

THE EDITOR'S TABLE.

Clothes and the Man.

THE world is still deceived by ornament. But is "deceived" the right verb? Man-kind has always been bored by the merely practical. The first object of a man's clothes, as of a man's house, is to afford protection against cold and wet. But he has never been content with merely efficient protection. He has been compelled by the æsthetic and imaginative yearning that differentiates him from all other animals to ornament his house, and often (indeed, generally) to sacrifice efficiency for what has seemed to him the beautiful in the cut and colour of his clothes.

The history of costume is an important chapter in the spiritual and æsthetic history of the human race, and such a work as *Costume and Fashion*,* written with profound knowledge by Herbert Norris and Oswald Curtis, and profusely and beautifully illustrated, suggests even more than it relates. This new volume, the sixth, is concerned with the nineteenth century, from the days of the dandies to the era of the frock coat and the "topper," that most deplorable of all masculine hats.

At the beginning of the century, men were more picturesquely dressed than women. At its end they had submitted to an almost general drabness. Victorianism may be said to have found its complete expression in the clothes worn by the effigy of Mr. Cobden in Camden Town. Poets now and again put up a fight—we remember Tennyson's sombrero and flowing cape—but generally, the masculine ambition was to be "correct," and to avoid anything that was likely to attract attention or to merit the charge of eccentricity.

Within the limits prescribed by the fashionable dressmakers, women were still able to express their individuality in their clothes. Men denied themselves that stimulating practice. Unlike his continental brother, the town workman did not wear washable overalls suitable to his craft, but sawed wood and laid bricks in unsuitable clothes, the cheap imitations of the garb of the peers and the bank clerk. And by the end of last century the smock frock of the countryman had almost disappeared.

This dull monotony, which shows no sign of disappearing, was due to the materialism that was the complement of Victorian prosperity, and to the development of democracy. Jack was anxious to demonstrate the fact that he was as good as his master by wearing the same clothes as his master. When Keir Hardie first went to the House of Commons, he wore an aggressive cloth cap, and was accompanied by a bodyguard of charwomen. The modern Labour M.P. has adopted a correct parliamentary costume, as well as a correct parliamentary manner. And he would be dreadfully embarrassed by a crowd of admiring charwomen in Palace Yard. The bourgeois ideal has triumphed in a bourgeois world.

It is true that the soul of an age finds expression in its costumes. There is the suggestion of adventure in the gay garments of the Elizabethan courtiers. The gloom of Calvinism was reflected in the sombre clothing of the Puritans. The horror of the worship of Mammon is revealed in the garb of the modern stockbroker and his clerks.

But this revelation of character is not always to be found, since fashions in women's clothes are frequently capricious, dictated by dressmakers seeking for profitable novelties or by the vagaries of some great lady whom baser women love to imitate. Thus the vogue of the crinoline was entirely due to the Empress Eugenie. Our authors quote a member of the French Court, who wrote:—

The Empress is greatly attached to this cage, which to us seems very ungraceful

and inconvenient. She sticks to it in spite of the quips of the Emperor, to whom she simply replies that she does not know how she lived so many years without a cage. I can only find two excuses for this fashion. One is that women who wear it have their legs free in walking, and are not hampered by skirts and petticoats hanging on their calves and thighs and hampering their movements; the other, in her case, is that there is a sort of harmony between the amplitude of the woman and the size of the apartments in which she lives. In our little rooms, to get through our narrow doors, walking in the street and on the pavement, such a thing is as absurd as it is inconvenient. But in these great, lofty apartments, a slight woman in tight-fitting garments would be lost, would seem of no consequence. Here, a dozen women adorn the salon admirably, and are in harmony with the wide spaces, the ample seats, the width and height of the doors.

It is interesting, as an example of how words change their meanings, that "crinoline" was originally the name of the material of which the voluminous skirt was made, and afterwards of the steel frame over which the skirt was draped.

Ridicule has never affected fashions. Mr. Punch has jeered for generations at the top hat; but, after a brief eclipse, it is again common in the London streets. The supreme ugliness of the Guardsman's busby is ignored by the military authorities.

Men's clothes remain drab, and often ugly. But women are escaping, never were their clothes at once so sensible and so attractive as they are to-day. We believe that there is still a chance for men to recover the picturesque. From one point of view, the post-war revolutions in Europe may be regarded as incidents in the ceaseless conflict between the flamboyant and the drab, and men are showing their hatred of the drab by the colour of their shirts. The Boy Scouts' uniforms are the outward and visible sign of a healthy boy's love of adventure. The Salvationists' uniform is the claim that joy can exist in mean streets.

The clergy, properly, have their distinctive dress, and other less exalted vocations may some day recover theirs.

Ruskin once said that happy peoples have always loved bright colours; and in the England of which the Christian revolution dreams, an England that has both the faith and the fun, if men still wear the bowler hat and the trilby, their colours will certainly be changed. They will be scarlet or purple or a splendid Madonna blue.

REVIEWS.

KARL BARTH.

The Epistle to the Romans. By Karl Barth. (Oxford University Press, 21s.)

THERE are many who will be glad to have this admirable translation by Sir Edwyn Hoskyns of Karl Barth's world-famous book. It is, indeed, the book from which Barthianism took its rise; and so much has been heard in recent years both of its extraordinary difficulty and of its epoch-making character, that it is good for English readers to have the chance of making trial of it for themselves. An American professor has recently said that, to most of his countrymen, "the intellectual formulations of the school are quite unintelligible"; and it is at least an interesting question whether we can make more of it on this side of the Atlantic.

It is unlikely that much antecedent sympathy will be felt for Barthianism, unless it is considered in its historical setting. It springs out of the chaos and despair of post-war Germany. Oddly enough, there is a rumour that Hitler may drive Barth into exile; yet Barth is in theology exactly what Hitler is in politics. Both represent an extreme reaction, a desperate assertiveness, a deafening affirmation; and as Hitler holds a pistol to the head of every government, Barth endeavours to bludgeon into silence every current system of theology.

Barth's immediate antagonism is against Protestant liberalism. Not that he assails it on scientific grounds. As far as mere criticism of text and history goes, he is himself willing to proceed to any length. This has not always been understood in England. Theological writers have sometimes hailed Barth as the new and heavenly champion of orthodoxy. But this is very doubtful. It seems questionable whether Barth is truly orthodox in any single position he holds. Perhaps it is harsh to pass such a judgment before he has

completed the great dogmatic work upon which he is engaged; but one is compelled to judge in the meantime by such indications as tumble out pell-mell in this and other published works.

The reason why Barth can hold together a destructive criticism and the appearance of orthodoxy is that, for him, the former simply does not matter. It is of the earth earthy, and he is concerned with heaven. All that history, the whole space-time continuum, can do is to afford us pointers, signposts, on the way to reality. It cannot bring us into touch with God; it leads us to the edge of the world, and beyond that we do not simply leap into the void, we discover that we have been in the void all along. But somewhere beyond that void is God, who is the Wholly Other.

Here at least we must feel some faint stirrings of sympathy. Barth puts to shame all our vague gropings after God, all our painfully contrived evolutionary monism. He is the most completely God-possessed writer of our generation. You cannot read a page of his commentary without feeling that you are in the presence of a religious genius, and that of a high order. And, indeed, there is no reason why you should not read any one page as well as any other. For he says the same thing over and over again for five hundred pages. The only thing that varies is the degree of paradox; but paradox in some degree is universal throughout his work, and one feels that this writer can never be taken literally except when he is asserting the reality of God.

One would naturally be inclined to call Barth the supreme dualist of our time, but he would loathe the accusation; and in point of fact he allows so tenuous an existence to anything other than God, that God appears to him to be the sole reality. It is difficult to see how, in such circumstances, there can be any true Incarnation. The nearest he approaches to an explanation of it is a kind of psycho-physical parallelism, with the physical reduced to a shadow. He uses language which comes very near to that of Docetism. "What is human and worldly and historical and 'natural' is shown to be what it veritably is in its relation to God the Creator—only a transparent thing, only an image, only a sign, only something relative."

We have felt it necessary to dwell thus upon the theological presuppositions of Barthianism, because we feel that that is what is really important in this book. As a commentary on Romans, we doubt whether the exposition has any permanent value. Barth himself suggests that he has been driven on, "till I know the author so well, that I allow him to speak in my name, and am even able to speak in his name myself." This is a very dangerous condition for any commentator. English theologians are accustomed to spend their time in elucidating the plain meaning of a text. Barth has acted very differently. He begins with a preconceived model, which is in truth a caricature. And then upon this model he has laid the veneer of his own thought, a very ill-fitting veneer, which serves to accentuate the extravagances of his original caricature. He appears to regard St. Paul as the key to Christianity, predestination as the key to St. Paul, and rejection as the key to predestination.

The fact is that Barth begins his theological inquiry at the wrong end. He begins from Luther and Calvin, and goes back by way of Augustine to St. Paul. In effect, he does not reach the Gospels. The God proclaimed by Jesus is not to be found here at all. Jesus revealed God as Father; He mediated to men the abiding friendliness of God. But God, as Barth sees Him, is a vast, all-dominating power, which acts in personal fashion in accordance with its own despotic will. Barth would have understood both St. Paul and Christianity better if he had begun from the Gospels.

What poor human beings are to do when faced by such a God, it is not easy to see. Some English interpreters of Barthianism have drawn the conclusion that they are to do nothing, but wait and see. When the parish priest adopts that attitude, it is only too likely that his parishioners will do the same, and the consequences are not edifying. Barth himself, in the present volume, describes his ideal life as one of "free detachment":—

There can be no doubt that, according to the Epistle to the Romans, there is demanded of us a quite precise manner of life. Should we formulate it as the life of "free detachment"? Detached, because it seems to be a direct and practical manner of life proceeding from the great divine disturbance and nothing else; free, because it seems to be the consequence of a shattering discovery of the freedom of God.

But this is not the detachment of the mystics, which leads to a more proportioned activity—Barth hates mystics—but it is the detachment of a Socrates: "His work is always exercising itself in criticism; it is destructive and Socratic; it dissolves the endeavours of others. But how does he exert his influence? . . . He leads by refusing all initiative. He breaks up the community by leaving everything as it is. He is a shining light by remaining altogether invisible."

We have put the ideal in Barth's own words, so that readers may judge for themselves. For our part, we think that one

Socrates is enough for a generation, and that if the character were universalized it would render society impossible. Certainly it is not the ideal of the Gospels, in which passive criticism is reduced to a minimum, and active generosity raised to a maximum. Here, as elsewhere, we feel that Barth has forsaken the school of Christ. It is not the least of all his paradoxes that he should allow his desperate effort at recovery from post-war pessimism to land him in so vociferous an assertion of the total incapacity of man.

Nevertheless, whatever we may say against this theology of crisis on theological or philosophical grounds, it is certain that, from the purely religious point of view, his work is of great importance. We badly needed this whole-hearted affirmation of God. It is now for other theologians to give it a truly Christian content, and to reconcile the conception of the Wholly Other with that of the Loving Creator.

MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION IN TUDOR DAYS.

Town Government in the Sixteenth Century. By J. H. Thomas, B.Litt. (George Allen and Unwin, 8s. 6d.)

THE average person's conception of municipal government in the "good old days" hardly extends beyond a vague notion that the local officials made unsuccessful attempts to put down profiteering. Even the well-informed have been led to understand that such matters as the public health and sanitation departments of the period are best left undescribed in the presence of persons with imagination in their nostrils. It is therefore a pleasure to report that everybody is altogether wrong. In point of fact, the provincial municipalities were pioneers of all good works, and executed in the sixteenth century schemes hitherto regarded as having been invented in the latter part of the nineteenth. The whole error seems to have arisen partly from London having been taken as typical of the country at large, and partly from the assumption that provincial conditions must have been as bestial in 1540 as they were in 1840.

Mr. Thomas's valuable and fascinating book, which proves these points, is based on the minute books of a dozen provincial towns. While, as yet, Parliament was feeling its way, provincial boroughs, secure in the possession of their charters and possessed of very wide powers, were carrying on vigorous and enlightened administration, and making their will effective alike on townsmen and the stranger within their gates. The picture composed from these Tudor records forms just the reverse of much which can be seen in local government to-day. Now, the national Parliament often has to urge the local bodies to take action. Then, it was the successful system of local government which gave the pattern to the national.

The opening chapters of the book briefly indicate the nature of the Mayors and Councils, and the evolution of their powers and finances. The bulk of the work deals in detail with their actual operations. These may, for convenience, be grouped into four classes, covering respectively highways and sanitation, regulation of supplies, provision for the poor, and health.

Under the first head, we find that the corporations were actively engaged during this period in paving the streets and maintaining them in repair and cleanliness. The streets generally must have been kept extremely tidy. All manner of regulations were enforced to abate or avoid nuisances. Municipal refuse collectors were employed. Pig-sties were not allowed within sixty feet of a highway. (By way of contrast, the Royal Commission reported in 1844 that in large towns beasts and fowl were kept in living-houses; and actually rows of houses were built with pig-sties in the basement!) Rubbish dumps were controlled. Derelict houses were pulled down and the sites confiscated. Water supplies were organized, sometimes pipes were even brought into private houses.

The Mayor was, as a rule, *ex-officio* Clerk of the Market, with dictatorial powers. There was strict control of prices, quality, and measures. Bread, meat, and beer, the chief necessities of life, were subject to particularly vigilant oversight, and profiteering, so far from being inefficiently tackled, was rigidly prevented, on the mediæval principle of the enforcement of a just price, just as milk prices are being fixed to-day by a national authority. Municipal trading was skilfully executed to ensure necessary supplies. In case of shortage, the borough frequently arranged for food or coal to be procured from a distance, and managed to sell it below current prices, though still at a profit. Strikes of the privileged guilds of bakers or butchers were broken ruthlessly by the declaration of free markets. Licensing regulations were entirely up-to-date; closing hours were imposed, and when necessary a reduction was secured of redundant ale-houses. An interesting sidelight on the times is cast by the efforts made to provide an adequate supply of candles, and to arrange for street lighting by their means.

The poor and the unemployed presented grave problems. Here, from one point of view, the administration was harsh, because the towns' limited resources did not permit them to relieve the poverty of any but their own people. But enlightened attempts were

* *Costume and Fashion.* The Nineteenth Century. By Herbert Norris and Oswald Curtis. (J. M. Dent and Sons, 25s.)