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THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN THE SECOND CENTURY.

At the close of the second century, the virgin birth was a firmly established part of the creed of the Catholic Christian Church. What was the origin of that belief? This question can be answered only after an examination of the birth narratives which are included in our first and third Gospels. But an examination of extra-canonical sources is also not without value. At the time of Irenaeus, belief in the virgin birth was firmly established. Can a gradual establishment of that belief be traced in the history of the second century, or was the belief firmly fixed from the very beginning? The present article will attempt to give some answer to this question, and thus lay the necessary foundation for answering the further and more important question: is the belief in the virgin birth based upon fact, or did it originate in some other way?

Of course, no one denies that the belief in the virgin birth arose long before Irenaeus. The most that could by any possibility be held is that the doctrine did not attain the full assent of the Church until his time. Even such a view, however, can be dismissed very quickly.

In the first place, the virgin birth has a place in the so-called Apostles' Creed.¹ The form of that creed which is now in use was produced in Gaul in the fifth or sixth cen-

¹ The following discussion of the Apostles' Creed is not based upon independent investigation. All that has been attempted is to point out the bearing which the commonly accepted conclusions in this field have upon the question of the virgin birth. See especially Harnack, *Vetus-*

just the question of the nature, or, as it is now fashionable to phrase it, of "the essence", of Christianity. A Christless Christianity is no more a contradiction in words than a non-atoning Christ is a contradiction in fact; Christianity involves the acknowledgement not of Christ *simpliciter* but, as Paul insists, specifically of "Christ as crucified."

Princeton.

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JESUS CHRISTUS IN DER GESCHICHTE. Ein Beitrag zu den Drews- und Jatho-Debatten, von D. EBERHARD VISCHER, Professor an der Universität in Basel. Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1912. 16 mo; pp. 42.

Eberhard Vischer always writes interestingly, and this Address—for it is an Address, delivered at a Conference of Christian students—is no exception to the rule. In substance it is a popular presentation of the argument developed at length and with more scientific stringency in his well-known article on "Historical Certainty and Faith in Jesus Christ," published in the *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* for 1898 (Heft. 3; pp. 195-260). Although, therefore, it declares on its title-page that it is a "Contribution to the Drews- and Jatho-Debates", it has only the slightest connection with these debates. They are mentioned only that the reader may be counseled to let them alone and go behind them. No doubt Drews and Jatho may be answered point by point. But what then? The real question still remains untouched. For it is Vischer's "conviction, that by this labor, necessary and meritorious as it is, the difficult questions raised by Drews and his predecessors are by no means answered; that, on the contrary, precisely by this defence the real problem which is in debate, is made a burning one,—the question, to wit, of how a historical personality, which, because it belongs to history, shares also the lot of all that is historical and passes more and more into the past,—of how such a personality can possess at the same time abiding significance, can be for humanity the guide, who guides them, despite all the changes of times and relations, most surely and most directly to the eternal Ground of all Being and Becoming. It is precisely by a defence which follows the doubts of the historicity of Jesus step by step, which takes up every consideration urged against the sources which come into account and tries its weight, that it first becomes thoroughly clear what it means that Jesus Christ too is a historical object" (p. 6). What is historical belongs to time, nay, rather to a time; and as times succeed times, it fades more and more into the past, to which, indeed, it inherently belongs, bearing its character and meeting perhaps its needs, but certainly not ours upon whom a new heaven and a new earth have dawned. Jesus Christ as a historical object cannot escape this two-fold result of his very historicity. He becomes only a shadowy figure in the fading past; and what may be discerned of Him through the mists of time belongs distinctly to the past, separated from our modern

world by a deep chasm. "What has this historical Jesus, this figure of a Jewish Rabbi in His indefiniteness and in the limitations of His times, in common with what Christianity has believed and confessed itself to possess in Christ? How can the significance which a great part of mankind has ascribed, and continues to ascribe, to Jesus for its relation to God, be combined with the knowledge that Jesus is a historical object, and all that is historical is transitory? This is the real religious problem which comes into discussion in this controversy over the historical Jesus" (p. 9).

Having thus posited the problem, Vischer addresses himself to solving it. At the outset, he is concerned that we shall adopt the right method. It is usual to begin with an investigation of the oldest tradition concerning Jesus, first of all of the conception of Christ of the earliest Christian community, and to ask, first, how far this is credible, and then how far we can recognize to-day a guide in this Jesus shown to be historical. This, Vischer considers a bad way: we shall scarcely go through with it without subjecting the results of our researches to a certain amount of manipulation to make them fit our needs. He recommends to us, therefore, an opposite way. Let us begin, he says, with the other end,—with what Jesus Christ has been and is to men, and proceed backwards from that to what He was as a historical figure. "Let us turn from the investigators who dispute over the trustworthiness of the oldest tradition, to the company of those who from the times of the first disciples until to-day have gathered about Jesus Christ as their Lord. What have they always believed that they found in and through Christ? And whence have they drawn this assurance, confident in which many have gone to their death" (p. 10)? The argument which he proposes, it will be seen, is that from effects to their cause; and the principle on which he proceeds—a principle fully developed, and defended at length, in the earlier article to which we have already adverted (*ZThK*, 1898)—is that not only a sound, but the only sound, method of reaching absolute certainty as to past things is through observation of their present effects. Of past personalities and events necessarily implied in present conditions we may have true certainty; of all other past things only a greater or less degree of probability may be attained.

Proceeding on this principle Vischer passes in rapid review what we may call the sequences of Jesus in history and emerges at length in the following conclusion. "If now, after this journey through history, after this survey of what the Christian community, yes, humanity in general have received from Jesus, and ever anew receive from Him, we turn back to the problem from which we started out, we have now found the right standpoint for replying to the questions contained in it. Now, at length we are in a position to give a clear and distinct answer to the question as to the historicity of Jesus. And it is certainly not too much to say that the arguments brought against it appear to us now simply ridiculous. Not because we now,—as no doubt we are

accustomed to hear,—occupying the standpoint of faith, have no need to give heed to the objections of historical science, but because we have struck out the method by which alone we can attain to a real, complete knowledge of historical objects, the method, to wit, of inference from the collective, still tangible, effects to their causes. Undoubtedly it is altogether right when, in order to obtain an assured judgment as to Jesus, all the testimonies to Him that lie before us, in and out of the Bible, are examined in the most exact manner, according to the methods which the historian applies in all his investigations; the Gospels, before all, as well as the Epistles of Paul, and the well-known passages in Tacitus, Pliny and Suetonius. Only so will we guard ourselves from substituting, on the ground of actual and alleged religious experiences, phantasies for the historical actuality . . . We would not, then, by an appeal to the element of faith juggle with the Christ of history. But neither would we neglect when dealing with Jesus what seems to us a matter of course in the case of every other great man. To the still existing vestiges from which we can and must infer the greatness or nature of a historical phenomenon, there belong, not merely the oldest written testimonies which give an account of it, but, much more, its work and the effects which proceed from it. It would be a remarkable historian who should carefully collect all the notices about Dante, and search the whole history of his times for traces of his existence, and not put himself under the influence of the *Divina Commedia*, but leave it to one side unheeded . . . Of course, the greater a personality is, the more important he is for the history of mankind, so much the more impossible is it for any rightly to comprehend his actuality and personality except those who stand under his influence, and possess the organs to feel the imperishable power of his work. That is true again of a Dante and a Goethe, of a Giotto and a Bach, of a Francis of Assisi, and of a Luther as well as of a Jesus. And we are asking no exceptional treatment for Him, when we reply to those who combat His historicity: Only when we attend to Jesus' effects in history and experience them in ourselves are we in position to decide this question. It is therefore quite intelligible when to the plain Christian who lives in the gospel, the conflict over the historicity of Jesus seems absurd. Only after we have traced the effects of Jesus through history and taken account of what the Christian community believes it possesses in Christ, and why it believes it possesses it, do we understand also how far Jesus Christ, in spite of being a historical man, affected in many respects by the limitations of His time, of His people, and of His locality, yet can possess abiding religious significance" (pp. 35 sq.).

What it is important to observe here is that Vischer is not arguing that the Christ of faith may be indifferent to historical assault. He is seeking the certitude of history not of faith. And he is arguing that history gives us a Jesus whose existence is not merely probable, in however high a degree, but absolutely certain; certain with the certainty of the axiom that every effect must have a cause. His method

is to point out that historical certainty does not wait upon the criticism of the witnessing documents, but may be grounded in quite other considerations; nay, wherever it exists, indeed, must always rest on other considerations—on the observation, in a word, of historical effects. Had history preserved for us no single intimation of the existence of Dante, the existence of the *Divina Commedia* would compel—not suggest—his postulation. And had historical records preserved for us no single intimation of the existence of Jesus Christ—or, what comes to the same thing, should historical criticism obliterate every existing intimation of His existence,—there exist in the world effects, quite as palpable as the *Divina Commedia*, which compel—not suggest—His postulation. What the consideration of these effects gives us is not probability, however high, but certainty. Of course the estimation of the effects and the discovery of the nature of their cause implies a certain capacity of appreciation. To infer a Raphael from the Sistine Madonna, a Beethoven from his Sonatas, a Dante from the *Divina Commedia*, implies specific endowments in the observer; likewise to infer from the effects which He has wrought in the world a Jesus Christ, has its implication also of endowments in the observer. This circumstance, however, no more in the one case than in the other, destroys the validity of the inference. It only directs us to its proper organs. Nor does Vischer desire by this appeal to the witness of the effects to set aside the appeal to the critically examined sources. So far as, under criticism, they yield a positive result, they supply, according to him, the details as to the personality inferred from His effects in the world. There could have been no *Divina Commedia* had there been no Dante; but it is from the historical notices of Dante that we draw our portrait of Dante. Our certainty that there was a Jesus is drawn from the effects He has wrought in the world; what manner of Jesus He was, we are to go to the criticized testimonies which have come down to us to tell us. To put it coarsely, our certainty of the existence of Jesus is given us in the effects He has wrought in the world; our conception of what this Jesus thus certified to us was is given us in the critically reconstructed records.

To put it thus coarsely does injustice to Vischer's position. It does not seem to do as much injustice to it, however, as it ought to. It can scarcely be contended that the inference from effects is only to the existence of a cause, without involving anything as to the nature of that cause; the qualitative is as stringent as the merely quantitative inference. It is not the existence of merely a man, but of a genius, and of a genius of quite specific gifts, that we infer from the *Divina Commedia*, the Sistine Madonna, the Sonatas of Beethoven. What from the effects Christ has wrought in the world? Vischer himself tells us (p. 11) that, in whatever various ways men may have expressed it, the one thing which Jesus Christ has meant to all the world, in all ages, may be summed up in the one word, God. What, then, if the criticism of the sources gives us, as the Jesus that really lived, not God but man?

In his eagerness not to juggle away "the historical Jesus" in the interests of the Christ of faith, and in his fear that men shall set their phantasies in the place of the historical actuality in their thought of Jesus, Vischer does not here do justice to his own principle of interpretation. When we survey the effects of Jesus in the world we are compelled to infer as cause, not some Jesus merely, but a Jesus of a very particular quality, of a quality which alone could be the cause of these effects. And that Jesus is not the Jesus which Vischer would commend to our acceptance on the basis of the criticism of the sources. How, after his survey of these effects, he can still recommend us to see in Jesus merely a man is a standing wonder. No matter what Jesus criticism extracts from the sources, the Jesus which actually was is the Jesus which is required to account for His effects in the world. Or rather, no criticism of the sources can be sound which eliminates from them the Jesus which corresponds to the effects which He has wrought in the world; for it is undeniable, that the Jesus which lies on the face of the sources is the very Jesus who appears in these effects. It will not do to attempt to account for the presence of the Divine Jesus in the historical records on the ground that it is a natural creation of those who have felt the effects of Jesus, and to substitute for Him another Jesus who stands in no recognizable relation to these effects. What needs to be accounted for is not the rise of the Divine Jesus in the consciousness of His first followers, but the fading of the Divine Jesus out of the consciousness of so many of His later followers. It is this last estimate of Him which stands in contradiction with the observed effects He has left in the world.

We wonder, in this connection, what Vischer can mean by words like these (p. 25): "Yea, even the death on the cross, this frightful enigma (*furchtbare Rätsel*), for the solving of which the deepest thinkers have ever afresh labored . . ." To Vischer Jesus Christ, though bringing to the world a revelation of God which has revolutionized the world, was after all only a Rabbi of Nazareth, who cannot Himself, but only God who has revealed Himself in Him, be our comfort and support in life and in death (p. 39). Why should the death of such an one, even on the cross, be a frightful enigma, to which profound thinkers devote continual labor in the hope of reaching a solution of it? Is there any enigma in a good man who throws himself athwart the religious prejudices of a fanatical people, falling a victim to their hate? What is there in Jesus' death more than in that of Socrates, which will justify us in speaking of it as a "frightful enigma", which ever presents itself to the investigation of profound thinkers, in the hope that, mayhap, they may fathom its mysteries? On Vischer's view of who and what Jesus was there is no mystery here whatever; no enigma to solve. What should a Galilean Rabbi do, but, after awhile, die? And what could a good man do other than die a martyr to his cause? And what could be more natural than that the zealots for the law should slay Him who made Himself greater

than Moses and the Prophets and clothed Himself (with whatever meaning) with those prerogatives of God, the forgiveness of sins on earth, the judgment of the world? (On the inevitableness of Jesus' death on Vischer's presuppositions, see the instructive exposition of Julius Kaftan, *Dogmatik* ⁴, pp. 570-572.) And as for the cross, how else could he have managed to die by judicial sentence, just then and there? If there be an enigma here to study, a mystery worthy of the thought of men of thought, it is because there is something more in Jesus than a Rabbi of Nazareth, and something more in His death than the natural end which a Rabbi of Nazareth who called down on Himself the wrath of His fanatical compatriots would make. That there was something more both in Him and in His death is certain, with that historical certainty which, Vischer insists, resides in the necessary implication of an adequate cause in observed effects. We wish he himself had followed his argument until he had uncovered precisely what this something more is.

Princeton.

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CHRISTUS, Manuel D'Histoire des Religions. By JOSEPH HUBY, Professeur au Scolasticat D'Ore Place, Hastings. Avec la collaboration de Mgr. A. LeRoy et de MM. L. de Grandmaison, L. Wieger, J. Dohlmann, A. Carnoy, L. de la Vallée Poussin, C. Martindale, J. Mac Neill, E. Böminghaus, A. Mallon, A. Condamine, E. Power, J. Nikel, A. Brou et P. Rousselot. Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne et Cie, Editeurs Ancienne Librairie Delhomme et Brigueot, 117, Rue de Rennes. 1912. 4e Édition. 8vo; pp. xx, 1036.

In a day when the history of religion almost invariably is made to play into the hands of naturalism it is refreshing to find a work on this subject so complete and thorough and scientific as this, which is written from a standpoint distinctly supernatural and which, while insisting on God's general revelation of himself in nature, portrays and establishes Christianity as "the way, the truth, and the life." Of course, we regret that it virtually identifies Christianity with the Roman Catholic Church. Radically unchristian though this position is, however, it is almost a peccadillo in contrast with liberal Protestantism's virtual denial of the Supernatural.

The scope of this treatise appears in the titles of its chapters as its scientific character is seen in the fact that each one of these chapters has been prepared by a specialist in the particular field traversed. Chapter One discusses "The Study of Religions"; Chapter Two, "The Population of Lower Culture"; Chapter Three, "The Religion of the Chinese"; Chapter Four, "The Religions of Japan"; Chapter Five, "The Religion of the Persians, with an introduction on the Religion of the Indo-Europeans"; Chapter Six, "Buddhism and Religions of India"; Chapter Seven, "The Religion of the Greeks"; Chapter Eight, "The Religion of the Romans"; Chapter Nine, "The Religion of the Celts"; Chapter Ten, "The Religion of the Ancient Germans";