

**NEW FORMS OF
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION:
AN ADDRESS TO THE
UNIVERSITY HALL GUILD**

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New Forms of Christian Education: An Address to the University Hall Guild by Mrs. Humphry Ward

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TO
THE UNIVERSITY HALL GUILD

BY
MRS. HUMPHRY WARD

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PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

THIS short address, which was originally delivered about six years ago to the Students' Guild of the University Hall Settlement, was published in London in the spring of 1892, and reprinted later in *The New World*. Messrs. Crowell & Co. have now undertaken an independent American edition of the pamphlet, and perhaps a few words of preface on my part are necessary.

Some small alterations have been made here and there in the style of the little paper. Otherwise I have left it exactly as it was given. During these six years, indeed, much has happened. The pressure of historical and literary criticism upon received beliefs has constantly increased, and, speaking broadly, one may say perhaps that the problems and difficulties of the Old Testament have been gradually supplanted in the mind of religious England by the problems and difficulties of the New. On Old Testament ground, indeed, there have been some rallies and diversions of great interest, even to the general public. It seems very possible that, owing to the labors of certain Assyriologists and Egyptologists, fresh light will be thrown upon portions of the Old Testament that had been prematurely or imperfectly explained by the literary critic. Many statements and sections of the Pentateuch may ultimately be shown by the archæologist to have a higher antiquity or a more definite historical

value than the critic has been able to grant; just as the modern historians of Rome, under the influence of the same force, are coming to allow a larger measure of historical importance to Rome's primitive traditions than the founders of their science at the beginning of the century could find it in their conscience to do. The origins of human civilization are receding further and further into the past; and the early culture of the Hebrews, itself the product of far older forces, is seen to be in all probability both more ancient and more complex than any critic of fifty years ago could have supposed.

But these incidents in the process make no difference whatever to the process itself. We shall no more return to the ideas of Pusey about the Pentateuch than we shall return to the ideas of the eighteenth century as to the historical place of Livy.

Archæology is a comparatively new 'discipline,' and it is transforming our knowledge of the ancient world. But it works for science, not for dogma; and for one idol that it seems to replace, it brings a new and destructive energy to bear upon a score of others. Professor Ramsay's vivid and interesting work upon the Acts, for instance, based mainly on the first-hand knowledge of an archæologist, is thought to have undone a great deal of German criticism on that perplexing work. It is very possible. But in the course of his inquiry, — an inquiry which leads him to the able vindication of much historical material in Acts which had been regarded as secondary and doubtful, — he delivers himself of judgments on the early chapters of Acts which are in reality far more vital to the contentions of orthodox theory than the main *Apologia* of his book. Writ-

ing as an archæologist and a historian, he ranks the historical importance of Luke, to whom he unhesitatingly attributes both the Gospel and the Acts, very high. But from the same standpoint he tells us that the first five chapters of the Acts — the chapters which deal with the Ascension, Pentecost, the community of goods, the earliest leaders and institutions of the infant church — are on a wholly different level; that Luke derived them neither from the evidence of eye-witnesses, nor from written documents; that they “seem to float in air;” that some episodes in them excite “reasonable suspicion,” and others show the “distorting influence of popular fancy.” The archæologist, both here and elsewhere, has been warmly welcomed of late as a defender of things sacred against the rationalist critic; in reality, he has so far done the work of historical science no less effectively than his brother.

No, the work of a unifying knowledge goes on, and sustains no real check. The field, as it seems to me, with which in historical theology it is now most eagerly and energetically concerned is the life of Christ itself, — the text and interpretation of the Gospel narratives. “Why are they still so full of the Old Testament at Oxford?” said an able pupil of Dr. Harnack’s, after his first visit, a few years ago, to that university. “For us that is done with; and English students seem hardly to understand that the problems which stand now in the forefront are the problems of the Gospels.” Since then the pages of our religious periodicals and reviews show clearly enough that here, as always, England is following in the wake of Germany. “The question of questions now before English religion,” says a writer in the *Expositor* (I quote from memory, and am not sure of the

exact words), "is not so much 'How are we to interpret the words of Christ?' — but 'What *were* the words of Christ?'" A few more discoveries such as that of the *Logia* of last year, and we shall know much more than we do now of the origins of the Gospels. And meanwhile scholarship is throwing ever fresh light on the current conceptions and beliefs of the age that saw the youth of Jesus. The editions of Apocalyptic books, from the Book of Daniel onwards, which we owe to Mr. Charles, during the last few years are full of fresh and important matter. We now know in far greater detail than ever before whence came the ideas of the "Son of man," of his Messianic power and pre-existence, his relations to God, the angels, man, the "kingdom," and "the last things," which meet us in the New Testament. They were the growth of the age immediately preceding Christianity; and they conditioned the whole earliest development of the new faith, before the speculative thought of Paul or the Hellenist conceptions of the Fourth Gospel arose to mark the second and third stages in the dogmatic development of the Church. The larger part of the primitive Christian phraseology as it meets us in the New Testament was already in familiar use nearly a hundred years before the birth of Christ. The whole cycle of ideas connected with the "Son of man," "the kingdom," and "the resurrection," was so far advanced before Jesus began his ministry, that as soon as he was identified on the one side with the Son of man, and on the other side with the "Suffering Servant," the belief in his resurrection followed as a matter of course. That belief began as a dogma of speculative faith; and it gradually took the legendary or pseudo-historical form, under which we know it, during

the forty years following on the Crucifixion. While the whole conception of the Virgin Birth, which was no part of the *depositum fidei* of the first Christian generation, is more and more clearly seen in its true place among the various primitive explanations, — born now of a mistaken popular exegesis, now of Messianic poetry, now of a Hellenizing philosophy, — whereby the earliest Christian mind tried to realize to itself the nature and functions of its Lord.

Many of these contentions are not new; some of them, at least, are as old as Strauss. But they have an ever-increasing mass of fact, — much of it new fact, — and, in addition, the momentum of nearly a century's thought behind them. The transformation of some of the fundamental conceptions of Christian Europe could hardly be effected in any better time. We are, in fact, only at the beginning of that transference of the ideas of the scholar and historian to the field of practical and daily life which is the next stage before us. But year by year each Christian, learned or humble, lay or official, is more urgently called to ask himself in all seriousness what these ideas mean *for him*, what changes they involve in his relation to his Master and to God.

Let him not fear! We are on the eve of a new Christian philosophy; and if Christianity is to retain its vitality, we shall see before long many struggles over the conditions of church-membership in the various Christian bodies. But the faith of nineteen centuries has been no mere delusion. We have not so learned God. The history of these centuries themselves, of the part played therein, and the transformations suffered by that force which we call "the life of Christ," will enter into the new *symbolum fidei* wherever it appears. That the