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Religion in India

The Living Religions of the Indian People. By Nicol Maenicol, M.A., D.Litt., D.D. (Student Christian Movement Press, 10s. 6d.)

IN the study of Indian religion, as revealed in Sanskrit texts, we have many great names, but very few in the study of the still living vernacular cults. The greatest name in what I may call *general* Indian studies is that of the late J. N. Farquhar, to whom I would miss no relevant opportunity of paying tribute, as to my own *guru*. I know that Indians regarded him as a special pleader; but what they have never realized is the change that came over his spirit, always so gentle and modest, yet at first not so deeply understanding as it was long before the end. His *Outline of the Religious Literature of India* is a book against which even the most aggressive Neo-Hindu cannot bring any objection, and it is a work of the profoundest scholarship. And since Farquhar died there has been no one doing his work as he did, except Dr. Nicol Maenicol. Mr. Birrell says in his *Obiter Dicta* that, while the little poets can do what they like, the great ones should never pass one another without a salute. It is characteristic of Dr. Maenicol's loyalty to friendship and his self-suppression that he never passes the name of J. N. Farquhar without this salute. And I, for one, find this attitude as moving as I find Milton's reference to "my dear master Spenser" or Shakespeare's breaking the flow of *As You Like It* to remember Marlowe:

"Dead shepherd! now I find thy saw of might—
"Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?"

I have known Dr. Maenicol's work for many years, and I had the good fortune to hear some of the lectures which form the basis of his latest volume. It seems almost unnecessary to commend a book of such knowledge and of a spirit so admirable. He passes in review the living religions of the Indian people, and the emphasis is on the *living*. While he is well aware of these religions as known historically and in their literatures, he is most keenly interested in them as professed by men and women in whose friendship he has passed his life. He misses nothing in the contemporary scene, and considers nothing Indian alien. No one can write about Indian religion (or about anything else) without sometimes criticizing, but Dr. Maenicol's criticism never forgets the claims of courtesy, and is always such as should arise out of remembrance that Indians and ourselves are by now members of one family, and that even our problems, even our faults, are interwoven. He notes that the archaeologist's spade is uncovering a great unsuspected civilization in the Indus valley, pre-Vedic yet throwing forwarding connexions with the popular Hinduism of today. The Vedic invaders lived in villages, were agricultural and at first nomadic; they worshipped their gods without images. But these pre-Vedic peoples, who cannot be dismissed as "uncivilized," lived in mighty cities, had a system of sanitation in its amenities in advance of eighteenth-century Europe, and they used images identical with many we see today. This last fact compels us to think again from the beginning, when we confront the mixture of Vedic and apparently barbarous elements in Hinduism now.

It is not possible in the limits of a review to bring out the well-knit quality of this book. But when a man has lived so long as Dr. Maenicol has in India, and all the time has been studying the beliefs and practices of the people around him, he writes out of such fulness and intimacy of knowledge as we have of our own daily lives. I have referred to his criticism. It is so gentle that, unless you notice its restrained quality, you may almost miss that it is criticism. For example, my own admiration for St. Francis Xavier has been (no doubt wrongly) of a rather lukewarm character ever since I discovered, many years ago, his responsibility for bringing the Inquisition to Goa. I think Dr. Maenicol lets his reputation off lightly when all he says is, "St. Francis Xavier in bitter and disappointed hours calls on John III of Portugal to reinforce with his authority the ineffectual forces of the Spirit," and makes no reference to that shocking institution, the Holy Inquisition. But I dare say he is right, when dealing with so great and saintly a man as Xavier, and that I ought not to let my twentieth-century prejudice against cruelty, and especially religious persecution, accompany me into

bygone centuries. This has led me into a digression. Let me get back, and draw particular attention to the last section of Dr. Maenicol's book, his study of Indian Christianity, which he rightly claims as now a naturalized "religion of the Indian people." Indeed, it has always been that. Almost Dr. Farquhar's last service to Indian religious scholarship was his demonstration of the sound basis for the old tradition that St. Thomas preached in India. Today Christianity has attained a new vigour in that land. It is true that some of the Indian Christian leaders cited in Dr. Maenicol's pages, and well known in the West, have a somewhat uncertain and almost dependent character, leaning too much on Dr. J. R. Mott and on Y.M.C.A. and Student Christian Movement support. But you cannot say this of that vigorous and picturesque figure Sadhu Sundar Singh, or of Pandita Ramabai or the Marathi Christian poet Tilak. But, for further knowledge of the way Christianity has found itself at last a genuine home in the Indian people, let me refer my reader to this wise and tolerant and widely learned book.

EDWARD THOMPSON.

Hymns of Praise

Earth Memories. By Llewelyn Powys. (Bodley Head, 7s. 6d.)
Here's England. By Dorothy Hartley. (Rich. and Cowan, 9s.)

Earth Memories is perhaps not the most appropriate title for Mr. Powys' twenty-three brief essays; they are more correctly hymns to life—a life that Mr. Powys came very near to losing twenty-five years ago. In the opening essay, "A Struggle for Life," Mr. Powys records, with quietness, courage and even some humour, how in 1909 he very nearly came to die: in the November of that year the first symptoms of pulmonary tuberculosis revealed themselves in him and he lay for some weeks extremely ill, "contemplating the bare elms and misty autumnal roof-tops of the town of Sherbourne," before he was recovered enough from the nervous and physical shock to travel to Switzerland. "I am ashamed now to think of how I dramatized my illness," he writes. And he goes on to tell how foolishly he behaved in other matters: staying too long in Switzerland, attempting a colossal mountain walk during his convalescence, going from Switzerland to the Rocky Mountains to hunt bears. Unlike the man in Sherwood Anderson's story, he did not realize that he held his life in his hand like a ball, and that he had only to open his fingers to let it drop. He realizes it now: and in reality these essays, though there is nothing to indicate it except their common spirit of vitality, are prose hymns of praise not only to life, but to the mere fact of existence. Except for the essay "Merton Wood's Luncheon" they are extremely quiet and reflective pieces of work: much as if the singer were singing to amuse himself. Here and there Mr. Powys prefaces his singing or breaks its rhythm or its climax by some discursive and inapt philosophy. Thus the essay "The Yellow Iris" is gravely marred if not quite ruined aesthetically by its prolix first paragraph, and "Unicorn Legends" suffers similarly. It is a natural fault in a writer of Mr. Powys' temperament and his experience of suffering.

It is very natural also that among the hymns of praise there should be also a hymn of hate; and in "Merton Wood's Luncheon" Mr. Powys raises his voice against scholastic humbug in general and certain Oxford dons in particular. Having made an abridgement of Clark's *Life and Times of Anthony à Wood*, Mr. Powys was pleased and honoured by an invitation to attend at Merton a luncheon in honour of Wood's tercentenary. I am not sure that the resultant essay is not the finest thing in the book: it is a delicious piece of contempt.

Earth Memories is therefore, whatever its faults, a deeply sincere and in many ways a most moving book, written from a genuine impulse, with restraint and beauty. Not so *Here's England*, which is in every way its antithesis. Its prevailing tone is one of gushing romance and enthusiasm; and it may very well have been purposely and solely conceived with a view to attracting Americans and colonials to these shores. They would almost certainly appreciate the *entre-nous* style of writing, the quotations from *olde Englishe* which preface each chapter, and the many recipes for Quainte Dishes which are embodied in the text. For myself, I see no reason why such things should not be confined to the pages of ladies' magazines.

H. E. BATES.