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"Pity For All Living Things"

A Talk on Albert Schweitzer at 70, by the Rev. Nathaniel Micklem, broadcast in the BBC Home Service.

I SHOULD doubt if there is any man living who is competent to write the biography of Albert Schweitzer, who on January 14 celebrated his 70th birthday. He needs three biographers at least; one must be a musician, another a theologian, and the third a medical doctor, and I am inclined to think there is quite a lot even those three

would miss. I shall not say anything about him as a musician* except to remind you that there is a connection between his music and the rest of his life. Indeed, theology and the organ were associated in his mind from the earliest days. "My first recollection," he tells us of his childhood in Alsace, "is of seeing the devil! As soon as I was three or four years old, I was allowed to go to church every Sunday, and I used to look forward to this the whole week through. I can still feel on my lips our servant girl's cotton glove, which she used to hold over my mouth when I yawned or sang too loud. And I remember how every Sunday I noticed in a bright frame by the side of the organ a shaggy face which was continually turning about and looking down into the church. So long as the organ was playing and the singing going on it was visible, but as soon as my father was praying at the altar it disappeared. When the playing and singing began again it re-appeared, but as soon as my father began his sermon it was lost to sight, to show itself once more for the closing hymn and voluntary. "This is the devil that is looking down into the church," I said to myself, "but as soon as my father begins with God's Word he has to make himself scarce." "This weekly dose of visible theology," he continues, "gave quite a distinctive tone to my childish piety." The devil, of course, on this occasion was "Daddy Iltis," the organist, reflected in the organ mirror.

When Schweitzer went first to Africa, the Paris Bach Society presented him with a pedal-piano cased in zinc to withstand the tropical climate and the tropical creatures. So it is that sometimes in the worst heat of a tropical day one may hear amid the wild jungles of primitive Africa the mighty music of Sebastian Bach, and one will know that the doctor after his morning operations is refreshing his mind and spirit in a musical siesta.

Why Only Human Beings?

A principle, the respect for life, dominates Schweitzer's philosophical writings and is deep in his nature. It goes back to his earliest days. "As far back as I remember," he writes, "I was saddened by the amount of misery I saw in the world around me. Youth's unqualified *joie de vivre* I never really knew, and I believe that to be the case with many children, even though they appear outwardly merry and quite free from care. One thing that specially saddened me was that the unfortunate animals had to suffer so much pain and misery . . . It was quite incomprehensible to me—this was before I began to go to school—why I should pray for human beings only." So he used to add a silent prayer for the animals. He was really haunted for days by the sight of an animal maltreated. He goes on to tell how he and a friend went out one day into the woods when he was seven or eight years old to shoot birds with catapults. He went very unwillingly, but feared lest he should be laughed at if he refused. Just at the very moment, he

*Station 1YX is at present broadcasting a series of Bach's organ works, recorded by Albert Schweitzer. They are heard at 9.0 p.m. on Wednesdays.



ALBERT SCHWEITZER
He needs three biographers

says, when they were taking aim "the church bells began to ring, mingling their music with the songs of the birds and the sunshine. It was the warning bell, which began half-an-hour before the regular peal-ringing, and for me it was a voice from heaven. I shoed the birds away so that they were safe from my companion's catapult, and then I fled home. And ever since then, when the Passiontide bells ring out to the leafless trees and the sunshine, I reflect with a rush of grateful emotion how on that day their music drove deep into my heart the commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill' . . ."

Debt to the Black Man

These were two of the great motifs of Schweitzer's life. First that sense of the majestic words of the Master spoken today in the hearts of men as once they were spoken by the Galilean lake, saying "Follow Me"; the other a profound and sensitive pity for all living things that suffer. This will perhaps help you to understand how this brilliantly successful man, the organist of the Paris Bach Society, the Professor of Theology who had written a book that every theologian in Europe was reading and discussing, took his degree in medicine and went off to French Equatorial Africa as a missionary doctor. Africa, he once told me, sits "like Lazarus" at the gate of Europe's house; "medical service among the natives of the colonial peoples is a necessary function of Christian civilisation." He went seeking to repay some of that debt the white man owes to the black for a record blotted by grievous sins of exploitation . . .

"Under the Fourth Cutlet"

He had to build his hospital; he had to be sole practitioner and endlessly to perform those operations which a doctor in home practice would leave to specialists, and the work was no easier when he did not know the language. His helper and interpreter in early days was one who formerly had been a cook. "Where," he would ask, "does the poor fellow feel the pain?" and the interpreter after inquiry would reply, "Under the fourth cutlet, sir." But the work has grown and prospered. Schweitzer has given his life to it; he is there now in

(continued on next page)



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