

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

By Rev. W. E. McCulloch, D.D.

Consider a few well-known historical facts that may be crowded into a brief paragraph. A little more than nineteen hundred years ago Jesus was born. His home was the little village of Nazareth. At the age of about thirty years he began to travel about the country, healing the sick and teaching men the truth of God. He organized a little band of disciples who submitted themselves to his instruction and authority. For about three years he continued his work, then was brought to trial by his enemies, condemned to death and crucified. His followers worshipped him as the Son of God, and went everywhere proclaiming his gospel and winning converts to the new faith. With astonishing rapidity Christianity spread throughout the Roman world. In three centuries it virtually conquered the great Empire. Sixteen centuries have passed since Constantine issued his famous decree: centuries of crusade and revolution and reformation and missionary enterprise inspired by the name of the Man of Nazareth. To-day the followers of our Master are numbered by the hundreds of millions, and Christianity is more intensely vital and aggressive than at any other period since the time of the Apostles.

In view of the above facts, is it any wonder that the problem of the Person of Christ has inspired the profoundest metaphysical speculations and the mightiest theological controversies? Instinctively men recognize that Jesus occupies a unique place in human life and history. There is a fine saying of Jean Paul Richter that "the life of Christ concerns him who, being the holiest among the mighty and the mightiest among the holy, lifted with his pierced hands the gates of empires off their hinges, turned the stream of the centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages." George William Curtis said of Christ that "the splendour of his devotion so overflows history with glory that men call him God." To an officer at St. Helena Napoleon said, "I think I know somewhat of human nature; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is more than man." William Ellery Channing, leader of Unitarianism in this country, said that "the life of Christ could not be explained on human principles alone."

What then, is the person of Christ? Who is he? What is the eternal mystery that clings about him? What is it that at once marks him as our brother, and yet sets him apart from us? To try to explain him as merely an extraordinary man is to meet with insuperable difficulties. To attempt to class him along with Confucius, Buddha, Plato and other great world teachers is to leave some very profound question unanswered. Why in the common sense estimation of the word, does he tower so immeasurably above all other men? Why do millions bow the knee before him and adore him as Lord and Saviour? Why has this person taken such a marvellous hold on the minds and hearts and lives of the multitudes through all these centuries of time? Fairbairn, in his great work on "The Philosophy of the Christian Religion," lays special emphasis on the fact indicated in the last of the above questions. His argument may be stated as follows: When men undertake to explain Jesus Christ, their task is not completed when they have examined a few ancient manuscripts and have studied critically the Four Gospels; they must tell us why nineteen long centuries have not dimmed the glory of his character; they must tell us why the unnumbered millions have worshipped him as divine, and more than that, have lived soberly, righteously and godly after his example; they must tell why the multitudes have loved him so devotedly and have gone down into the shadowy valley, serenely trusting in him; they must tell us why that force in the world which we call Christianity, with its organizations, its institu-

tions, its civilizing genius, its wondrous moral and spiritual vitality centres round this one person; they must explain Jesus Christ in history.

We Christians profess to give the explanation in a sentence. We say that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God. That, and that alone, furnishes a satisfactory solution of the problem. We believe that Jesus Christ is what the New Testament represents him to be. We read that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and that men beheld his glory"; that in him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; that he is "the brightness of the divine glory and the express image of the divine person." These plain declarations can mean nothing else than that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God.

Why should the Incarnation be regarded as contrary to reason? Is it incredible that divinity should appear on earth in the form of humanity? The idea is a very old one, as all are aware who have even the most superficial knowledge of ancient history, philosophy and mythology. It has always held a prominent place in human thought. The reasonableness of the Incarnation is to be found in the fact that God and man are alike in certain respects. The difference is not so much in kind as in degree. God and man possess the essentials of personality, which are intelligence, will and feeling. God thinks, wills and loves. Man thinks, wills and loves. As to personality, there is likeness between God and man. That is a profound saying of the Scripture that "God created man in his own image." However much man has been marred by sin, there is something god-like about him. He bears upon himself the seal divine. It has been said that "when man is most truly himself, he finds himself to be a partaker of the divine nature; and what he is most profoundly conscious of is not himself, but the God in whom he lives." In view, then, of the fact of similarity between the divine and the human, why should it be thought incredible that God should express himself or manifest himself in the form of man? We believe that he has done this very thing in Jesus Christ. To see Christ is to see the Father. Our conception of divinity can rise no higher than that which is revealed to us in Christ. As we look upon him he appears the very essence and sum of godliness. Divine Incarnation alone explains Jesus Christ. Nothing else can meet the facts.

The clearest, most convincing revelations come to us in and through personality. No doubt it is possible to "see God in clouds and hear him in the wind." We learn something of his nature and his will through the laws which he has written on our hearts. We have the Sacred Writings, our precious Bible. But Christianity is more than a nature religion and more than a book religion. It is the revelation of God to men through the person Christ Jesus. Herein is the charm and the power of our religion—personal relationship to the Son of God. To be a Christian is to trust a Saviour, to sit at the feet of a Teacher, to imitate an Example, to serve a Master who is Christ the Lord.

Recently I heard a gentleman of scholarly attainments and reverent soul declare himself after this fashion: "I have read a considerable amount of philosophy; I want to say that it is very refreshing to get back to the New Testament; it does not pretend to solve the problems of ultimate being or reality, but it gives us the majestic figure of the Christ." He who acquires a real experimental knowledge of Christ will not lack a philosophy. And it is philosophy that brings satisfaction to the intellect and rest to the heart. No doubt it is a very perplexing world and human life presents some dark problems. But a sweet consolation and a wondrous hope possess our souls when we come to know him who is the Light of the

world. We are blessed with the spirit of good cheer when we look into his face.

What is needed above all else in human lives is unquestioned loyalty to this person who is called Christ. To be truly wise is to surrender the whole heart to him, to acknowledge his supreme Lordship of life. A simple little chorus which Gipsy Smith uses a great deal in his meetings runs as follows:

"Where he leads me I will follow;
I'll go with him all the way."

In this day of unexampled missionary opportunity at home and abroad, the Master's call is for disciples whose courage shall not fail, whose enthusiasm shall not waver. These are the kind of ambassadors who shall carry the Gospel of righteousness to all the nations.—The United Presbyterian.

ON LIVING THE ETERNAL LIFE NOW.

(By W. W. Davis.)

"There is no Death! What seems so is transition;

This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian,
Whose portal we call death."

—Longfellow.

There are thirty millions of people in England, and mostly folk, decided Carlyle seventy years ago. Shakespeare was of the same opinion: What fools these mortals be! Sang the Psalmist: "I said in my haste all men are liars. Ah, David commented the Scotch dominie, you might have said that at your leisure. Poor human nature! It does not stand very high among the critics and philosophers.

One thing is certain. The world for thousands of years has been entertaining many foolish beliefs. The earth was flat until Magellan and the circumnavigators proved it to be round. No writing they said in the time of Moses until the ruins of Nineveh and the tombs of Egypt show an early age of letters and libraries. Our earth was the center of the universe until Copernicus gave our little planet its yearly revolution around the sun.

Changes have taken place, also, in religious belief. The Bible has not changed, but people have found it necessary to change their interpretation of it. "Reconstruction in Theology" is the title of a suggestive treatise by Henry C. King, president of Oberlin College. Some churches have been obliged to revise their creeds and catechisms. While the cardinal doctrines remain, some old-fashioned ideas are giving way to a better philosophy of Christian living.

The world is growing wiser. People once believed in witches, were afraid of comets, defended slavery, thought thirteen an unlucky number, Friday an unlucky day. Now, theologians are asking, Must we wait until we get to Heaven to be really happy? Why not let the blessed condition begin here? Why cannot saints walk about our common streets as in the new Jerusalem? No reason. With this present body and this old earth, we may have William Morris's "Earthly Paradise."

"Through the shadow of the globe,
We sweep into the younger day,
Better fifty years of Europe,
Than a cycle of Cathay."

To the old Greek philosophers, matter was vile, essentially bad, the seat of sin, and strangely enough, the Christian church has for ages cherished the same unhappy belief. Hear Bernard of Cluny:

"The world is very evil.
The times are waxing late."

And you find the same sad note through most of modern hymn writers. Take that popular hymn of Williams:
"Gulde me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land,
Dr. Muhlenberg doubtless had the blues when he wrote: