CURRENT ISSUES.

ANOTHER symposium on *Immortality* (Putnam) has appeared; the book consists of nine papers by various writers, with an introduction by Lord Ernle, who remarks that the essays converge upon the conclusion that immortality "is not only a possible truth but the object of a reasonable faith such as that on which men act in all practical affairs, and the most adequate interpretation of the ethical and spiritual values of the life of mankind." The closing essay is slightly apart from the others; it is a short piece upon immortality as interpreted in poetry, and comes from the pen of Mr. Maurice H. Hewlett.

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In English poetry Mr. Hewlett contrasts Shakespeare and Spenser. As he admits, there is no positive evidence that Shakespeare was personally interested or convinced. The well-known passages which voice the hope of life after the grave are upon the whole dramatic. What interested Shakespeare was the present life. To him "the world was less a stage than an inn. The guests came and went, ate, drank, ruffled, made merry, and paid the reckoning. Quietly he sat by, looking on, knowing all about the springs of their bustling, fervid commerce, concerning himself scarcely at all with their fate beyond the door." Whereas Spenser followed men beyond the door. He had a Platonist's intense conviction of the eternal order to which the soul belonged. Among English poets he is the first and finest expression of the idealistic Christian belief in immortality.

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Mr. Hewlett is scarcely fair to Cowper, among the later poets. Cowper, he declares, was one of those who, under the stress of a narrow evangelical theology, "thought dreadfully of Immortality," one of the unfortunate religionists who allowed

their sense of eternal bliss to be overpowered by their fear of its opposite. But Cowper never ceased to believe in eternal bliss. He lived in the steadfast conviction of a Christian immortality, and this hope was for him a power and postulate, not a problem. Whether he himself was worthy to attain it, he sometimes doubted, in his moods of despair; but he never thought "dreadfully" of immortality, when he thought about what awaited the elect after death. He might be wrecked, but people like his father and mother were safe in God's harbour. As he says, addressing his mother's picture:

> "Me howling blasts drive devious, tempest toss't,
> Sails ripped, seams opening wide, and compass lost,
> And day by day some current's thwarting force
> Sets me more distant from a prosperous course.
> Yet oh the thought that thou art safe, and he!
> That thought is joy, arrive what may to me."

Cowper's morbid apprehensions were purely personal, and they were due to a belief which became weaker during last century, the belief in a final judgment.

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This is what we miss in Tennyson's statement of immortality, and the omission is significant. *In Memoriam* argues that men live after death, but it is silent on the New Testament doctrine that "after death comes the judgment." The reaction against a crude, materialistic doctrine of hell was in full swing, and Tennyson faintly trusted "the larger hope." Nevertheless it is not fair to say, with Mr. Hewlett, that Tennyson and Browning "were optimists by temperament," as if that explained their passionate faith in immortality. Both had to fight doubts, and both worked out what was to them a reasonable basis for their faith. Why should "temperament" be used to disparage good features in a man's soul any more than to excuse inferior ones?

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Mr. Hewlett ends abruptly by maintaining that the only two living "poets" whose gifts correspond to these great names of the past are the poet-laureate and Mr. Housman, one a Stoic and the other an Epicurean. This is rank heresy. Mr. Hardy is not to be ignored, though he is agnostic on the question of immortality, and Mr. Herbert Trench has written a poem which

is deeper than anything ever penned by Mr. Bridges or Mr. Housman. There are few things in modern literature upon this subject more daunting and disheartening than "Apollo and the Seaman," with its plea for a naturalistic view of the world, and its description of how the barque of immortality has foundered on the high seas.

> "I heard them calling in the streets
> That the ship I serve upon—
> The great ship Immortality—
> Was gone down like the sun."

Only, never to rise again.

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The philosophers of to-day have done more than the poets to restate in a serious form the implications of the Christian doctrine of immortality. This is mainly due to the study of human personality. And, whatever may remain vague, there is little doubt that the older idea of past generations being used up as materials for a richer race has been abandoned. In the symposium it falls to Professor R. G. Macintyre of Sydney University to expound the Christian idea of immortality, and in the course of his argument he makes this point. "Love is never *singular*, it implies a social universe of personalities; 'we love because He first loved us.' It is a divine lesson by God who is love, carrying with it a new commandment, 'even as I have loved you that ye also love one another.' Now, such a relationship, once established, must, if true to itself, go on, and *go on as individual* relationship. The idea of countless generations as mere stepping-stones to the attainment of an ultimate few, the last stage of an evolutionary process, may be true in the other and lower stages of organic life, but cannot be so for man as spirit, self-conscious and morally capable. That quality lifts him, not merely in type, but as an individual, to a higher life where values cannot remain except as inhering in the individual personality, though never wholly for himself."

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This is the Christian theologian. But he is only stating in prose what a poet had already sung in verse. F. W. H. Myers was the laureate of immortality for last generation, and he protests passionately against this evolutionary perversion of the idea of eternal life. Myers wrote fluently. But now

and then he concentrates his convictions, as in the following lines:

> "Oh dreadful thought, if all our sires and we
> Are but foundations of a race to be—
> Stones which one thrusts in earth, and builds thereon
> A white delight, a Parian Parthenon,
> And thither, long thereafter, youth and maid
> Seek with glad brows the alabaster shade,
> And in procession's pomp together bent
> Still interchange their sweet words innocent—
> Not caring that those mighty columns rest
> Each on the ruin of a human breast—
> That to the shrine the victor's chariot rolls
> Across the anguish of ten thousand souls."

This is not selfishness. It is not the soul grasping what belongs to itself against the demands of posterity. Those who are most unselfish in serving their age and in taking thought for the next generation are at the same time sensible that human life, theirs and that of others, is too valuable to be used as mere material for a future in which they have no part. It is inherent in love, the supreme expression of personality, to affirm itself. Even in this world there are sacrifices of honour and purity and truth which love cannot make, for the sake of its own essence. Similarly, it cannot consent to any view of the future in which it ceases to be itself. It cannot believe that a just God would make such a demand upon personality.

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Belief in immortality of a really Christian quality is one of the acid tests which reveal the weakness of Tolstoy's theories. Mr. Janko Lavrin has just published a study of *Tolstoy and Modern Consciousness*, in which he fastens acutely upon Tolstoy's travesty of the doctrine. He shows how Tolstoy was from the first haunted by the fear of death. He had a perfect horror of it. Indeed, he was driven to long for a kind of self-extinction, "in order to get rid of the horror itself." This Buddhistic refuge would have been logical. But then, as Mr. Lavrin shows, he tried illogically to push it into his adaptation of the New Testament religion. Tolstoy was far more interested in a few precepts of Christ than in Christ Himself. And he reveals his entire misconception of the gospels by arguing that Christ

meant by eternal life not any personal immortality but participation in a sort of consciousness of humanity.

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Christ, says Tolstoy, summoned men away from themselves to a "common life bound up with the past, present, and future life of the whole of humanity, the life of the Son of Man." Christ never did anything of the kind. He did not identify personality, as Tolstoy does, with mere selfish individualism. Mr. Lavrin points out how Tolstoy was driven along this line of error to adopt a sort of Nirvana or vague world-consciousness of humanity as the ocean into which the little drop of personal life would be glad to fall. "While Dostoevsky with his dynamic religious temperament was driven nearly mad by the mere possibility of personal extinction after death, the converted Tolstoy accepts it with Buddhistic placidity. He even welcomes it as a boon which may rid us from the burden of our self for ever and ever." Dostoevsky's position at least provides the opportunity for a Christian gospel of eternal life. Tolstoy's does not. He evades the issue characteristically. The truth is, outside one or two ethical axioms, he had no thought-out message; he felt strongly, but he is weak when he comes to reflect upon the issues of religion. His literary genius cannot blind us to his failures in the interpretation of Christianity. Psychologically, says Mr. Lavrin, "he is not so much a real Christian as a weary Eastern Nihilist in pseudo-Christian garb."

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It is three hundred years, this month, since George Fox, the Quaker, was born in Leicestershire. His remarkable personality is revealed in his Journal, though it has never had the popularity of Wesley's Journal, partly owing to its restricted range of interest, partly on account of the rather conscious and self-righteous traits which lie side by side with better qualities in the writer's character. But Fox was a phenomenon and force in the seventeenth century. A just historical estimate of his work has been arrived at long ago. The pendulum of judgment swung for a while between two violent extremes of depreciation and eulogy. Now, thanks in the main to Dr. Hodgkin's biography and Dr. Gardiner's pages in the second volume of his *History of the Commonwealth and the Protectorate*, the verdict upon Fox is fixed. Unconciliatory and narrow as he often

was, he did vital service in exposing not only formal hypocrisy but the intellectual and religious limitations of current Calvinistic theology, particularly in connexion with the Bible. Mr. W. D. Niven's article is a fresh effort to bring the exact value of Fox's theories before the mind of our age, and to appreciate his limitations as well as his courageous pioneering intuitions.

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Fox was, for good and bad, a man of one book. The Bible was his textbook for life, and the Bible read by the inner light. As Dr. Hodgkin points out in his biography, "the Bible seems to have been his only literature, and it may safely be said that Amos, the herdsman of Tekoa, who was separated from him by an interval of twenty-four centuries, had infinitely more influence on his mind than William Shakespeare, who died but eight years before he came into the world." Hence his ultra-puritanic attitude to the innocent pleasures of life, for example. But one prefers to dwell on the service he did in calling Christians to pass through the letter to the spirit. The call was not always wisely put, but it was a call of inner wisdom, and Fox voiced it with mystical intensity, for all his exaggerations and one-sided attacks upon other Christians.

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His Journal has nearly as many thorns as flowers in it. Among the finer passages, that upon his mystical experience in the Vale of Beavor is best known. But there is another, which anticipates the lines in F. W. Faber's passion-hymn:

> "O break, O break, hard heart of mine!
> Thy weak self-love and guilty pride
> His Pilate and His Judas were."

It is the extract from his diary of 1648, which begins: "I saw the state of those, both priests and people, who in reading the Scriptures cry out much against Cain, Esau, and Judas, and other wicked men of former times, mentioned in the Holy Scriptures; but do not see the nature of Cain, of Esau, of Judas, and those others in themselves. These said, it was they, they, they that were the bad people; putting it off from themselves: but when some of these came, with the light and the Spirit of truth, to see into themselves, then they came to say, I, I, I, it is I myself that have been the Ishmael, and the Esau, etc." This is Fox in a better moment. Had he written more often

in this vein, instead of filling his diary with rather stupid and petty attacks on churches as "steeple-houses," and on church-people as either hypocrites or deluded creatures, he would have left a more permanent contribution to religious literature. Still, historically, he was a stimulus, and it is worth while to ask whether his message may not have some permanent elements of value.

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A correspondent writes kindly: "*Reddite ergo omnibus debita . . . cui honorem, honorem.* In the January issue of the EXPOSITOR (p. 23) Dr. Robinson refers with real appreciation to the late Rev. C. L. Marson's *The Psalms at Work*, but unintentionally gives the impression that Marson followed Prothero, whereas the opposite was the case. In the quaint preface to the fourth edition of his book, Mr. Marson, apologising for the delay (it was published in 1909), refers to 'another author' who 'by a daring piece of free trade has incorporated almost the whole of the second edition into a work of his own and cried it freely before the public.'" Another slight correction may be offered, apropos of Professor Stevenson's allusion to Dr. Peake's book on *The Bible*, in the June issue (p. 410). The publishers, Messrs. Hodder and Stoughton, report, I am glad to say, that it is not "out of print" (price *7s. 6d.*) This may reassure those who have expressed their disappointment that a work of this rank was inaccessible.

"TEN" TREATISES ON THE "TEN" COMMANDMENTS.

So much of the best work on the Decalogue is to be found in articles in magazines and in dictionaries that it would not be well to make "books" the main subject of this paper. The short Bibliography which follows illustrates and justifies this statement.

(*A Bibliography containing twenty entries, German and Dutch, is given by W. Nowack in the Baudissin-festschrift* (1918), p. 381. I am indebted to Nowack for several of the entries given below.)