

The Bulletin

—of the—

WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

VOLUME IV.

FEBRUARY, 1912

No. 3.

Back to Christ

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“The movement or tendency described by the phrase ‘Back to Christ’, both in its extent and in its far-reaching consequences for religious thought, justifies us in regarding it as the most important event of the last half century”. This is a statement of a writer in Hasting’s “Dictionary of Christ and the Gospel”. He is speaking of a movement in Christian doctrine only. The phrase is used by others with a different meaning, as in ethical and sociological teaching. They hold that Christ emphasized ethical and sociological principles, and that Christian society has substituted metaphysical doctrine and become aristocratic and unsocial in sympathy and unethical in conduct. Hence the slogan of reform is “Back to Christ”. Upon this phase of the subject we cannot now enter. The limits of this article confine us to a general account of the doctrinal movement, with a brief statement of some of its dangers and some of its benefits.

The movement has received some impulse at different times from both skeptical and spiritual forces. In recent years the floodgates of free thought have been opened into the fields

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ture, "because the heretics had their own sacred books, or because they claimed the right to reject any Christian books that did not agree with their own teachings, the Church was compelled to emphasize the sacredness and consequent authority of the writings it had accepted". "The Spirit of God working in the Church . . . was the real agent in the formation of the Canon".

The Text of the Gospels is treated in two chapters. Under the heading *Manuscripts*, the author carefully explains the terms ostraca, papyri, parchments, and codices. Five of the principal codices are described. The Syrian, Alexandrian, Western and Neutral groups of manuscripts are discussed. The value of the versions and the writings of the Fathers in helping us to determine the correct text is indicated. The chapter closes with a few examples of "the chief changes in the text of the Gospels adopted by the best textual critics of today."

The External and Internal evidence for determining the Dates of the Gospels is next given. This chapter presents both methods and results.

The next three chapters present the Synoptic Problem, Johanne Problem, and characteristics of the separate Gospels in a very clear manner.

The true instinct of the teacher is seen in the last two chapters. After all the details of criticism presented in the preceding chapters, the author presents convincing reasons for believing the Gospels to be trustworthy. The final chapter on the Use of the Gospels classifies the different schools of modern critics and shows which are safe and which are dangerous and why. It draws the line clearly between constructive and destructive criticism, and makes it possible for each reader to decide such matters for himself.

All in all, the book will be found not only valuable as a textbook for college classes, but very instructive and interesting to the general reader, who has a real desire to know the facts about the four Gospels and the Life of Christ.

University of Wooster.

J. Milton Vance.

The Ideal of Jesus, by William Newton Clarke, D. D. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1911. 8vo. pp 329. \$1.50 net.

Dr. Clarke, author of the widely read *Outline of Christian Theology*, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, etc., has chosen a title for his latest work which is fairly indicative of its content. The book is designed to present in broad outline the ideal of life which Jesus strove to inspire in the hearts of his followers.

Dr. Clarke's very liberal theological standpoint is too well known to need comment. No one who reads this book will be disposed to deny that it has furnished an admirable vantage ground from which to view large portions of the teachings of the Master.

The ideal of Jesus, as Dr. Clarke conceives it, is not to be sought as if it were embodied and realized in some definite institution or set of facts or ideas that correspond entirely to the Master's original gift. It is to be found in Jesus' conception of what life ought to be and of what he supremely desired that life might become—life rightly allied to the powers above and rightly exercised upon the plane of its being; life personal, expressed in all such character and conduct as are worthiest of men; and life social, wrought out in all such

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spirit and service as make the best and most successful world. Since Jesus nowhere set forth this ideal systematically but everywhere lived it himself, exhibited it in its particular application to each case as it presented itself in his ministry, and commented upon its various aspects from time to time as his hearers were able to comprehend them, the only method by which we can depict this ideal for ourselves is to recreate it by an inductive study of the pertinent material in the Gospels. Only the Synoptic Gospels are used, for the teachings of Christ as presented in the Fourth Gospel are held to have been too thoroughly recast in the mind of the author of that Gospel to be available for our present purpose. The synoptic material itself, Dr. Clarke handles freely. He observes that where the strictest criticism might deprive Jesus of some saying attributed to him, the saying may still be valuable in our study as reflecting the opinion of a disciple who had been near to the mind of the Master. On the other hand, some critically impregnable sayings of Jesus appear to be contradictory to the general drift of his teachings elsewhere upon the same theme. These he simply omits from present consideration.

Turning now to the body of the work, we find that our author has followed the method of grouping this material topically without regard to its chronological position or emergence in Christ's utterance. Within the narrow limits of this review we can only enumerate the topics which are used as chapter headings in the book:—The Picture of the High Aim, The Kingdom of God, Righteousness, The Twofold Law of Love, The Filial Life, Deliverance from Evil, Liberty, Human Value, Justice, Wealth, Christianity, The Church, and Society.

A short time ago, Dr. Stalker in his "Ethic of Jesus" interpreted practically the same material that Dr. Clarke has here utilized. Many of the topics discussed are the same, but his standpoint was individualistic and evangelical and his interests were chiefly religious and only secondarily ethical. In Dr. Clarke's book the theological standpoint is anything but evangelical, the teaching is distinctly social, and the emphasis is placed on what is ethical although what is religious is inseparably associated with it.

As an illustration of Dr. Clarke's treatment of these themes, let us follow him through one of these chapters. I select, almost at random, the one entitled Liberty. He begins by pointing out the fact that while we do not know that Christ ever used the word Liberty, he did set forth the thing, and in such a way as to make it a vital and imperishable part of his teaching. In his day, legalism was the only orthodoxy. It demanded a careful conformity to the minute externals of the law, a ceremonial obedience which ruled out independent judgment and free personal action. It obscured, if it did not destroy, all real spiritual communion between God and man. Jesus lived under this system and understood it well but legalism was altogether strange to his lips and thought. There is no record that for himself he ever performed any act of ceremonial obedience or paid any form of legal deference to the law. He proclaimed a genuine personal liberty and openly set his friends at work in making use of it. He never called it liberty or formulated any doctrine of it, but liberty it was and nothing else. A brief but luminous examination of the question asked Jesus by the Pharisees and certain disciples of John about fasting, and his answer, leads to this conclusion, heretical and revolutionary, but true and full of the spirit of freedom, "If a man feels that he must fast, he may fast, but it becomes him to

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have a good reason for it". Again, an examination of Jesus' teaching when questioned concerning ceremonial cleansings and defilements shows how freely he exercised his moral judgment upon even ancient law written in the Scriptures, and leads up to the statement that defilement is inherent in no food, but its source is to be found in living evil in the heart. God is not mindful of the thousand and one externals but only of that which is spiritual and ethical. From another point of view, Jesus taught the lesson of liberty when he opened to his followers a noble freedom with reference to the use which they should make of the Sabbath Day. Religious institutions have their true place as servants of man. The substance of his teaching on the law was that moral value alone can give it permanent validity. Men must in any given case freely act upon their own judgment of good and evil. The chapter closes pointing out the general bearing of all these various declarations. They establish one lordship over man's spirit—that of God. They do away with all other and lesser authorities. The Soul's loyalty to God is the key of its freedom from the domination of man. True liberty is grounded in the last analysis in religion.

No brief review can do justice to the book. As our thoughts wander back over its contents, chapter after chapter seems to call for special mention. Nothing, for instance, could be finer than the sane and judicial consideration of the vexed question of Christ's attitude toward wealth. Again the chapter on the Church is a most satisfactory presentation in brief compass of what a church really ought to be. The origin of the Christian Church, its development, the features which may properly be deemed essential to it, and the points in which our churches fall short of Jesus' ideal are all admirably treated. We could mention others but the book itself must be read to be appreciated. Its many excellencies make it amply worth reading. It is written in Professor Clarke's bright, clear, delightfully readable style. There is not a single technical theological term in it. From first to last its English is the English of ordinary cultivated use. The quotations from Scripture are particularly well handled, being sufficiently distinguished from the comment by some clear indication, and yet at the same time being made an integral part of the text of the chapter, thus obviating the necessity of foot-notes. We do not know whether it will be considered an advantage or a detriment by most readers that there is not a single chapter or verse reference. But we are sure that for many people the book would have been more available for ready reference if it had been furnished with an index of some kind—if not of subjects, at least of texts upon which comment was made.

As we are closing this review, word comes of the death of its honored author. We are inclined to think that his writings were more widely read the world over than those of any other American theologian—perhaps than any other writer in English on systematic theology. In this day of the neglect of theology, that a book dealing with that subject should have reached its nineteenth edition, as is the case with Dr. Clarke's Outline, is of itself a tribute to his genius as an author, unique in his generation. In many a manse in Scotland this book is the only recent contribution to theology from this side of the water. Men like Dr. Clifford quote it. And we remember that Dr. Agar Beet in the introduction to his own work on theology had this to say, "Of modern manuals of theology the most able and outspoken and stimulating is Dr. W. N. Clarke's 'Outline of Theol-

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ogy' ". Two Americans, and only two, were mentioned by Hermann in his lectures during a summer semester several years ago. One was Professor Clarke, the other was William James. The news of his death will therefore be felt as a loss by a very wide circle, and we close the book we have just reviewed with a deep feeling of sorrow that it is the last we shall have from an author so universally read and esteemed.

John W. Christie, '07.

The Five Great Philosophies of Life. By William De Witt Hyde, President of Bowdoin College. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1911. pp. X+296. \$1.50 net.

This is the second edition of a work originally published in 1904 as the Haverford Lectures and with the title, "From Epicurus to Christ: A Study in the Principles of Personality". The author justifies the new edition under a new title on the ground that "From Epicurus to Christ" had an "antiquarian flavor" and suggested an air of finality contrary to the object of the book which was intended as an "approach to present day solutions of the fundamental problems of life". The last chapter on "The Christian Spirit" is re-written and considerably enlarged.

The book contains five chapters with the titles, "The Epicurean Pursuit of Pleasure", "Stoic Control by Law", "The Platonic Subordination of Lower to Higher", "The Aristotelian Sense of Proportion", and "The Christian Spirit of Life". These topics are discussed from the standpoint of practical rather than theoretical ethics. In the treatment of the defects of Epicureanism (pp. 36ff), for example, little or no use is made of the stock criticisms of Hedonism furnished by modern psychology. The writer's plan is to let "the masters of these sane and wholesome principles of personality talk to us in their own words; with just enough of comment and interpretation to bring to us their points of view, and make us welcome their friendly assistance in the philosophical guidance of life" (p. vi). We are given these points of view from different angles. In the chapter on Hedonism we have quotations from Epicurus, Horace, Spencer, Omar Khayyam, "Our American Pagan, Walt Whitman", as well as from the "confessions of an Epicurean heretic", John Stewart Mill. In the chapter on Stoicism extracts are given from Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Maeterlinck, and Kant. Of particular interest and value is the author's sympathetic interpretation of the good in each philosophy. One feels after reading the chapter on Epicureanism that the writer might have made a good Epicurean himself, though the philosophy of Aristotle is doubtless the one that best represents his ethical point of view.

The presentation of Jesus' philosophy of life, to which the last seventy-five pages of the book are devoted, is singularly colorless and uninteresting as contrasted with the chapters that have preceded. The excuse for re-writing this chapter is that "while the faith of the world has found in Jesus much more than a philosophy of life, in its quest for greater things it has almost overlooked that" (p. vi). It may be seriously doubted whether Jesus has any philosophy of life apart from these "greater things". The Love that is placed by the writer at the core of Jesus' philosophy cannot be measured in terms of the social sanctions that govern the ethics of Plato