
And the shadowless soul is in sight.

Meredith, also, in 'Foresight and Patience,' states his version of the humanist creed :

No extramural God, the God within
Alone gives aid to city charged with sin.

To-day the beliefs of humanism are to be found in many varieties, yet all of them share in the assertion that the essential human values can be secured and conserved without the aid of anything beyond our own reach, and in the hopeful outlook characteristic of this way of thought. 'We are to give up the quest for companionship with a being behind or within the fleeting aspect of Nature,' writes Mr. Walter Lippman in his *Preface to Morals*, 'we are to assume the universe to be indifferent towards the human venture : we are to acknowledge ourselves to be adrift in infinite space on our little earth, the sole custodians of our ideals.' And thus, we are told, there is to be found a new satisfaction here, in place of the mere dream of happiness beyond. Instead of the long winter and Dark Age which the pessimist predicts, we are to have confidence in the future, since, to quote Mr. Bertrand Russell again, 'an unyielding rationalism has a better faith and a more unbending optimism than any of the timid seekers after the childish comforts of a less adult age.' A thoroughgoing relativity in ethics will, it is suggested, do far more to promote our health and happiness—the two main concerns of humanist teaching—than all our careful obedience to the moral law, or our seeking to do the will of God. So far from agreeing with Mr. G. E. Newsom, in *The New Morality*, that there is a better hope than that of 'the dark road along which we have been travelling, lit by a few gleams of faith in human nature, or of hope for human destiny,' the humanist is confident that we need no other light, and that this road of human endeavour and human achievement is better than any pathway of our dreams.

The same attitude of mind is apparent, in an intensely practical form, also, and we can trace its

working in different lands. In India, for example, as Dr. Nicol Macnicol has pointed out, 'Nationalism has taken the place of religion, if, indeed, we should not rather say that it has itself become a religion'—a religion of humanity, divorced from everything supernatural, yet claiming the allegiance and devotion of many no less than the older faiths. The Fascism of Italy and the Nazi movement in Germany bear their own traces of humanist thought and influence in the political sphere, but it is in the Soviet Republic that we see a vast experiment in which humanist principles appear, not only as part of a political system, or an industrial organization, or an educational movement, but as a substitute for religion, or even, as seems to be becoming more and more clear, a kind of religion in itself. It is a deliberate attempt to control the whole of life for human purposes and ends. 'The Communist,' writes Mr. H. J. Laski, 'feels himself essentially the servant of a great idea.' But it is an idea confined to humanity, even if its disciples make use of ritual, ceremony, and dramatic appeal reminiscent to some extent of the old religion. Its deliberate denial of anything beyond the range of human endeavour and achievement is symbolized by the reverence paid to the embalmed body of Lenin, the 'God of the godless.' Its claim is, on the one hand, for loyalty, enthusiasm, and surrender to the ideals of Communism, and, on the other, for a resolute abandonment and destruction of all that would suggest the superhuman or other-worldly.

The varying expressions of humanism are, of course, open to criticism in detail. A fundamental objection to all of them, however, may be directed against their assumption that the life of this world and of humanity is all-important and self-sufficient. Can we agree that values which we have created for ourselves are 'all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know' ? Here we find ourselves returning to our earlier argument, for, as was pointed out above, the same is asserted by pessimistic thinkers also, though in precisely the opposite sense. For humanism and pessimism alike, the part of reality which includes our human life is to be separated from the whole, but, while the humanist asserts that value is to be attached only to the part, the pessimist declares that the part is really worthless and ultimately insignificant. These contradictory conclusions seem themselves to suggest that the common assumption may well be questioned, and that an answer to pessimism and humanism alike may be found in the endeavour to show the unsatisfactoriness of the dualism on which both depend.

Such an answer will follow familiar lines. There is, it may be held, a harmony in the nature of things, in virtue of which our beliefs will only be true in that they are not partial, but are related to the whole of reality, so far as it is known. By abstracting the part from the whole, whether value be ascribed to one or to the other, we are really undermining the truth of our theories. The isolation of certain phenomena which is legitimate and necessary for scientific purposes, becomes misleading as soon as it is allowed in the wider field of speculative thought. 'The true logical subject,' we may say with Bosanquet, 'is always reality.' Our moral decisions are consistent, and reveal a settled purpose only as they are related to the whole circle of our experience. Our intellectual convictions depend ultimately on a belief in the unity of the universe, which neither pessimism nor humanism can consistently allow. The dualism which both accept is, from this point of view, wholly misleading, and does not, in fact, exist.

Against the arguments of humanism, it may be pointed out, following this line of thought, that the whole of reality must be richer and more complex than any of its parts, and that these parts are inevitably dependent on the whole. The study of human life involves more than the recognition of political, economic, scientific, and social problems. There are æsthetic, moral, and spiritual judgments which claim a validity in their own spheres as real as that of any intellectual or scientific conclusion. Poetry and art and religion are not to be denied when they speak to us of a larger reality than humanism will recognize. Physical well-being and happiness are not the ultimate standards of humanity. Our life is to be set within, and cannot be held apart from, the infinite and the eternal which surround us. Only by reason of ideals which we have not created, but after which we find ourselves to be seekers, are we aware of the evil that besets our lives. Only because our existence is within a universe that conditions it can we recognize at once our insignificance and the possibility of human greatness. 'Our life upon this planet,' writes Mr. John Buchan in his *Life of Scott*, 'and this planet herself, are parts, or shadows, or roots of something intenser and greater. We, who are mortals, are only partially sentient, partially spiritual. But invisibly, very near us, touching us all, is a real world of divine order and beauty . . . and, remote as this world is in so many ways, its messengers are constant, and its centre is everywhere.' From that unseen world we cannot allow the gospel of humanity, with its self-confident

optimism, to cut us off, for from it our truest being is derived. Without the recognition of our own conditionedness and dependence on that which is beyond, we shall not even begin to attain to the goodness and beauty, which humanism, at its best, so earnestly desires.

On the other hand, it need not be true, as the pessimist declares, that the part is without value to the whole. It may well be that the significance of human life is only seen when its conditionedness is recognized. The dwellers in the cave may refuse to come forth into the light, but the light will not cease to shine. The depravity of human nature may emphasize the greatness of the power which can deliver it from itself. If the possibility of life on this planet is shown to depend upon the working together of endless processes, from the infinitely great to the infinitely small, humanity will receive new dignity and new worth. If we can assert, with confidence, that the rationality of our minds, the response of our nature to goodness, and our appreciation of beauty are correlates of a rationality, a goodness, and a beauty in the nature of things, we are making an assertion great enough to banish our despair. For, if so much has been done for us—to make possible our life and to enrich it in a world of colour to delight the eye and sound to charm the ear, we dare not be pessimistic. We shall have on our lips the question—Is all this conditionedness of life meaningless and vain? Does it not rather carry a promise and hope to gladden our hearts? It is the question that faith has often uttered and has found to be triumphantly answered :

And can He have taught me
To trust in His name,
And thus far have brought me
To put me to shame?

The influences that come to us from the unseen, seeking our response, are very real. If the world is a vale of soul-making, the fashioning is not from within, but from without. However unresponsive we may be—however true the pessimist's indictment of human effort—we may believe that these influences do not cease. The universe is not, as the pessimist suggests, the indifferent theatre of man's actions and his failure, nor is it what the humanist declares, a far-off reality, out of touch with life.

Hence in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither.

We may say with confidence, to humanist and

pessimist alike, that, in the philosopher's phrascology, the infinite is ever reflecting itself in the finite nature of man ; or in the language of religion, that beyond and above the world, with its conflicts and disappointments, its achievements and its failures, its joys and its sadness, knowing and caring for it all, is a Love that passeth knowledge, before which sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Our beliefs

are to be kept within no narrow limits, but linked to every phase of human life, to knowledge old and new, and to the unseen order in harmony with and dependence upon which lies our truest life : which makes demands upon us and gives us help in meeting these demands : which has set, neither despair nor self-confidence, but something of eternity within our hearts.

The Venerable Bede: Christian Saint and Hero.

BY THE REVEREND G. PERCY THOMAS, CARDIFF.

THE story of the rise and progress of the Christian Church ever remains one of transcendent interest to those who would realize alike their heritage and responsibility to-day. Thomas Carlyle once wrote that 'History is the essence of innumerable biographies,' and that of the great and holy man who is the subject of this article, comparatively unknown as it is, may well serve as a shining example of constancy, unremitting toil, and patient humility to us who have to carry on in these depressing and difficult times.

Bede was born at or near Jarrow-on-Tyne in 673 A.D., during a period of transition and travail. The country was divided into petty kingdoms constantly at war, while over the land lay that spiritual darkness and ignorance which were to be gradually dissipated by the gospel of deliverance and healing carried with such self-sacrificing devotion by the willing hands of those whom the monasteries sent forth. For a moment let us look at the setting in which this picture of romance and beauty is framed and recall some of the events which preceded our hero's arrival. The kingdom of Northumbria stretched, in the seventh century, from the river Humber to the Firth of Forth. Its most powerful king was Edwin, who reigned from 617 to 633. It was he who built a strong fortress on an old volcanic rock overlooking the Firth, which he called Edwinsturg, eventually to become the Edinburgh of our day. His marriage to the Christian daughter of Ethelbert, king of Kent, was of far-reaching significance, for, when she came to York for the wedding, she brought her chaplain, Paulinus, a convert of Augustine, who persuaded Edwin to become a Christian, while, in time, Paulinus became the first Archbishop of York.

Unfortunately, Edwin was killed in battle against Penda, the pagan ruler of the neighbouring kingdom of Mercia, and the religion of the Cross suffered a serious set-back. Green tells us that the Roman Church in Kent shrank into inactivity before the heathen reaction ; but let it be noted that the cowardice of a few never has and never will prevent the onward march of God in the task of world salvation ; in His wondrous design Britain's destiny of ultimate greatness founded on the rock of Eternal Truth could not be frustrated by the temporary triumph of pagan force, and in a very short time after Edwin's death the fiery zeal of missionaries of the ancient Irish Church was flung into the struggle, and we see the spirit of St. Columba from his monastery in lonely Iona directing the work with a masterly hand, and St. Aidan, a brother-monk, joyfully accepting the hard and perilous task, preaching all over Northumbria and erecting his monastery on Lindisfarne (so aptly called Holy Island), where he gathered his pupils and sent them as intrepid evangelists to the mainland, knowing neither weariness nor failure. Presently the savage Penda himself is defeated and slain, the Christian faith rehabilitated, uniting the English peoples of both Northumbria and Mercia. The conversion of the turbulent Picts and Scots through Columba's great ministry added to the general atmosphere of tranquillity into which Bede was born, and which seems so essential to the pioneer and constructive labours which have brought for him an imperishable name among the real heroes of the past.

He himself has told us that at the early age of seven years he was placed in the abbey of Wearmouth under Benedict, whose inspiration and