

**HISTORIC
CHRISTIANITY AND
THE APOSTLES' CREED**

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BY

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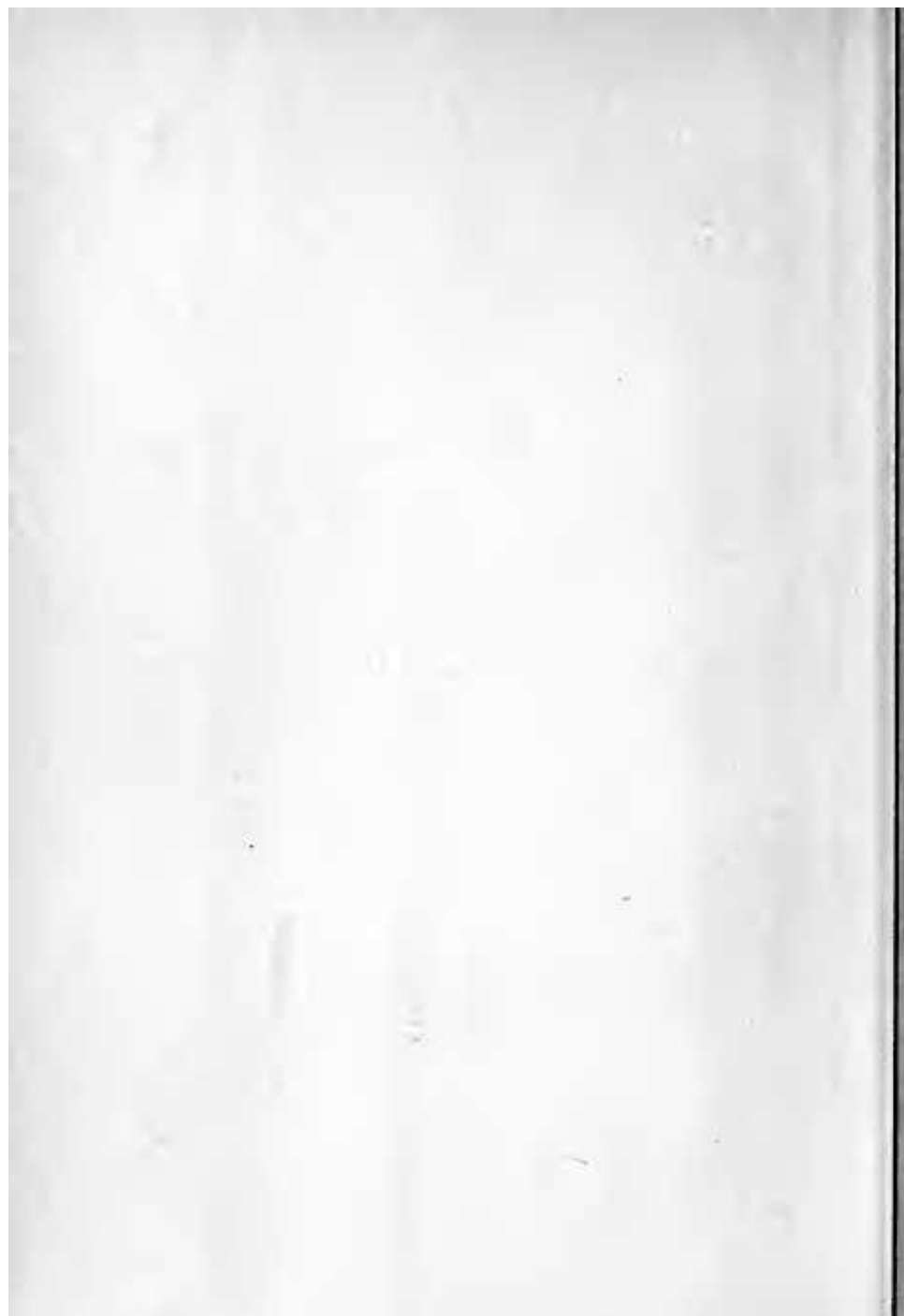
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TO
D. J. P.
IN FRIENDSHIP



INTRODUCTION

THE present volume, though composed of two different sets of addresses, is still, I hope, a unity. For through both the divisions of it there should run the one thought—Christianity is a religion rooted in history, its supernatural character evidenced in the facts of its origins, its oldest creed testifying to this, its essential, nature. I am sure that we need to free ourselves from the idea that Christianity can be, primarily and fundamentally, natural religion or mysticism or philanthropy or anything else whatever except the grace of God, manifested and wrought out from Himself and into the fabric of the world through particular historical happenings. The endless misunderstandings as to what the words "Christian," "Christianity" involve, the endless attacks upon the Church because in this respect or that it does not conform to what the particular critic assumes to be the meaning of Christianity, would be less frequent if only a deeper knowledge of the New Testament could make it plain that the positive and unchangeable element in Christianity, the Christian thing, is God's action through Christ in history. Once that is grasped, other problems can be faced with a confidence that the inquirer has rock

beneath his feet; when that is not the case, one can expect nothing better than brilliant and experimental theorising, or the intuitions of minds naturally sensitive to spiritual things. These often represent great gifts of God, but they need something stronger and simpler than themselves on which they may rest, and whereby they may steady themselves. Steadiness in religious thinking is exceedingly important; it need not be dull; it might with advantage be commoner than it is.

The importance of a right decision on the question of the historical aspect of Christianity has been made still clearer to me by a discussion which has recently taken place in the *Yorkshire Post*. A contributor of certain articles to that paper on the subject of spiritualism (he was opposed to the spiritualistic hypothesis) made, in connection with the relationship of religion and Christianity to the beliefs and practices of spiritualism, the following remark, "The conclusion, then, that it ought not to make any difference in our lives if the whole of the New Testament record as history were thrown under permanent suspicion, is one that every sincere Christian ought to reach." On this he was challenged by the Bishop of Durham and other correspondents of the *Yorkshire Post*. In his reply he insisted that the words "as history," which the Bishop had omitted in his quotation were "the key to the passage," and that the implication had been "that there would still remain the far more important evidences to which we individually bear internal witness, and which would be totally unaffected by the suspicion thrown on historicity." He continued, "I am quite convinced that they would remain totally unaffected

and that nothing would be changed in our recognition of an Infinite God and His purpose towards mankind. If our conceptions of 'crime and duty, right and wrong,' were unaltered, because they rest on eternal truths, would not our lives bear the same relation as hitherto to those truths and the Author of them?" Now this is precisely the attitude—far from uncommon—which has never really closed with the essential Christian thing, but is always in danger of resolving Christianity into eternal moral truths and a relationship to God based upon a recognition of them. But for the New Testament, Christianity is not in the least an ethical theism rooted somewhere else than in history. It is, of course, impossible to demonstrate beyond the possibility of error that the New Testament records are history and not myth; but it is also impossible to demonstrate that our moral conceptions and our intuitive acknowledgments of God and eternal truth correspond to objective reality. Faith always enters in, and Christian Faith has its distinctive character in virtue of its being directed towards a history in which, in a way absolutely unique in kind, God's grace and truth were present in action, for our salvation.

The first part of the book was prepared for three Sunday addresses in St. Margaret's, Westminster, during June, 1918; the third I was prevented from delivering, but all appeared in the *Guardian*; whence by the courtesy of the Editor they are reprinted, substantially in their original form. The addresses on the Apostles' Creed were given in Great St. Mary's, Cambridge, during Lent, 1919; the development of thought is essentially the same, but identity does not extend further.