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CHRIST IN THE THOUGHT OF TO-DAY.

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THE questions—"What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?"⁽¹⁾ "Who say ye that I am?"⁽²⁾ face men on the threshold of the 20th century, as they have done in every preceding age. On the answer to these questions depend the world's religious hopes. A very negative critic (Weinel) does not hesitate to say: "After Jesus, there is either His religion or no religion."⁽³⁾ But who is Jesus, and what is His religion? And what prospect is there of His religion maintaining itself if Peter's answer to his Lord's question, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God,"⁽⁴⁾ interpreted as this is by the apostles in the sense of full divinity—be abandoned? The question is grave enough in the present condition of thought to demand a very serious consideration.

For it is impossible not to recognize that it is precisely the apostolic answer to the question about Christ's person, and the faith of the historic church built upon it, which is being assailed on every side by the new scholarship. On the continent, in England and in America, this is the case. The crisis, growing out of a long train of conditions in the spirit of the age, is perhaps greater than

⁽¹⁾ Matt. xxii. 42. ⁽²⁾ Matt. xvi. 15. ⁽³⁾ *Jesus im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, p. 292. ⁽⁴⁾ Matt. xvi. 16.

many apprehend. New scientific ideas, historical research, the study of religions, the advance of Old and New Testament criticism, have contributed to develop it. The storm of criticism which, for the last quarter of a century has assailed the Old Testament, was fondly thought by many to leave intact the New Testament. That stood—at least the Synoptic Gospels stood—so it was believed, on a different footing of security. What mattered it about Abraham and Moses, so long as Jesus and His Gospel remained? That delusion has passed away. It was long evident to unbiased observers that much of the radical criticism of the Old Testament proceeded on principles, and was conducted by methods, which had only to be applied with like thoroughness to the New Testament to work like havoc. The fundamental ideas of God and His revelation which underlay that criticism could not lead up to a doctrine of the Incarnation, but to a negation of it. The conceptions of Christ and Christianity which were its tacit presuppositions from the days of Eichhorn, De Wette, and Vatke, to those of Kuenen and Wellhausen, were *toto coelo* different from those of the believing Church and could not in time but work themselves out to their logical conclusions. That fact is now becoming apparent to the dullest. The principles of a rationalistic criticism, having once gained admission, tolerance and approval, finally acceptance and praise, in the region of the Old Testament, are now being transferred, and applied with increasing boldness and vigour, to the New, with the result that it is rapidly coming to be assumed that only a Christ from whom all supernatural traits are stripped off can be accepted as historical by the “Scientific” mind. This, it will immediately be seen, is the underlying postulate in a multitude of works recently issued and enjoying considerable popularity, in their own tongues and in translations. Not only critics like Wellhausen and Gunkel, who, leaving the Old Testament, have

entered the New Testament field, (1) Schmeidel and Van Manen, more daring than their fellows in their destructive attacks on the Gospels and Pauline Epistles in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, but writers like Réville, Sabatier, Ménégot, Harnack, Wernle, Wrede, Weinel, Oscar Holtzmann, Percy Gardner, with many more, are at one here. A note of a few of the recent works of this class referred to in this article (not mentioning American) is given below. (2)

A hardly less noticable feature of the times is the timid and half-hearted way in which these attacks on the citadel of the faith are met by Christian apologists. Very many do not meet them at all, but acquiesce in them, accept them, extol them, with but slight caveat, or dissent in secondary details. In our popular broad-toned magazines it is not uncommon to find works which cut up the roots of belief in Christ's Person as Incarnate praised for their fine Christian character, their literary style, their masterly and fearless criticism, or even commended for their apologetic value; and insistence on such facts as the Virgin-birth, the Resurrection, or the miracles of Christ's ministry, is treated as the mark of a mind that lags behind the spirit of the age—an "unmodern" mind.

(1) Wellhausen translates and critically comments on *Matthew and Mark*. As stated below, he leaves out of reckoning Matt. I. and II.

Gunkel: *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verstandniss des Neuen Testaments* (Contribution to the understanding of the New Testament from the standpoint of the History of Religions), 1903. Translation in *The Monist* of April of that year. Gunkel seeks to show that the evangelical narratives of the virgin-birth and infancy of Jesus, of His temptation, transfiguration, resurrection, etc., borrow from foreign religions (through Judaism).

(2) Harnack: *Wesen des Christenthum* (Lectures in Berlin), 1900. Translated under the title, *What is Christianity?*

A. Sabatier: *The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit* (E. T., 1904).

Percy Gardner: *A Historic View of the New Testament*. The Jowett Lectures. Popular Edition, 1904.

D. W. Wrede: *Das Messiasgeheimnis in dem Evangelien* (The Messiah-Secret in the Gospels), 1901.

Heinrich Weinel: *Jesus im Neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Jesus in the Nineteenth Century), 5th thousand, 1903.

D. Oscar Holtzmann; *Leben Jesu* (Life of Jesus), 1901. Translated.

Others have glided into sympathy with the new ways of thinking without realization of all they involve. It is not uncharitable to say that there are men in nearly all the Churches—excellent men, many of them—who have, half-unconsciously to themselves, parted at bottom with that faith in Christ on which their Churches are built, and which alone can sustain these, or any Christian Churches in existence. Certain it is that if any other great controversy—say the English fiscal dispute, or reform of the liquor laws—were attempted to be conducted in the same lukewarm, indecisive, concessive way, with exchange of compliments and plentiful sprinkling of rose-water, as the Christian defence is being conducted on its most vital points at the present moment, the battle might as well be given up at the outset. One sees in current religious controversy continually this lack of real grip of the gravity of the issues at stake; and it will serve an important end if something is said in this paper to recall those who prize their Christian Gospel to the need of a firmer testimony on its central articles.

If we ask, What is the view of Jesus which the “modern” mind would have us substitute for that embodied in Peter’s confession—“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God?”—it is happily not difficult to find the answer. When we pierce below surface differences in current representations, we find a singular unity in the kernel of the matter. (1) Whether we start from a popular book like Mr. Percy Gardner’s *Historic View of the New Testament*, conceived in the spirit of Jowett and Matthew Arnold, or from a treatise like Weinel’s, tracing the different “lights” in which Jesus has appeared in the schools of the 19th century, (2) or from a professed *Life*

(1) We leave out of account extremists like Friedrich Nietzsche, to whom Jesus is simply a “decadent”—the type of everything that is most unwholesome in life.

(2) Weinel sketches the breaking up of the traditional image of Jesus by historical criticism, the views of Him as ethical and social reformer,

of Jesus, like Oscar Haltzmann's, we come back essentially to the same thing. There is an easily-recognized "common denominator" to which all these diverse manifestations of opinion may be reduced. Widening our outlook, if we consult Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, in the speculative and rationalistic philosophy of the past, Carlyle and Emerson, and the bulk of our popular writers, in literature, Harnack and Sabatier, as types of influential opinion in Germany, Holland, and France, T. H. Green and Dr. Edward Caird, as representing the younger Hegelianism, we come always at bottom to a general view of Christ in which, without much difficulty, though in slightly differing phraseology, they would agree. This fact is an immense simplification of our task in defining the issue the Church of to-day has to face.

Negatively, this view of the "modern" mind strips off from Jesus, as already remarked, everything distinctively supernatural. The mind formed by modern culture can admit no "miracles."⁽¹⁾ The Church doctrines of the "Trinity" and of the "Two Natures" are it need hardly be said, thrown over as obsolete products of Greek metaphysics. Jesus is reduced precisely to the dimensions of humanity. The view is not exactly what we are wont to call Unitarian, since in this term lies implicitly an opposition to Trinitarian, but may rather be described as *Humanitarian*. It would claim to differ from the older Unitarianism in the further respect—a difference more in words than in reality—that in its chief phases it aims rather at deifying humanity, than at humanizing divinity. There is a sense in which it affirms the presence of a divine element in Jesus as in all men,

in the "Liberal" and "Social-Democratic" schools, the pessimistic conception of Him as the preacher of a Buddhistic self-redemption, then considers His relation to the religious questions of the present. He takes no account of *believing* thought about Jesus in the past century. That, apparently, is a quite negligible quantity.

(¹) A partial exception is made of possible "faith-cures," which are not strictly miracles.

even where it does not positively speak, with the Hegelians, of an "identity" of the divine and human. It is to be conceded to it also, that, unlike the older and coarser unbelief, its general spirit is one of reverence for Jesus. It holds itself free to criticise Him—to accept or reject His teaching at its will—but it acknowledges and honours Him in its own way as revealer of God, and religious and ethical teacher. It extols and "admires," if it refuses to worship, Him.

But, positively, what is this view of Jesus which the "modern" mind asks us to accept as a substitute for the old? It may be stated very briefly. It rests on the idea of God as the immanent spirit of the world, revealing Himself in it and in humanity, and nowise else. As we have ventured to put it elsewhere: "A universal Father—God, whose presence fills the world and all human spirits; Jesus, the soul of the race, in whom the consciousness of the Father, and the corresponding spirit of filial love, first came to its realization; the spirit of 'divine Sonship' learned from Jesus as the essence of religion and salvation—such in sum is the new theology. All else is dressing, disguise, *Aberglaube*, religious symbolism, inheritance of effete dogmatisms." (1) Weinel states it for us thus: "Jesus has left to humanity two gifts; which are its most precious possession—a new faith in God, and a new idea of man . . . the way in which man comes to God, receives from Him and gives to Him, is, with Jesus, only the speech of the heart, and the listening to the voice of the Father, as He speaks to us from nature around us, and from the depth of our own being." (2) Whether Jesus Himself believed that a heavenly, spiritual nature dwelt in Him, raising Him above the rank of other men, "is not the main thing . . . signifies very,

(1) *Ritschlianism: Expository and Critical Essays*, p. 151. (2) Pp. 247, 280.

very little.” (1) Readers of Harnack’s lectures on Christianity, which this writer accepts as “on the whole the image of history,” will remember that the lecturer makes the essence of Christ’s Gospel to consist in its teaching on the Fatherly love and providence of God, the value of the soul, and spiritual righteousness; Christ’s Person is not essential to it. The question therefore to which we are brought is—will this suffice for Christianity? Can Christianity even survive without something more? It is this question, we are convinced, which the Church of the future will have to meet with a very decisive “Yes” or “No.”

There are many to whom the Christ of the New Theology has a plausible aspect. He attracts them, they say, as the Christ of the old Creeds did not. He is more human, more brotherly, more lovable—fights His battles more nearly on the same spiritual ground they themselves tread on; is therefore fitted to be a Leader and Guide for humanity as the supra-mundane Christ, with the aureole of “Godhead” about his head, was not. Besides, is not everything really vital in the religion of Jesus preserved? If much has to be dropped to which past ages attached an exaggerated importance (which however, has now become to thinking minds a barrier keeping them from Christ) is not that more a gain than a loss, when it is agreed on all hands that the essential spiritual content of Christ’s Gospel is the world’s most precious possession? Is it not much, they argue, that we should be able to find here a common basis on which reverent minds of all types seem able to agree: a something “verifiable” about Jesus which no advances in criticism or progress in science and philosophy can shake; which furnishes a common standing ground for Unita-

(1) P. 287. Men, he explains, have always attributed that “something higher, something superhuman” which they feel in those who make a deep spiritual impression on them, to an indwelling Genius or God. “It was not otherwise with Jesus” (p. 282; cf. p. 287).

rian and Trinitarian, for orthodox and "liberal," for Hegelian and humanist, and finds a place within the Church — a grander, nobler Church — for a Goethe and Renan, a Carlyle and Emerson, a Channing and Martineau, as well as for a Luther, a Calvin, a Wesley, and a Newman? We lose, it is true, the "thaumaturgist," who wrought (to the modern mind) incredible "signs and wonders;" we drop such legends as the Virgin-birth and the resurrection of a dead body from the tomb; we lose the rabbinical "heavenly man" of Paul's theology, the Alexandrian "Logos" of the Fourth Gospel, the metaphysical "two-natured" Christ of the Councils; we lost theories of "mediation" and "satisfaction;" but how morally and spiritually sublime, how infinitely more human and tender, how "divine" in the *true* sense of the word, the Man of Nazareth who remains!

It is extremely desirable, even at the risk of seeming to delay upon it, that we should have before our minds a clear image of what exactly it is which, when verbal disguises are removed, we are asked by this new way of thinking (new, yet in essence very old) to accept as the future basis of our Christian hope and life. It is only by facing the alternative presented to us without shrinking that we are able to form a right judgment on what the proposed new departure means. As to what is parted with, one cannot improve upon the eloquent words of Dr. Martineau in his *Loss and Gain in Recent Theology* (1881), who thus signalizes "the disappearance of the entire Messianic theology:"—

"From the Person of Jesus, everything official, attached to Him by evangelists or divines, has fallen away; when they put such false robes on Him, they were but leading Him to death. The pomp of royal lineage and fulfilled prediction, the prerogative of King, of Priest, of Judge, the Advent with retinue of angels on the clouds of heaven, are to us mere deforming investitures, misplaced, like court dresses, on the 'spirits of the just,' and He is simply the Divine Flower of humanity,

blossoming after ages of spiritual growth—the realized possibility of life in God . . . All that has been added to that real historic scene—the angels that hang around His birth, and the fiend that tempts His youth; the dignities that await His future,—the throne, the trumpet, the assize, the bar of judgment; with all the apocalyptic splendours and terrors that ensue,—Hades and the Crystal Sea, Paradise and the Infernal Gulf, nay the very boundary walls of the Kosmic panorama that contains these things, have for us utterly melted away and left us amid the infinite space and the silent stars.”⁽¹⁾

What remains is simple. The ground-fact is that a young Galilean peasant, by name Jesus, son of Joseph and Mary of Nazareth, starting as a disciple of John the Baptist, became, about his 30th year, the originator of a remarkable religious movement in Galilee, which brought him into collision with the Pharisees and ecclesiastical heads of the nation, and led, after perhaps a year's activity, to his being arrested at Jerusalem at the Passover, and after trial by the Sanhedrim, and before Pontius Pilate, put to death by crucifixion as a blasphemer. Whether, as the Gospels say, He claimed for Himself the title Messiah, is a moot question—Wrede, in the work above cited, contends that He did not; whether He spoke the Apocalyptic discourses attributed to Him is held to be even more doubtful.⁽²⁾ Probably, as most allow, He did both, and to that extent, as in so many other particulars in His thinking—His views, e. g., of God in heaven, angels, demons, Paradise, etc.—was a victim of illusions, or shared the erroneous beliefs of His age. But His soul was one of singular purity—not “sinless,” for the modern mind dare not use so absolute a word;⁽³⁾ His religious and ethical ideals were the most spiritual yet given to mankind; while the filial confidence He exercised in the Father, His perfect love and sympathy with men, and

⁽¹⁾ Pp. 14, 15.

⁽²⁾ Harnach doubts it. Mr. Percy Gardner has in his Contents to Lect. VII. of his *Hebraic View*: “The belief in the Second Coming: Did it arise out of statements of the Founder, or from the adoption of Jewish Eschatology? So far as we can discern, it seems to come from the latter source.” Cf. exposition on the Lecture.

⁽³⁾ The writer asked an able and representative Ritschlian in one of our churches whether he would affirm the sinlessness of Christ. His guarded reply was: “That is a theoretical question.”

the continual polemic which cost Him His life against the merely outward, ceremonial, and legal in religion, in favour of a spiritual worship, and an inward morality of the heart, made Him, in another sense than the theological, the true Founder of a Kingdom of God on earth. He gave up His life in fidelity to His convictions on the cross, but, it need not be said, according to the new version of the Gospel, did not rise again. Yet it is allowed that His disciples believed He did, and even that they had seen Him, and that it was by their energetic preaching of a Risen Lord that the Christian Church was founded among men.⁽¹⁾ These dreams, we are told, are gone, and the Church of the future will have to content itself with a Jesus on whose grave, as Mr. Arnold says, the Syrian stars still look down. Is it so?

Were it worth while, it might be shown that this humanitarian Christ of the new teaching, far from being really new, is as old as the history of Christianity; that similar views have never been wanting in speculative and cultured circles as a set-off to the higher dignity claimed and contended for in the Church as belonging to its Lord, on the grounds of His self-witness, the facts of His life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, the testimony of His apostles, and the felt need of a divine Christ for man's redemption. Even eclectic emperors and neo-Platonists of the third century did not object to see in Jesus a good and wise man to be regarded with reverence; Spinoza, in the 17th century, would not refuse to own Christ to be the Son of God in the sense described, but it should scarcely need demonstration that the view of Christ which would satisfy a Plotinus, a Spinoza, a Goethe, or a Renan, cannot well be adequate for the purposes of a Chris-

⁽¹⁾ Mr. Gardner says: "For any one who studies the marvellous story of the rise of the church it soon becomes clear that this rise was conditioned—perhaps made possible—by the conviction that the Founder was not born, like other men, of an earthly father, and that His body did not rest like those of other men in the grave," etc. (Lect. V., Sec. 1).

tian Church. We gratefully accept all testimony, from whatever quarter, to the incomparable excellence—the moral and spiritual grandeur—of Christ; we rejoice to behold men, severed from us by denial of His supernatural attributes, paying homage to Him even on this lower ground; we willingly see in the fact new evidence that He is the “Light of the World,” irradiating in part the intellects and hearts of many to whom the full splendour of His revelation as “the only-begotten of the Father” is veiled; but we must not allow this recognition of His moral and spiritual pre-eminence to blind us to the measureless gulf which separates such an acknowledgement from the confession of oneness with the Father, reaching beyond all limits of creaturehood, which is of the essence of the Christian doctrine of His Person.

There are many grounds on which we think it may be shown that this view of Jesus presented to us by the modern teaching must be rejected, alike as inadequate for the needs of the Christian Church, incapable of sustaining in the minds of men even a colorable imitation of Christianity, and untenable on its own merits. The same considerations will serve to show that the Church can only be sustained in activity and power by the confession of the Lord’s full divinity, i. e., by cleaving fast to the unweakened doctrine of the Incarnation.

1. It need not be said, in the first place, that the humanitarian view of Christ’s Person now urged upon us is a decisive break with historic Christianity. This may be thought to mean little; to be only an appeal to unreasoning tradition. In reality it is much more. It is one of the legitimate tests to apply to the truth of a doctrine anew lifting up its head among us, and claiming admission as Christian. For the doctrine of the Church on the Lord’s Person is not something that has simply been received, and subsequently held fast, in blind submission to authority. It was a doctrine won through

long discussion, through severe testing of every possible alternative, through deliberate rejection of opposing views; which has held its own through repeated searching trial in the fires of heated controversy since. If, as the result of such an age-long process, in which Scriptural statement, historic testimony, Christian experience, and the instinct for what is, and is not, vital to Christian faith, have all borne their part, the doctrine of the full and essential Deity of Christ has always emerged triumphant; if it has not been overthrown in the course of 19 centuries by Ebionite, Gnostic, Arian, Socinian, and modern Unitarian denials; if even at this hour it forms a fundamental article in the creed of every great historic Church, Latin, Greek, Protestant; if humanitarian phases of belief have only raised their heads to be from time to time repudiated, it is surely more than unreasoning reliance on tradition to cherish the confidence that the thing which has been, in this relation, is the thing that will be. It cannot be too clearly borne in mind that when we speak of a break with historic Christianity, we do not think merely of a break with the Greek age, or any later age of the Church's existence; we think even more of a breach with the Christianity of the apostles, and with what was understood in the age of the apostles to be the Christianity of Christ Himself. There never, in truth, has been on the earth, since the days when Christ lived, anything labelled "Christianity," of the nature of that for which the name is now claimed, save in odd corners of a few heretical, and not historically influential sects.

2. Not only would the acceptance of this humanitarian view be a break with historic Christianity, still more seriously, it may be affirmed, it would be a break fatal to the life and hope of the Church. One has only to think of what the Church of Christ is in its wide-spread ramifications throughout the world, of the mass of spiritual life, and wealth of activities represented by it,—of

its congregational life and work, its unceasing philanthropic and rescue activities, its extensive Sabbath-school operations and home and foreign mission enterprises,—of the numberless eyes and hearts that are daily, hourly, turning to Christ, for consolation, strength, deliverance from temptation and sin,—and ask himself, What view of Christ is needed to sustain all this? to see how utterly futile is the dream of sustaining it on the memory of a young Galilean peasant who believed Himself to be the “Son of God,” but whom “historic criticism” has proved to be quite wrong in that belief! It was on a different faith from this that the Christian Church was founded; by a different faith from this that its great saints, martyrs, reformers, evangelists, missionaries, were inspired; a different faith from this which wrought its revival and recovery to spiritual health and earnestness in days of religious declension; a different faith which was the origin of the great Christian enterprises and organizations which are spreading the Gospel and circulating the Bible at home and abroad; a different faith which touches the springs of liberality from which, in increasing flow, the wealth needed for the support of these institutions is obtained. What hope is there of any similar results from the spell of the residuary Christ of the new critical processes? Could Paul’s “The love of Christ constraineth us” (1) ever have been dissevered from his “I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I have by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” (2) We have here in part the experience of the past to guide us. When have these humanitarian views proved capable of developing a vigorous, aggressive Christianity, or of inspiring large and disinterested efforts for the spread of the Gospel, and the

(1) 2 Cor. V. 14.

(2) Gal. II. 20.

spiritual uplifting of humanity? Testimony is abundant as to the sterilizing effects of rationalism in the countries in which it chiefly had its birth—Germany and Holland. Kuenen's teaching, as his biographer, Mr. Wicksteed, ingenuously confesses, emptied his class-room at Leyden; and the experience is not peculiar. These views of Christ and His Gospel, in truth, are chiefly the work of closet-recluses, of men of philosophic and speculative bent, of littérateurs, of men more at home in general culture, and in historical and critical studies, than in experimental religion, and the practical work of the Church. They belong to coteries, and are not in the least fitted to take hold on, or bring help to, the masses of the people. They are condiments for the few, not a Gospel for the many.

3. This touches a new point, viz.: the humanitarian view of Christ leaves the world without the Gospel that it needs. Christianity, in the simplest statement of it, is a religion of redemption. It finds a world in sin and spiritual ruin, estranged from God, and incapable of lifting itself out of the guilt, depravity, and bondage in which it lies. To such a world it brings a message of deliverance from God, who of His love has provided the means for its salvation. The Gospel is the proclamation of forgiveness, yet of forgiveness on such terms, and on the grounds of such an atonement, as upholds God's holiness, and the majesty of His dishonored law, in the very act of bestowing it. The Saviour is no fellow-creature, but God's own Son, dwelling eternally in the bosom of the Father, who laying aside His glory, takes upon Him our nature, and enters into redeeming fellowship with us. In Christ and through His cross there is cleansing from the guilt of sin; and through His Spirit there is the impartation of a supernatural power, which works complete renewal. This, it will hardly be denied, is the kind of Gospel exhibited in the Epistles—in John, in Peter, in

Hebrews, in the Book of Revelation, not less than in Paul—a Gospel which, preached with spirit-touched lips, has brought peace, hope, and new life in God to millions that have received it. There is here a proportion between means and ends. No ordinary son of the race could take on him the burden of a world's redemption. The magnitude of the work to be accomplished justifies the Incarnation; the Incarnation has a worthy end in the salvation of a world of sinners. On the new humanitarian basis, there is neither room for any such Gospel, nor felt need for it, nor the possibility of it. Sir Oliver Lodge, in a recent article in the *Hibbert Journal* says that the world has given up worrying about sin. There is truth in that, and therefore a non-supernatural, purely humanitarian Christ, may for a time suit it. But sin is still there as a terrible fact in life, and in human experience, and wherever, or from whatever causes, the sense of it re-awakens, and, under the vision of the divine holiness, men feel themselves laden with guilt, and held in an alien power from which they cannot by any efforts of their own deliver themselves, the cry will go up, as of old, for a Redeemer that is mighty—for a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, and for a supernatural strength to break the bonds. Such help does not proceed from any merely human source. When the question is put—What kind of a Person must faith postulate for such a work as Jesus came to do? the only satisfying answer can be: one who is Himself divine.

4. Yet another evidence of the inadequacy of a merely humanitarian view of Christ lies in the fact that it destroys the basis of *certainty* in religion. It is well that Jesus—this radiant Galilean spirit—should have had this joyous trust in a Father-God, and should have assured men of God's loving providence and forgiving grace. But who is to guarantee the trustworthiness of His child-like thoughts and beliefs on these high themes? What,

calmly considered, could He *know* of them from His own cogitations more than others? He thought, He felt, He imagined; He dreamed pure and beautiful dreams; He framed for Himself the image of a Heavenly Father that cared for the sparrows, and clothed the lilies, and devoted His life to that Father's service in boundless trust; but cold science comes, and says, What if it is *only* a dream? What avenues of knowledge had *He* which enabled Him to give mankind assurance on these transcendental facts? It is vain to speak of natural revelation of God to the soul; for, psychologically, there is no such direct perception of the supernatural, personal Being we call God—any more than of angels and demons—which could warrant confident assertions regarding His character, attributes, and purposes. Aspirations, conjectures, poetic speech, personifyings, symbols, there may be; but what right have we, apart from *supernatural* revelation, to speak of more? At best, the truth of what is declared can only be accepted so far as it is found to agree with the judgments of our own reason. Deprived of a real revelation of the Father in the soul of Christ, giving sure, objective, authoritative knowledge, we are transported into a region of subjective imaginings to which no certainty worthy of the name can attach. The step is a short one from the humanitarian Christ to pure Agnosticism. The consciousness of Jesus, it is admitted, was in error or illusion on a multitude of points; on His own Messiahship and future return in glory, on the Scriptures and the course of past revelation, on angels and demons, etc.—how should it be supposed unerring on God, the soul, and immortality? Must we not here also disengage husk and kernel? We cannot think, it may be said, of the Supreme Power as Jesus in His age did, or figure providence with Him, as a minute care of the individual, or have His confidence in the power of prayer for temporal or spiritual blessings, or be quite sure that His

views of sin are ours, or that God forgives sins precisely as He supposes. Here also, it will be contended, we must make allowance for the personal equation, and think on these subjects for ourselves, in the light of modern knowledge. Thus the so-called "revelation" recedes, and is beheld dissolving in thin air. We fail to see how it can be otherwise, if this is all the account we have to give of the Revealer.

5. Still, it will now be urged, what if this "modern" conception of Jesus be after all *true*? Will the fact of its inadequacy for such a Christianity as we desiderate, or any dire consequences we please to deduce from it, avail to stay its acceptance by thinking men, if the concurring evidence of the sciences point to it as the one which *ought* to be, and *must* be accepted? We agree; but this brings us to our final remark, that judged even on its own merits *this view is not tenable*. It is not so logically, if brought to the test of self-consistency, and it is not so historically, if the evidence for Christ's divine dignity and Messianic claims is impartially weighed. To test its consistency, we have but to put ourselves in the standpoint of the theory, and ask what kind of God it is that Jesus is supposed to have revealed? It will be agreed that it is a Father-God, who loves and cares for men, who hears them and answers their prayers, whose loving providence attends them at every step, who has warmth in His heart towards them, with whom man stands in the closest personal relations—the very antithesis of the abstract *Grand Etre* or metaphysical First Cause of the speculative thinker. This is well, but must it not always be an incredibility that God should be *so much* to man and *not be much more*—should not enter into more direct relations with Him in the form of personal, supernatural revelation? Dim gropings of man after God through untold ages—this is what the theory comes to—with a few successful hits on the part of great spirits in the midst of

millions of misses; and God Himself is aback of the process all the while, able if He willed, to give to man the sure guidance He needs. But *He keeps silent*. Is this believable if the view which Jesus entertained of the Father be a true one? It is important to be reminded that none of the successful "feelers" in the line of Israel themselves believed this to be the way their knowledge of God reached them. Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, *Jesus*—one and all believed that it came to them through direct revelation of God Himself. Only Jesus put Himself here in a different category from all prophets, and ascribed His knowledge to direct insight into the Father's mind and will. (1) Such a view is self-consistent, and affords a sure basis for faith; the other compels us either to reject Christ's conception of the Father, or, accepting it, to look for higher revelation.

But historically also the impartial mind will never be able to rest in the defaced, humanitarian image of Jesus which the critics would fain impose on us as that of the Christ of history. It is admittedly not the image of the Gospels as they stand, but the contradiction of that image. Wrede naively confesses this in his comments on his predecessors, who, he thinks, have not treated the Gospel history in a sufficiently thorough-going way. After saying that their method has been to cut out the supposed incredible traits, and use the rest as history, he remarks: "That is, there is substituted for the narrative something of which the writer has never thought, and this is given out as its historical content." (2) Every effort is therefore made, by the approved critical methods, to destroy the credit of the Gospels as reliable narratives of what Christ said or did. It is, in short, assumed *beforehand* that nothing can enter into the life of Jesus that transcends the bounds of the purely natural, and the

(1) Matt. XI. 27.

(2) P. 2.

Gospel records are cut down, and trimmed, to suit. Thus Wellhausen, in his recent work on Matthew, simply leaves out the first two chapters, and begins the Gospel with the third chapter, without a word of explanation or justification. Such high-handed dealing with historical documents, however, can only recoil on the heads of those who find it necessary to indulge in it. The Gospels are not to be played with, and their witness spirited out of existence in this remarkably easy fashion. They are no late compilations of unknown authors, but have every claim to be regarded as authentic records, by apostles themselves and their companions, of the first-hand, consistent testimony about the sayings and doings of Jesus, borne by the Apostles in their preaching, and carefully deposited by them in the various Churches which they founded. (1) The supernatural traits in the portraiture of Jesus in these Gospels, criticism tries in vain to eliminate. Only the most arbitrary manipulation can expunge from them, e. g., the lofty Messianic claims, and the eschatological discourses, in which Jesus predicts His return in glory to judge the world. The difficulty for the critics is to reconcile with these claims the modesty or even the sanity of One whom, with all Christendom, they recognize as the perfect pattern of meekness, self-abnegation, and suffering dignity; free in His Spirit from every trace of extravagance or impure fanaticism. There is no denying the fact that, reduced to their barest elements, the claims of this lowly Nazarene overtop everything the world has otherwise ever known or heard of. He stands in a unique relation to God and to man; is the goal of all previous revelation, and fulfiller of law and prophets; is the commissioned founder of the Kingdom of God on earth, and King and Lord over it; Himself knows no sin, but is the forgiver of the sins of others; attributes to His death the efficacy of a ransom for the

(1) Cf., Luke I. 1-4.

sins of the world; baptizes with the Holy Ghost; arrogates to Himself prerogatives and functions in heaven and on earth, and as arbiter of the everlasting destinies of mankind, which a mere human being would be impotent to exercise; demands for Himself surrender and service such as only God is entitled to require. Is it possible to place such a Being in our thoughts in a merely humanitarian frame? For such an One even as the Synoptic Gospels depict Him, there is no incongruity, but the divinest fitness, in the manner both of His entering the world, viz., by supernatural birth, and of his exit from it, — by resurrection and ascension. The critics have to account for such a Being, for such a sinless character, for the possibility of such claims, for the amazing self-consciousness that lay behind them, for the actions, words, and works, which sustained them, and enabled a Christian Church to be founded on them, for the death and resurrection that have had such momentous consequences for the history of mankind since. Those who think that this is a problem to be solved by the spilling of a little ink, or a display of critical dexterity in getting rid of inconvenient texts, will find themselves grievously mistaken. It seems easy, e. g., to dispose of reports of miracles of healing by speaking of them as “faith-cures,” but when have faith-cures extended to giving sight to the blind, the instantaneous cleansing of the leper, or the raising of the dead? There is nothing tentative or uncertain about Christ’s work of healing—no whisper of failure in His attempts. The crowning miracle—His own resurrection—stands as a changeless barrier in the way of all naturalistic explanations of His Person. How account even for the faith of the disciples in the resurrection,—for their belief that they had seen Him, conversed with Him, eaten and drunk with Him, after He had risen,—if the event never happened? Theory after theory has been invented to explain this—imposture theories, swoon

theories, vision theories, spiritualistic appearances— but each effectually refutes the others, and the empty grave and manifestations of the Risen One remain as inexplicable as ever. The newest hypothesis, we confess to us an original one, of Oscar Holtzmann is, that it was *Nicodemus* who secretly moved the body from the tomb (the sealing and guard of soldiers being mythical, but then why not Nicodemus and the new tomb also?), disliking the idea of the body of a crucified malefactor reposing in his honourable family vault! (1) Could anything, one asks, be more exquisitely *wooden* than this suggested solution of the mystery on faith in which the Christian Church is built? With Christ's resurrection is connected His exaltation, and the whole Christian hope. The true solution is that furnished by Paul: "Declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (2)— "Delivered for our offenses, raised again for our justification." (3)

It seems needless to press home the lesson of this discussion. Naturalism does not hold in its hands the answer to the question—who is Christ? The Church did not need to wait for the 20th century to give her that answer. She had it from the moment of her birth in her faith in a risen and glorified Lord. The apostolic teaching but throws into clear light the truths about the Lord's Person implied in the facts that had preceded. No temporary storms of unbelief or critical assault will shake the Christian mind from its conviction that in the once-abased, now-exalted and ever-reigning Jesus it beholds the eternal Word made flesh.

(1) *Leben Jesu*, p. 397. (2) Rom. I. 4. (3) Rom. IV. 25.