

The Deity of Christ

ROBERT E. SPEER

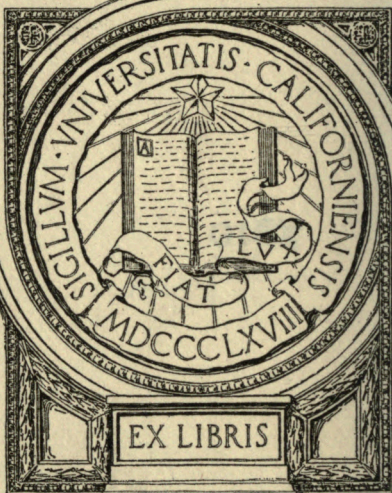
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The Deity of Christ

An Address delivered at Northfield
With Three Supplementary Notes

By
ROBERT E. SPEER

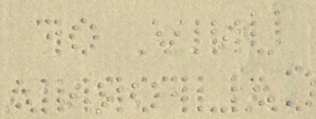
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CHRISTIANITY is the only one of the great religions of the world which calls itself by the name of its founder. Other great religions are named after their founders by us. They are not so named by their own adherents. This is not a mere accident; it is a fact of the deepest significance. To be sure, the name Christian was given originally by enemies but it was given by them because from without they had already discerned the essential and distinguishing character of the new religion, and had been impressed by the inseparable connection which, they saw, existed between it and its founder Jesus Christ. The disciples of the new religion presently accepted the name as the most appropriate name possible for them and their faith. They themselves were aware that the relationship in which they stood to Jesus Christ was the central and funda-

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mental thing in their religion. So long as He had been on earth their religion had consisted in personally following Him, in finding their fellowship in His company, in drawing their nourishment from His words, and in resting their hearts on the peace and quiet which they found with Him. And after He was gone they perceived that their religion consisted in a relationship to Him of a far more vital and wonderful kind than they had understood while He was here. For now they realized that their religion did not consist in the mere memory of a good man who was gone, in the effort to recall the things that He had said, and to comfort their hearts with recollections of joyful hours which they had had with Him in the days of His flesh. They realized that their religion consisted in a living relationship to Him, as still a living person with them, which their faith was not a recollection of what Jesus had taught, or the mere memory of a lovely human character, but a living relationship to an abiding, supernatural Person.

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This is the fundamental thing in Christianity. The name "Christian" is only a sign of that which is most radical and essential in its character. The main problem of Christianity is this of Jesus Christ: Who was He, and what are we to think of Him? We cannot do any thinking about Christianity at all that is direct or adequate without coming at once to think of the problem of the person of Jesus Christ, who stands at the heart of His religion, without whom the Christian religion is not the religion of Christ.

I know there are many voices to-day which tell us that this is not necessary. I was in a gathering a little while ago made up largely of college presidents and professors, in which the subject under discussion was the evangelical basis of the Young Men's Christian Association in our colleges and universities. It was a little company of fifteen or twenty men. One of the college presidents in the group, a minister in an evangelical church, expressed it as his own opinion that the question of the divinity of Jesus Christ

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was a matter of metaphysics about which we need not trouble ourselves and about which we had no right to burden the minds and consciences of the young men and women in our colleges and universities. We certainly had no right, he felt, to make a dividing intellectual issue of it.

Now if it is meant that the question of the deity of Christ is a matter of metaphysics in the sense that it lies beyond merely physical and material things, of course it is indeed a matter of metaphysics. But everything, for that matter, of any significance is metaphysical: friendship and love and truth and beauty and goodness are all metaphysical also. Everything that is worth while, everything that is real, all those unseen things that are the eternal things, are also metaphysical. If that was what the speaker meant, of course he was right. Christ's divinity also is metaphysical. But then, also, if that was what he meant he was wrong. Because these are the only things that it is really worth our while to think about at all. Indeed, you cannot do any thinking which is not meta-

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physical in that sense. But if he meant that the deity of Christ was metaphysical in the sense that it was impractical, that it went out into the speculative regions where life is not lived, then he was utterly and absolutely wrong ; for nothing can be more real, more practical, more near, more fundamental for every one of us than the question of what we are to think and what we are to do with the person of Jesus Christ, who declared Himself to be, and is believed by the Church to be, the very Son of the living God.

We simply must think about that problem. We must think about it, for one thing, because Christ can have no meaning for feeling unless He has a meaning also for thought. As mature beings we cannot attach a feeling value to anything to which we cannot attach a thought value. That song we were joining in a moment ago, "More Love to Thee, O Christ," has no meaning whatever except the meaning derived from the thought value we attach to Jesus Christ. If you think of Christ merely as you would think

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of Julius Cæsar, then the song has no more significance than if we were singing "More love to thee, O Julius Cæsar." All the meaning springs from the thought value we put upon Jesus Christ. Those men and women who tell us to-day that we can keep Christ for religious values even when we have lost Christ in His thought value are preaching an absolutely fallacious and meaningless gospel; for Christ will stay with us in our religious life, He will stay with us as an adequate living value in our hearts only so long as we give Him His rightful place in our thoughts about Him and His person.

In the second place, we have to think about Christ and who He was because we are thinking beings, and wherever we go we have to take our minds along with us. I cannot go any place and leave my mind behind me. I cannot carry my body or my emotions into a certain attitude towards Christ without also carrying my rational processes along with me. I cannot take myself apart. I am a unit. I can only feel about those things that I think about

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and will about. It is impossible for me to have any relationship to Jesus Christ whatever except as I think about Christ and arrange my mind with reference to Him. It is intellectually maudlin and foolish to say "Christian" and "Christianity" unless we mean something by those words. What do we mean?

In the third place, we have got to think about Christ because He is a fact. You cannot get rid of a fact by saying "I will not think about it." You look back across the years and there stands Jesus Christ demanding that you reckon with Him, that you give Him His place, that you think about Him, and relate Him to all the other facts that you know. Jesus Christ is not a doctrine; Jesus Christ is not a theory or a myth; Jesus Christ is not a mere imagination of men of our day; Jesus Christ is a great fact in history and in the life of men; and you and I are bound to think about that fact, to account for it and value it, to determine what the quality of that fact is, what the relations of that fact are to our present life to-day, and to all the life of humanity.

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And once more, we have to think about this question because it was the only question that interested Jesus Christ. So many times we are told to-day that it does not matter what men *think*, that it only matters what men *do*. It is a wonderful contrast to turn back to the Gospels and find Jesus reversing this emphasis. What men thought was what interested Him. He had no interest in a man's clothes; he had a secondary interest in a man's external acts. What did interest Him was what men had inside their hearts, because from within flowed all those great forces that were to determine the outer life. And so His great question, as He went up and down the world mingling with men, was the simple question, "What do you think about Me? Who am I?"

So, if we have never done any clear, consecutive thinking about Jesus Christ, we ought to begin to do that thinking now. There will come a time in our lives when we will have to do it. We must reckon with Jesus Christ and determine for ourselves whose Son we believe Him

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to be, and what conviction regarding His person we are to hold. Well would it be for us if to-day we should go straight home to what is not only the fundamental problem of Christianity but the very bottom-most issue of our human life and face for ourselves that old question: Who is Jesus Christ? What do we believe Him to be? Was He in any unique sense the one Son of the Living God? And I want to state in the simplest way I can the grounds for my own personal faith in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. I believe, first of all, in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ because of His *character*; for it seems to me, in the great language of Horace Bushnell, that "the character of Jesus forbids His possible classification with men." The argument of the whole volume, "Nature and the Supernatural," is concentrated by Bushnell, in that one chapter, "The Character of Jesus Forbidding His Possible Classification with Men." For Christ was such a Man that He could not have been a mere man. He was a Man so great, so perfect,

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that He must have been more than just a man. Now we can put the matter in a very summary fashion at this point. If our Lord was only a man, if His character was merely human, then Bowdoin, Yale, Bryn Mawr, and Vassar ought to be turning out better men and women than He was. If our Lord was only a man, it is strange that the nineteenth century cannot produce a better one. He was born in an obscure and contemptible province. He grew up in no cultured and refined community. He was the Child of a poor peasant's home, of a subject race. Yet He rises sheer above all mankind, the one commanding moral character of humanity. Now, if Jesus was all that just as a mere man, the world should long ago have advanced beyond Him.

It would not be so if it were a question of intellectual genius, because we all realize that intellectual genius is a matter of endowment and gift, and a man cannot be held responsible for not being as able a man intellectually as another. But we all feel that each of us can be held responsible

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for not being as good a man as any other man. We know that moral character is a duty of each one of us, and there is nothing in perfect moral goodness which our own conscience does not tell us we are bound ourselves to attain. And so I challenge you who believe that Jesus Christ was merely a man, to reconcile that belief with the fact that you are not a better character than He was. With nineteen hundred years of His influence upon the world, with advantages possessed by us such as He never dreamed of in His day, if Christ's character was purely human, it ought long ago to have been surpassed and there ought to be in the world to-day many men and women who are superior in their character to Him.

This is a crude, though I think proper dilemma. If Christ was only a man we are bound to surpass Him. If He was more than a man, we are bound to obey Him. I do not mean to let the point go merely with this general statement, however. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and proved to be such by the

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elements of character in Him not to be found in men.

(1) First of all, there was the supernaturalness of His claims. "I am come that ye might have life." "I am the light of the world." "I am not come to condemn, but to save the world." "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Now a man cannot talk that way. If you should say in reply that the words I have quoted are from the Gospel of John, and that they do not actually represent what Jesus said but only what John afterwards put into His lips, I should demur; but without stopping to do so, I would say now, Very well, turn to the Gospel of Matthew and find the passage which criticism still leaves to us, in which Christ says just as much as He says anywhere in the Gospel of John: "All things have been given unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, save the Father; and no man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him. Come unto Me, all ye that labour

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and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." There is supernatural claim here just such as you will find in the deepest of our Lord's alleged utterances in the Gospel of John. Or, turn to the Sermon on the Mount. It is full of unique self-assertion. Who is this young man who stands on the shores of the Galilean Sea and sets aside the doctrines of the fathers? "Ye have heard it said so and so, but *I say unto you*;" and who closes His discourse with the declaration, "Many will say unto Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not cast out devils in Thy name? and I will say unto them, I never knew you, depart from Me." Who is this who thus sets Himself up as the very touchstone of human life in the day of judgment?

Our Lord by His claims set Himself in a class absolutely apart from men. Now He either made these claims or He did not make them. If He did not make them, then we know nothing whatever about His

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life, and what took place in the past, for the evidence of the fact that Christ made these claims is as good as any historical evidence that we possess. If He did make these claims, they were either true or false. If they were false, then Christ instead of being a man of high character, as all men have recognized Him to be, was a mere falsifier, an impostor. But if they were true, then He was as He claimed to be, the Son of God.

(2) Observe further, not only did Jesus put forth supernatural claims, but those claims were attested by our Lord's own consciousness. Let any of us set ourselves up to be divine and see how quickly we will fall down to the earth from any such pinnacle. Our own deeds would belie us and our own consciousness break down under the palpable falsehood. In Acre, Syria, the head of the Behais, Abbas Effendi, has actually claimed to be God the Father incarnate on earth. But he simply could not carry it through. He could not bear himself godlikely. But we look on the outer and even more

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on the inner life of Christ. It actually sustained the tremendous, world-upheaving claims that He put forth to be the unique, supernatural Son of the living God. Men are turning now as never before to the study of Christ's consciousness, the most wonderful problem in human history, and they are finding in the inner thought of Christ and the inner life of Christ, in the integrity of it, the way in which He was able to carry through to the end these tremendous claims of His, a new argument for the truth and reality of these claims. How clearly it shone out at the last when hanging upon the cross, with the two thieves on either side of Him! He died like the God He had claimed to be, so that the hard-hearted centurion, who stood and watched Him die, said to himself, "Well, I have been by many a dying man, but I never saw one who died like this. Truly this man was the Son of God." But the manner of His death only consummated the sustained sincerity of His life. I believe in the deity of Christ on the score of His character not only because He put

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forth claims to be supernaturally unique, but because His own inner spiritual experiences supported and vindicated these claims.

(3) And because of the universality and eternity of His character, I believe in the deity of Jesus Christ. Of course He had to be born in a given age, among a given people, and He was born away back in the first century and in the Jewish race. It was impossible that there should be an incarnation without its being somewhere and somewhen. But the wonderful thing is, that though Christ came in a given age and in a given race He transcends that age and that race and is felt by every race and every age to be its ideal and its Lord, the satisfaction of all its spiritual needs. We see this aspect of His character illustrated in the universality and eternity of the sympathies that find expression in His parables. Some of you have seen, perhaps, a little book of illustrations of the parables that appeared a short while ago. They were by a modern artist. He had taken eight or ten of the parables out of

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their old Oriental setting and given them a modern setting. One of them was a picture of a girl sitting in a restaurant with wine glasses on the table before her. Another girl, a Salvation Army lass, was coming through with her tambourine, collecting gifts. Beneath were the words: "Five of them were wise, and five of them were foolish." Another was the picture of the Pharisee and the publican. The poor man was sitting in ragged clothes in the last pew of the church, and the wealthy man, standing in his self-contentment and power, was taking the collection and holding the plate at a distance for this poor man to put his coin in. Another was the picture of the man with the talents. A young man sat alone at his club, with bowed head, while round about him the air was filled with figures of others who had toiled, while the opportunities of his life had been lost and thrown away; and beneath was the simple verse taken from our Lord's parable of the talents: "And he went and hid his talent in a napkin and buried it in the ground." These parables

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come driving right home into the heart of our modern life as though they had been spoken to-day. And these parables of our Lord's, spoken nineteen hundred years ago, cast first of all in His native setting in the East, but always and everywhere alive, are only typical of the universality and eternity of His living sympathies. He is the world's still distant ethical ideal. He is still the friend of all. The first century Jew is the whole world's and all the centuries' Saviour.

(4) And from the perfect balance of His character I believe that Jesus Christ is the Divine Son of God. Every one has some of the characteristics of Christ, but no one has all of them. We develop one good quality at the expense or the atrophy or the stricture of some other quality. Our Lord bound up in Himself all the different qualities of the perfect human character as no other man has ever done.

(5) But not to prolong an analysis of His character unduly, think of only one other outstanding fact in it. I mean the fact of His sinlessness. No other great

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teacher ever dared to utter Jesus' challenge: "Which of you convinceth Me of sin." No one has thought of claiming sinlessness for other great religious teachers. In none of the sacred books of any other religion is its founder represented as a sinless man. The very conception of a sinless character was never invented by anybody. It only came to men's minds as they saw it worked forth in the character of Jesus of Nazareth. There is marvellous significance in this fact. He was the holiest man that ever lived. Everybody looks back upon Him as the most wonderfully perfect character. And He was the one Man who was never penitent, who never asked God to forgive Him for anything, who walked right through life unrepentant, without ever being aware that He had done or thought anything wrong. "Father, forgive them," He prayed, but never "Father, forgive Me." Find a single great human character whose goodness does not rest on a sense of utter personal unworthiness, whose goodness does not spring from the deep realization of having

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been forgiven much by the great and loving God. But here is Jesus of Nazareth, the one character to whom we all look back as the best of men, absolutely impenitent, and He died impenitent because there was nothing in His life for which He needed to ask forgiveness. If you can believe that this character was merely human, then you are a very credulous soul. To believe that this character was merely human is a belief more wonderful far, involving more strain to human faith, than the simple conviction that we can account for the character of Christ by believing Him to be what He claimed to be ; namely, the Son of the Living God.

II. In the second place, I believe in the deity of Christ because of His teaching ; not only because of the form and authority of His teaching—though that was wonderful enough to impress in the deepest way the imagination of those who heard Him—for He taught, as Matthew recorded in comment on the Sermon on the Mount, as one having authority and not as the Scribes. “This man spake,” said those sent by the

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Sanhedrin to arrest Him, "as never man spake." But I am thinking now not of the form and the power of His teaching, but of the substance of it. I believe the substance of Christ's teaching sets Him off absolutely from the class of mere human teachers.

(1) First of all, consider His teaching regarding God. Where did He find out what He knew about God? He taught things about God which the world never knew before, and which the world had not been able to discover for itself. To-day, as a matter of fact, almost the whole content of our knowledge of God is due to the teaching, the life, and the example of Jesus Christ. There is something to be learned about God from the heavens and the world round about us. But in the case of people who deny the divinity of Christ and who say they believe in God, that God in whom they believe is the God about whom they would know little or nothing if Jesus Christ had not come and revealed Him by what He was, as well as by what He said. You cannot reveal God by words; you cannot bring to men an idea

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entirely outside their experience simply by talking to them in words ; you have got to show it to them in life. Christ could never have revealed God by a mere doctrine. He could not by any possibility have broken open the shell of man's limited notions of God and expanded these notions to the great realities to which Christ did expand them by merely proclaiming intellectual opinions concerning God. You can only give men a new idea of God by showing it to them in life. This is the way you do it to-day. There is no other way. It is what Christ did nineteen hundred years ago,—not by talking about this ideal, but by Himself being this God in front of their eyes.

And here we come upon what it seems to me is the saddest irony of all human history ; that Jesus Christ Himself has created the difficulty in the way of men's faith in His deity. You ask men why they do not believe in the incarnation to-day, and they tell you that they cannot believe that their God, so spiritual, so high, could be brought down into humanity. Where

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did they get that God so spiritual and so high? Why, out of the God who was incarnate in humanity. The mere fact of this larger idea of God which Christ by the incarnation gave is now made by many men the reason why they will not believe in Christ and the incarnation through which alone that idea of God ever could have come to us. You and I would not have such difficulty in believing in Christ as God, if Christ had not been God. It was the very fact that Christ was God that gave us these notions of God that have created, I will not say wholly, but in large part, the difficulties in the way of our faith in the incarnation. Surely the man who will sit down and contemplate the revelation of God in Christ and think all the implications of the situation through will at last say to himself exactly what Thomas said when his eyes at last were opened, "My Lord and my God."

(2) And I believe in the deity of Christ not only because of His teaching about God but also because of His teaching about man. He told us things about man that

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we never knew before, that are not known in the world to-day except where the influence of Christ's life has reached, bringing them to man. It was only Christ who told man what a good man may be and must be, who gave man his ideal of his own duty and destiny and possibility of character. It was only Christ who came near to man and assured him of the great spiritual possibility and duty of unity with his fellows, that has become one of the great words of our time, but of which in reality we have come to conceive only through the influence of Jesus Christ. A German ethnologist once said that the deepest thing ever uttered by Saint Paul is that word of his about there being in Jesus Christ "neither male nor female, Greek nor barbarian, bond nor free." These were the three great lines of cleavage that cursed the world before Christ, that curse the world everywhere now outside of Christ. That curse was obliterated by Christ's new revelation to man of his relation to his brother.

(3) I believe also in the deity of Christ

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not only on the ground of His teaching about God and man but also because of His ethical teaching. We have conceded far too much in the study of comparative ethics to the non-Christian religions. Not only are the non-Christian religions destitute of our Lord's great teaching about God and man, but they do not have in them those fundamental moral principles which Christ brought into the world, and over which He poured a whole flood of illuminating glory from God. Take Christ's great ethical conceptions, such as truth and duty and purity and love and righteousness, and where can you find in any of the non-Christian religions any great moral conceptions corresponding to, or that anywhere approach the great moral ideas which Jesus Christ brought into the world and which He both taught and lived. We can rest our argument for the deity of Christ, for His absolute separateness from man, on the ground of the magnitude and uniqueness of His contribution to the moral life alone. On God and man and morals He has spoken the last word. "The attempt to add to or

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improve on the teaching of Christ," Lord Avebury recognizes, "seems vain and even arrogant." On the ground, accordingly, not only of what He was, but also of what He taught, I believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

III. In the third place, not alone on the ground of His character and doctrine, but on the ground of the acts which He did while here on earth, I believe in the deity of Christ. I am not speaking now of His miracles on nature, though I have no trouble with them; they are exactly the things I believe God incarnate in human flesh would do. But I pass them by to speak about what He did on human life. There is the miracle of His influence on the twelve apostles. He took those men—barring, of course, the one who failed Him—ignorant, unlettered, with no early advantages, fishermen many of them, adult men when He took them under His influence, and He made these hard men the finest gentlemen of His time. He sent out these eleven ignorant, uninfluential men to shake the world, He made them the foun-

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dations on which He built His indestructible kingdom. Where could you find a greater miracle than that? He made other men and women also, and His work on life was crowned at the last by the outstanding miracle of His own resurrection. I believe there is no fact in history better attested than our Lord's resurrection. It rests upon evidences stronger than any other evidences that we have of any other event, as strong as the evidence we have for what took place on the fourth of July, 1776. And I believe that we may rest as securely on the evidences of the resurrection as we may on the evidences that there was ever a Declaration of Independence. You say, we have it now. I say, we have a living Christ now. You say, men saw it signed. I say, men saw Him rise. You say there is a nation living whose existence testifies to the Declaration of Independence. I say, there is a kingdom of Christ in existence that bears witness to the fact that something lifted it out of the death in which it lay when He hung upon His cross. It was saved by nothing less than His

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rising again from the dead. Without a risen Christ there is no adequate explanation of the resurrection of Christianity. You say the historic evidence does not satisfy every one. I say, it convinces all who would be convinced if they saw Him rise with their own eyes. Because of what He did while here upon the earth, I believe Him to be the Son of God.

IV. Further, I believe in the deity of Christ because of His posthumous influence. He is doing in the world still things just as wonderful as anything He did in the world nineteen hundred years ago. Napoleon turned once at St. Helena to Count Montholon with the inquiry, "Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was?" The question was declined, and Napoleon proceeded, "Well, then, I will tell you. Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and I have founded great empires, but upon what did these creations of our genius depend? Upon force! Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him. . . . I think I understand something of human

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nature, and I tell you all these were men and I am a man. None else is like Him. Jesus Christ was more than a man. . . . I have inspired multitudes with such a devotion that they would have died for me, . . . but to do this it was necessary that I should be visibly present, with the electric influences of my looks, of my words, of my voice. When I saw men and spoke to them I lighted up the flames of self-devotion in their hearts. . . . Christ alone has succeeded in so raising the mind of man towards the unseen that it becomes insensible to the barriers of time and space. Across a chasm of eighteen hundred years Jesus Christ makes a demand which is, above all others, difficult to satisfy. He asks for that which a philosopher may often seek in vain at the hands of his friends, or a father of his children, or a bride of her spouse, or a man of his brother. He asks for the human heart. He will have it entirely to Himself. He demands it unconditionally, and forthwith His demand is granted. Wonderful! In defiance of time and space, the soul of

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man with all its powers becomes an annexation to the empire of Christ. All who sincerely believe in Him experience that remarkable supernatural love towards Him. This phenomenon is unaccountable; it is altogether beyond the scope of man's creative powers. Time, the great destroyer, is powerless to extinguish the sacred flame; time can neither exhaust its strength nor put a limit to its range. This it is which strikes me most. I have often thought of it. This it is which proves to me quite conclusively the divinity of Jesus Christ."

We see to-day in the world a work being done that no man could do. Julius Cæsar is not raising dead men to-day. Martin Luther is not taking men dead in trespasses and sins and washing them white as the very snows, redeeming them to new and powerful life. Christ is doing that to-day. He is taking the roué and the debauchee out of the gutter, and He is making them pure and sending them out with cleansed consciences to do the work of men in the world. He is taking

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the weakling, the man or woman with no strength of character, without enough strength of passion to go down into the gutter, and He moulds them to strength and usefulness. And He is redeeming good people, which is the most wonderful thing of all. He is taking the proud and the selfish and the pitiless, He is taking the rich who have everything and do not know that they are poor, the clothed who think they are clothed and do not know that they are naked,—Christ is taking them and revealing the realities of their own life to them and giving them the realities of His life. And what no man ever did—Christ is releasing men from the shame and guilt of sin as well as delivering them from its power. This work which we see Christ doing to-day in the lives of men is no human work. To-day, as of old, Christ is transforming being, doing the work of God on the life of man.

Christ is still, as He has always been, the great transformer of the life of the world. We cannot explain the influence with which Christ has wrought upon the

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life of the world on the theory of His merely naturalistic character. Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Mohammedanism by their results have proved that their founders were not divine. But Christ has been doing here a work only God could do. He has changed the world. He has reconstructed human society. He has created and sustained the highest moral life. His living principles have ordered all human progress. It is far more irrational to attribute these effects to inadequate causes than it is to say that they must have a cause adequate to produce them. They are the work of God; by the hand of God they must have been done. Those who have experienced them in their own souls know that it was by God in Christ that they were done.

V. And now, last of all, why is it that if we have grounds for belief in the deity of Christ such as these there are so many men and women who do not believe that Christ is the Son of God? Well, in the first place, some of them have never done any thinking about it. They have listened

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to what other people have said, and what the other people have said was only what they heard somebody else say. They themselves have never done any real, conscientious, consecutive thinking about the problem of Christ at all. Some of our want of faith in Christ simply springs from shallowness, superficiality, or utter neglect of any thinking about Christ.

In the second place, a great many have no adequate conception of the person of Christ simply because they have never studied the original documents. If you will saturate your mind and heart with the four Gospels for twelve months, if you will read them through, all four every week, and not only read them but dwell upon the character of Christ as it comes out there, letting your imagination play with the freedom of the Spirit of life upon that life of Christ, that word of Christ, that personality of Christ, you will come back twelve months from now with your faith in the deity of Christ as the Son of God absolutely unassailable.

In the third place, a great many do not

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believe in His deity simply because they do not know how absolutely the world needs God incarnate in the flesh. I have a dear friend, who says that he never realized how it must be that Christ was the Son of God until during his university course he went down to work in the county jail. Sunday after Sunday as he sat down among the prisoners in that jail, among men of darkened souls, men of rotted-out characters, men who were hopeless about this world and the world to come, men who were as dead as any man could ever be when his body was laid down in his grave, he realized as he had never realized before that, if there never had been an incarnation, by the very character of God there must be one; because it was necessary that there should come into the world somewhere and some time that great release of divine and transforming power without which the world in its death could never live. We believe it came nineteen hundred years ago once for all in Jesus of Nazareth.

And lastly, there are men and women

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who do not believe in the deity of Christ simply because they have never tried Him. The deity of Christ is not a mere doctrine or proposition. It is a living theory of being, and the way you test it is not alone to go back and examine all these evidences which we have been running over in this hasty and inadequate way. The way you test it is to try Christ whether He is what He claims to be. I suppose that many of you read in an issue of *The Sunday-School Times* last winter Prof. Edward Everett Hale's article on the change wrought in him by his experience of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. He had not grown up to believe in the deity of Christ—far otherwise. But he had done his thinking for himself, and at last he came one night in a little prayer-meeting in the city of Schenectady, where he lived, to the point where he made up his mind that the only way to find out was to experiment. He put Christ to the test and he found Him divinely true and truly divine. If what I have said here could only so far remove the intellectual difficulties which

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any of you may feel as to make it possible for you to put Christ to the test, you too would find Him true.

No one leaned on Him in vain when He was here; no one leans on Him in vain to-day. Would that we might see Him in the fullness of His glory as He is: Son of Man, indeed, Son of God as well; Son of Man because only so could God ever come near us and lay hold of our lives and assure us that His will for us was what we see in Christ; Son of God because only so could we ever get strength to rise into God. "Who say ye that I am?" was the question He asked Simon Peter by Cæsarea Philippi of old. "And who say ye that I am?" is the question He is asking of each of us here now. God grant that the same Father who revealed the truth to Simon Peter that day may enable us to behold the truth to-day, that we may answer as he answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That is what He is. Is He that to us?

Three Supplementary Notes

- I. ON CHRIST'S SELF-ASSERTION AND LOWLI-
NESS
- II. ON THE INADEQUACY OF THE UNITARIAN
VIEW
- III. PROFESSOR EDWARD EVERETT HALE'S EX-
PERIENCE

Note I

On Christ's Self-Assertion and Lowliness

THE late Richard Holt Hutton, Editor of *The Spectator*, in his essay on "Christian Evidences," speaks of the supernaturalness of Christ's foresight in perceiving that these extraordinary claims of His would be accepted by men and be found by them to be entirely consistent with His lowliness of soul. "That Christ should have understood the personal relation in which His immediate disciples would stand to Him," says Mr. Hutton, "was perhaps a mere instance of discernment such as, no doubt, many great men have shown. But that He should deliberately have demanded the same kind of attitude towards Himself from all future disciples, as He certainly did, and have gained what He asked in the very act, does seem to me one of the clearest marks of supernatural knowledge of the human heart which could be given. Nothing could be more hazardous than this emphasis laid by any human being—especially one who from the very first preaches lowliness of heart, and predicts the

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shortness of His life and the ignominious violence of His end—on Himself as the source of an enduring power, and the corner-stone of a divine kingdom. The necessity of loving Him, the perpetual fame of her who anointed Him for His burial, the grief that will be rightly felt for Him when He leaves the earth, the identification of men's duty to each other, even to 'the least of these, My brethren,' with their duty to Him,—all these are assumptions which run through the whole Gospel quite as strikingly as does the clear knowledge of the frailty of the human materials Christ has chosen, and of the supernatural character of the power by which He intended to vivify those means. Though His kingdom is to be the kingdom of which a little child is the type, the kingdom in which it is the 'meek' who are blessed, in which it is the 'poor in spirit' who are to be the rulers, yet in this He is only saying in other words that He is to be the life of it, since it is because He is 'meek and lowly in heart' that those who come to Him shall find rest to their souls. Whether you choose to say that it is in spite of this humility or because of this humility, yet in either case Christ proclaims Himself as the true object of love, and the permanent centre of power throughout the kingdom

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He proclaims. He not only declares that His departure will be the first legitimate cause of mourning to His followers—‘Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast’—but even to all others the love of Him is to predominate over all other love. ‘He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.’ Exclusion from His presence is everywhere treated as that outer darkness where there are weeping and gnashing of teeth. His vision of the spiritual future of untrue men is of men crying to Him, ‘Lord, Lord!’ and entreating Him to recognize them, to whom He will be compelled to say, ‘I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.’ He justifies with warmth all honour paid to Him personally; ‘The poor ye have always with you, but Me ye have not always;’ ‘Verily I say wherever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, which this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.’ Is not that most hazardous policy for any one not endowed with supernatural knowledge? Consider only what usually comes with self-

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assertion much less astounding than this in a human being, and yet what actually came of it in our Lord's case. The greatest of the world's teachers made light of themselves. Socrates treats his own death as of no moment. The Jewish prophets never think of treating their own careers as of any significance apart from the message they deliver. And as a rule in the world, when a man magnifies himself with gentleness and simplicity, we smile ; we may find him lovable, but there is always a little laughter mingled with our love. When he does it arrogantly or imperiously, we are revolted. In either case, the first generation which does not personally know him puts aside his pretensions as irrelevant, if not even fatal, to his greatness. But how was it with Christ? The first great follower who had never known Him in the flesh, St. Paul, takes up this very note as the key-note of the new world. To him, 'to live is Christ, to die is gain.' His heart is 'hid with Christ in God.' His cry is, 'Not I, but Christ that worketh in me.' He makes his whole religious philosophy turn on the teaching of our Lord, that He is the Vine, and His disciples the branches. In the land of the olive St. Paul adapts the image to the husbandry of the olive. Again, Christ is the Head,

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and men the members. And what is true of St. Paul is true of all those in whom the Christian faith has shown its highest genius in subsequent ages. These sayings of Christ as to Himself the centre of human affections and the light of human lives, instead of repelling men, interpret their own highest experience, and seem but the voice of an interior truth and the assurance of an imperishable joy."

Note II

On the Inadequacy of the Unitarian View

THERE are deeper considerations than these of which I have spoken for rejecting the Unitarian view of the person of Jesus Christ. Mr. Hutton sets these forth as the reason for Maurice's departure from the Unitarianism of his father. "What then," asks he in an essay on "Maurice and the Unitarians," "is meant by saying that Maurice's rejection of Unitarianism was the result of an ardent yearning after a centre of more perfect unity with others,—others generally differing from himself,—than he had ever been able to find in Unitarianism? It means just this, that Maurice regarded the self-revelation of God within whose eternal nature there is something more complex and more mysterious than merely lonely will and lonely power, as the best guarantee of which he could conceive for the mutual affections and the mutual forbearances of human society; and that he believed that such a gradual revelation was actually made to man in the Providential story of Jewish

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history as it culminated in the life and death and resurrection of Christ. . . . The reason he was dissatisfied with Unitarianism was simply this,—that Unitarianism, even as his father understood it, explained away a great part of the actual revelation made by God to man, and therefore attenuated its importance and the trust and hope with which it inspired him. It was not that he thought himself any holier than Unitarians. On the contrary, he thought many Unitarians holier than himself. But he held that the history contained in the Bible pointed to something much more mysterious and much more adequate to the need, and guilt, and passion of human nature, in the character of the divine life which it revealed, than anything which the Unitarians could find in that history, and therefore he held the Unitarian interpretation of that history to be a pallid one, which missed a good part of its true burden, and especially that part of it which is most essential to promote the true unity of men, and to add depth and intensity to the social relations. He admits in a letter to his father that Unitarianism is a much *simpler* account of the revelation given in the Bible than his own faith. But then, what it gains in simplicity it loses in adequacy, both as re-

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gards the actual language of Scripture, and also as regards that actual life in man in its appeal to which the language of Scripture is so potent. 'It is simpler, he says, 'to believe in a Great Spirit with the North American Indians, it is simpler to worship wood and stone; but what is the worth of simplicity, if it does not satisfy wants which we feel, if it does not lead us up to the truth which we desire?' The prophecies of the many predecessors of Christ were to Maurice unintelligible, if they represented nothing but the foreshadowings of a great 'exemplar,' and the life of Christ was still less intelligible as the mere life of that great exemplar. Either this long history, with its great catastrophe, meant something a great deal more expressive of that groaning and travailing of creation to which Paul referred, than the coming of an exemplar, or else a great deal less than the Unitarianism of the elder Maurice represented it to be. Maurice believed that it meant a great deal more, and not a great deal less, than his father and the Unitarians generally understood by it; that it meant the deliberate unfolding of the nature and life of God with such power and passion as to inspire in man a transforming trust and a uniting love. Maurice did not, of course, expect

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that any theological belief could be the centre of unity ; but he did expect that, if God were what he held that Scripture declared God to be, God Himself would be that centre of unity, because it showed God to be spending on the reconciliation of men to Himself the infinite stores of that divine passion of which we find our only adequate type in Gethsemane and on Calvary." The Incarnation, as Mr. Hutton, who himself had passed over from the Unitarian view to an absolute acceptance of the deity of Christ, argues elsewhere, in "The Incarnation and Principles of Evidence," is necessary to reveal to us, as I have already declared it did reveal to us, both the nature of God and the nature of man. We know neither God nor ourselves apart from the divine Christ. "I believe then," says Mr. Hutton, "that the revelation of God through an Eternal Son would realize to us, if it can be adequately believed, that the relation of God to us is only the manifestation of His life in itself, as it was or would be without us—'before all worlds,' as the theologians say; that 'before all worlds,' He was essentially the Father, essentially Love, essentially something infinitely more than Knowledge or Power, essentially communicating and receiving a living affec-

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tion, essentially all that the heart can desire. This is not, then, relative truth for us only, but the truth as it is in itself, the reality of Infinite Being. It is first proclaimed to us, indeed, to save us from sin, strengthen us in frailty, and lift us above ourselves; but it could not do this as it does, did we not know that God was, and His love was, and His Fatherly Life was, apart from man, and that it is a reality infinitely deeper and vaster than the existence of His human children.

“And it seems to me that to know God to be in His own essential nature a Father, not merely a Father to us, is a very great step towards exalting the whole tone of our actual life. We are apt to take the word ‘Father’ as metaphorical in its application to God—a metaphor derived from human parentage. But such a faith teaches us that the most sacred human relations, which we feel to be far deeper than any individual and solitary human attributes, are but faint shadows of realities eternally existing in the divine mind. It is customary in many philosophical schools to regard the ‘absoluteness’ of God, the absence of all relation to Him, as a part of His divine *privilege*. To me such a conception appears essentially atheistic, if really thought out, though, of course, prac-

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tically consistent with the most genuine and fervent piety. Judaism never did think it out without hovering on the very margin of the discovery which Christ made to us. That discovery was, as it seems to me, in one aspect of it—that aspect in which it could be made only through an Eternal Son of God—this :—‘Never try to think of Me,’ it seems to say, ‘as a mere Sovereign Will; never try to conceive My Infinitude as exclusive of all divine life, except My own; My infinitude is not exclusive but spiritual, and includes the fullness of all spiritual life, eternal love. Think of Me as always communicating life, and love, and power—as always receiving love. Never pronounce the word “God” without recognizing that diversity of reciprocal life which is the highest life—the reconciliation of life overflowing and returning, which cannot be without a perfect union of distinct personalities.’

“The Incarnation, if believable, seems to me to throw a strong light on the seeming contradictions of human nature—contradictions which are only brought out into sharper relief by a fuller knowledge of the Creator. The more we acknowledge the greatness of God, the more are we perplexed by contending thoughts as to the nature of man. The knowledge we have

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gained only humiliates and crushes us, or produces an artificial elation. We either crouch with the highest of purely Jewish minds, or become urbanely self-content with the Pelagian-Unitarian thinkers. We either cry, 'Woe is me! for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!' or we congratulate ourselves that we are, by inherent right, children of God, 'born good,' as Lord Palmerston said, and have no profound need, therefore, of purification at all. The humiliation alone, and the exaltation alone, are alike false to the facts within us and destructive of the true springs of human hope. The 'coal from the altar' which purified Isaiah's lips was a special deliverance from the abject humiliation of Oriental self-abasement—a kind of deliverance which is not universal enough for mankind; and, on the other hand, the persuasion that we ourselves are, in our own right, children of God, is a graver delusion in the other direction. What we want is some universal fountain of divine life within us which shall yet not blind us in any way to the truth that we ourselves are not by our own right children of God, but only become so through One who is. We need a reconciliation of the fact of the unhealthy egoism of our own

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individualities, with the equally certain fact of a divine Light struggling with that egoism, and claiming us as true children of God.

“The Incarnation alone helps us adequately to understand ourselves ; it reconciles the language of servile humiliation with the language of rightful children. Both are true. The unclean slave and the free child of heaven are both within us. The Incarnation shows us the true Child of God—the filial will which never lost its majesty, which never tasted the impurity of human sin—and so still further abases us ; but then it shows Him as the incarnate revelation of that Eternal Son and Word, whose filial light and life can stream into and take possession of us, with power to make us like Himself. The Incarnation alone seems to me adequately to reconcile the contradictory facts of a double nature in man—the separate individuality which has no health of its own, and turns every principle to evil directly it begins to revolve on its own axis—and the divine nature which lends it a true place and true subordination in the kingdom of God. ‘We are not,’ said Athanasius, ‘*by nature* sons of God, but the Son in us makes us so ; also, God is not *by nature* our Father, but He is the Father of the Word, dwelling

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in us ; for in Him and through Him we cry, " Abba, Father." ' It is obvious that Athanasius uses the word ' nature ' here in a much narrower sense than Bishop Butler. In the largest sense it *is* our true ' nature ' to live in and through the Eternal Word. But what Athanasius meant—namely, that not by virtue of anything in our own strict personality or individuality, only by virtue of the divine life engrafted upon that personality or individuality, do we become sons of God—seems to me the very truth which St. John reveals:—" He came unto His own, and His own received Him not ; but as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God." This teaching, and this alone, seems to vindicate the divine nature *in* us without leading us into the delusion that it is *of* us."

It is no mere figure of speech to declare that without Christ, understood as He represented Himself and as the Church has conceived Him, humanity is lost. It is without the knowledge of God. It is without the knowledge of itself. It is true that great multitudes have some part of this knowledge who yet do not accept Jesus Christ as the Eternal Son of God, but they would not have it if He had not been the Eternal Son of God and brought this knowledge into the world.

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But it is not only the knowledge of God which Christ gives us. It is God. The healing of sin in us, the removal of its burden, the dissipation of its darkness, the sense of pardon and forgiveness,—these things which no man could ever give to us Jesus gave to men when He was here and is giving to men still. And He gave them then and is giving them now because He was able as God to deal with sin and the soul bowed under sin as no man could deal.

Note III

Professor Edward Everett Hale's Experience

PERHAPS it will help you to read now a part of Professor Hale's account. It confirms the views I have quoted from Mr. Hutton: "In earlier days," writes Mr. Hale, referring especially to John 3:16, "the Gospel of John was without interest to me. That seems to me now very natural. There was comparatively little in it that to me bore the stamp of authenticity, for the characteristic events in the life of Jesus, and the accompanying teaching, found no particular answer in my own experience. I was just as much puzzled as Nicodemus at what was said of being born again. I had no particular sympathy with the unique confidence of the man born blind who had received his sight. I saw very little meaning even in Jesus' words of consolation to Martha when she grieved, though she knew her brother was to rise again at the last day. There is much in the Gospel so beautiful that it will reach all hearts; but a good deal of it will, I think, remain a pretty dark saying to one who has not tried the great experiment of trusting everything to Jesus as a living Saviour, with the expectation

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of gaining thereby the life that is independent of the conditions of every-day existence, and of the death that must come to all.

“So, if I paid little attention to this passage, or even to the whole Gospel, it was natural enough ; it was probably even inevitable. What should this particular text have meant to one whose definite belief was that Jesus was not the only begotten Son of God, but the greatest among many sons ; who held that it was not by belief in Jesus that one should be saved, but rather by incorporating into one’s own life and character the principles of His teaching ; who did not readily conceive of any real perishing on the part of those who put their trust elsewhere than in Him ? One can see, I believe, that with such a one this text had no great weight, even though it were in the Gospel of John, but on the other hand that the Gospel lost something by having the text in it.

“On the other hand, let it be the case that this passage gains with a given person, say, especial importance from its application to the conditions of mission work in our cities. This, too, is not accidental, but really very characteristic. The text is a fine text for its place ; but the place it holds is a pretty typical one, and the reason that it is good where it is, is reason enough for

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its being good in other very different places. For suppose we do not think of it as authoritative, but simply as declarative : not as a truth that is true because it is expressed where it is expressed, but a truth that is so to us because it expresses so much that we know. Then we see that these few words say to us that God is not merely a lawgiver, but a Father ; that Jesus is not merely an elder brother, but a divine Saviour ; that the salvation He offers is open to any one that will avail himself of it ; that those who will not take it are turning away from the only possibility of true life ; that those who come to Him are thereby beginning upon a life that is independent of the conditions of time or place in this world or any other. All these things, doubtless, are things that one wants to impress on a set of homeless men, hard up or 'down and out,' who come to a mission meeting largely because it is a good warm place on a cold night, and who yet have some pretty definite idea that there is a God, that they have souls, and that somehow or other they will have to make answer to Him for their life here. But these things are only good to impress upon such men because these things are also impressed on all who accept Christ as their Saviour. They are put on the wall

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of a mission room only because written in the hearts of all Christians.

“It is now somewhat more than two years since I was called to acknowledge Jesus Christ as a living Saviour. It was at a revival meeting that I did so, and at the end of that meeting the general advice was given to those who had just made decisions, to read the Gospel of John. I remember at the time thinking the advice was by no means wise or to the point. One will easily see the cause of that idea : the Gospel of John had always seemed to me impractical, mystical, philosophical, by no means such as to be read by any one who did not have already a pretty well grounded faith, and a fairly well developed idea of the essentials of Christian doctrine and life. I did not at that moment appreciate the new spirit with which one would read who had just seen reason to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, and who had in that belief found himself at the beginning of a new life. I did not understand that though the book was written to induce belief, it yet had infinitely more meaning to one who already did believe.

“At any rate, I did not read it with especial care for some time. I did read the Bible with a great and new interest : indeed, for a great while I could not be in-

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terested in anything else, and even now I find no book to compare in interest with it, or with something that explains or illustrates it. Still for various reasons, either because there was so much else to read, or because there was so much else to do, I did not read the Gospel of John with care for some time.

“When I did so, I was surprised to see what a simple, practical, every-day book it was,—how entirely different from my earlier conceptions. Matters which had seemed inexplicable, figurative, exaggerated, or without clear or definite meaning, were, I found, statements of matters of experience that I knew about. Incidents in the lives of those who had come in contact with Jesus in the flesh appeared at once to be, in essentials at least, prototypes of incidents in the lives of those who meet and know Him to-day in the spirit only. I think Luke 7:36–50 was the first Gospel story that impressed me most forcibly in this way, but among the first was the utterance of the blind man in John 9:25. This experiential character, as it may be called, gave a realizing understanding, not only to the rest of the Bible, but particularly, perhaps, to the Gospel of John, and not only to event or incident, but to much else, as, for example, this Golden Text.

“Thus the thought of God as a God of

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love: I must confess that, in spite of the importance of this element in my father's preaching, it was never a realized element in my own belief. In fact, to-day, I do not see how God is readily thought of as a God of love, save as He is revealed to us as such by Jesus. A God of law He was to me, but His law was something external, something to a great degree arbitrary, something in fact that I did not like. John in his epistle says that we love God because He first loved us. Others may see in the order of the universe and of human life sufficient evidence of the love of God for humanity. I do not mean that it is not there; but I did not see it till I saw the love of God revealed to us in the life and the death and the life everlasting of Jesus. That was a light by which I could see what had been there before, but unseen.

"So with the rest—it would take too long to comment on the whole text—that Jesus is His only begotten Son; that anybody may come to Him; that if one does come, one has life everlasting; that if one does not, one has not that life. All these things mean something to me now, because they are a part of my own experience; because they have become, not announcements of external truth, but expressions of what is the natural order of my existence.

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“Jesus said that no one comes to the Father but by Him, that He is the way. It is certainly so.”

Every man may have this experience if he will. Whoever will make the experiment will find Christ all that He claimed to be, all that the Church has held Him to be. You too will be able to say when you make the test, what good Dr. Bonar has said in his hymn :

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“ Come unto Me and rest ;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down,
Thy head upon My breast.”
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad,
I found in Him a resting place,
And He has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“ Behold I freely give
The living water ; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink, and live.”
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream ;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“ I am this dark world's Light ;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright.”
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun ;
And in that light of life I'll walk,
Till travelling days are done.

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