

UC-NRLF



B 3 475 579

PROFESSOR HARNACK
AND HIS
OXFORD CRITICS

T. BAILEY SAUNDERS

THE JAMES K. MOFFITT FUND.

LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.

GIFT OF

JAMES KENNEDY MOFFITT

OF THE CLASS OF 1886.

Accession No.

Class No.

CONVERTED

PROFESSOR HARNACK

AND HIS

OXFORD CRITICS

RECENTLY PUBLISHED, SECOND EDITION, demy 8vo, cloth, 10/6;
half-leather; 12/6.

What is Christianity?

By **ADOLF HARNACK**,

Rector and Professor of Church History in the University, Berlin.

Translated by **THOMAS BAILEY SAUNDERS**.

WILLIAMS & NORGATE, PUBLISHERS, LONDON.

Works by Thomas Bailey Saunders

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

THE QUEST OF FAITH: Being Notes on the Current
Philosophy of Religion.

**THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF JAMES
MACPHERSON.**

**THE MAXIMS AND REFLECTIONS OF
GOETHE**, with Aphorisms on Science selected by
HUXLEY, and on Art by LEIGHTON.

**THE ESSAYS OF SCHOPENHAUER TRANS-
LATED.**

1. The Wisdom of Life.
2. Counsels and Maxims.
3. Religion, a Dialogue and other Essays.
4. The Art of Literature.
5. Studies in Pessimism.
6. The Art of Controversy.
7. On Human Nature.

SCHOPENHAUER: A Lecture.

THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF MELANCHTHON

[Shortly.]

PROFESSOR HARNACK

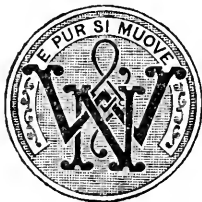
AND HIS

OXFORD CRITICS

BY

THOMAS BAILEY SAUNDERS

||



WILLIAMS & NORGATE

14 HENRIETTA ST., COVENT GARDEN, LONDON, W.C.

AND 7 BROAD STREET, OXFORD

1902

11-1

NOFFITE

P R E F A C E

IN publishing the following Essay, I may be permitted to say that I had the honour of delivering parts of it as a lecture to the Socratic Society of the University of Birmingham. My hope was that I might thus assist, however humbly, a movement for the foundation there, when further endowments are provided, of a Faculty of Theology; believing as I do that the study of this subject, if pursued in a spirit not of dogmatism but of inquiry, is one which none of our newer Universities can permanently afford to neglect.

T. B. S.

LONDON, *March* 1902

PROFESSOR HARNACK
AND HIS OXFORD CRITICS

WHEN the learning of Oxford measures itself against the learning of Berlin in any of the intellectual encounters of our time, he must be a dull man whose thoughts do not stray for a moment from the actual question at issue to the contrast which the opposing forces present. What reflections are not invited by the very coupling of the names! It is impossible to contemplate these famous Universities as they now flourish, or to examine the work which they do for their respective countries, without being tempted to ask whether any academies of equal rank

and a similar range of study can ever have offered so many points of difference in so great a community of interest. They make the same claim to the pursuit of truth. They profess the same estimate of what is valuable in knowledge. Yet in the type of their activity, in their history, in the traditions that give form and influence to their ideals, how far they are apart! To say that a distinction, whether of method or of result, could be traced between them throughout the whole circle of the sciences would, of course, be absurd; but the less exact the science and the more the branch of knowledge is composed of ideal and imaginative elements, the greater is the probability that some distinction would be found to obtain. In all the studies—and they are many—which do not yet, at least, or do not in all respects, deserve to be called scientific, nowhere is there a stranger mingling of things new and old in such

unlike proportions. Nowhere is the finer harvest of the mediæval spirit so happily garnered as in the one, or the faults of rationalism and the whole philosophy of what has been called the age of enlightenment so sanely corrected as in the other.

The very qualities, too, which they appear to derive from their mere locality and from outward circumstance are of a kind to disclose and illustrate a profound diversity of character. Who of us can deny that they possess those qualities in abundance; nay more, that with those qualities they also possess, in a special degree, the allied infirmities? A University in a small city, remote from the business of the world, may well have an atmosphere charged with sublimer elements than are commonly found in the strenuous life of a metropolis. The atmosphere may be luminous and serene, but it may not, perhaps, be inspiring of fresh enterprise. Nor can anyone familiar with

the genius of these places escape the feeling that, as the ancient courts and gardens, the dim light and lingering music of the chapels, induce emotions scarcely possible in the monotonous severity of the German halls, so opinion at Oxford is inevitably settled by an undue acceptance of past ideas ; while opinion at Berlin not less inevitably reaches out to what is new and adventurous, even if in the effort something seems to be lost that mankind cannot willingly abandon.

Of the studies thus insensibly affected, and forced, as it were, into different moulds by the silent pressure of tradition and circumstance, the most conspicuous are those which treat of the vast problem of religious belief. That this should be so is in no way surprising, for, where the emotional factors of a problem are as essential a part of it as the intellectual, the treatment will plainly vary according as the one or the other make the stronger appeal. We are all

conscious that, in some ill-defined way, German theological scholarship does not move on the same lines as its English counterpart. Possibly the divergence may be due to the simple circumstance that the intellectual factors are more potent in the one and the emotional in the other. There is a popular impression among us that the German inquirer is unresponsive to the subtler promptings of the religious spirit; that he has an inadequate sense of its mystery; that he pays small attention to the deep significance of religious institutions and the moral aspect of their continuity. He is said to be too destructive in his criticism; too ready to disprove the authenticity of whatever he is reluctant to accept; too eager to suggest a natural explanation of phenomena which, as we are told, would lose their force and even their meaning if they were so explained. On the other hand, the English inquirer is said

to inquire too little ; to interpret the documents of his creed not in the light of research, nor with any allowance for the psychological element in history, but with a paramount regard for tradition ; and, if he attempts any criticism at all, to ignore its results by trying to blend them with the very ideas which they destroy.

The popular impression is not in this case wholly unsupported by the facts. Some of the theologians who were prominent in Germany in the middle of the last century did, indeed, so treat the origins of Christianity as to give good ground for the charge that they were neglecting certain vital elements of the subject and abandoning accepted views on insufficient evidence. A similar charge is often made against the most capable of the theologians of the present day, or, at least, against those who exercise the widest influence ; and there can be no doubt that the methods which many of

them adopt would still be denounced as sacrilegious by the unthinking multitude, and as shallow by those whose belief is professedly superior to evidence and reason. That theology in England, as represented officially in the Church and the Universities, has until recent years been wholly determined by respect for tradition, and, apart from the writings of Hatch and one or two others, has been lacking in courage and candour, will hardly be denied by anyone who has taken the trouble to contrast what has been done here with what has been done abroad. It is instructive to remember that Strauss's *Leben Jesu* appeared when the *Tracts for the Times* were in course of publication; that during the very period when the Germans were sifting the Christian documents and arriving by patient effort, by dauntless persistence, nay, even by a large experience of failure and mistake, at the modern science of Biblical criticism, the

English were mainly engaged in bringing about an ecclesiastical revival, and in giving fresh life to ancient forms and ceremonies. There were, it is true, men prominent on either side whose endeavours cannot be so simply classified. Among the English, in particular, there was one, as remarkable for his character as for his intellectual attainments, who was not less profoundly versed in the philosophy of belief than learned in the history of the Church. But in regard to the influence which the two parties exercised, and the popular effect of their activities, the broad distinction remains. One of them was labouring to show that certain dogmas were the outcome of ideas that had either passed away or were steadily declining. The other was proving by its practice that, if the dogmas could no longer be held intellectually in the sense in which they once prevailed, they could at least be retained emotionally by the aid of

symbolic acts and solemn ritual. Strauss and Baur in Tübingen were quickening a critical movement which has carried on and will some day complete the work of the Reformation in Germany, while their contemporaries in Oxford, more especially Newman, Pusey and Keble, were arousing sympathies that have done much to belittle the same work in England.

I

To Oxford the votaries of the Catholic renaissance still look in the main for the support which learning and research can afford them, and from this source, too, they are presumably ready to accept some guidance as to the attitude which they ought to adopt towards the results of learning and research elsewhere. Tübingen, however, has given place to Berlin. The University established in the capital of the Empire enjoys, indeed, no monopoly of the

high character with which in the sphere of theology German scholarship and German criticism are everywhere invested. There are men of mark in this sphere at Göttingen, at Halle, at Giessen, at Marburg, at Erlangen, at Strassburg. But whether in the number of its famous professors, or in the importance of their work, or again in sheer authority, Berlin is now supreme. It is there that Professor Pfleiderer, Professor Weiss, Professor Kaftan, and Freiherr von Soden hold their chairs. It is there, above all, that Professor Adolf Harnack, who won a great reputation by his previous labours at other Universities, occupies an unchallenged position as the most influential theologian in the Germany of to-day. His colleagues are, indeed, distinguished scholars, who have done admirable work; who on some questions, perhaps, have come to conclusions which are not the same as his; and who, in any estimate of opinion at Berlin,

have hardly less claim to be considered. But if there is one theologian there who is typical of the general tendency, it is he. Of his *History of Dogma*, which was hardly published in its entirety before it became the standard treatise on the subject; of his *History of Early Christian Literature*, which has thrown light on a multitude of obscure problems in the growth of ecclesiastical thought; of his many studies and researches on special topics; of his discourses on great men and great movements; of a contribution to learning made, as it were, by the way—his *History of the Prussian Academy*—this is not the place to speak. Such are the writings by which Professor Harnack is known to all scholars and critics as himself a scholar and critic of the rarest kind. But he is much more. He is a man who, in the best sense of that much-abused word, is profoundly religious. He can inspire enthusiasm not only for the

things of the mind but also for all that ennobles human life and gives it a meaning. He is an orator as well, and able to captivate any audience, academic or popular. And where, as in the present day, a large body of intelligent opinion is becoming more and more estranged from ecclesiasticism, the spirit in which he treats of Christianity makes the supreme appeal to all who have the interests of religion at heart. "The theologians of every country," he observes, "only half discharge their duties if they think it enough to treat of the Gospel in the recondite language of learning and bury it in scholarly folios." There are few men, however, who can wear their weight of learning so lightly as he, and no place where such vast knowledge is attractive to so large a number of students as at Berlin.

These various qualities are very effectively united in a book which during the last two years has been the delight and

instruction of many thousands of readers in Germany, and, by the title under which I had the privilege of translating it, *What is Christianity?* is beginning to be appreciated in England. *Das Wesen des Christentums* is a series of sixteen lectures originally delivered extempore to some six hundred undergraduates, and attended not only by students of theology, history, and literature, but by young doctors and surgeons, lawyers and candidates for official appointments. The object of the lectures was to give a plain statement of the Christian religion; to show what it was and what, in the course of time and under external pressure, it has become; and to ascertain how far it bears upon certain problems of life and civilisation. Whether in any other University or by any other professor an audience so large, so miscellaneous, and representing so many nationalities, could be secured for such a theme, and could follow week by week

discourses which, although lucid and brilliant, demanded close attention, may well be doubted. In any case it is a remarkable fact that amid surroundings likely to afford many other attractions, and in an atmosphere unfavourable to the traditional faith, a series of lectures devoted to the reality which keeps that faith alive should have met with such unmistakable success. Great, too, has been the effect which they have produced elsewhere in Germany in their permanent form. They have been read with lively interest by men and women of every degree of education, even if the views which they embody have often been warmly contested. Nor can we in England fail to be moved by the knowledge that they were a solace in her last days to that noble and enlightened lady, the Empress Frederick.

Had these lectures been delivered at Oxford they would not, apparently, have been received with the same kind of apprecia-

tion, if an opinion may be formed from the public judgment passed upon them by some of the theologians of that University. Their great merits, their value as a fine example of historical exposition, their learning, their eloquence, the earnest tone that pervades them, are not denied; indeed, to deny them at least this much distinction would be impossible. But it is plain that they arouse dislike; that they are regarded with suspicion; that the views which they contain are thought to be dangerous. One of the hostile critics goes so far as to confess to a feeling of deep disappointment: he had expected something different, and he deplores what he finds. Another, who admits—as he well may—that the book in which these lectures are embodied is a serious work, and that the author is a really religious man, roundly asserts that nevertheless in his opinion it is likely to do more harm than good. There are, I am glad to know, other

critics at Oxford who have read the book in a more generous spirit; who recognise not only the religious temper but also the courage and the love of truth which the author displays; who welcome so able an attempt to take a natural and a reasonable view of the Christian faith on the basis of its history. But for the moment they are silent. A judgment that is largely unfavourable is alone expressed. If I take Professor Sanday¹ as the chief exponent of this opinion, and devote my remarks mainly to him, I do so because he was not only the first to publish his comments, but has also been closely followed in what he says by his colleagues. He is also an accepted representative of ecclesiastical scholarship in this country, and his attitude deserves notice because it is characteristic of

¹ *An Examination of Harnack's 'What is Christianity'?*
By W. Sanday, D.D., LL.D., Lady Margaret Professor and
Canon of Christ Church. A paper read before the
Tutors' Association on October 24, 1901.

that adopted by most of the theologians of the Church of England towards German theology, even where, as in many cases, they profess themselves ready to acquiesce in the best results of criticism.

How characteristic, for instance, is the very first accusation that the Oxford scholar brings against the book! He is willing to recognise its good qualities. He praises its freshness, its breadth of view, and its genuine enthusiasm. He admits, too, that in it the questions at issue are well defined and furnish a good opportunity for taking our bearings. Yet when he proceeds to deal with these great questions so far as they are presented, he passes a solemn censure on the answers that are given. He tells us that at Berlin the critical movement is conceived as issuing in a process of 'reduction';¹ and accordingly we are asked to infer that what is offered us is a reduced Christianity, a

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Christianity consisting only of ideas, with much omitted that has always been taken to be essential. He tells us that to regard Christianity thus ; to regard it as no more than Christ's teaching and the immediate effect produced on his first disciples, is to draw the line at an arbitrary point, and that, if we are adequately to appreciate any conspicuous historical phenomenon, we must not stop at its initiation.

Now, whatever may be thought of this argument as a whole, there can be little doubt that it is the outcome of a view which is held firmly by many estimable persons and very vaguely and ignorantly by others ; the view, I mean, that the critical movement is depriving religion of something without which religion cannot live. I shall endeavour to deal with the argument on its merits. But, with regard to the purpose to which it is here put, so far as it is an attempt to discredit the con-

ception of Christianity entertained at Berlin, or the use there made of the historical method, it can be destroyed by simple reference to what Professor Harnack himself says; and what he says is so plain as to defy misunderstanding. He does, indeed, speak of a process of 'reduction,' but not in the sense attributed to him at Oxford. He speaks of religion being brought back again to itself; being reduced to its essential factors.

"In the history of religions [he says], every really important reformation is always, first and foremost, a *critical reduction* to principles; for in the course of its historical development religion, by adapting itself to circumstances, attracts to itself much alien matter, and produces, in conjunction with this, a number of hybrid and apocryphal elements which it is necessarily compelled to place under the protection of what is sacred. If it is not to run wild from exuberance, or be choked by its own dry leaves, the reformer must come who purifies it and brings it back to itself."¹

¹ *What is Christianity?* p. 270. Here, as elsewhere, I quote from my own translation.

What else, may I ask, is sound reform, what else is scientific history, but just a critical reduction to principles? Yet how different is this process of bringing religion back to its essential factors, of stripping it of the accidental growths with which time and circumstance inevitably encumber any of the world's ideals, from the process of diminution which Professor Sanday implies when he speaks of a 'reduced' Christianity. Were it not a reflection upon a University to which I am proud to belong, I should be tempted to suppose that he is unaware of the ambiguity which lurks in the word 'reduction,' and that none of the tutors to whom he addressed his criticisms had sufficient courage to point out to him that he was using this ambiguity to beg the question at issue.

But let us pass at once to the fundamental issue. The question here raised is whether in the case of Christianity any

critical reduction to principles be allowable at all. If, with Professor Harnack, we inquire what this religion is, what it was, and what it has become; if we try to answer the question by employing, as he says, "the methods of historical science and the experience of life gained by studying the actual course of history,"¹ we must surely be allowed, nay, we are compelled, to go back to principles. Unless we are to be forced into an indiscriminating acceptance of everything that in the march of the centuries has called itself Christian, we must endeavour to separate the kernel from the husk. We must be the more strenuous in this endeavour, the more eagerly we desire to keep the kernel from perishing. The Oxford scholar would not himself, I imagine, dispute this view of the matter. He would admit the necessity of sifting the historically true from the historically false in

¹ *What is Christianity?* p. 7.

what passes now or has passed in former ages as the Christian creed. He allows, indeed, in so many words, that all doctrine is relative to the age in which it was drawn up; and that, in the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, "the edges of the definition seem sharper than is right."¹ The issue, therefore, is not whether Christianity, as commonly understood, cannot be reduced to its essential factors, but in what those essential factors consist; in other words, how far the reduction is to extend.

This is a question in which all who appreciate the influence of spiritual ideals upon life are deeply concerned. In the last resort it is the theological question in which Oxford and Berlin are alike interested. All the more necessary is it, then, that each of these universities, even if they represent different tendencies of thought, should also

¹ *An Examination*, etc., p. 28.

be able to understand the other. Professor Harnack's views are very plainly stated. He nowhere conceives of Christianity as though it consisted only of ideas or of teaching. He nowhere declares that it is limited to what Christ said or the impression which it made upon the first generation of Christ's disciples. He nowhere demands that this or any other historical phenomenon shall be appreciated only by its beginnings. On the contrary, he conceives, he declares, ✓ he demands, the exact opposite; and he does so not casually, or in an obscure passage of a late chapter, but in the very forefront of his exposition and in express terms. In premising that he will keep to the purely historical theme, what is the Christian religion? he explains, in the most direct manner, the method which he proposes to adopt. "Where," he asks, "are we to look for our materials?"

“The answer [he says] seems to be simple and at the same time exhaustive: Jesus Christ and his Gospel. But however little doubt there may be that this must form not only our point of departure but also the matter with which our investigations will mainly deal, it is equally certain that we must not be content to exhibit the mere image of Jesus Christ and the main features of his Gospel. We must not be content to stop there, because every great and powerful personality reveals a part of what it is only when seen in those whom it influences. Nay, it may be said that the more powerful the personality which a man possesses, and the more he takes hold of the inner life of others, the less can the sum total of what he is be known only by what he himself says and does. We must look at the reflection and the effects which he produced in those whose leader and master he became. That is why a complete answer to the question, What is Christianity? is impossible so long as we are restricted to Jesus Christ's teaching alone. We must include the first generation of his disciples as well—those who ate and drank with him—and we must listen to what they tell us of the effect which he had upon their lives.

“But even this does not exhaust our materials. If Christianity is an example of a great power,

valid not for one particular epoch alone; if in and through it, not once only, but again and again, great forces have been disengaged, we must include all the later products of its spirit. It is not a question of a 'doctrine' being handed down by uniform repetition or arbitrarily distorted; it is a question of a *life*, again and again kindled afresh,—and now burning with a flame of its own. We may also add that Christ himself and his apostles were convinced that the religion which they were planting would in the ages to come have a greater destiny and a deeper meaning than it possessed at the time of its institution; they trusted to its spirit leading from one point of light to another and developing higher forces. . . . We cannot form any right estimate of the Christian religion unless we take our stand upon a comprehensive induction that shall cover all the facts of its history.”¹

And again, a few pages later :—

“ We shall follow the leading changes which the Christian idea has undergone in the course of history, and try to recognise its chief types. What is common to all the forms which it has taken, corrected by reference to the Gospel, and, conversely, the chief features of the Gospel,

¹ *What is Christianity?* pp. 10, 11.

corrected by reference to history, will, we may be allowed to hope, bring us to the kernel of the matter.”¹

These passages, which supply the keynote to all that follows—the keynote that recurs again and again in the development of the theme—are amply sufficient of themselves to rebut the suggestion that their author takes too limited a view of Christianity. And even if they were not sufficient, there is the fact that one half of the volume in which they occur deals with the Gospel in the apostolic age, with Catholicism Greek and Roman, and with Protestantism, to smash and pulverize the statement that this great phenomenon is appreciated only by its beginnings. The objection is urged, however, that in spite of this explicit promise the criterion actually employed is a mutilated version of Jesus’ teaching, and that that and nothing else is what is meant by the Gospel. That by the Gospel Professor Harnack

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

means the lessons taught by what Jesus did and said, and that in his judgment the Gospel is the criterion which we are to apply to the whole Christian movement throughout the ages, is quite true ; nor do I know what else any Oxford theologian could mean by the Gospel, or what other criterion he could prefer. The plain fact of the matter is that those who complain of Christianity being reduced by criticism are guilty of a confusion. They confound Christianity as a conspicuous historical phenomenon with the Gospel out of which it grew ; with the ideas and the teaching which it in part developed, in part distorted, in part abandoned. How the Christian religion as represented in the Churches is related to the Gospel as disclosed by the study of history—this, I take it, and nothing else, is what Professor Harnack has endeavoured to show.

But, we are told, in so doing ^{he} has

‘mutilated’ the Gospel; he offers us a portion of it and not the whole; he gives his own view of the leading points in Christ’s teaching, and asks us to accept this in place of the Christianity which we know and understand; in place of the creed which we have derived from “the sum total of New Testament teaching as to the contents of the religion which Christ came to found.”¹ Nor, we are assured, is he less arbitrary in the treatment of the materials. He admits that the impression which Christ and his Gospel made upon the first generation of his disciples is of the first importance, but refuses to accept it all as authoritative. He disparages the account given by the fourth Evangelist. In his impatience of dogma, he would have the Christian life without any doctrine as to Christ’s person. In short, “he wants to have a Christianity without a Christology.”²

¹ *An Examination*, etc., p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 13

II

To charge an historian with mutilating something which he is trying to reduce to its essential factors is a controversial device too common, perhaps, even amongst theologians, to call for any special apology ; and in this case, at all events, none is offered. Yet there are more pleasing methods of expressing disagreement. We must proceed, however, to examine the charge.

Professor Harnack declares that in answering the question, What is Christianity?, he will speak solely as an historian ; that he will look for his materials not only to the impression which the Gospel made upon the earliest disciples, but also to all the later products of its spirit, including the greater meaning and deeper destiny which in subsequent ages it came to possess. Now, if historical study is to teach us anything

at all, it must do two things. In the first place, it must aim at ascertaining what actually happened. This will not always be the same as what subsequent ages believed to have happened. Further, if its lessons are to be of any value, it must proceed by picking out what is essential and discarding what is accidental. The task is never free from difficulty. But in the case in question it becomes absolutely impossible if at the outset we are met by the demand that all the links connecting the Gospel with the age in which it appeared are to be preserved. None of the great beliefs which we have received from the past could have survived if they had been so treated. We are all agreed that slavery to the letter is an intolerable burden, and can we doubt that slavery to a particular age may easily become something just as bad? What is plain, moreover, is that, as Professor Harnack himself observes, those

who make a demand of this kind do not think of making it seriously. They could not do so if they tried, because they cannot help feeling and judging as children of their own time.

“The historian [he reminds us] whose business and highest duty it is to determine what is of permanent value, is of necessity required not to cleave to words but to find out what is essential. . . . There are only two possibilities here: either the Gospel is in all respects identical with the earliest form of it, in which case it came with its time and has departed with it; or else it contains something which, under differing historical forms, is of permanent validity. The latter is the true view. The history of the Church shows us in its very commencement that ‘primitive Christianity’ had to disappear in order that ‘Christianity’ might remain; and in the same way in later ages one metamorphosis followed upon another. From the beginning it was a question of getting rid of formulas, correcting expectations, altering ways of feeling, and this is a process to which there is no end. But by the very fact that our survey embraces the whole course as well as the inception, we enhance

our standard of what is essential and of real value.”¹

The method thus assigned to the historian seems to me, at least, not only the true but also the sole method by which he can get at the significance of the facts with which he is dealing. Professor Sanday’s admission that all doctrine is relative—“relative in the first instance to the age in which it was drawn up, and relative at all times to the limitations of our human faculties”²—is, in effect, an endorsement of this view. It recognises that in tracing the whole Christian movement the historian must be prepared to discriminate between what is of transitory and what is of permanent value. But if this be so; if a discrimination is to be made; if an enquiry into the extent and character of the relativity of doctrine is to be pressed, is the process to be applied only to the history of the Church? Is it not also

¹ *What is Christianity?* pp. 13, 14.

² *An Examination*, etc., p. 28.

to be applied to the development of the Gospel? Is 'the sum total,' in the Oxford scholar's language—"the sum total of New Testament teaching as to the contents of the religion which Christ came to found"—not to be sifted? Are the particulars of the sum not to be examined, so that we may distinguish between those of them that are of the first importance and those that are merely illustrative; those that find their source and their support in the heart and the intelligence of man in all ages, and those that belong to the age in which they appeared and with that age have passed away?

What is the attitude of the theologians of the Church of England towards these questions? I confess that, notwithstanding that they sometimes make a show of being critical and of recognizing the necessity for criticism, I cannot arrive at any clear view of the opinion which most of them hold about the New Testament. I cannot

discover that in referring to the many historical problems which it presents they show themselves willing to treat them historically. Nor, taking Professor Sanday for the moment as their representative, can I discover that so far as he treats these problems at all he throws any light upon them. To me, at least, he seems to be in the curious position that where he agrees with Professor Harnack he is open to the same censure as he passes upon that scholar, and where he differs from him he is inconsistent with himself.

For example: in the early part of his *Examination* he announces, not once only but again and again, that, but for what he calls the 'disparagement' of the fourth Gospel and the lack of a definite theory as to Christ's person, he is not out of sympathy with the attitude which the Berlin theologian adopts. He does not object to what is said about the Synoptic writers. On the

treatment of the question of miracles, including the whole subject of the Resurrection and the hope of immortality bound up with it, he offers no criticism that is not favourable.¹ The portion of the book which deals with the Gospel proper in the sense in which it is taken, that is to say, with Jesus' teaching, he finds the best of the whole; a discovery of which I may at least say that it ill accords with the charge of mutilation. The entire interpretation of what Jesus meant by the kingdom of God is, he ventures to think, exactly right. The study of the circumstances and conditions in which Christianity arose is put, he asserts, in its proper place. The sketch of the manner and method of Jesus' teaching he pronounces to be 'specially attractive.' So far, and with the exceptions noted, he is pleased to certify that on most of the questions in debate

¹ *An Examination*, etc., p. 8.

Professor Harnack takes what he calls the 'right side.'

This expression of agreement cannot but be welcome to those of us who, on the one hand, are prepared to examine the Christian documents historically, and, on the other, seek the foundations of religion in something else than fable. Nay, if we consider for a moment what this 'right side' is, and to what anyone who approves it is committed; if we also consider what a lamentable spectacle theology has often presented in the past and in a large measure still presents, we ought indeed to derive much hope from the fact that an Oxford professor of that branch of learning can approve opinions of the kind without, so far as we know, exciting the disapproval of his colleagues. For this 'right side' involves the position that the Synoptic Gospels, although unique and not altogether useless as sources of history, "were written not ✓

with the simple object of giving the facts as they were," but with a definite purpose, which colours them throughout; that the miraculous element which they exhibit is simply the reflection of phenomena hitherto unexplained; that "miracles do not happen";¹ that, "if the Resurrection meant nothing but that a deceased body of flesh and blood came to life again, we should make short work of this tradition";² that a report that "the earth in its course stood still, that a she-ass spoke, that a storm was quieted by a word, we do not believe, and shall never again believe";³ that in the account of Jesus' childhood "there is a mythical touch";⁴ that the introductory history which two of the Gospels contain may be disregarded as untrustworthy; that the "casting out of demons" was by no means peculiar to Christ, but, on the contrary, was a common

¹ *What is Christianity?* p. 20.

² *Ibid.*, p. 160.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

phenomenon of his age. We may, I say, rejoice that these opinions should receive some countenance from a learned dignitary of the Church, and yet be at a complete loss to reconcile them with the demand that we are to accept the sum total of New Testament teaching as to the contents of the religion which Christ came to found, and that we are to subscribe to the whole of the impression which he and his Gospel made upon the first generation of his disciples as authoritative. As the Oxford critic appears by his own account to support the view that the Synoptic Gospels do not give the facts as they were, that miracles do not happen, that there is a mythical touch here and something that may be disregarded there, he plainly does not himself accept that sum total or himself subscribe to the whole of that impression. He must either admit as much, or else contend that the matters in question are not essential.

In other words, he, too, must distinguish between what is essential and what is accidental, between what is credible and what is incredible. But in so doing he must abandon much that millions of Christians in all ages of the Church have regarded as an integral part of the Christian creed. Yet for making a similar distinction he reproaches another scholar with mutilation, as though a critical inquiry into certain features of the Synoptic Gospels were skilful if undertaken by Professor Sanday and clumsy if conducted by Professor Harnack. I do not believe that posterity will assent to this view.

III

LET us be frank. What causes Professor Sanday so much concern is not that a critical method should be adopted, but that it should be applied with consistency, with

courage, and with a resolute determination to separate the kernel from the husk. Nowhere is this concern so apparent as in his brief allusions to the historical question of the fourth Gospel and the doctrinal question of Christ's person. That the theologian's view of one of these questions will be closely connected with his view of the other is obvious, and accordingly we find that on both questions the views that prevail at Berlin are regarded with dismay.

What was there said as to the fourth Gospel was that it does not emanate or profess to emanate from the Apostle John, and cannot be taken as an historical authority in the ordinary meaning of the word :

“The author of it acted with sovereign freedom, transposed events and put them in a strange light, drew up the discourses himself, and illustrated great thoughts by imaginary situations. Although, therefore, his work is not devoid of a real, if scarcely recognisable, traditional element,

it can hardly make any claim to be considered an authority for Jesus' history; only little of what he says can be accepted, and that little with caution. On the other hand, it is an authority of the first rank for answering the questions, what vivid views of Jesus' person, what kind of light and warmth, did the Gospel disengage?"¹

The critic who denounces this language as sweeping and unjust might be expected to have a strong opinion of his own, and to be able to support it by something more than vague allusion. Yet if we try in the present instance to discover the opinion which he himself holds as to the origin and character of the fourth Gospel, we shall find that, in common with many other theologians who want to be positive and cautious at the same moment, he speaks with an uncertain voice; that when he ventures upon a plain declaration he modifies it afterwards, or else weakens its force by a concession, and then, perhaps, withdraws half the concession by an obscure

¹ *What is Christianity?* |pp. 19, 20.

qualification. He asserts that this Gospel “does but develop features in the history and personality of Christ to which the other Gospels clearly point”;¹ but he does not specify, as he might have done in a few words, what those features are, or where we can see them unmistakably indicated in advance. Elsewhere he is less courageous: he only goes so far as to say that it “does but concentrate the light upon and so reveal data that are latent in the Synoptics.”² Between developing features that are clearly foreshadowed and revealing data that are latent, there is a difference; and in the matter in question the difference is surely important enough to be elucidated by a serious student of history. For if these apparently diverse functions of the fourth Gospel are one and the same; if what is obvious may also be described as hidden, criticism of the New Testament enters upon a phase too revolutionary

¹ *An Examination, etc.*, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

to pass without a challenge. If, however, they are not one and the same ; if the features that are to be developed are to be distinguished from the data that are latent, the measure of this distinction and its bearing upon the problem ought to be shown. In any case what we want to have presented to us are the actual passages in the Synoptic writings which exhibit a patent or a latent claim on Jesus' part, a claim in harmony with the whole spirit of his message and admitted by his disciples, to be put in the position in the Universe in which the fourth Evangelist places him. Are there any passages to this effect which, without the slightest doubt or hesitation, can be pronounced to be genuine or free from question ? Even if such passages could be cited—for example, Matth. xi. 27—who of us is so blind or so perverse as not to perceive that they form a very slender basis for the overwhelming structure which is sought to be

raised upon them ; or that, in point of mere naked fact, the fourth Evangelist differs from the other three in his whole attitude ; or, again, that, Jew though he probably was, he derived his theology not from Jesus but from the mystic religion of the Greek world ? Indeed, that such doubt and hesitation exist, and must exist for anyone who will calmly consider what these documents are and in what circumstances they arose, Professor Sanday does not, I think, fail to recognise. "If," he says, "or so far as the fourth Gospel does more than . . . develop and expand, on lines which I believe to be historical, data . . . present from the first, . . . I should be content to have judgment suspended about it ; but in the meantime I believe it to be substantially verified by the unbroken tradition of primitive Christendom."¹ This is not the language of certainty, and the critic who can so ✓

¹ *An Examination, etc.*, pp. 21, 22.

express himself is hardly justified in expending damnatory epithets upon a view for which there is at least as much to be said, and which is entirely honest and consistent.

Again, in re-affirming the traditional opinion as to the authorship of the fourth Gospel, he is too familiar with the established results of modern research not to admit that the writer, whoever he may have been, exhibited "a certain amount of freedom" in the handling of his materials. He adds, however, by way of qualifying this admission, that in his judgment the freedom is often exaggerated. In what respect, I ask, is this freedom exaggerated in the present case? Does he deny that there is abundant proof of the statement to which Professor Harnack commits himself, that the writer of the fourth Gospel "transposed events and put them in a strange light, drew up the discourses himself and illustrated great thoughts by imaginary situations?"

In the speeches of John the Baptist, for instance, or in the interview with Nicodemus, or in the meaning attributed to many of Jesus' utterances, does the Oxford scholar doubt for a moment that the writer was acting with something more than a limited freedom, or that the purpose which this freedom serves is not plainly visible? But if he has no doubt in the matter—and what scholar with any knowledge or insight can harbour any doubt?—how can he claim, how can anyone claim, that the fourth Gospel is to be accepted as an historical authority in the ordinary meaning of the word? We cannot refuse to recognise that, although containing some truth, this Gospel is, as a record, obviously inaccurate and distorted in its account of what Jesus said and did; however high a value it may possess as a register of the views which came to be entertained about his person two, or possibly three, generations afterwards, or as

a statement, profound and imperishable, of the essential mystery of religion. If examination of the Christian documents has produced anything certain, this is certain; and no protest, whether emphatic or merely half-hearted, can affect the position.

But we are solemnly warned that "the most real objection to the fourth Gospel is an objection to the supernatural generally."¹ What this warning may mean, I confess that I am at a loss to know. That it is so expressed as to confound objection to the received authorship of the Gospel with objection to the Christology of the Gospel is plain. It may thus be only a rhetorical flourish, a mingling of two issues which must be decided on different grounds. It may be intended to suggest to the Oxford tutors that if any of them should dispute the traditional view of the fourth Gospel he would have no right, in Professor Sanday's

¹ *An Examination, etc.*, p. 7.

opinion, to call himself a Christian. It may lay down that any reluctance to accept the metaphysics in that document proves a man to be insensible to the spiritual element in life. It may mean all or any of these things ; but, so far as I, at least, can see, it is no answer to the statement that that document "has little claim to be considered an authority for Jesus' history." Yet of this statement it is offered as the final and conclusive criticism.

Surely it is a criticism which recoils upon the critic. If the fourth Evangelist alone gives us such an insight into what is called the supernatural that the most real objection to his testimony involves a complete denial of that element, the circumstance must have a direct bearing upon the testimony of the other three. Does it diminish or, on the contrary, does it increase their value as trustworthy historians? There can, I submit, be little hesitation as to the answer.

If in spite of their obvious prepossessions they are in one respect much less affirmative; if they know little and certainly say little about Christology; if their writings stand nearer in point of time to the events which they relate and the personality which they portray; if, finally, we remember the common tendency, wherever we have any record at all, to exalt a great man and even ✓ to deify him as he recedes into the past, we cannot refuse to believe, if we are honest with ourselves and with the facts, that the first three Evangelists, by sheer comparison with the fourth, are much the more trustworthy in their estimate of Jesus' message, as he actually gave it, and that historical truth is with them rather than with him. We must remember that it is with the historical question alone that we are dealing; and that, if the first three Evangelists make less of this element which is regarded as so essential to the credibility of the fourth, we,

too, as serious students of history, must also make less of it.

But we have here passed to the supreme question on which, as we are informed, the German theology is most at fault. It lays no stress on any doctrine as to Christ's person; nay, the demand for a definite belief on the subject—such a belief, in fact, as ought to be the distinguishing mark of a Christian—is impatiently set aside. We are advised that the first disciples were undoubtedly in possession of a Christology; that since their day Christianity has always had a Christological basis; and that Christianity is impossible without it.

The argument is one which is often urged in ecclesiastical circles whenever the results of the critical movement cannot be otherwise impugned, although what definite theory ought to be held, or what precise belief ought to be professed, is not so often explained. Indeed, in the present instance,

as we shall see, the only plain statement advanced is virtually an approval of the view adopted by the German theologian. But so far as the argument is an appeal to history, a wrong use, as it seems to me, is made of the appeal. The lesson which history actually teaches is the contrary of that which it is supposed to enforce. To contend that a Christology is indispensable to-day because the first disciples had one is to put the necessity for a Christology on a wrong basis. The contention suggests that any modern theory that may be formed must be in essence the same as theirs. That this is to invite disaster, to imperil the permanent element of the faith by binding it to the transitory, will be at once obvious when we recollect that an essential part of their theory about Jesus, and a belief everywhere accepted by them, was that, in a very short time, he would visibly return in clouds of glory and set up the Kingdom of God

upon earth. If there was any doctrine about Christ's person which was held firmly by the first disciples, it was this. The same doctrine was held and expressed by Paul, for the greater part of his missionary career, together with other doctrines which either by the mere lapse of years have been proved to be erroneous or else have been quietly abandoned. We are told that the German theologian is little in earnest in professing to go to the first Christians for his definition of Christianity,¹ because he refuses to accept a correct theory about Christ's person as the fundamental substance of the Gospel—a theory which, as we know, entered largely into Paul's theology. But is his critic himself in earnest in appealing to the views of the first disciples? Does he not himself overrule their unanimous testimony on the subject of Christ's return when it conflicts with the witness of history,

¹ *An Examination, etc.*, p. 18.

with the belief which he is himself compelled to form? I only note the fact that, whether they like it or not, both he and his antagonist are compelled to adopt a critical attitude towards Christology, and that the difference between them is one of courage and consistency.

Nothing emerges more clearly from a study of the Christian documents than that the further we go back into primitive Christianity the greater is the part of it which consists in a vivid experience of the Christian life. That this experience should try to find expression in a doctrine, and that the doctrine should reflect the thought of the time, whether Hebrew or Greek, was inevitable. But when we arrive at the original Gospel preached by Jesus himself, no such doctrine is found to form any part of it. We may, nay, we must, recognise that he had a mysterious sense of an inward-call and a high mission; that he had a

unique consciousness of a special relation with God which he could express by invoking God as his Father. We may admit that he claimed to be the promised Messiah and was hailed as such, first by one and then gradually by all of his immediate disciples. But he embodied the promise in a form in which most of its previous interpretations were ignored, and the vast majority of his contemporaries saw nothing but mockery and delusion. The message which he gave to the world—the message of salvation, of citizenship in the kingdom of God—involved no dogma as to his special relation with the Being whose general Fatherhood he proclaimed. The individuals whom he singled out for a personal tribute, the publican in the temple, the widow with her mite, the thief on the cross, knew nothing of any Christology. As Professor Harnack well says :

“ Jesus desired no other belief in his person and no other attachment to it than is contained in the keeping of his commandments. Even in the fourth Gospel, in which Jesus’ person seems to be raised above the contents of the Gospel, the idea is still clearly formulated: ‘ If ye love me, keep my commandments.’ He must himself have found, during his labours, that some people honoured, nay, even trusted him, without troubling themselves about the contents of his message. It was to them that he addressed the reprimand: ‘ Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father.’ To lay down any ‘ doctrine’ about his person and his dignity independently of the Gospel was, then, quite outside his sphere of ideas. In the second place, he described the Lord of heaven and earth as his God and his Father ; as the Greater, and as Him who is alone good. He is certain that everything which he has and everything which he is to accomplish comes from this Father. He prays to Him ; he subjects himself to His will ; he struggles hard to find out what it is and to fulfil it. Aim, strength, understanding, the issue and the hard *must*, all come from the Father. This is what the Gospels say, and it cannot be turned and twisted. This feeling, praying, working, struggling

and suffering individual is a man who in the face of his God also associates himself with other men.”¹

And again :

“The consciousness which he possessed of being *the Son of God* is nothing but the practical consequence of knowing God as the Father and as his Father. Rightly understood, the name of Son means nothing but the knowledge of God. Here, however, two observations are to be made : Jesus is convinced that he knows God in a sense in which no one ever knew Him before, and he knows that it is his vocation to communicate this knowledge of God to others by word and by deed—and with it the knowledge that men are God’s children. . . . How he came to the consciousness of his power and to the consciousness of the obligation and the mission which this power carries with it, is his secret, and no psychology will ever fathom it.”²

Once more :

“To contend that Jesus meant his whole message to be taken provisionally, and everything in it to receive a different interpretation after his death and resurrection, nay, parts of it to be put aside as of no account, is a desperate supposition. No ! his message is simpler than the churches would

¹ *What is Christianity?* pp. 125, 126.

² *Ibid.*, p. 128.

like to think it; simpler, but for that very reason sterner and endowed with a greater claim to universality. A man cannot evade it by the subterfuge of saying that as he can make nothing of this 'Christology' the message is not for him. . . . *The Gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the Father only and not with the Son.* This is no paradox, nor, again, is it 'rationalism,' but the simple expression of the actual fact as the Evangelists give it."¹ . . .

Theologians affirm, what nobody, indeed, denies, that the mind must inevitably form some propositions about Christ, but they usually go on to assert that only if these propositions take a certain shape can Christianity be said to be propagated through him. The suggestion, I presume, is that only if they take the shape demanded by the Catholic Church can Christianity be said to be Christian. For this reason, among others, they lay so much stress upon the importance of the Church and of Doctrine. For this reason, among others,

¹ *What is Christianity?* p. 143.

they are confident that, amid all the changes of doctrine, the Church on the whole has been guided aright. Yet if all doctrine is admittedly relative to the age in which it was drawn up ; if the Christological doctrine of the first disciples was relative to their day and to the kind of thought which then prevailed, its survival must depend upon its capacity for being adapted to the thought of later ages. That the doctrine has, indeed, already undergone some beneficial changes, Professor Sanday and others would apparently concede. Possibly of any rigid definition of it that might be now given he would be ready to say, as he says of the doctrine of the Trinity, that "the edges of the definition seem sharper than is right." How he would himself define it, he does not here state ; although elsewhere¹ he describes four

¹ *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Dr. Hastings, s.v. "Jesus Christ."

different but admissible ways of dealing with the problem, corresponding with the attitude of different minds. A man, he says, may accept the decision of the undivided Church as authoritative, or he may prefer the simplicity of the picture drawn in the Gospels, or else he may cherish the metaphysical ideas of the age that followed, or, finally, he may avoid the necessity and the perplexities of criticism by relying on individual and immediate experience. If we ask which of these different attitudes the Oxford critic adopts, the astonishing answer, apparently, is that he adopts them all. They seem, he says, "to put asunder what ought rather to be combined"; notwithstanding the patent fact that they are attitudes which, if not all mutually exclusive, are at least, when held with any firmness, logically irreconcilable. A man cannot ultimately rely on his own feelings and also at the same time accept external

authority as the criterion of truth, or look to the Gospels as his guide and in the same sense to the Council of Nicæa. In spite of this attempt at a fusion of conflicting thoughts and emotions, the elements of the mixture are so plainly separable, so insoluble one in the others, as to suggest that the Christian who takes refuge in his own experience in order to avoid the perplexities of criticism is perhaps the wisest. In any case, the effort to combine four different ways of dealing with a problem betrays, when it is not clearly successful, a certain amount of versatility, not to say vacillation, on the part of anyone who makes the effort.

I find something of the same mental quality in Professor Sanday's present criticism. After first reproaching the author of *What is Christianity?* for wanting to dispense with any doctrine as to Christ's person, and then taking pains to show that never-

theless the language employed in that book virtually assumes such a doctrine, he states that Professor Harnack has penetrated to the real object of all Christology in emphasizing the personal force at the centre of the Gospel. In Jesus, says the Berlin theologian, "the divine appeared in as pure a form as it can appear on earth," and "it is not as a mere factor that he is connected with the Gospel; *he was its personal realization and its strength, and this he is felt to be still.* Fire is kindled only by fire; personal life only by personal forces."¹ This language, says his reviewer, "expresses a deep and most certain truth." But if, as he argues, the object of all theories about Christ's person is to make sure that the personal force at the centre of the Gospel shall not be overlooked, then on his own showing Professor Harnack's conception of Christianity not only admits a Christology, but gives it in

¹ *What is Christianity?* p. 145.

its most vital and essential form. A critic who complains that a fundamental idea is lacking and ends by finding it set out with great discernment may, indeed, be ingenious in his criticism, but can hardly claim to be destructive.

The rest of Professor Sanday's observations support the conclusion—at which, as I submit, no impartial judge can fail to arrive—that, taken as a whole, they are the outcome of ecclesiastical prepossession, without doubt unconscious and perfectly sincere, rather than of historical insight. I do not allude to the difference of opinion between him and Professor Harnack with regard to the Gnostic movement, or the dates to which the Creed, the Canon of the New Testament, and the institution of episcopacy, are to be assigned. These are topics intimately bound up with the spread of the Christian faith in the second century; drawing their interest partly from their great

importance, partly from the very difficulties which beset them; but, when all is said, clearly more relevant to the doctrines, ordinances, and government of the Church as an institution than to the heart and substance of religion itself. The attention which he pays to them is characteristic of his entire attitude, but not so characteristic as his final protest against the disparagement of Church, of Doctrine, and of Catholic Worship, which the German account of Christianity is alleged to contain. Here, however, as elsewhere, the objections urged are strangely suggestive of the views assailed. The faults and shortcomings which Professor Harnack mentions in the Church, Professor Sanday does not deny. He pleads that they should be amended, as Professor Harnack would also plead were his task to exhort and not to record. Both admit that Doctrines are an historical necessity and relative to their age, but Professor Sanday

seems to me at least to betray a tendency to confuse these transitory forms with the permanent truth which has in all ages survived them.

IV

THAT the criticism with which I have been so far dealing represents the views not alone of a distinguished professor but also of a whole school of theology at Oxford is notorious. They appear to be the views, as I have already said, of the dominant party in the Church of England, or rather of such members of it as not content with only holding and practising the Christian faith also make some attempt to examine its basis. I now pass to a brief consideration of another criticism in which the attitude adopted towards Professor Harnack's book is virtually the same; although the reasons for adopting it are of a different and, as I hope to prove, even less satisfactory kind.

They are set forth in the concluding pages of a little work recently issued by the Dean of Christ Church.¹

The work possesses some interest in the present connexion, because it seems to show that in certain circumstances the results of learning and research can produce almost as little effect on those who hold high place at Oxford as on the great mass of the clergy everywhere. Among some of the latter the endeavour to which I have previously alluded—the endeavour to overcome these results by trying to blend them with the very ideas which they destroy—is freely made. The Dean, however, takes a still more courageous course: he makes no attempt at the blending process, and overcomes inconvenient speculations by simply putting them aside. He declines to enter what he calls the ‘interminable labyrinth’ of theories as to

¹ *Historical Christianity the Religion of Human Life.*
By Thomas B. Strong, D.D.

the origin of the Gospels, or to consider the question whether these writings belong to the second century or the first. He claims, indeed, that the argument which he proposes to unfold will gain in strength and importance the further back their date can be put, and he assumes—I think, somewhat hastily—that in consequence of recent investigations there is good ground for placing the books of the New Testament mainly within the lifetime of the first of Christ's followers. But the question of origin is one which he does not raise; in the position which he adopts, it is, he imagines, relatively immaterial. He starts, as he declares, from the opposite end. He maintains that if the discussion of Christianity be approached by a frank acceptance of the Gospels “very much as they stand,” the interest of any theories as to their origin will be found to be literary rather than historical. By way of supporting this contention—and it ob-

viously needs all the support that it can get—he bids us remember that the Gospels have done their work mainly as a whole, and that they were selected out of a number of other writings because in the eyes of the early Church they embodied a certain point of view. Let us grant, he says, that as they stand they may have been built up out of fragments. If a consistent view of Christ nevertheless emerges, it does not matter how they arose: the view thus obtained is historically true, because “the chances of getting a consistent idea out of a patchwork of fragments are very small indeed.”¹

Such is the first position in Dr. Strong’s argument. If we ask what this clear and consistent view is, we find that it is the view that Christ was in a true sense God, or, at least, co-eternal and co-equal with God; and that he is shown to have been so by a series of historical events. The second

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

position is that Christianity thus conceived, Christianity resting not on ideas but on facts, that is to say, on the facts as related in the Gospels and as borne out by the other books of the New Testament—the Christianity, in a word, which is fully expressed in the Nicene Creed, is the only faith that will satisfy the religious needs of men. Whatever else may be said about this argument, one thing is plain: if the first position cannot be maintained, the second does not admit of being defended.

A writer who proposes to treat Christianity as an historical phenomenon and to appeal to the reason and the intelligence of his readers can scarcely hope to produce conviction unless he exhibits some, at least, of the elementary qualities of an historian. Those qualities I take to be candour, impartiality, a knowledge of the general circumstances of the period in question, and a correct appreciation of the value of

evidence. Nor will he have much prospect of success if he suspends the ordinary rules of criticism in dealing with his subject. Yet when we inquire into Dr. Strong's conception of history and historical study as applied to the rise and growth of Christianity, we find ourselves confronted with demands which he would not think of making in any other connexion. We are asked to believe that a series of highly technical statements drawn up for a particular purpose at the Council of Nicæa in 325 is an accurate account of events which took place in and near Jerusalem three centuries previously. We are asked to believe that these statements are substantially in strict accordance with the story of Jesus and his work contained in four documents collectively known as the Gospels, but admittedly of uncertain date, of doubtful authorship, of a composite character, and bearing every indication of having been put together, also for a particular

purpose, in an uncritical age. We are asked to believe that a view which can with difficulty be wrung from isolated passages in three of them, and is expressed in mystical language in the fourth, by common consent the latest in point of time, is not only clear and consistent but also true as a simple matter of fact; and is not only true in this sense, but also superior to all other truth. We are asked to believe that the view thus embedded in these documents is alone accurate, because, long after the events which they profess to relate, they were picked out, again for a particular purpose, from amongst a number of other documents containing, as we are told, quite different views. We are asked to believe, finally, that the conception of Christianity which thus emerges is historical; that is to say, that it rests on facts.

If the Dean of Christ Church elects to think that in three out of the four Gospels a certain view is clearly and consistently

presented which one of the learned Canons of that Cathedral pronounces at one moment to be only foreshadowed and at another to be latent, and which he himself admits to be incapable of being inferred from them, he may, of course, do so. It is an opinion which I do not share, and I am not alone in being unable to share it. The results which for the purpose of his argument Dr. Strong puts aside—the results of inquiry into the origin and historical value of the Gospels—seem to me, at least, to dispose of it. Nor can I discover that the results of learning and research are such as to establish his assumption that the date of these books as they stand can be pushed back to a period within the lifetime of the first of Christ's followers. But even if their date could be so fixed, the circumstance would not lend clearness and consistency to a view which lacks these qualities. Nor, again, after the considerations which I have adduced in the

previous pages do I imagine that any good purpose would be served by following Dr. Strong through his attempt to show, by a large number of quotations, that this conception of the permanent truth of Christianity is borne out by all the books of the New Testament. I am concerned here only with his criticism on Professor Harnack, and only with the object of showing what it is have I dealt with the general nature of his argument.

Before passing, however, to that criticism, I desire to draw attention to what he says, or, rather, what he omits to say, about the doctrine of the Resurrection, which, of all the facts on which he declares Christianity to rest, is surely the most important. He himself, indeed, so describes it. He leaves us to believe that in his opinion, whatever may be its spiritual significance, it was an historical fact, an event which took place at a certain spot, at a given time, and was

sufficiently attested by trustworthy witnesses. In the sense this Resurrection is not only a miracle, but the miracle of miracles. But he expressly states that he does not propose to discuss the possibility of such occurrences. They form an interesting subject which has been advisedly omitted.

“It has been omitted because it is metaphysical, and we are trying to clear up an historical question. We want to see whether the Gospels as they stand give rise to a consistent idea of Christ that falls within the subsequent history of the Church. And as the literary question of the origin of the Gospel has been put aside, so a discussion of the metaphysical question of the meaning and limits (if any) of the laws of Nature would be equally out of place.”¹

I confess to finding this an astonishing declaration, and one which, unless its language be employed in some unusual sense, destroys the argument which Dr. Strong is endeavouring to maintain. For if the facts on which Christianity is said to

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 47.

rest are historical ; if certain events, notably an Incarnation and a Resurrection, occurred in the domain of history, and possess the unique significance which is attached to them, they are miracles. If they are miracles, they belong in their historical aspect to the physical order, and in that aspect have nothing metaphysical about them. Hardly less astonishing is the absolute silence in which, in his chapter on "Christ and the Four Gospels," he passes over the various accounts there given of this alleged historical fact. Again and again he mentions it as the crowning evidence for the truth of Christianity, and yet he never once examines the evidence. Surely it is a part of the Gospels as they stand, and to the view in question the part of them that is most vital and essential. That to discuss it in the light of this view would involve any historian in a labyrinth is, of course, obvious ; but this is not a danger

that ought to be evaded by anyone who believes that religion is ultimately dependent on external fact.

What, then, are the specific objections here taken to Professor Harnack's conception of Christianity? Dr. Strong refers to *Das Wesen des Christentums*, and quotes some half a dozen passages from an English version. He declares that the book represents the general opinion of the average man in England, which is a greater compliment to that individual than in my experience he deserves, or than I expected him to receive from the Head of an Oxford House. Because Professor Harnack describes the Gospel as something so simple as to be easily distinguishable from its contemporary integument by anyone who has a fresh eye, he is said to be introducing "a perilously subjective method."¹ His account of Jesus' teaching as a conviction capable

¹ *Historical Christianity*, etc., p. 91.

of being presented under three heads, each of them, however, containing the whole of it in a single aspect, is pronounced to be equally perilous because it is a mystical and individualistic conception of the Gospel which is admittedly opposed to the teaching of the Church from the first.¹ Moreover, the conviction, says Dr. Strong—the conviction of the Fatherhood of God, of a divine kingdom and of the higher righteousness—was in the world already; and unless we regard Christ as offering valid evidence and assurance, this conception of Christianity is “a return to Natural Religion and puts men back into the position of those who aspired so unsuccessfully before Christ came.”² Finally, this whole conception is condemned on the ground that it is attainable only by tearing the New Testament to pieces and assuming that the whole history of the Church has been a series of errors.

¹ *Historical Christianity*, etc., p. 94.

² p. 96.

To examine these objections in detail is, I venture to think, unnecessary. They involve a strange distortion of the singularly full and luminous picture in which Professor Harnack presents to us the rise, growth and varied development of the Christian religion; of the reality which has at all times underlain it; of the true source of its strength and its permanence; and of the way in which it meets the needs of human life. If the Gospel be not something simple; if it cannot be distinguished by anyone who has a fresh eye; if it cannot be stated except in the technical language of theological dogma, and with the help of long-discredited ideas about nature and the supernatural, about science and history, and about the place which our earth occupies in the universe, it cannot live; nay, it would have already perished. What Christ taught was not, indeed, new. What was new was the way in which he

taught it, the personal force with which he transformed old truths, and gave them a significance which they had never previously possessed; the power by which he became and has remained the life of a new community. That and that alone is the historical fact in Christianity which can never be disputed, and which ought, therefore, to take precedence of all its other facts. The assertion that this conception of it is a return to the Natural Religion which preceded it is one which seems, to me at least, to argue a misapprehension of both. And if the Gospel held its own amid all the changes which the Christian community underwent in its development into the Catholic Church, that circumstance is only another testimony to its undying power in the midst of conditions that were not always favourable. Nowhere in Professor Harnack's pages is the whole work of the Church assumed to have been a series of

errors. On the contrary, again and again he shows, in language not less eloquent than lucid, how in every age and in all circumstances the Gospel was the essential and abiding element in its life.

History, I submit, as interpreted with candour and intelligence, gives a plain reply to Dr. Strong's contention, and proves that the distinction between fact and idea which he seeks to apply to Christianity cannot be maintained in the sense which he adopts. The distinction in any case is too sharply drawn. But his whole argument collapses if it can be shown that what he calls historical Christianity is for the most part not historical ; if the facts on which he tells us that this religion rests are for the most part not facts but the kind of ideas in which all religions are commonly clothed ; if the ideas on which he tells us that it does not rest are for the most part the only undoubted facts about it that we possess.

As the distinction between fact and idea may be drawn too sharply, so also between intellect and emotion. All religion must be emotional in the sense that it must stir the heart and move the feelings; it would not be real if it failed to be a vivid experience. But there is another kind of emotion which consists in weak and vague desire, in the lust of the eye and the ear, in a spasmodic and superficial enthusiasm. To regard a conception of Christianity which endeavours to penetrate to its secret; which examines the conditions of the time in which it arose; which traces its growth and progress through the ages—to regard this conception of it as emotional in the feeble sense seems to me an unaccountable error. Yet such, in the Dean's opinion, is the religion which is presented in Professor Harnack's pages. The description, as I remarked at the outset, is more appropriate to a faith which is ultimately founded on

the persuasion that certain miracles happened at a particular period in the history of mankind, and, when that persuasion is with difficulty maintained in the light of the injunction to search the Scriptures, to prove all things, to hold fast that which is good, endeavours to establish it afresh by the aid of ritual and ceremonious observance. Surely of this kind of faith the reproach was once for all uttered: *Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.*

V

HERE I might end, for the rest of the criticisms directed against Professor Harnack's book at Oxford seem, as far as I can gather, only to reiterate the arguments which I have already described. But in some cases the objections taken to it are coupled with a frank admission that, whatever else it may do or leave undone, it exhibits the elements of Christianity as

conceived by Christ himself, and pleads with timely force that by these elements Christianity is to be judged. One alone of these criticisms has been brought to my notice in any detail. Yet there, too, I find that the German theologian is accused of paying too little attention to the social life of the Christian community, with its worship and its corporate traditions ; in other words, to the life and organisation of the Church. He is apt, we are told, to forget the great principle of development, and to think that nothing that is not vital in Christianity is of any importance at all.

These are objections taken by Dr. Hastings Rashdall in a sermon preached in the chapel of New College, and repeated elsewhere. To some extent I have already dealt with them, and I cannot now do more than contrast them with what Professor Harnack says as to the work done in and for the Church by members of it in all

ages ; with the tribute, for instance, which he pays to the monk in the past or the deaconess in the present. Nor can I see any ground for the charge that he has in any way neglected the principle of development. He would not be an historian had he done so, and the whole of the latter part of his book is the best answer that can be given to any such assertion.

To conclude, then : we must remember that in these pages we have been considering the Christian religion in its historical aspect only. If the views which I have advanced are correct, it has been kept alive for nineteen centuries not by any theory about Christ's person, however useful such a theory may have proved in periods of storm and stress, nor yet by any of the external forms in which that religion has been from time to time embodied, however necessary such forms may be, but ultimately by what Jesus himself said and did and by

the spirit of his work. But there is another aspect,—in my opinion, at least, not less important,—which may be called the philosophical, and for which I have found no place. Among the difficulties that might have been raised is the question, How are we to conceive of the divine in Christianity and in what sense can we speak of it as a revelation? We shall not, I submit, make any approach to an answer to such a question unless we recognise that it arises not in regard to Religion only, but wherever we seek to explain the possessions which the great men of our race have wrung for us from the unknown. Neither in Art nor in Science can we give any account of the mysterious power by which a fresh ideal is presented or a new truth laid bare. We cannot tell how the painter opens to us a vision of beauty that seems to be out of the reach of nature itself; from what depths of consciousness the musician draws

his harmonies ; or by what method the inquirer discovers the laws of the material universe. All these efforts of the human spirit seem to attain to some perception of the divine, and to have a claim to be called a revelation. They give us glimpses into things of which we were ignorant, and into possibilities which we had not perceived. But if in the common uses of language we speak of Religion alone as something which is imparted to us from without and which we could never have grasped of ourselves, we do so because the individuals who quicken our sense of it are so rare as to be unique in their kind. More than any of these efforts it gives our life a meaning ; it touches its deepest issues ; and it points with still stronger conviction to the existence of that great Reality in which in the last resort we put our trust.

“Professor Harnack’s Great Book.”—*Expository Times*.

Now ready. Second Edition.

Demy 8vo, cloth, 10s. 6d.; half-leather, 12s. 6d.

What is Christianity?

By ADOLF HARNACK,

Professor of Church History in the University of Berlin.

Translated by THOMAS BAILEY SAUNDERS.

With a Special Preface to the English Edition by
the Author.

“Seldom has a treatise of the sort been at once so suggestive and so stimulating. Seldom have the results of so much learning been brought to bear on the religious problems which address themselves to the modern mind.”—*The Pilot*.

“Thoroughly religious in tone, full of real and living interest in mankind, and marked by signs of deep conviction as to the truth of Christianity in the sense in which Dr. Harnack understands it.”—*Guardian*.

“Since Strauss, now nearly seventy years ago, produced his *Leben Jesu*, or to confine ourselves to England, since the appearance of Seeley’s *Ecce Homo*, no book on the central theme of Christianity is likely to produce a greater impression than this latest work by the illustrious German historian. And this for two reasons. It is, in the first place, a deliverance on the very essence of religion by one of the foremost living authorities, and, secondly, it is, in its style and handling, addressed directly to the western mind. . . . Mr. Bailey Saunders has done his work admirably. He has secured all Harnack’s pith and *verve*, and produced a volume which, apart from the supreme importance of its subject-matter, is a piece of magnificent English prose.”—*Christian World*.

“The book is a great book, and cannot fail to exercise a deep and wide influence. It exhibits an originality and insight, a mastery of the history of ideas, a power of lucid, and often glowing, expression—the whole suffused with the deepest piety—a combination of qualities as splendid as it is rare.”—*Expository Times*.

“And what does Professor Harnack mean by Christianity? He rightly means the actual teaching of Jesus Christ. We are glad to recognise the intense religious fervour, the glow of enthusiasm, in which he approaches the subject. These academical discourses are in parts more like passionate mission preaching; the eloquence carries one away.”—*The Church Times*.

WILLIAMS & NORGATE,

14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON, W.C.

NEW WORK IN ENGLISH OF
PROFESSOR HARNACK.

Just Published. Crown 8vo, cloth. 4s.

MONASTICISM:
Its Ideals and History ;
AND THE
Confessions of St. Augustine.

TWO LECTURES
By ADOLF HARNACK.

Translated into English by E. E. KELLETT, M.A.,
and F. H. MARSEILLE, Ph.D., M.A.

"The lectures impart to these old subjects a new and vivid interest, which cannot but win this faithful version many admiring readers."—*Scotsman*.

"The former of these essays is one of the most brilliant we have ever read. . . . In a word, no better ecclesiastical essay has been written than this."—*Church of England Pulpit*.

"One might read all the ponderous volumes of Montalembert without obtaining so clear a view of this immense subject as are offered in these luminous pages. . . . The translation, we may add, is excellent, and gives us Harnack in pure and vigorous English."—*Christian World*.

"The former of these lectures is a wonderfully lucid, interesting, and suggestive review of the origin and history of Monasticism. . . . Every one who is in the least interested in the history of the Church should read these lectures; like the author's 'What is Christianity?' they are striking illustrations of the great gift of popular exposition possessed by one of the most distinguished scholars of our time."—*Week's Survey*.

"Professor Harnack affords a brilliant example of the way in which a profound scholar, who is a perfect master of his subject, may expound it to a popular audience in fresh and vivid hues. In these two lectures he goes over familiar ground, but with a keenness of insight and a breadth of treatment that make it new."—Professor W. F. ADENEY in the *Examiner*.

WILLIAMS & NORGATE,

14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON, W.C.

“No work on Church History in recent times has had the influence of Professor Harnack’s ‘History of Dogma.’”—*Times*.

Seven vols. demy 8vo, cloth, £3, 13s. 6d. ; half-leather, £4, 7s. 6d. Each volume sold separately, cloth, 10s. 6d. ; half-leather, 12s. 6d.

A History of Dogma.

BY ADOLF HARNACK.

Translated from the Third German Edition. Edited by the late Rev. Professor A. B. BRUCE, D.D.

“A book which is admitted to be one of the most important theological works of the time.”—*Daily News*.

“The first volume of this great ‘History of Dogma’ we reviewed some time ago, and it gives us equal pleasure to call attention to this. . . . We take our leave of this volume by once more calling the attention of our readers to the admirable series of which it forms one of the most important issues.”—*Quarterly Review*.

The work is divided up into divisions as follows :—

Introductory Division.

Division I.—The Genesis of Ecclesiastical Dogma, or the Genesis of the Catholic Apostolic Dogmatic Theology, and the first Scientific Ecclesiastical System of Doctrine.

Book I.—The Preparation.

Book II.—The Laying of the Foundation.

Division II.—The Development of Ecclesiastical Dogma.

Book I.—The History of the Development of Dogma as the Doctrine of the God-man on the basis of Natural Theology.

Book II.—Expansion and Remodelling of Dogma into a Doctrine of Sin, Grace, and Means of Grace, on the basis of the Church.

Book III.—The Threefold Issue of the History of Dogma.

WILLIAMS & NORGATE,

14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON, W.C.

FROM WILLIAMS & NORGATE'S LIST
OF RECENT WORKS ON THEOLOGY.

Theological Translation Library (New Series).

Recently Published. Demy 8vo, cloth, 10s. 6d.; Half-leather, 12s. 6d.

Introduction to the Greek
New Testament.

BY PROFESSOR E. NESTLE, of Maulbronn.

Translated from the Second Enlarged Edition by the Rev. WM. EDIE, D.D., and Edited by Professor ALLAN MENZIES, D.D. With Final Corrections by the Author and Eleven Reproductions of Texts.

"We have no living scholar more capable of accomplishing the fascinating task of preparing a complete introduction on the new acknowledged principles than Professor Nestle. This book will stand the most rigorous scrutiny; it will surpass the highest expectation."—*Expository Times*.

"Nothing could be better than Dr. Nestle's account of the materials which New Testament textual criticism has to deal with."—*Spectator*.

Demy 8vo, Cloth. 2 Vols. 10s. 6d. each.

The Apostolic Age.

BY PROF. CARL VON WEIZSÄCKER.

Translated by JAMES MILLAR, D.D.

"Weizsäcker is an authority of the very first rank. The present work marks an epoch in New Testament Criticism. The English reader is fortunate in having a masterpiece of this kind rendered accessible to him."—*Expository Times*.

Demy 8vo, Cloth. 2 Vols. 10s. 6d. each.

A History of the Hebrews.

By R. KITTEL,

Ordinary Professor of Theology in the University of Breslau.

Translated by JOHN TAYLOR, D.Lit., M.A., HOPE W. HOGG, B.D., and E. B. SPIERS, D.D.

"It is a sober and earnest reconstruction, for which every earnest student of the Old Testament should be grateful."—*Christian World*.

WILLIAMS & NORGATE,

14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON, W.C.

Williams & Norgate's List of Recent Works on Theology
—continued.

Demy 8vo. One Vol. 10s. 6d.

The Communion of the Christian with God

A Discussion in Agreement with the View of Luther.

BY W. HERMANN,

Dr. Theol., Professor of Dogmatic Theology in the University of Marburg.

Translated from the Second thoroughly Revised Edition, with Special
Annotations by the Author, by J. SANDYS STANVON, M.A.

"It will be seen from what has been said that this book is a very important
one. . . . The translation is also exceedingly well done."—*Critical Review*.

Recently Published. Demy 8vo, Cloth. 6s. 6d.

AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF THE Literature of the Old Testament.

With Chronological Tables for the History of the Israelites, and other
aids to the Explanation of the Old Testament.

BY E. KAUTZSCH,

Professor of Theology at the University of Halle.

Reprinted from the "Supplements" to the translation of the
Old Testament edited by the Author.

Translated by JOHN TAYLOR, D.Lit., M.A.

"Dr. Taylor has rendered a great service to the English readers by his
excellent translation of this important work."—*British Weekly*.

"I venture to give the strongest recommendation to an excellent work by
a German specialist, which gives in a brief compass the main results of
criticism according to the average opinion of scholars."—Rev. Prof. T. K.
CHEYNE, in the *Church Gazette*.

Recently Published. Demy 8vo, Cloth. 4s. 6d.

Doctrine and Principles:

Popular Lectures on Primary Questions.

BY REV. C. E. BEEBY, B.D.

Author of "Creed and Life."

"The tone of the book is excellent, and its learning praiseworthy."—
Expository Times.

"Without pretending to decide upon all the profound and delicate
questions at issue, we think that Mr. Beeby's work is a very able and
singularly manly contribution towards their progressive settlement. . . .
We hope these lectures will be widely read."—*Daily Chronicle*.

"While scholarly in tone the book is admirably simple in expression."—
Bookman.

"Able and stimulating."—*Outlook*.

WILLIAMS & NORGATE,

14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON, W.C.



FOURTEEN DAY USE
RETURN TO DESK FROM WHICH BORROWED

This book is due on the last date stamped below, or
on the date to which renewed.

Renewed books are subject to immediate recall.

29 Oct 75 GB

FOURTEEN DAY USE

AUG 31 1980

U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C004971175



