

A Swiss Shorter Catechism.¹

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IN these days of demand for a simpler creed and of experiments in that direction, this catechism, which is in its fourth edition and of which 10,000 copies have now been printed, is well timed in its appearance. The joint-compilers, Professor Louis Emery of Lausanne University and Pastor A. Fornerod, who, if we mistake not, now occupies a chair in the same institution, belong to the more advanced wing of French Protestantism. By their published writings they show themselves to be disciples of Ritschl, or perhaps one should rather say, in the case of French theologians, of Sabatier. This catechism is an attempt to render the Christian verities in terms of modern religious thought. The *Kingdom of God* and *Communion with God* are favourite categories with the writers; and they have evidently made it their aim to reduce their propositions to the simplest terms possible, consistent with intellectual precision and a certain degree of spiritual culture. One is struck with the obviousness of most of their answers. But therein lies their excellence. The writers have not weighted their exposition with a single word that cannot be understood and accepted by the twentieth-century mind. We can gather their standpoint from words which Professor Emery used in his inaugural lecture at Lausanne some years ago. 'We do not recommend that the truth of the Gospel should be made to bend to every breath of the wind of day, . . . but that Protestant theology should not repeat its words of holiness and love in a language that our century can no longer understand. The Gospel is a wine always new, always ardent and generous; it must not be poured into bottles that are old and badly patched, but into new bottles where it can ferment at pleasure.'² This catechism is an exemplification of that principle. It is written in the language of common sense, and yet withal is pervaded by a true religious flavour, and some of the sections, such as that dealing with the Person of Christ, could hardly be surpassed for their artless beauty of expression.

¹ *Le Royaume de Dieu*. Exposition abrégée de l'Évangile à l'usage des Catéchumènes par L. Emery et A. Fornerod. Lausanne: F. Rouge et Cie.

² *Religion et Théologie*, p. 24.

The catechism is divided into eight chapters, with an introduction dealing with the place of Christianity among the religions, and the relations of the Old and New Testaments, and an appendix which summarizes the history and contents of the books of the Bible. The chapters, again, are divided into sections, and to each section there is appended a set of Scripture proof-texts quite in the orthodox fashion.

Chapter I. is entitled '*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*,' and provides us with definitions of the Kingdom and of its distinctive character:

'The Kingdom of God is the totality of men who recognise God for their sovereign master and apply themselves to the doing of His will.'

'The fundamental character of the Kingdom of God is to be a spiritual kingdom. The reign of God must first of all establish itself in the heart, in order to manifest itself thereafter in the individual and social life.'

Chapter II. is entitled '*Jesus Christ, the Founder of the Kingdom of God*.' The chapter is historical as well as doctrinal, dealing in successive sections with the *vocation of Jesus*, His *ministry*, His *gifts*, His *personality*, His *death and triumph*. Here are some of the questions and answers:

Q. 'What do the names of Jesus and Christ signify?'

A. 'Jesus is a proper name which signifies in Hebrew "God is Saviour." The word Christ, Greek in origin, corresponds to the term Messiah, which comes from a Hebrew word meaning anointed. These two names designate Jesus as the chosen of God, announced by the prophets, for the founding of His kingdom.'

Q. 'How was Jesus prepared for His mission of Messiah?'

A. 'From His most tender age Jesus showed a lively interest in all that concerns the Kingdom of God. By prayer, by meditation on the Old Testament, by obedience to His duty, He lived in a perfect communion with God.'

In the section dealing with the gifts of Christ we have this interesting dictum on His miracles:

'The people sought Jesus out also on account of His miracles. Without seeing in them acts

contrary to the laws of nature, we think of Jesus as possessing an extraordinary power, of which the healings are the most frequent manifestation.'

In framing a doctrine of the Person of Christ the writers make much of His sinlessness :

Q. 'In what did the personality of Jesus differ from that of other men?'

A. 'That which particularly distinguishes Jesus from all other men is His perfect holiness.'

Q. 'What do you understand by the holiness of Jesus Christ?'

A. 'The holiness of Jesus Christ is His perfect consecration to the will of God. While the best among men lament that they stop short of their duty, Jesus never disobeyed God.'

Q. 'What is the source of the holiness of Jesus Christ?'

A. 'The source of the holiness of Jesus Christ was His perfect communion with God.'

Q. 'In what did that communion consist?'

A. 'Jesus allowed Himself to be completely penetrated with the Spirit of God, and realised perfectly the life of confidence, love and obedience which ought to unite man to his Creator. That is why He is Son of God.'

Exception might be taken to the phrasing of this answer as hardly doing justice to the timeless element in the Person of Christ. Though the defect is perhaps met in a subsequent question :

Q. 'What connection is there between the work of Jesus Christ and His character of Son of God?'

A. 'By virtue of His perfect communion with God the person of Jesus Christ was the very manifestation of the eternal love of God for sinners of mankind.'

In another place Christ is described as 'Love made man.'

The death of Christ is presented in various aspects :

Q. 'Are we able to understand the principal reasons of its necessity?'

A. 'The death of Jesus Christ is the visible demonstration of human corruption. The holy and the just crucified! What more evident proof of the gravity of sin.'

Q. 'Was not the death of Jesus Christ also the supreme proof of His obedience to God?'

A. 'In showing Himself obedient unto death, even that of the Cross, Jesus has made display of His faithfulness to God, and has been able thus to

become the head and the example of a people of good will.'

Q. 'What more does the death of Jesus Christ show to us?'

A. 'The death of Jesus Christ is the greatest proof of His love for us. It is to snatch us from our sin that He has made the sacrifice of His life.'

The question of the bodily resurrection of Christ is not dealt with ; but the reality of His appearances to the disciples is accepted :

Q. 'Did Jesus give proofs of His supraterritorial existence?'

A. 'Jesus appeared repeatedly to His disciples with the aim of re-establishing and confirming their faith in their crucified Master. The Church was founded on the preaching of the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.'

Chapter III. is of '*The Heavenly Father, Sovereign of the Kingdom.*' God is called 'The Creator of the Universe, which He has submitted to the law of evolution (development). All beings draw their existence from Him and depend upon Him, while He Himself depends on none.'

The Immanence of God is glanced at in the next question :

Q. 'Has God abandoned the universe to itself after having created it?'

A. 'The evolution of the universe executes itself in complete dependence upon God in such fashion that, while leaving a certain autonomy to the creatures, it must tend to the realisation of the reign of God.'

The Fatherhood of God is accepted as one of the simplicities of the Gospel :

'By the term Heavenly Father, Jesus wished to indicate above all that God loves us as a father loves his children : God is love.'

Chapter IV. brings us to the other side of the subject, '*Men as Candidates for the Kingdom of God.*'

Human personality is spoken of in these terms : 'Man, being a person, manifests thereby that he is created in the image of God ; he is able then to enter into communion with his Creator ; he is a religious being.'

Sin is defined as 'the transgression of the divine will revealed by our conscience ; that transgression proceeds from the free will of man.'

The time-honoured phrases Original Sin and Total Depravity are dispensed with for a simple affirmation of the doctrine of heredity :

'Humanity is not a simple collection of individuals independent of one another; it forms a body, the members of which are united among themselves by an intense solidarity. Our ancestors being sinners, we inherit from them an inclination to evil further enhanced by evil examples.'

To the question, 'Is death also a consequence of sin?' the answer is given:

'The body of man is by its very nature devoted to death; his spirit only is called to live on. But death ought to be nothing more than a simple passage to a new life. It is sin which has made it for the troubled soul an object of fear and terror.'

Chapter V. bears the title, '*Man a Member of the Kingdom of God.*' The new birth is thus defined: 'The new birth consists at once in the breaking with sin and in the bringing forth of a new life of obedience to God, which constitutes the Christian life.'

Two of the truths most perfectly formulated in our own Shorter Catechism are *Repentance unto Life* and *Faith in Jesus Christ*. It is interesting to compare the corresponding statements in this catechism:

'Repentance is a deep grief for having offended God, it may be by the evil which we have committed, it may be by the negligence we have brought to the doing of good.'

'Faith in Jesus Christ is a humble confidence of the sinner in Jesus Christ as his Saviour.'

The experimental note is beautifully voiced in this statement of the effects of Justification:

'The believer knowing himself pardoned, feels himself thenceforward reconciled with God, he knows himself as His child, heir of eternal life.'

The refreshing unconventionality which is characteristic of the volume is seen in such a question as this, as to the different modes of conversion:

Q. 'Does conversion fulfil itself in all Christians in the same manner?'

A. 'The forms of conversion can vary from one individual to another. With some it fulfils itself insensibly in a manner little apparent; with others it is sudden and provokes an abrupt breach with the past.'

The Holy Spirit is defined as 'God considered as acting in the heart of man to make a Christian of him.'

Chapter VI., which is on '*The Laws of the*

Kingdom of God,' deals generally, in the first place, with the Christian vocation and worship:

'The Christian is called to realise his Christian vocation in the framework of his earthly profession, be he agriculturist, commercial man, artisan, married or single.'

Of worship it is said, 'To pray and meditate on the words of God is not only a homage which we ought to render to the Eternal, but is in addition the source of our religious and moral force. That is why we ought to consecrate some moments to it every day.'

The remainder of the chapter is taken up with duties to oneself and one's neighbour, and some of the answers are models of terse, epigrammatic statement.

As this to the question: 'What are the vices from which the Christian must keep himself in the possession and use of his goods?'

'The Christian ought to be neither avaricious nor prodigal. He ought to know how to possess his goods without being possessed by them.'

Again, 'Candour is not garrulousness; it consists not in saying all that comes into our mind, but in thinking all that we say.'

'Man and wife owe to each other fidelity, support, love, without forgetting those mutual regards and attentions which are the small change of charity.'

Here is a truth for the times:

'Family worship, by uniting all the members of the family before God, is particularly adapted to recall to us our duties and to give to us strength against temptations.'

The practical and up-to-date character of this chapter will have been already apparent. It may be further indicated by mentioning that there are sections on *L'hygiène* and on *La patrie et l'humanité*.

Here is a sentence from the latter:

'True patriotism is not exclusive of the love of humanity; we ought, in the measure possible, to interest ourselves in all peoples, specially in those who have need of our aid, and to work for the cause of peace.'

In Chapter VII., on '*The Church and its Worship,*' a concise account is given of the various sects of Christendom and of the distinction between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.

The concluding chapter deals naturally with the Last Things or, as it expresses it, '*The Destinies of the Kingdom of God.*'

The question is asked, 'Is the Kingdom of God already realised here below?' and nothing finer could be conceived than the spirit of the answer :

'The Kingdom of God is still far from being realised here below, but it is the task of Christians and churches to cause the Spirit of Christ more and more to penetrate the manners and institutions of society, in such wise as to hasten the realisation of the Kingdom of God.'

The fate of the impenitent is briefly touched

upon in such a way as to suggest some sort of finality, while avoiding that dogmatizing on the subject which is so distasteful to the modern mind.

This volume deserves a wide circulation among lovers of the truth. It may not come up to the old Scottish idea of a compendium of doctrine; but to many present-day readers it will be welcome as a statement in natural, unstrained language of the faith that is in them.

In the Study.

Literature for the Study.

Apologetic.

MESSRS. T. & T. CLARK have issued a new and cheaper edition of Dr. Frank Ballard's *The Miracles of Unbelief* (1s. net).

Canon Henry Lewis, M.A., has been reading widely in the biography of unbelief; and he has come to the conclusion that, whatever its form, atheistic or agnostic, it makes neither for happiness nor for character. He has read the biographies of Voltaire, Paine, John Stuart Mill, Renan, Bradlaugh, Herbert Spencer, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, George Sand, Huxley, George Eliot, Sidgwick. It is a striking list. Perhaps these men and women, having genius, could not have happiness; but they might have had character. He does not say that none of them had character. What he finds is that their character was not strengthened by their agnosticism or atheism, but rather hindered by it. To grow in character one must grow in grace, and the word was unintelligible to them.

The title of the book is *Modern Rationalism as seen at Work in its Biographies* (S.P.C.K.; 4s. net).

Canon Edmund McClure, M.A., has been occupied with a similar subject. He has been studying rationalism also. But his study has been of the systems, while Canon Lewis has studied their makers. In *Modern Substitutes for Traditional Christianity* (S.P.C.K.; 2s. net) he gives an account of six modern systems — Non-miraculous Christianity, Undogmatic Mysticism, Theosophy, Christian Science, the Cult of the Superman, and

Secularism. The one thing which Canon McClure finds most certain, as he travels through all this welter of new religions, is that some hold on the past, some continuity of doctrine, is necessary for us all.

Religion and Temperament is not a title that will appeal to every one, but the book which the Rev. J. G. Stevenson, B.A., has written under that title is marked by very great ability and very great timeliness (Cassell; 3s. 6d. net). For there is abundant evidence that with a shrug of the shoulders many men dismiss the demand God makes upon their will, and say, 'Consumption is to the consumptive, and religion to the religious.' To meet this multitude (which does not seem to diminish) we need so able and candid an apologetic as this book contains. One wonders that, in the day of the popularity of psychology as a religious ally, this matter of temperament has not received more attention. Perhaps it has not been scientifically gathered within the Science of Psychology yet. Mr. Stevenson is not troubled about science. He takes the temperaments quite empirically. But he touches real facts, and facts that are of universal application.

Mr. J. M. Thompson, by his outspoken book on miracles, has certainly made the discussion of the miraculous a popular discussion. He has also been the occasion of the writing of many books. Among the rest he has the responsibility for the choice of *The Miracles of Jesus* as the subject of the Davies Lecture for 1913. The lecturer is the Rev. E. O. Davies, B.Sc., who has now published