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## Entre Nous.

### Robert Forman Horton.

Twenty years ago Robert Horton published his autobiography, a book described by the *Church Times* as 'a fine, a noble, a most moving book.' Full though it was, there is room for the present biography. When, indeed, is there not room for a good biography? and this is good. It has been written jointly by Sir John Marriott and by Dr. Peel (Allen & Unwin; 10s. 6d. net).

Robert Horton was born in 1855, and into a home in which religion was supreme and other interests secondary. 'Behind Robert Horton there were at least three generations of devout men and women'—his father, a Congregational minister, a missionary grandfather, and a great-grandfather who was a Methodist class-leader. His mother, Sarah Ellen Forman, was a woman of outstanding personality and culture; she had been 'consciously and savingly' converted to God when fifteen, and had given herself to good works. Robert was the second of a family of six, the others being girls.

In 1867 he was sent to Tattenhall, a school for the sons of Nonconformists, of which his father was one of the promoters. He went on, somewhat surprisingly, to Shrewsbury, where on the whole he does not appear to have been happy, though he made great progress in work. It was while he was there that his mother died. Forty years later he wrote: 'I thought I could never smile again when she died, but she left in me something of her own happy spirit; she has seemed to me to be watching my life and taking the deepest interest in it.' From Shrewsbury he went to Oxford, being elected—religious tests having just been abolished—to an open scholarship in New College.

Mr. Nathaniel Micklem, K.C.—the father of the present Principal of Mansfield College—was a contemporary of Horton at Oxford. He describes him in his undergraduate days as having 'a wonderful vitality and charm. He had a wholesome enjoyment of life and was the best of good company. A really brilliant talker, he loved argument and the interchange of ideas. No one enjoyed a humorous story more than he did, and few could tell one better. . . . I remember no one who exercised such a strong Christian influence in the college as

he did.' This is borne out by another whose views were far remote from Horton's, the late Father Cyril Bickersteth of the Mirfield Community. Commenting on the friendship between the two, Marriott says that great as his devotion was to his own community, 'his passion was for Christianity, for the salvation of souls.' Years afterwards we find him writing to Bickersteth: 'if you had time I should love to see you here. It would be beautiful to span the gulf, which appears to divide, by a heart-to-heart talk about our blessed Saviour who always, and necessarily, unites us.

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In 1880 Horton began his life-work—not politics, though he never lost his keen interest in them; and not the Bar, although he was attracted to it,—but the ministry of the Congregational Church. In that year he went to Hampstead (Lyndhurst Road Church). In his ordination address all the things he wished to say, and did say in his long ministry, he summed up in the one word, 'the key-word Jesus.' 'Though God should spare him to preach there for fifty years he could not express,' he said, 'what was summed up in Christ. As to the Christian ministry, it was the ministry of Jesus. They as a Church, believing that he had been

called by the Holy Spirit, said to him, Enter into the things of Jesus, live in them, think in them, do not entangle yourself with the ordinary issues of life. They all were sacred, but they often weaved a veil between men and spiritual things above the veil.'

The dominant notes of Horton's preaching were the missionary enterprise of the Church and prayer. To his prayer life the central chapter of the biography is devoted. While the awful responsibility of the ministry never left him, it was the time of prayer that lay most solemnly upon his heart. 'As his love for God grew, so did the desire for His companionship. He wanted that more than anything else, and he set himself to receive and nurture it with every faculty he possessed. At last it appeared to those who lived with him that his desire was realized, for they would often hear the quiet voice as in conversation going on day by day. . . . He broke it off only to talk to human beings.

'For this part of the service he prepared with all the thought at his command, making notes of the prayer to be offered, and exercising himself in it throughout the week that it might be disciplined and enlightened and true to man's need. . . .

'But more than this. He knew the consolation he had found in prayer, the recovery, the power, the altered view. And he set himself to prepare his spirit, as his mind, to receive the peace of God, to be filled with the consolation of the Spirit, if haply he might mediate to others something of that divine satisfaction which had been given to him.

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#### How God becomes Real to Men.

'Then we get the strange facts of conversion: when through some object or even—perhaps quite small object or event—in the external world, another world and its overwhelming attraction and demand is realised. . . . It was the voice of a child saying, "Take, read!" which at last made St. Augustine cross the frontier in which he had been lingering, and turned a brilliant and selfish young professor into one of the giants of the Christian Church; and a voice which seemed to him to come from the Crucifix, which literally made the young St. Francis, unsettled and unsatisfied, another man than he was before. It was while St. Ignatius sat by a stream and watched the running water, and while the strange old cobbler, Jacob Boehme, was looking at a pewter dish, that

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#### The Christian Choice.

'Is it possible for a modern person, bathed in the atmosphere of relativity, aware of the immense variety of religions, and accustomed to the long perspectives of history, to make this choice which really means, as a friend once put it to me, to hang the whole world on one nail?

'It is hard for the depersonalized men and women of the twentieth century who think in terms of law and idea to accept it as a fact that in the last resort truth comes to us in the form of a person. It is hard for relativistic moderns to believe that God should have spoken in time and space, and that there is one point in history which is not merely an event in the endless chain of events but the very centre of history. And it is hard for ambitious and greedy people of all ages to give allegiance to a Master whose life consists of acts of obedience, sacrifice, and humiliation.'<sup>2</sup>

#### Adoration.

'Any form of the Christian gospel which has parted with the element of wonder, or become altogether inoffensive to those who hear it, is fatally untrue to type. For beings such as we are, in presence of such a being as Christ is, the only alternative to offence is adoration.'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *The Spiritual Life*, 53 ff.

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