PREFACE TO THE FIRST SERIES

NEVER, when about to publish a book, have I experienced such a conflict of feeling as I have in laying before the public this first series of Gifford Lectures, delivered in the University of St. Andrews in February and March, 1947. On the one hand, for many years I have been convinced that such an attempt at a Christian doctrine of the foundations of civilisation is overdue, having regard in particular to the situation and the responsibility of the Protestant churches. It really ought to have been made long ago. What might not have been avoided if it had! Sometimes I even think it is already too late. At any rate, if by the mercy of God we are to have some further breathing space, if He does grant us another chance to build up a new European civilisation on the ruins of the old, facing all the time the possibility of an imminent end to all civilised life on this globe, Christianity has a tremendous responsibility.

In this book I seek to formulate and to justify my conviction that only Christianity is capable of furnishing the basis of a civilisation which can rightly be described as human. It is obvious that a clear conception of the relation between Christianity and civilisation in their different spheres is of paramount importance for such a task. Therefore somebody has to begin, however inadequate may be his resources compared with the immensity and difficulty of the work to be done.

It is this feeling of inescapable urgency which has prompted me to hasten the publication of my first series of lectures, which deal with the fundamental presuppositions. I should hardly have overcome my hesitation, however, had I not received so much spontaneous encouragement from my hearers, particularly from my colleagues on the staff of the University of St. Andrews,

who appeared to be unanimously of the opinion that this initial series should be published without delay.

On the other hand, the more I considered the problem as a whole, the more alarmed I was by the disproportion between its vastness and the incompleteness of my equipment for dealing with it. Whilst I am fully confident and free from anxiety in my own mind as to my main theses, I have little doubt that the detail of my argument, particularly in its historical sections, presents many openings for criticism, whether by the expert in the history of philosophy, or the historian of civilisation. As the lay-out of my lectures is topical or systematic, and not historical, it was unavoidable that each chapter should somehow follow the whole course of European history, and that, necessarily, in seven league boots. The historian is entitled to dislike such surveys which cannot do justice to the manifold aspects and facts of historical reality. Simplifications are necessary in all sciences; one might even say that simplification is the very essence of science. But over-simplifications may be unjustifiable from various points of view. On some of these I am not too sure that I shall not be found at fault.

Furthermore, I feel most vividly the disproportion between the magnitude of each of the main topics I am dealing with and the brevity and sketchiness of their treatment in a number of chapters, each the length of an hour's discourse. From the point of view of the scholar, it would have been preferable to choose one of them only and try to treat it more or less exhaustively. But then the main purpose, which was exactly the opposite—namely to show under a variety of aspects the same fundamental dependence of our civilisation on its Christian basis—would have been defeated. I therefore hope that my readers will bear in mind this main purpose and make allowance for the inevitable limitations resulting from it.

There are, it seems to me, two kinds of scientific conscientiousness, the one demanding specialisation with all its inherent possibilities of profundity, the other calling for a venture in synthesis with all its danger of superficiality. The European mind of the last century has been developed so entirely and

exclusively along the first line, that any attempt at synthesis is looked upon as a sign of arrogance and as irresponsible dilettantism. But there are times—and such a time is ours—when synthesis must be risked, whatever the cost. Perhaps the one who so ventures has to pay the penalty and accept without grumbling the reproach of unscientific, premature audacity. Still, I cannot quite suppress the hope that there may be some, even amongst those with high standards of scientific probity, who can see that it is not lack of respect for their standards, or youthful impertinence, but a feeling of imperative necessity which might prompt such an undertaking. Having already published not a few extensive monographs, I may be entitled to hope that this plea will not be misunderstood.

The specific character of the topic of these lectures, which makes necessary such a venture in synthesis, may be accepted also as justification for the fact that the "scientific apparatus", which in my previous books has been rather too heavy, is this time very slight. The field covered in this book is so vast that complete documentation is altogether impossible, so that it seemed to me more honest not to attempt it.

May I conclude this preface with an expression of my deepest gratitude to the Senate of the University of St. Andrews for the great honour they have shown me in inviting me to give this course of Gifford Lectures, and for the extraordinary kindness and friendliness with which the members of the staff, particularly of the Theological Faculty, received me and made me feel at home in their delightful and historic town.

E. B.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND SERIES

THIS second series of my Gifford Lectures, given at St. Andrews University in March 1948, is complementary to the first. While the first was an attempt to work out something like a Christian philosophy of civilisation dealing with some basic principles which underlie all civilisation, it is the scope of this second series to give a Christian interpretation of some of the main features of civilised life. Many readers may miss some other aspects, such as marriage and the family, which they feel of equal if not of greater importance than those treated in this book. If so, I completely agree with them, but having been compelled to restrict myself to nine such subjects (in the tenth lecture I attempt to give a synoptic view of the whole field), I think it justifiable to leave out some of the topics which have been in the focus of Christian thought throughout the ages as well as in recent times.

As a matter of fact, I am not so much afraid of the reproach of having treated too few, but rather of the criticism of those who think I have tried to deal with too many subjects. I hear them ask how any one man can claim to have competent knowledge of so many different sectors of civilisation, each being almost infinite in itself. Again I fully share this view. There is probably no one—at any rate not the author—who can make such a claim. Still, it so happens that my life is concerned with all of these sectors and I have to try to lead it as a Christian, and the same is true of thousands of my contemporaries. While it is necessary that Christian men and women particularly competent in one of these fields should speak and write about the relation of the Christian faith to that particular matter, it seems to me legitimate, and even necessary, that alongside these monographs of specialists someone should at least try to give a synoptic view of the whole (even if he has no expert knowledge

of a majority of these subjects), provided that he has given to all of them prolonged thought as a Christian.

Perhaps I would not have dared to form such a plan had I not, in lecturing about one of those subjects which is particularly remote from my own experience—that of technics, or should I say technology?—received much encouragement from groups of experts, both professors and practical technicians. None the less, I am sure that in every one of these lectures there is much to be criticised by those who do have expert knowledge in that particular field. They may be assured that they will find me sincerely grateful for their criticisms; indeed I have been so conscious of the inadequacy of my knowledge and my lack of experience that on several occasions I have felt like giving up altogether.

This view of my task made it imperative not to try to give my lectures an apparent weight of scholarship by quoting many books. The only scholarship to which I might lay claim is that of a theologian or Christian thinker, who has made up his mind to apply some of the basic Christian doctrines to some of the problems of civilisation or culture, of which the urgency is felt by every live Christian.

The brevity of these lectures, compared with those of most of my predecessors, is mainly due to the fact that for reasons of language I could not afford to prepare two sets of lectures, one for fifty minutes' delivery, the other for publication. Even within this limitation I should not have succeeded had I not received most generous help from colleagues at St. Andrews, particularly Professor Donald Baillie and Professor W. R. Forrester. Again I wish to thank many other good friends, both within and outside St. Mary's College, for their sympathy and hospitality, which made my stay in their town a happy experience which I shall not forget.

E. B.