

would be a tragedy if they were allowed through haste or other cause to become less good than his best.

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THE PATH TO PERFECTION. By W. E. Sangster. (Hodder and Stoughton; 7s. 6d.)

This study of John Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection is written by a follower of Wesley primarily for other Wesleyans; for those in fact to whom the doctrine in question is, presumably, already familiar, yet the book will interest a far wider circle. Dr. Sangster's aim, as he himself states it, is 'to endeavour to re-state Wesley's doctrine in the thought-form of our age'; he is in fact a Methodist Modernist. This aspect of his work may well appeal to those members of his own communion who find the doctrine in its original form unacceptable, and we gather from the present work that many do so to-day, but it is no insult to Dr. Sangster's treatment of his theme to say that for the outsider, it is Wesley's doctrine in its original undiluted form that is of interest rather than any modernised version of it.

Dr. Sangster states the doctrine itself as follows:—'He (Wesley) believed and taught this: that in an instant, and by a simple act of faith, perfection was "wrought in the soul." It was indeed the second of two distinct stages in the Christian experience of Salvation as he conceived it; the first consisted of justification, and the second of sanctification; the former being a change in our relations with God, our pardon and reconciliation; the latter a change in ourselves wrought by the Spirit of God. In the first stage, a new heart is given to us, so that we now love God and desire to please Him, and will not *willingly* sin against Him in anything. But sinful tempers remain, and though they are resisted, and resisted successfully, they remain. The second stage, with which we are now chiefly concerned, is *entire* sanctification, which comes as an immediate gift of God, entirely cleansing the heart from sin and slaying the dire root and seed of it.'

This division of the process of justification into two separate stages would appear to be Wesley's especial contribution to the doctrine of 'justification by faith,' and admirers have acclaimed it as 'an unique synthesis of the Protestant ethic of grace, with the Catholic ethic of holiness.' This is a provocatively ambitious claim; the impression produced on any detached reader is rather of complete lack of synthesis, an unco-ordinated endeavour to combine two incompatible ideas:

It is only fair to its founder to remember that he never claimed to formulate a new doctrine; his claim was simply to expound the Scriptures; in his 'Plain account of Christian Perfection' the main source of our knowledge on the subject, he quotes the Bible 195

times, and his entire position rests upon a very personal interpretation of these texts. Wesley is clearly an example of the true 'Bible Christian' for whom: 'Religion is the most simple thing in the world. It is only "we love Him because He first loved us"; so far as you add philosophy to religion, just so far you spoil it.'

Dr. Sangster considers at some length the exact nature of the 'sinlessness' to which the fully 'sanctified' laid claim and is at pains to emphasise that Wesley himself repudiated the notion that this final sanctification implied any immunity against future sinning with the resultant antinomianism. Here too there seems in Wesley's testimony a curious confusion of thought, an instinct sounder than his own ideas. The extracts from contemporary testimonials with which Dr. Sangster illustrates his argument are vivid and very often moving; the simplicity and sincerity of the 'witness' cannot be doubted and there is a striking unanimity as to the experience which they recount. In many cases, though not all, so we are assured, the experience of sanctification was accompanied by a corresponding change of conduct. That Wesley was convinced of the reality of this sanctification in his followers seems clear, but it is enlightening to discover that he never claimed the experience for himself. Replying to an attack on this very point, he says: 'I tell you flat, I have not attained the character I draw.' Is it too paradoxical to suggest that it was the actual virtue in Wesley which prevented his making such a claim himself?

Dr. Sangster's approach to his subject is sympathetic, yet somewhat detached; he is familiar with the New Psychology and with modern Protestant authorities, but there is in his book an astonishing lack of background; it is not merely that he appears to be unacquainted with the main stream of Catholic teaching, but even the earlier 'reformers' are barely touched on. We are left with the impression that the whole question of grace and sanctification had been almost entirely ignored until the middle of the eighteenth century. We do not see Wesley's idea of Perfection in the setting of the whole Christian tradition of sanctity, as one attempt among so many throughout the ages 'to find the way to Heaven,' but merely as an isolated theory peculiar to one group of people, at one moment, and this unnatural absence of perspective impoverishes the presentment of a fine subject.

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**LIGHT BEFORE DUSK.** A Russian Catholic in France, 1923-1941. By Helen Iswolsky. (Longmans; 15s.)

In 'Light before Dusk' Helen Iswolski speaks of people she has known and worked with, of movements in which she has taken part, of ideas which she has held and holds; in short, of a life which she has shared. It was the life—essential but very little known—of