

which He would draw all men to Him. But as they listened to His voice, as they were more perplexed, they stumbled at the cross, had His revelation of Himself to them closed at Calvary, they must have remained in utter and hopeless confusion, and we would never have heard of Him or of them. Even His resurrection did not make all things plain, for it was not until after the Ascension and the gift of the Spirit, the gift bestowed on Gentile as well as Jew, that they recognized Him in the fulness of His power and glory. As at the dawn of creation the elements were formless, chaotic, until the Spirit of God moved upon them, so the conceptions that the disciples had of Jesus were dim, vast, struggling, undefined, until brought into order by the Spirit, whose function it is to testify of Christ and to show men His glory. Then they went forth on their mission as men who saw Christ to speak of Him to others, men to whom the living Christ was the supreme reality of the universe. They knew that He would Himself remain an eternal presence amid His people, needing no mediator between them and Him, but Himself the abiding Mediator between them and God. They knew that He was ready to enrich every believer with the fruits of all that His reason had planned, and His heart had suffered, and His power had wrought. They lived in His light as those who saw Him face to face. That vision was their test of truth and duty, their solace in every sorrow, their inspiration for all effort, their present life and joy, and the insurance of that fuller life in which, in beatific vision, they would see Him as He is.

MODERN THEOLOGY CENTRES UPON THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

As with His first disciples, so with His Church ever since. May we not say that the aim and purpose of Christian thought through these eighteen centuries has been to see Jesus, to set forth and interpret Him in His relation to the Father, to the world, and to the course of history? Through the conflict of opinion the Church has surely been gaining clearer and fuller knowledge of her Lord, and although He must always remain greater than our greatest conceptions of Him, yet our effort must be to get ever nearer to the conception that He had of Himself.

The most encouraging feature in the theology of to-day is the way in which it centres upon the Person of Christ. Never before since the days of the apostles, was there a more earnest or widespread attempt to know what Jesus thought about Himself, and to find in Him the solution of all our problems. Whatever may be the view that thoughtful men hold concerning Christ to-day, they try to justify it not by speculation, but by exegesis, not by mere argument but by appeal to Christ's own teaching. When He ask them: "What think ye of Christ?" their answer depends on their interpretation of His own reply to that other question: "Whom makest Thou Thyself?" It has come to be recognized that, on such a matter, Christ's own words are the final test of truth, that from His judgment there is no appeal, that the only question for us is: What did Jesus say, and what did He mean by what He said?

Now, if Jesus is to us what we believe He claims to be, then we should welcome every stride of progress, every advance in knowledge, every new truth, come from what quarter it may, confident that, in the long run, it must help us to a more adequate conception of Him.

VALUE OF THE HIGHER CRITICISM.

There is to-day a very searching study of the Word of God. The Higher Criticism has done much to throw light on our ancient Scriptures, to help us understand their history and connections, and to restore them to their original form. Some devout readers have felt amid the conflict of the critics as if, like Mary at the sepulchre, they could say, "They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him," and yet, like Mary, they may find their Lord nearer than they imagined. This very work of criticism may help them to see that the great test of Scripture is its witness to Christ. The final significance and value for us of the Old Testament is its testimony to Him, its anticipation of Him, its bearing upon His Person and work. We should, therefore, welcome and pursue the most searching scrutiny of our Holy Scriptures, confident that, whatever opinions may have to be changed, we shall reach a clearer and more exalted conception of Christ.

STUDY OF COMPARATIVE RELIGION.

Again, we have of recent years greatly increased our acquaintance with heathen religions. We recognize much that is good and true in the religious systems, for example, of China and India; and we feel that we need not disparage them in order to magnify Christ, for, when all that is best in others has been acknowledged, Christ still stands in lonely and pre-eminent grandeur. But, more than that, we must widen our conception of Jesus to see Him as the source of all this excellence. We no longer dream of saying with Augustine that the virtues of the heathen are only splendid vices. Instead of that, their virtues and the elements of truth and goodness in their religions may help to give us worthier views of Him Who is "the light that lighteth

every man that cometh into the world." In the loftiest ideals and best efforts of the heathen we recognize an inarticulate desire to see Jesus, and we would respond to it in the spirit of Paul's message to the Athenians, "Whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." The study of Comparative Religion should not weaken in the least the fervour of our efforts to preach among the heathen Christ and Him crucified, but it should help to enlarge our conception of Christ Himself who, in ways that we know not, shall fulfil His own promise, "They shall come from the east and from the west, and from the north and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God."

EFFECT OF MODERN SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERIES.

Once more, the thoughts of men have in modern days been widened by the discoveries of science. Astronomy, geology, archaeology, and other studies have enlarged our thoughts of the extent and history of the material universe. We have had to broaden our horizon to embrace the almost illimitable realms disclosed by the telescope, we have had to push backwards indefinitely our limits for the existence of life and for the beginning of the present order of things. And we look at the Christ of the Gospels, and we ask if He is equal to the demands of this vast empire extended thus in space and in time, and the question of the Baptist recurs to us, "Art thou He that should come or do we look for another?" And yet these very disclosures of science may help us to read a fuller meaning into the words of those who saw Christ more clearly than any who have seen Him since their day—"All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made;" "By Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by Him and for Him; and by Him all things consist;" "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the First and the Last." It is not merely the kingdoms of the earth that are to own the sovereignty of Christ; every province, visible and invisible, belongs to His empire; and science may help us to push back the boundaries of what we recognize as His domain, and so to get worthier conceptions of our King as we crown Him Lord of all.

Thus we might find that when we have seen Christ through his Word and Spirit, every field of thought, and, indeed, our whole life with all that we do and suffer and enjoy, may help us to the clearer and more complete vision of Him.

THE CALL TO BEAR WITNESS FOR CHRIST.

But they who have this vision are called to bear witness of Him; they cannot have the vision and fail in witness bearing. They who see Jesus shall, even unconsciously, shew in what direction they are looking, reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, as the face of Stephen, when turned toward Him, shone with an angel's brightness. And they shall consciously and purposely bear witness for Him; the more distinctly they see Him the more must the work of witnessing become the chief purpose of their life. It was to such that He said from the first, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me," and only through those possessing this vision of Christ has there been provided the true apostolic succession of witnesses on His behalf.

It is not strange that each of the two who immediately preceded me in the Moderator's chair chose as the subject of his opening sermon, Acts i. 8, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." The one applied the words to the work that is so dear to his heart in the great field of Foreign Missions, the other to the work, equally dear to him and pursued with the same tireless enthusiasm, in the great Home Mission field. Let me follow up their message, fathers and brethren, by reminding you that the only fitness for witness bearing is the personal knowledge of Christ, so that ours may be no second hand evidence but that of those who testify what they have seen. The need of the Church and of the world is for men who see Jesus, men to whom the Holy Spirit testifies of Christ, glorifies Christ, shews the things of Christ, so that Christ is for them the supreme reality of life, their light of all their seeing and the strength of all their service. We all know what it is to have dim and distant views of Him, learning about Him from others rather than seeing Him for ourselves. May he keep giving us the nearer, clearer, fuller vision of Himself that shall make us more efficient witnesses and more zealous workers, and that shall be to us the inspiring pledge of that perfect vision to be enjoyed by His followers when "they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads, and they shall reign for ever and ever."

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end, Amen."