

**THE GOSPELS AND THE GOSPEL;
A STUDY IN THE MOST RECENT
RESULTS OF THE LOWER AND
THE HIGHER CRITICISM**

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The Gospels and the Gospel; a study in the most recent results of the lower and the higher criticism by G. R. S. Mead

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G. R. S. MEAD

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A STUDY IN THE MOST RECENT
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THE HIGHER CRITICISM BY G. R. S.
MEAD, B.A., M.R.A.S.

"Press not the breasts of Holy Writ too hard, lest they yield
blood rather than milk."—BISHOP ULRICH OF AUGSBURG.

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THE GOSPELS AND THE GOSPEL.

PREAMBLE.

THIS small volume of short sketches is put forward with the very modest purpose of roughly chronicling a moment in the ever-changing fortunes of opinion occasioned by the persistent inroads of scientific research into the domain of theological traditions. The chronicling is neither that of a scientist, nor of a theologian, but of a friendly spectator, who, as a devoted lover of both Science and Religion, has no partisan interest to serve, and, as a believer in the blessings of that true tolerance which permits perfect liberty in all matters of opinion and belief, has no desire to dictate to others what their decision should be on any one of the many controversial points touched upon.

For the most part the writer is content to record the results of the researches and the expressions of opinion of others. When he ventures to put forward his own view, he is the

first to recognise that it also is equally an expression of opinion, although the nature of the subject may at times compel a phrasing which has all the appearance of voicing a very positive conviction. It is true that many of the results arrived at by critical research seem to the writer to belong to the same category of acquired facts of science as the now universally accepted truths of the revolution of the earth round its own axis and round the sun ; but the deductions drawn from these results with regard to the essentials of religion are at present still entirely in the domain of opinion, and must presumably remain there until we possess some common ground of knowledge, some normal basis of repeated experience, so to say, in the actual facts of general religion.

Even the most learned scientist or theologian knows really very little, when all is said and done, of these facts. So far, the warfare between them has resulted almost solely in the removal of errors of opinion and belief in matters of physical and historical fact ; so far, there has been little, if any, gain of positive knowledge in the domain of religion itself. But though our positive knowledge on scientific lines of the facts of religion may be said to have hardly begun, it would be a mark of littleness and conceit to grudge the expression of our highest

admiration for the unwearied patience, unflagging industry, and wonderful ability for research shown by the great scientists, scholars, and critics of Christendom; and no matter how the opinions of many of them may still differ from our own on many points, it would be entirely unscientific, not to say impertinent, to raise any question even in thought as to their personal motives, or to doubt the sincerity of conviction of those who take part on either side in this unceasing warfare.

It is with their opinions we have to deal and not with the men themselves; for so strange a compound is man, that one and the same individual may hold, at one and the same time, the most sublime views on some subjects, and the most absurd opinions on others; and, stranger still, a man may be of irreproachable moral character (as morals are generally conceived by a generation which as yet is still strangely ignorant of the meaning of intellectual morality), and yet hold the most absurd views on religion; or, again, he may live a life of license, and yet be correct in his opinions on many matters of the greatest importance in forming an enlightened view of religion. But in spite of these glaring contradictions, both experience of life and a knowledge of history force upon us the conviction that there is an inevitable will which is ever con-

straining the rational man towards a reconciliation of belief with knowledge, and which compels him to strive to be consistent with himself at any cost, if he would find peace. That this compulsion, moreover, is the best thing possible for him in the long run, is the persuasion of a philosophic mind, and that, too, even if in the process he finds himself compelled to abandon many of those things which he may have previously in ignorance considered as his greatest goods.

The following chapters have appeared month by month in a review which is devoted to the study of religion from an entirely independent standpoint, and the vast majority of whose readers have been long prepared to endeavour to consider such questions without trepidation or partisanship, no matter whether they belong to any one of the many churches of Christendom or to some particular school or sect of Brāhmanism or Buddhism, of Mohammedanism or Zoroastrianism, or whether, again, they follow no special form of religion. The professed object of all these students is to aid in breaking down the walls of separation between these sister world-faiths, in the firm confidence that such walls of separation have been erected solely by the ignorance of man, and form no part of the plans of the real builders of the fair originals, who (they firmly believe),

one and all, according to their capacity, laboured under the direct inspiration of the Master Architect of the essential religion of this planet.

Such readers required no general introduction to the subject to ensure a patient consideration of the immensely important problems of Gospel-criticism laid before them; and even now, when these papers go forth in book-form to a wider public, the majority of my readers will still be of those who take an intelligent interest in the subject, and who will approach it without prejudice. They have the courage to think for themselves, and are, therefore, not to be deterred from reading a book because it bears the name of a Society whose intentions and labours have, for the past quarter of a century, been for the most part as greatly misunderstood as the work of all pioneers the world over in every advance towards a better understanding of the nature of things.

It should, however, be stated that the imprint of the Theosophical Publishing Society (*not* of the Theosophical Society) means nothing but that the book is published by that entirely unofficial body. It is not an *imprimatur*, but purely a trade indication. No book that has ever been brought out by any member of the Theosophical Society through any publisher whatever, or by any non-member of the Society through any one of the publishing firms which