

TESTIMONIUM ANIMÆ, or Greek and Roman before Jesus Christ. A Series of Essays and Sketches dealing with the Spiritual Elements in Classical Civilization. By E. G. Sihler, Ph.D., Professor of the Latin Language and Literature in the New York University. New York, G. E. Stechert & Co. Pages x + 463. Price \$2.25 net.

This book is from the pen of a teacher and scholar who has spent the working years of his life in studying the remains of classical antiquity and in following the classical movement down to modern times. "At the end of it all," he says in his preface, "there has come over my soul a profound melancholy." This

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is because so much of the industry of modern professional classicists seems "to be spent in the fond belief (hallowed by long academic tradition) that Classic Literature was something absolute, something precious and transcendent in itself, that the addition of a monograph no matter on how infinitesimal a detail of classic tradition (though destined to be read by two or three specialists alone, perhaps) was an adequate object of life and labor." The archaeologists especially excite his indignation. He is also dissatisfied with the classicism that has issued in an intellectual and æsthetic culture which ignores the transcendent value and deepest needs of the human soul, and which attempts to reduce Christianity to a position of inferiority. Likewise the classicism dominant in European culture during the period of the early Humanists is condemned, the conclusion being that the immorality and generally contemptible character of the Humanists (who, knowing the ancient world but ill, circle about what was debased in classic literature and art) demonstrate the essential interdependence between the Renaissance and the decadence of the Church, and that to the craving for radical betterment which finally led to the Reformation the Humanists contributed less than nothing.

These distressing forms of classicism, the author claims, are due to the stupendous error of ignoring the broad basis of sin and corruption which lie at the base of the history of the classic world. It is utterly wrong, he says, to separate the progress of understanding and art, literature and material civilization, from the moral decadence of that ancient world. Therefore with the "vile and sordid paganism which underlies most of classical civilization" always before his mind, and yet maintaining that Greek and Roman letters abundantly reveal to us the course and range of man's powers and aspirations in our concern for the highest things, he essays a revaluation, entirely on the moral and religious side, of the thought and conduct of the Greeks and Romans before Christ.

His position is that of one who holds to the absolute and divine worth of revealed religion, to belief in a personal God, to the dignity of the immortal soul and to a divine law of conduct. Religion, faith, theology, in connection with pagans are "monstrosities of designation." Religion is not defined, but is apparently nothing less than Christianity, the essence of which "is a reception of transcendental boons coming at a definite point in his'tory." The Christian ideal is accepted as absolute. With it as a standard the author examines the views of the Greeks and Romans concerning the soul, life and death, God and the world, as well as the character of their religion and worship, morality and conduct.

There is no lack of emphasis upon the darker side of classical antiquity. The repulsive features of Greek and Roman life, from

the time of Homer to the time of Seneca, and the impotence of Greek and Roman polytheism to cure these evils are treated in great detail, with a mass of quotations from classic writers, in versions made by the author himself. The Greeks receive especially hard treatment. They pass before the reader immersed in the bliss of the mere surface and steeped in unnatural vice. No theory of morals, no call to goodness for all men. Art embellished but did not elevate Greek worship. Greek men craved no righteousness deeper or higher than that of their own anthropomorphic gods, in whom "the good has no share, is no element." The Greek character, it would seem, was rotten at the core.

On the other hand the intrinsic soundness of the Roman character is recognized. Yet the conquests of the Romans were only exploitation on a gigantic scale, a career of force and fraud. The covetousness engendered by growing wealth and power, and the corruption introduced by the Greeks caused the old severity of morals to decline until the climax of wickedness came in the cruelties and bestiality of Nero's reign. Religion, though free from the vicious legends of the Greeks, was concerned chiefly with the outward faring of the state and with conformity to ancestral observances. It had almost no relation to soul and spirit; in acts of worship the mental or moral state was hardly concerned at all.

Yet the author does find spiritual elements in the classic literature, and this *testimonium animæ* he aims to present. For valuations of poets, historians, philosophers and moralists, the book must be read. Some will arouse dissent, as, for instance, the short and contemptuous reference to Virgil. There were thinkers who had profound spirituality, but all were infected to a greater or less degree with the current practical paganism and their higher teachings made no impression upon the spirit of their world. Not only was there no progress in morality towards Christian ideals, but the spiritual pride of the Stoic system forbids the view that in the noblest utterances of Seneca there was a historical point where Stoicism and Christianity met.

With some of the author's judgments the Christian scholar will agree. For instance, he will not dispute the insufficiency of mere intellectual or æsthetic culture, or of mere technical scholarship or antiquarian research, to satisfy the soul and purify the life. He will not deny that there were repulsive features in classic civilization, or the failure of classic paganism to regenerate the world. Yet to most of the implications which the author discovers in these admissions the well informed and fair minded reader will not consent. Likewise he will regret the narrow range of sympathy and the meager conception of the Christian ideal which condemn as "utter futilities" everything which is not of eternal import. Evolution is "the current simian mythology"; admira-

tion of Greek art is "mandatory ecstasy"; to view a matter through Greek eyes is "absurd and mendacious ecstasy." This bent of mind incapacitates the author from recognizing the full measure of worth in anything that can not bear the test of his highest standards. If, tried by the absolute Christian ideal, the religions of Greece and Rome were a failure, yet for a time they worked well, considering the age. This relative success, however, does not appear in a book from which are excluded comparisons with contemporaneous peoples and all the happier features of classic civilization. In consequence it is not illuminating and fails to delineate clearly the essential qualities of two great and gifted nations. This is perhaps not as the author intended, but it is the necessary result of the bias with which the testimony of Greek and Roman life is selected and interpreted. At the same time the author's zeal for righteousness claims the respect even of the reader who can adopt few of his positions and conclusions.

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