

Albrecht Ritschl.

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It has been given to few men in our generation to exercise so wide and decisive an influence on theological thought as that which has been exerted by the subject of our present sketch—Albrecht Ritschl. Ritschl's independent activity, indeed, began as early as the middle of the century, but it is only within the last twenty years or thereabouts that the breadth and force of the movement proceeding from him have become fully apparent. Now it is seen that a quiet power was going forth all the while from that Göttingen class-room, which was leaving its life-impress upon a whole generation of younger theologians, and sending its pulses through unobserved channels into the thought and literature of other lands. Ritschlianism, at any rate, is a phenomenon which no one can any longer afford to ignore, and it is natural that an increasing interest should be manifested in the personality and teaching of the distinguished founder of the school.

Ritschl was born in 1822, and died as Professor at Göttingen in 1891. His father held the position of general-superintendent of Pomerania. The bent of the young student's mind from the first was towards theology, and we find him successively at Bonn, Halle, Heidelberg, and Tübingen, sitting at the feet of the teachers of highest repute in these various seats of learning. Two things strike us particularly in this part of Ritschl's career, when his ideas were yet unformed, and he was simply groping in search of a system. One is the remarkable *receptivity* of his mind—his impressibility by the various influences which were brought to bear on him. As one of his critics has said, he traversed all the crises of the religious thought of his epoch. At Bonn he came under the powerful spell of Nitzsch, and even for a time venerated Hengstenberg. He was won to Hegelianism at Halle by Erdmann. He was on friendly terms with Tholuck and Julius Müller, though he afterwards spoke of them in highly disparaging terms. He sat for six months at the feet of the speculative Rothe. Thereafter we find him an enthusiastic and convinced disciple of Baur at Tübingen. At a later period we find him deserting Baur for Kant and Lotze. He thus, as above remarked, in his own spirit ran the whole gauntlet of the theological

thought of his time. It was this in no small measure which gave him his peculiar influence. He touched the thought of his age from within, mirrored its dissatisfactions, showed that he had correctly diagnosed its wants, and from the very weaknesses of the systems which he rejected, gained wisdom for the construction of his own. The second thing we notice about Ritschl at this period is the assertion in the midst of these constant changes of standpoint—of this apparent subjection to external influences, which of itself might be interpreted to mean weakness—of a *strong and independent personality*. It was Ritschl's way of apprehending ideas, if we may so express it, not so much to argue or reason about them, as first to take them into his own spirit in the full strength of their original impression, then to test them by what he found to be their value for his personal wants. He applied to them, in other words, the method afterwards so characteristically described by him as that of "value-judging." The practical instinct guided him all through. Each step in his theological advance was really a new stage of self-assertion—a fresh verdict passed on what was needed for his full satisfaction. Even when nominally a Hegelian, the core of his thinking was ethical; and he tells us that it was his practical good sense which kept him from adopting the dialectic constructions of Rothe. The truth is, Ritschl never had, in the proper sense of the word, any strong dialectical interest. The dialectic of systems interests him from the historical point of view, but his own attitude is always external and critical; and the excursions he sometimes takes into the regions of philosophy are the weakest parts of his work. It is precisely on this account that later on he may have settled down into a modified Kantianism; for to a thinker of Ritschl's stamp it is a positive relief to find a philosophy which demolishes once for all the pretensions of reason to have any knowledge on the subjects of religion.

We may say, therefore, that Ritschl was a Kantian in principle long before he was one in practice. His abiding bent was towards the ethical, but along with this, and subservient to it, were two other tendencies, which likewise gave a character to his work, and essentially contributed to its

success. The first was a conspicuous talent for history and criticism. It was this which first powerfully attracted him to the school of Baur, then, at a later period, led him as decisively to separate himself from it. The second was the impulse to dogmatic construction. It is necessary to emphasise this, for the popular impression of Ritschl, derived from his attacks on the ordinary school theology, aided, perhaps, by an element of haze in his own style, is that he was the enemy of definite and articulated thought in religion. This is far from being the case. It is among the recurring complaints which he makes of his earliest teachers that he found them lacking in this faculty of system. Tholuck and Julius Müller as systematic theologians he found "confused." There can be no doubt that the systematic interest dominates Ritschl's thinking throughout, and only grew more powerful as time advanced. It is indeed to the fact that from his own new standpoint he was able to crystallise his thoughts into a comprehensive and well-compacted system—a system very different, no doubt, in idea and development from those which it sought to displace, but an articulated dogmatic view none the less—that we trace no small part of its power over the minds of his disciples, and, more generally, its attraction for those—and they are always the majority—who desire to see truth presented in a connected and organised form.

Ritschl's first important work, however—that which fairly established his reputation—lay not in the region of dogmatic thought, but in that of Church history. The impulse he had received from Baur naturally led him to the study of early Christianity, and particularly directed his attention to the problem of the development of the old Catholic Church. In 1850, accordingly, when he was yet but twenty-eight years of age, appeared the first edition of his book on *The Origin of the Old Catholic Church*, a work already showing independent tendencies, but mainly dominated by the ideas of his master. A reaction, however, had begun, which ere long was to separate him entirely from Hegelianism, and from the historical theories of the school of Tübingen. In 1855 he broke formally with Baur, as he had previously done with all his earlier teachers. In 1857 his work on the Origins appeared in a second and entirely rewritten and recast form—that which it has subsequently retained, and in which it has had an effect on the study of early Church history little short of epoch-

making. It would be impracticable here to give even the briefest sketch of the positions of this remarkable book—positions which, as Harnack truly says, have in substance "found acceptance, if not with all, yet with the majority of independent critics."¹ It may suffice to say that a main point in it is the rejection of Baur's thesis that the old Catholic Church was the product of a fusion or reconciliation of Petrine and Pauline parties in the sub-apostolic age, and the development of the counter-idea that Gentile Christianity is not offhand to be identified with Paulinism, but was rather the result of a failure to apprehend Paul's profoundly evangelical ideas, and of the intrusion of the conception of Christianity as "a new law," which conception had for its counterpart the legalising of the outward framework and institutions of the Church, and the growth of the hierarchy and of sacerdotalism. On none of his writings, probably, did Ritschl bestow so much pains in respect of style and clearness and precision of thought and expression as on this, which exhibits, accordingly, a special excellence in these qualities.

In 1852 Ritschl had been appointed "Professor Extraordinarius" at Bonn, where for some years he had been lecturing as *privat-docent*. He was now in 1859 appointed "ordinary" professor in the same university. Here he began those dogmatic labours which have since made his name famous. His dissatisfaction with existing systems led him to plan a reconstruction of theology on entirely independent lines. From scholastic and speculative theories he felt the need of moving back directly on the historical Personality and revelation of Jesus Christ. His attention was specially directed to a right comprehension of the great doctrine of reconciliation—one of the *foci*, as he conceived it, of the Christian system, the other being the idea of the Kingdom of God. In 1864 came his call to succeed Dorner at Göttingen. This transference was important to him in many ways, but not least in that it threw him in contact with Lotze, to whom he professes his obligations for furnishing him with a satisfying theory of knowledge. There are, he says, in the history of European philosophy, three doctrines of knowledge. The first is that of Plato. The second is that of Kant. The third is that of Lotze. This he accepts.² Ritschl attaches the very greatest

¹ *Contemporary Review*, August 1886, p. 234.

² *Rechtf. u. Vers.* p. 20 (3rd ed.).

importance to his theory of knowledge, which he maintains lies at the basis of his whole theology—a strange position for one who so consistently depreciates the intrusion of metaphysics into theology—but it is exceedingly doubtful whether he is entitled to speak of himself as in accord with Lotze. His view, as his critics have pointed out, is much more a slightly modified Kantianism. With both Kant and Lotze he held that we know the world of reality only through its effects upon ourselves—through the phenomena it produces in us. But whereas Lotze believed that by reasoning, if not through direct experience, we could arrive at conclusions as to the nature of reality beyond us, Ritschl, like Kant, treats the causes of our impressions as incognisable, and declares himself concerned only with their relations to ourselves. This theory, at any rate, seems to have furnished him with what he needed as a basis for the complete construction of his system, which soon thereafter was expounded historically, exegetically, and dogmatically, in the three volumes of his principal work—his *magnum opus*—on *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*. (1871-4.) Later editions, with considerable changes, appeared in 1882-3, and in 1888-9. The range of this work, at once critical of other theories, expository of the author's own ideas, and under the head of "presuppositions" embracing a full treatment of the doctrines of God, of Sin, and of the Person and work of Christ, makes it the authoritative text-book on all that pertains to Ritschl's theology. Of Ritschl's other works it may be sufficient to mention his lengthy *History of Pietism*—likewise in three volumes (1880-6).

What now are the leading thoughts of a system which, in a comparatively short space of time, has so powerfully impressed a large number of talented and earnest minds, and occasioned what may be described as a new departure in theology? It is difficult in a few sentences to state them, while, of course, in a brief notice of this kind, anything like an adequate exposition cannot be attempted. To some extent it may be said that Ritschlianism is an inspiration rather than a system. Few of Ritschl's followers have adhered strictly to his standpoints, or slavishly committed themselves to the concatenation of his thoughts. The note of the school is rather its independence, leading sometimes to tolerably wide divergences. Still there are common marks of the party, pivots, as it

were, round which the thinking of master and disciples alike revolves, and some of these we may briefly indicate. We must distinguish between the formal character and the positive content of the Ritschlian theology. In a general respect the great watchword of the school is that indicated in the phrase—*theology without metaphysics*; in a positive regard, the principle from which it professes to derive the whole organism of Christian truth is the *historical Person and revelation of Jesus Christ* as the Founder of the Kingdom of God. The bane of previous theology, in the view of the Ritschlians, has been its adulteration with the presuppositions and ideas of a foreign philosophy. At an early stage theology succumbed in this way to the influence of Greek thought—mainly Platonic; the Middle Ages were dominated by Aristotelianism; the Reformation only partially shook off the bondage, and ere long lost itself in a new scholasticism; later times have seen the reigns of Wolfianism, of Rationalism, of Kantianism, of Hegelianism, etc. It is a primary aim of Ritschlianism to free theology from this dependence on foreign influences; to vindicate its right and ability to develop itself purely from its own principle—the historical revelation in Christ; and, above all, to assert the truth that in Christianity it is not the theoretical but the practical, not the intellectual but the ethical, which has the primacy, and that a pure theology can only be constructed from a practical standpoint. All this is healthy enough in its way; it is the development given by the Ritschlians to these essentially sound principles which exposes them to so much well-grounded criticism. The argument is valid against the infection of Christianity with the ideas and methods of a *foreign* philosophy; but it may still be contended that in the discussion of its own problems Christianity cannot avoid coming in contact with questions which are in their nature philosophical, and to which—unless it is to abdicate thought—it must take up some attitude, and attempt some solution. This need not be done by incorporating alien philosophies, but rather by seeking the development of a *Christian* philosophy—one in harmony with Christian postulates and principles. All this, however, the Ritschlians would taboo. To justify their declination, they extend their opposition to philosophy to the whole sphere of "theoretic" thought, and will have it that theology has nothing to do with

theoretic thought at all. How then, we ask in some surprise, can we get any theology? For theology surely has to do with propositions, with the assertion of truths, with their concatenation into a system. Ritschl answers this by drawing a broad distinction between "theoretic" and what he calls "religious" knowledge,—a species of knowledge which depends solely on practical judgments, and the truth or falsehood of which is to be tested by practical standards alone. In religion, according to his favourite expression, we have to do only with "judgments of value" (*Werthurtheile*), that is, not with the objective or scientific aspects of truth, but solely with their relation to our practical ends—the ends in this case being those of religion, namely (in Ritschl's view), the attainment by the help of superior powers of freedom from the hindrances or limitations of the natural life. Because this, in point of fact, is presumed to be attained in Christ's revelation of forgiveness and doctrine of the kingdom of God, Christianity is certified as true, independently of any other evidences. But here again the difficulty arises as to the possibility of keeping apart these practical judgments from all contact with theoretic considerations. If the *truth* of a judgment is affirmed, however it may originally have been obtained, it seems idle to say that it can be withdrawn from theoretic criticism. We cannot have two kinds of truth with no sort of relation to each other. The mind cannot be divided into compartments, with its theoretic knowledge on one side, and its religious knowledge hermetically sealed off from contact with the theoretic on the other. The two must be brought into relation, into comparison, into such unity as is practicable. The question, indeed, cannot help forcing itself upon us whether Ritschl's "judgments of value" ever rise higher than merely subjective representations, with the objective or scientific truth of which, in the strict sense, religion has nothing to do. This, at any rate, is his position, that theology must content itself with the tabulation and formulation in systematic connexion of purely religious judgments, and must not attempt to impose on them any theoretic character. Here, if anywhere, is the "Achilles' heel" of the Ritschlian system—the point at which it is most vulnerable to hostile attack. There are many subordinate questions relating to the same subject, as, *e.g.*, whether Ritschl is not liable to the reproach of doing the

very thing which he condemns, in bringing Christianity into dependence on a particular metaphysical theory; whether his Christianity *is* a pure transcription of the primitive or apostolic gospel, or is not really as far removed from that in its essential ideas and presuppositions as any of the theologies of the schools; whether he does accept *in integro* Christ's revelation, or only so much of it as fits in with his *a priori* theory of religion, etc. These are wide topics on which we cannot enter further. We can only attempt to show what his views are on some leading points in Christianity.

We have said that the *positive* principle in Ritschl's system is the historical Person and revelation of Jesus Christ. Here again, unquestionably, Ritschl strikes a true note. It was time the mind of the Church was recalled from abstruse theologies and scholastic refinements of doctrine to the fresh, living impression of Him whose life and work are the foundation of her whole structure. Largely to Ritschl is due the now widespread reversion to the idea of "the historic Christ" in theology. Ritschl himself, as we have seen, approached the subject on the side of a prolonged and exhaustive study of the doctrine of Reconciliation. This led to his giving this doctrine a co-ordinate place with that of the Kingdom of God in his mode of exhibiting the Christian system. Christianity, he says, may be compared to an ellipse, with these doctrines as its two foci. In reality, however, the tendency of his teaching was to make the Kingdom of God the all-embracing notion within which every other doctrine—that of reconciliation included—held its articulated place; and this has been the line adopted, I think without exception, by his followers. Here, also, in the prevalence which this notion has obtained in current theology, we trace another result of the influence of Ritschl. It is this notion of the Kingdom of God, viewed as at once the highest (moral and spiritual) good for man, and the aim of his practical endeavours, which in the Ritschlian systems is made the standard for the determination of every other doctrine in theology—for example, of God, of the Person of Christ, of Sin, of Redemption. Yet, perhaps not quite logically, this notion is sought in turn to be derived from the historical manifestation of Christ, and the revelation of God as Father and as Love given us in Him. All metaphysical considerations are here to be excluded. The Christian idea of God

has nothing to do with the God of natural theology. God is solely and entirely for our faith "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The character of this Being is pure love. His world-purpose (that for which, therefore, the world in the religious view is held to be created) is the founding of the Kingdom of God. It must be noted, however, that this kingdom but exists for the realisation of the end—practically Kantian—independently posited in the Ritschlian theory of religion. The same conception determines for us the place and worth of Jesus Christ in His own religion. Jesus is one with God in His complete identification of will with the Father's purpose of founding a Kingdom of God, and in His entire surrender of Himself to this as His life-task. He is likewise perfectly equipped for this task; realises in His own person the true religious relation of man to God; is in this respect the Archetype and Exemplar of man in His normal relation to God in His Kingdom, as well as the Founder of the latter; finally, in so far as men are sinners, kept back from God by the sense of their guilt, Christ perfectly reveals the grace and truth of God, and His free forgiveness of sins. How Christ should arrive at this knowledge of God, should possess these extraordinary endowments, should stand in this unique relation to God and to His purpose,—in short, should be the Person that He is, and should stand in the relation to God and man that He does,—is a mystery into which we are not permitted to pry. To raise questions of this kind would be to enter the prohibited region of "metaphysics." The fact must suffice us that it is so. We must not even attempt to ask too precisely what is meant by "Revelation" in this connexion. These questions are better left in convenient vagueness. While, accordingly, Ritschl continues to speak of the "Godhead" of Christ, we are warned against putting on this phrase any "metaphysical" interpretation. The term is to be understood in consonance with the general principles of the school as an expression for the *religious* value which Christ has to the Church as the Revealer and Representative of God. But the question still presses—Can we stop here? Will Christ's own utterances and claims, His present lordship over His Church, the words and functions ascribed to Him, permit us to stop here? Or dare we apply this term "Godhead" in any metaphorical sense to one who essentially is *not* God? Part of

this difficulty Ritschl avoids by declining to occupy himself with any but the historical and earthly aspects of Christ's life. Whether Christ even rose from the dead is left a moot question in Ritschlian circles, while the whole range of scriptural doctrine regarding His heavenly reign, and His return for the work of resurrection and judgment, is put aside as non-essential. But is this to take pure Apostolic Christianity, and preserve it in its simplicity from unauthorised corruption, or is it not rather to exercise a criticism on Christianity determined by Ritschl's peculiar philosophical presuppositions? It is as possible in the interests of a *a priori* theory to mutilate Christianity by subtraction, as it is for philosophy to vitiate its essence by addition.

Intimately connected with the doctrine of Christ's Person and work is the Ritschlian view of sin, and of God's relation to it. Since God, in Ritschl's conception, is purely love, it follows that there is nothing properly judicial or retributive in His dealings with the world. Wrath, at most, has solely an eschatological significance, and then only in a hypothetical case. Original sin Ritschl denies. Actual sin is due so largely to ignorance that it is a proper subject of pardon. A feeling of guilt haunts the sinner, and separates him from God. But the revelation of God's grace in Christ dispels these fears, and enables the sinner with confidence to return to the Father. Christ's death, which, in respect of Christ Himself, is the supreme trial of His fidelity in His life-calling, is at the same time that which specially inspires the sinner with trust in the reality of God's gracious disposition towards him. For it assures him that Christ's view of the character of God was a true one. The outcome of Ritschl's study of the doctrine of Atonement, therefore, is that no Atonement, in the old sense of the word, is needed. But there is subjective reconciliation, mediated by Christ's life and death, and this is the kernel of the apostolic doctrine. We do not wait to criticise these notions, which seem to us to involve as great a transformation of original Christian doctrine as any which can be blamed on the orthodox theology. There is a peculiar side of Ritschl's teaching here on the mediation of all these blessings to us through the Church, which (not the individual) is the direct object of the divine justification, but it is far from clear how this is to be worked up with the general structure of the system. Probably Ritschl's

idea is that the consciousness of this new standing with God through Christ belongs first to the community, and is enjoyed by the individual only as he knows himself to be part of the body.

The only other point in the teaching of Ritschl to which we can here advert is his pronounced anti-mysticism. Ritschl will hear nothing of direct spiritual communion of the soul with God. Pietism in all its forms is an abomination to him.

The one way of communion with God is through His historical manifestation in Jesus Christ, and experiences due to a supposed immediate action of the Spirit in the soul can only be regarded as illusion. This is the side of Ritschl's teaching which has been specially taken up and developed by his disciple Herrmann. It will be difficult, we fancy, to persuade most people that this is a nearer approach to the primitive type of Christianity than is found in the ordinary theology.

Requests and Replies.

What Lexicon is there on the Septuagint?—F. D. T.

THE only serviceable lexicons for the Greek Old Testament are still, so far as I know, Schleusner's *Thesaurus* (Lips. 1820-21) and Wahl's *Clavis* (Lips. 1853), the latter limited to the "apocryphal" books. But neither of these works is up to date, and until some Old Testament Grimm-Thayer comes to his aid, the student of the Greek versions will be under the necessity of supplying the defects of his lexicon by a diligent use of Mr. Redpath's great Concordance. An interleaved Schleusner, supplemented and corrected by personal study, might form a useful basis for a new lexicon. The time has now almost come for an attempt on the part of some scholar or band of scholars to provide a satisfactory lexicon and grammar for the LXX., based upon the great uncial MSS. which are now within our reach.

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Is it likely that the Samaritans would receive their Pentateuch from the Jews at any time after the separation under Jeroboam, B.C. 950?—M. J. B.

It is not probable that the Samaritans received their Pentateuch from the Jews during the period of the independence of the northern kingdom. When that kingdom was overthrown by the Assyrians, the friendly influence of Judah would be not unwelcome to those members of the ten tribes who were left in the land of promise. And, if the Pentateuch was then in existence, it may have come into possession of the Samaritans in connexion with the reformation under Hezekiah.

A more favourable occasion is offered in Josiah's reformation, which, as we know (cf. 2 Kings xxiii. 15-20 and 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3-7), extended to the important centres of the northern kingdom.

If, however, we may rely on the scanty information which has reached us, the most probable occasion, subsequent to the days of Jeroboam I., is found in the proceedings of the Samaritans after the return of the Jewish exiles from the Babylonian captivity. From the narrative of the Old Testament, taken in connexion with that of Josephus, it appears that the Samaritans made an earnest attempt to associate themselves with the restored Jews. Their proposals were rejected. The final result was the establishment in Samaria of a rival worship to that of Jerusalem, under the charge of a Jewish priest who stood in the closest family relation to the High Priest in Jerusalem.

Whatever date may be claimed for the Pentateuch, it is admitted that, among the Jews, it was raised to quite an exceptional pre-eminence about the time when the Samaritans established their rival sanctuary on Mount Gerizim. From this same period has to be dated that enmity between Jews and Samaritans which is so prominently referred to in the New Testament. Even if the Samaritans possessed a copy of the Pentateuch before this time, and used it in their religious services, it is from this date that its special importance among the Samaritans has to be reckoned. It is, of course, possible that, if the Pentateuch was in existence in the days of Solomon, a copy of it was secured by Jeroboam I., and used (with such divergence from its precepts as suited his self-seeking policy) in the arrangements he made for his schismatic kingdom. If so, the document must have practically passed through the same changes in the northern as in the southern kingdom, or the legislation must have been stereotyped from the days of Solomon.

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