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and acceptable birthday gift (United Free Church of Scotland Publication Offices.)

Mr. W. J. Clennell of H.M. Consular Service in China has a very unusual gift of clear writing. In a book entitled *The Historical Development of Religion in China* (Fisher Unwin; 6s. net) he has undertaken to tell us all that is really worth our knowing of the religious beliefs and practices of the Chinese, and that in order of their evolution. It is just about as difficult a literary task as a man could undertake. For the religious beliefs and practices of the Chinese are nearly incomprehensible in their character, nearly inextricable in their confusion, and altogether uncountable in their number and variety. Why, Professor J. J. M. de Groot of Leiden has written in English (because he had no hope of finding a sufficient audience in Dutch) an account of the religion of the Chinese in six immense volumes, and has only half-finished his task. And yet he has given a detailed account of only one small corner of China, the city and neighbourhood of Amoy. Yet Mr. Clennell, by his undoubted mastery of the subject, and still more by his mastery of the English language, has written an intelligible and even fascinating history of the progress of religion in China from prehistoric times until now—so fascinating that we undertake to say that not one of those who begin to read the book will lay it down unfinished, if they have to do so, without something like painfulness.

The Last Messenger.

By the Rev. J. M. Creed, M.A., Fellow and Chaplain of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.

'But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.'—Mt 21^{37}.

Modern men find difficulty in ascribing finality to a Saviour who was born into the world nearly two thousand years ago, and lived in an environment different from their own. The difficulty is chiefly theoretical, but it is acute. There are indeed those who are disposed to regard all morality as convention, but those who believe in the validity of moral judgments do not, in point of fact, find the Gospel Ethic an unsatisfying ideal. The modern man's difficulty does not arise from the Parable of the Prodigal Son, nor is it suggested by deficiencies in the Sermon on the Mount, but it has its origin in a way of thinking which has become second nature. The question we instinctively ask to-day is not, What is this? but, How did this grow? Religion, like everything else that falls within human experience, is being reviewed in the light of the doctrine of Evolution. 'Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?' asked St. John Baptist. Modern man seems forced on *a priori* grounds to look, not for one, but for many others yet to come. That is what paralyzes modern preaching.

The documents of the New Testament leave us in no doubt as to the attitude of the first Christians to our Lord. To them He was the final word of God. In the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen our Lord gives His interpretation of the story of Israel. Jehovah had planted a vineyard, and let it out to husbandmen. Again and again had He sent His servants to receive the fruits, and as often had they been abused or martyred. At last the Lord of the vineyard sent His son, saying, They will reverence My son. That was the final act of God; it was the beginning of the end. The apostolic writings are in the same vein. In the opening verses of the Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul declares himself to be 'an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand by his prophets in the holy scriptures, concerning his Son, who has been born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared Son of God in power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead—Jesus Christ our Lord.' In the Fourth Gospel Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, the absolute revelation of God to man—the personal mediator of Eternal Life.

The primitive Christian *did* believe in the finality of Jesus Christ. The Cross had brought the world to a halt; Christ had 'flung off from Himself' the powers unseen which hung about His path, and in the Cross had made open triumph over the

spiritual forces which ruled men's lives. The victory was already won, and the Saviour might be expected at any moment to consummate what He had already achieved.

But Christ did not come; and the world did not end. During the centuries which have passed since the gospel first stirred to its depths the spiritual life of the old Græco-Roman world, down to the present day, the world has not stood still. It would seem impossible to conceive a more complete refutation of the primitive Christian faith than the *fact* of the history of the last two millenniums. And yet the enigma of Jesus Christ has not been solved. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian Church is the most important factor with which the historian of European civilization has to deal. The obvious fact that history did not stop has not prevented people from believing in the finality of Jesus Christ, who suffered under Pontius Pilate. Is that belief still tenable to-day? Has an age-long delusion been at last dispelled, or may we hope to effect yet another combination between belief in the finality of Jesus Christ and acceptance of the developing facts of the world? For that is what Christian theologians have hitherto succeeded in doing, and the future of the Christian Church depends—humanly speaking—on the success of her theologians now.

If the problem has been set aright in what has been said, there are two centres of theological gravity—the Bible and the Age. It is discouraging to find that there are writers of repute who seem to believe that the Churches can construct their theology on the basis of one only of these two centres—and that the second, the Age. A scholar to whom students of the New Testament owe much, Professor Kirsopp Lake, has lately published a volume of lectures, originally delivered in Boston, U.S.A., under the title *The Stewardship of Faith*, in which he combines a study of the development of the Apostolic Church with suggestions as to modern requirements. The only significance that he seems able, in these lectures, to assign to the first period of Christianity is that it presents us with a striking instance of development, which we must aim at repeating. 'I have tried to show,' he says in the preface, 'the way in which the first Christians did this work [of teaching Christianity] by translating their message from the terms of Jewish thought to those of the Græco-Roman world, and adding to it considerably in the process. And I have also tried to suggest that the Churches of to-day ought to consider seriously the necessity for moving on in the same direction.' And again: 'Christians were men who had seen a vision,' and the duty of Christian teachers is 'to teach their pupils to join with them in seeing visions and dreaming dreams.' The statement is, no doubt, true, and the moral a good one, but what *was* the vision? and was it a *true* vision? Those are the real questions we have to face, and we cannot escape them by the apotheosis of 'development.' Development is not, in itself, 'a good.' If the sons of the kingdom are represented in the parable by wheat, the sons of darkness are represented by tares—and they both developed.

But Professor Lake does not, I think, really deal with these questions at all. Our conception of the Person of Jesus Christ must, in order to be convincing, provide an historical starting-point for the religious type which has been built upon the foundation of His life, death, and resurrection, and it is, I think, more than doubtful whether, if we judge by this criterion, Professor Lake's chapter on 'The Teaching of Jesus,' combined with the substitute he proposes for Christology at the end of his interesting chapter on 'Uninstructed Christianity,' will be found adequate.

The same writer rebukes modern theologians—especially English theologians—for their undue interest in history, to the neglect of 'the facts of observed religion.' The criticism is of value as a reminder to old-established theological schools of the daily increasing importance of the science of psychology, and this is the point which Professor Lake wishes to make; but both here and throughout the book he surely misses another and an essential point. What are 'the facts of observed religion' in this year of grace 1916? Religion is at present undergoing a change more far-reaching perhaps than any since the sixteenth century. In our own country the old forms of national piety are dissolving before our eyes; and what is the solvent? Of course there are many contributory causes, but can it be denied that criticism of certain ancient historical documents has been a main factor? 'The facts of observed religion' send us back to ancient history and dead languages. There are still people in England who know the 91st Psalm as 'He that dwelleth,' and can tell you at what chapter and verse to read to them from St. John, but those people are dying out, and that is

the outstanding fact of contemporary religion. The plain man does, as a matter of fact, suppose that Christianity is bound up with historical happenings, and now that he is told that some of what he has taken as *bona fide* history is not history at all, he is puzzled.

And psychology can give us no real help here. Psychology is of importance in helping us to a method in presenting truth of all sorts, but it does not itself give us anything to teach or anything to believe. It cannot. Its function is to describe the behaviour of the living mind: that is all. We may well hope that psychology is going to provide us with a new common denominator to the first century, and the twentieth, and so teach us a new way of representing the meaning of Scripture. It cannot for Christianity replace Scripture. The historical criticism of the last half-century is of far greater importance to contemporary religion than much popular theory, both inside the Church and out of it, allows us to admit. The Church has not yet discovered a new method of using her documents, and that is her greatest need. It will be met in time. The writings of the New Testament are the classic monuments of the profoundest agony in the story of man's spiritual life. There will be those among the men who are passing through the valley of the shadow of death for a great cause, who will help us to find there the facts which take us from the temporal to the eternal; which show us man as the child of God, injustice as sin, and redemption as the act of God.

At present we do less than justice to the Faith. We half apologize for suggesting that the first century may have something to teach the twentieth. The prophets, we say, were miracles of intuition, or even inspiration—considering how long ago they lived; but we do little to meet the real question which is in men's minds: Why should I study them to-day? There is a clear issue here: either the prophets of Israel are of lasting significance to mankind in general, and therefore of significance to modern man in particular, or else—

> What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba.

And the Old Testament and the New, as we clearly see now, hang together. We can no longer hope to throw the Old Testament to the critic wolves, and save the New. In the case of both we must come to terms with the new learning. Our Lord cannot be understood apart from the Old Testament Revelation which He completed. The theologian's first task is the same to-day as it has been in the past—to help to create a new Christian epoch by the re-interpretation of Scripture.

We are not in these days awed by great names; it makes little impression on our contemporaries to tell them that Origen and Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Luther, Professor von Harnack and the Pope would all assent to the affirmation that the Person of Jesus Christ is of central importance for Religion; and it is good for us to know that we cannot rely on the prestige of the past. But the argument from tradition is irrefutable in proving that the Biblical Revelation cannot be disposed of as a stage in religious evolution which has been since superseded. From the first century to the twentieth, Religion in Europe for all practical purposes has meant Christianity. Until to-day the the Apostolic Age has always been regarded as in some sense normative for Christianity. The historical tradition has always formed one—though never the only—element in theology. It is perhaps abstractly possible that we are now about to evolve a different religion, which will dispense with the historical basis, but analogy is against the hypothesis and there is no presupposition in its favour. Once it is recognized that the moral, the intellectual, and the emotional needs, to which Christianity answers, are permanent in humanity, the *a priori* difficulty of the modern man in ascribing finality to our Lord disappears. And in favour of our belief that Christianity—historical Christianity—is about to take a new lease of life, there is the mass of critical work on the documents, accumulated by modern scholarship, which has not yet borne fruit in the life and thought of the Church as a whole.

Theology, then, must be based on the Bible. Teachers in the Church must know the Bible, and be prepared to answer questions about the Bible. It is through the Biblical Revelation that Christianity enters the field of human life and history as an objective fact, of which mankind at large must take account.

But our task does not end here. A living system of Christian thought must be in vital relation, not only with the historical facts on which the Church is built, but also with the main tendencies of contemporary life and thought.

At this point our difficulties increase and multiply. Theology is not to-day Queen of the Sciences, and

the civilized world does not, as a whole, acknowledge the suzerainty of the Holy See. Formally at any rate, the mediæval world, out of which we have grown, had a ready answer to the problems which to-day are so difficult both in practice and in theory. But that answer is closed to us. We cannot go back. Each age has to work out for itself the problem of authority, and in the new age we shall have to start once more almost from the beginning.

Without attempting to deal in detail with any one of the pressing problems, which are opened up by the question of the relation of Christian doctrine to the life and thought of the world about us, let us try to find some guiding thoughts.

Roger Bacon believed that, if he could read the original sacred text aright, he would therein disclose all possible scientific discoveries.[1] That point of view has gone for ever. Natural science will never again be called upon to show cause why she should depart from the cosmology of Genesis. A similar consideration applies to History. The new construction of the history of mankind will not be within the framework which did duty for all Christendom until within living memory. Perhaps we may say that theology has much to learn from, and no contribution to make to, the inductive study of natural phenomena and of history. Science and History are autonomous. But while theology must never presume to dictate results, theology is rightly interested in ascertaining the *a priori* limits of scientific and historical inquiry. The theologian will try to make clear the ideal aim of Science — that Science is a human description of how things happen; that Science can never create a really new fact; that it merely provides us with a more adequate account of something which is already given. So too with History: the theologian is interested in the abstract question of the nature of History as a critical account of events. However complicated critical questions may be, the event itself, he will remember, remains unchanged. It is the interpretation of a fact, not the fact itself, which develops.

While, therefore, the theologian will contribute nothing to inductive inquiry in itself, he will try to keep in touch with the presuppositions of inductive inquiry, and he will insist that any attempt to correlate scientific advances with human experience as a whole, must take account of the unique, and, as he believes, final fact of Christ.

Perhaps a somewhat similar discrimination is possible in considering the relation of theology to the great problems of social life. These problems must be dealt with on their merits. By calling ourselves Christians, we do not absolve ourselves from the duty of exercising our innate ideas of justice on each question as it presents itself. Unless, indeed, we are prepared to consider questions on their merits, it is impossible for our faith to remain healthy. The Christian Church, however, will maintain and vindicate her belief that she is the custodian of a Spirit which must be reckoned with as a definite factor, and she will not cease to declare that it is only in the Spirit of the crucified Saviour that real peace—either individual or social—can be found.

To sum up: Christianity is by definition the Religion of the Christ. The Christ is a definite Person, who appeared at a certain point in history. The theologian's first task is to grasp the fact of the Christ in its historical setting. The critical appreciation of the documents of Scripture is the necessary preliminary to this task. Until we have arrived at some general agreement on the historical questions raised by the study of the Old and New Testaments, we cannot expect theology to be coherent or stable. At the present moment our most trusty guides seem to warn us that the end of the inquiry has not yet been reached. But it should not be beyond the wit of man to attain to a real comprehension of the Religion of the Bible, and the end may be nearer than we think. The second task of the theologian is to apply this ascertainable objective fact of the Christ to the life of our own day. For this we require an act of faith in Jesus Christ and in that Spirit, proceeding from God, which has not hitherto failed the Church. The enemy is scepticism; scepticism as to the possibility of real knowledge of our Lord's life and work; scepticism as to the validity of moral judgments; scepticism as to the validity of the conclusions of the reason. We must trust the faculties with which God has endowed us; we must patiently serve Him by obeying His voice whencesoever it may come to us. Finally, if we would be servants of Jesus Christ, we must live remembering that every human soul is of value in the eyes of God.

[1] 'Sed tota philosophiae intentio non est nisi rerum naturas et proprietates evolvere, qua propter totius philosophiae potestas in sacris literis continetur; et hoc maxime patet, quia longe certius ac melius et verius accipit scriptura creaturas, quam labor philosophicus sciat eruere' (*Opus. Majus*, viii.).