

CHRIST AND CRITICISM

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Christ and Criticism by John Gamble

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JOHN GAMBLE

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BY

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PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH the results of the Biblical study of the last century have already been widely disseminated, few attempts have yet been made, in this country at least, to solve the serious problem thus presented to the Christian believer. If he accepts such of these results as would now appear to have assumed the rank of established conclusions, how is he to think of Christ? This is the fundamental question to which an answer is here, in broad outline, suggested. The writer has been forced by his position to search for a solution to the problem. He has felt the necessity of reconciling the conclusions to which he has been led by a critical study of the Bible, with the duty laid upon him by his office of presenting Christ as the life and the light of men.

No reflecting observer can be satisfied with the position which the Bible now holds in the mind of an ordinary well-informed worshipper in our churches. He is no longer able to regard it as it was regarded by the Christian of a century ago, while he has not reached any new conception of its inspiration by which its value can be restored and its authority

re-established. He hears much of the destructive force of criticism, its demolition of opinions long unquestioned, and he has but little knowledge of the gains we owe to it, the significance it has imparted to words that had become meaningless, and the moving interest with which it has invested the lives of the Church's founders. Thus an unobserved gulf often divides the preacher from his listeners. They may hold different views of the nature of the passage which forms the lesson or the text. Their thoughts may never meet, because they are moving on different planes.

It may, indeed, be urged that the time has not yet come when an attempt such as is here made can possibly be successful. A century is not a long interval in the onward march of spiritual or intellectual movements, and Biblical criticism may well be said to be a science still in its infancy. The writer has striven to bear this in mind, and has taken care not to claim for critical results a greater finality than they really possess. He has advisedly placed himself at the point of view of a perfectly unfettered criticism, in order that he may survey the consequences to Christian belief which the adoption of such a position may involve.

There can be little doubt that the fundamental difference between the two schools of thought, in which Biblical students are now grouped, turns upon the meaning that should be given to the Scripture word "miracle." It is assumed in the following pages

that the action of God in time has been continuous and unvarying. The Incarnation is understood to mean that Christ accepted to the full the limitations of manhood, that He remained throughout within the sphere of human motive and faculty. This belief does not imply that we are in a position to overlook the course of His life, or to bring each of His actions within some familiar category. It pre-supposes only that if we were in such a position, we should see nothing that was inconsistent with humanity.

As regards the Resurrection, the writer believes that the transition between the earthly and the heavenly life of Christ has been irrevocably withdrawn by God from human inspection. He accepts the deficiencies of the synoptic narratives as an indication that the evidence of the Resurrection is to be sought, not in the empty grave, but in the Church's subsequent history, and in the experience of the individual believer. In the most recent phase of this never-ending controversy, it would seem as if the disputants were at one in believing that the spiritual action of Christ, His power to sustain and guide His people, had suffered no interruption by His death, and as if they differed only in their conceptions of the way in which the transition between His earthly and His heavenly life had been effected. An attempt is made, in an appended note, to set forth the facts, and to estimate the extent of the difference between the two conflicting opinions.

It need only be added that the contents of the

present volume formed the subject-matter of some public lectures delivered, during the spring of the present year, in the University College, Bristol. The book is published in the hope that it may contribute, in some humble measure, towards the rebuilding of that spiritual temple whose finished glory it will not be given to our eyes to behold. "Shew Thy servants Thy work, and their children Thy glory."

CLIFTON, *November* 1904.

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