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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-*

utter ignoring of "external revelation" as a source of "religious insight." This is neither excused nor explained by the statement already alluded to with approval, that, without the sources of religious insight that have been set forth and that express "the witness of the spirit within us, no "external revelation", however miraculous, would avail. This is true, but it is not the point. We could not see without eyes; and yet with the best of eyes we should see nothing, if the world were not presented to our eyes. Precisely so, we do not minimize the necessity of the natural witness of the Spirit of God within every man, when we insist that no man could adequately know God, if God had not "at sundry times and in divers manners spoken in times past unto the fathers by the prophets," and "had not in these last days spoken unto us by his Son," and had not accompanied and attested these external revelations with "signs and wonders and mighty deeds" so manifestly not of nature as to stamp those who wrought them as ministers of a supernatural message. Indeed, there is but one way to dispense with and so ignore the external revelation of God; and that way is the one which Prof. Royce undoubtedly adopts. Man needs no external revelation of God; for he sees God adequately in himself, as he himself is God. This, however, is the very point at issue when the "sources of religious insight" are under discussion. Hence, admirable though Prof. Royce's discussion is in many respects, we are forced to say of it that it has missed the point.

It occurs to us to ask as we close, and we do so with great diffidence, Do these lectures fulfil the object of the donor of the Bross Foundation? That object was, "to call out the best efforts of the highest talent and the ripest scholarship of the world to illustrate from science, or from any department of knowledge, and to demonstrate the divine origin and the authority of the Christian Scripture."

Princeton.

WILLIAM BRENTON GREENE, JR.

APOLOGETICAL THEOLOGY.

DIE BEDEUTUNG DER GESCHICHTLICHKEIT JESU FÜR DEN GLAUBEN, von ERNST TROELTSCH, Dr. phil. et theol. Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1911. 8vo; pp. 51.

Troeltsch's chief merit as a writer on theological themes lies in his straight-forward downrightness. Among the sentimentally inconsistent naturalists which crowd the ranks of "modern" theologians, he shines forth as the consistent naturalist, who will have nothing to do with half-measures. In the Lecture which at present lies before us there is, however, a greater appearance of "halfness" than is customary with him. He is clear that religion is a natural phenomenon; and that Christianity as truly as any other religion is a natural phenomenon. He sees no reason why in the natural development of human life and culture Christianity may not be transcended, and a different religion take its place. He, therefore, will not affirm the "eternity" of Christianity.

But he sees no immediate prospect of the replacement of Christianity by a new religion. He is sure that Christianity is so related to the culture of the Mediterranean basin that so long as that culture endures, so long will Christianity endure. And he writes to show that the historicity of Jesus is essential to Christianity. Thus the thesis of his Lecture is the indispensableness of the historicity of Jesus for faith. And yet, he will not admit that this indispensableness is absolute. What is indispensableness for faith now may cease to be indispensable hereafter. Who knows whether the culture of the Mediterranean basin is the ultimate culture? Who, then, can know whether the religion which is bound up with the culture of the Mediterranean basin is the ultimate religion? Meanwhile we know that for the culture of the Mediterranean basin Christianity is the only possible religion; and that for Christianity the historicity of Jesus is indispensable. This is the ground on which Troeltsch stands.

The Christianity which, in Troeltsch's view, is the only possible religious expression of the culture which has been developed in the Mediterranean basin, and to which he wishes to show that the historicity of Jesus is indispensable is, of course, not historical, or, as it is more willingly called in some quarters, "traditional" Christianity. For any Christianity the object of whose faith is a divine Christ, and the center of whose gospel is the saving work of this divine Christ "propitiating God and thus freeing men from the consequences of their infection by original sin", to raise question of the historicity of Jesus by whom this redemption has been wrought, were nonsense. "From this standpoint the raising of this question would be nothing else than to display the death-certificate of the whole of Christianity" (p. 5). The same is true of those "mixed forms" which "share the fundamental change which the Christianity of the modern world has suffered,—the transmutation of the real miracle of redemption wrought out in a historical act, into an ever new redemption through the knowledge of God"—but who "connect this redeeming faith-knowledge with the knowledge and recollection of the historical personality of Jesus, which here comes into consideration, however, with respect to neither its miracles, nor its separate declarations, but the total effect of the religious personality" (p. 11). "This", continues Troeltsch, "is the view, founded by the later, ecclesiastical Schleiermacher, which has been presented with most emphasis by Ritschl and Herrmann. For Schleiermacher, it is the suggestive power of the personality, which, working on through the mediator of His community, and conspicuous in the portrait of the Gospels, conquers the religious inefficacy, unconquerable everywhere outside the sphere of Jesus' influence, and creates the might, certitude, joy and permanence of the knowledge of God. What apart from the faith-creating influence of Christ remains mere idea and presentiment, becomes by means of this personal influence continued in the community victorious and effective force. With Ritschl, the same idea is referred less to the suggestive power of the personality than to the authority of Jesus,

producing assurance of the forgiveness of sins. Christ by this authority makes Himself Lord and King of the Kingdom of God, or of the Kingdom of God-trusting capacity of life, and it is by the knowledge of Him mediated by the community that there comes the assurance without which sinful man dared not, and may not dare, to believe in God's sin-pardoning grace. With Herrmann the humiliating and exalting fact of the personality of Christ is a historical reality which only the evil and impenitent will can deny, just as it is only the believing will, yearning after God and convicted of its sin, that sees it. It is this fact alone that gives the courage to believe in God as sin-pardoning grace, and with it, the bright delight in and power to all the goods conformable to conscience, while he who cannot become sure of this fact of God falls into doubt, or soothes himself in scepticism and loses the habit of religious needs. It is clear that in all these cases, Christianity is a thought of God, an idea, a faith-knowledge of the true nature of things. All notion of a historical redemptive miracle happening once, and of the foundation of an institute of grace carrying it on, is lacking. But the idea is still, in its efficiency, bound to the historical personality of Christ, by which alone power or certitude is lent it, and the idea so strengthened made the property of a community united in the recollection of Christ. The presupposition for such a mode of thought, besides the silent assumption of the knowableness of the religious personality of Jesus and its effectiveness by means of the mediation of the tradition and the abiding community, is the essential incapacity of men who do not know Christ for hearty faith in God. 'Without Christ I should be an atheist',—that is the express or silent necessity which is here assumed for men who do not know Christ. The consequence corresponds to the presupposition which places Christianity in sharp contrast with extra-Christian humanity. The kingdom of God, or the Christian community, or the church as the object of faith, or the redemption-connection proceeding from Christ,—that is the sole region of redemption, and the necessary, eternally abiding collection of the redeemed in the Kingdom of Christ. It will last till the end of humanity, and will extend unto eternity as the collection of humanity in the religious communion of absolute salvation and of absolute truth made possible by truth" (p. 13). Evidently those who think thus cannot raise a question of the historicity of this Christ without self-stultification.

There can be no question, then, of the historicity of Jesus except among truly modern thinkers who know, like David Friedrich Strauss (in his Christian period) how to distinguish between the principle of Christianity and the Person of Christ (p. 10); and who have learned that "in the first instance Christianity is a living faith in God, new at every moment, and that redemption is an ever new work of God in the soul through the operation of faith in God",—"or, otherwise expressed, that Christianity is a particular faith in God, a peculiar knowledge of God with its corresponding mode of life, or, as it is called, a religious

idea or a religious principle"—not, however, necessarily intellectually or philosophically conceived. On this ground there is no historical work of salvation postulated in the background, and there is no inner necessity for the assumption of a historical Jesus. And it is not strange that men standing on this ground, should be moved by the increasingly radical conclusions of the historical criticism of the Gospel narratives to raise the question whether it is any longer necessary—or possible,—to give significance to Jesus for faith. In ever wider circles there is a feeling growing up that the riddle of the Gospels is incapable of solution, and that the figure of Jesus is fading from sight. And even though it be recognized that the more radical conclusions that are sometimes drawn are unjustified, can faith in God be really inseparably connected with a historical object subject to such critical doubt? "Must it not rather be made inwardly independent of all essential relation to historical elements which in any case are subject to science and which, under scientific examination show a form so far removed from the religious life of to-day" (p. 5)? "Thus there is to remain, then, nothing but a purely historical-factual and a pedagogical-symbolical significance of the Person of Jesus for the Christian idea! We are to come back to Lessing's declaration of the third Gospel, or to Ibsen's representation of the third kingdom, where religious faith maintains and propagates itself without historical supports, purely by its own purifying and redeeming force, and is to develop itself in connection with the totality of life, freely, out of its own inner depths!" (p. 23). "That in very fact", remarks Troeltsch, "seems to be the outcome of it all",—and then, he adds, a "But . . ."

But—this is never the way religion exists or propagates itself in the world. There is no clearer result of the history of religions and religious psychology than that what is essential in religion is not dogma or idea, but cultus and communion. "The third kingdom where in religion each stands off to himself and the spirit develops itself in perfect freedom and isolation in the individual, will probably never come, any more than the state and society which rest simply on the natural coalescence of individual interests or reasons" (p. 28). There will never be a really active Christianity apart from communion and cultus; and "as we need cultus and communion so also we need Christ as the head and point of union of the community. For the Christian knowledge of God has absolutely no other means of producing union and making itself visible, and lectures on the philosophy of religion will never create and never propagate a real religion" (p. 31). "So long as there exists a Christianity in any sense whatever, it will be bound up with the central place of Christ in worship" (p. 29). It is idle, therefore, Troeltsch declares, to talk of a Christianity without Christ, and if criticism ever really disproves the historicity of Jesus or even abolishes all real knowledge of Him,—that is the end of Christianity. On religio-historical grounds a Christless Christianity is an impossibility: "Christianity, in the central position of the per-

sonality of Jesus, does not have a distinguishing peculiarity which separates it from all other religions and renders redemption possible to it alone, but only fulfils in this a general law of the life of the human spirit, though after a fashion peculiar to itself" (p. 42).

To those who suppose that the historicity of Jesus may go and His personality be retained as "a symbol", which will serve the same purpose as a rallying point as His reality, Troeltsch has this to say:—"But the state of the case being such, certainly a real and principal indifference regarding the historico-critical questions is impossible. No doubt Jesus is in this sense the symbol of Christian faith in general. But those who imagine that for such a symbol a rooting in historical fact is a matter of indifference, and that the great work of the history of religions is precisely the mythical embodiment of ideas, are for their own person far removed from entering into and giving themselves inwardly with enthusiasm or practical labor to, a faith-circle the idea of which is embodied by this mythical symbol. They merely impute to believers, that they, in their humbler limitation, may be altogether content with a mythical symbol. Such imputations, as those for example made by Samuel Lublinski, are nothing more than examples of those aestheticizing toyings with reality which are so common nowadays, where the aesthete proposes to the believer that he shall satisfy his life-hunger on a mystical symbol, because he himself considers that what has to be quieted in the case is not at all a real hunger for conviction and certainty, but only a playful demand of the fantasy. For one who really belongs inwardly to the Christian life-world, it is impossible to hold that the center and head of the community, the point of reference of all worship and of all apprehension of God, is simply a myth, no matter how beautiful it may be. As God is to him not notion and possibility but holy reality, so will he stand with this, his symbol of God, also on the firm ground of real life. It is for him of true importance that an actual man lived, strove, believed and conquered thus, and that from this actual life there has flowed a stream of power and certainty down to him. The symbol is to him a real symbol only because behind it there stands the figure of a preëminent actual religious prophet, by means of whom he not only comes to the knowledge of God, but on whom he stays and strengthens himself in his own uncertainty, as he requires now and again support in a superior personal-religious authority, and reiteratedly experiences it in life. This is what is legitimate in Herrmann's talk of the 'fact of Christ'. What is under consideration, however, is not that the assurance of salvation of the individual can be won only by becoming assured of Jesus, but that there can be no productive and strengthening life-coherence of the Christian spirit without gathering about Jesus, and a gathering about Jesus must also go back to a real living life if it is to have real power and veracity" (pp. 31-33).

The point of Troeltsch's contention thus is that religion is after all a social affair and consists at bottom in associated worship, and this

associated worship requires for its persistence a rallying-point which must be envisaged as real. So soon as the reality of this rallying-point is doubted, the whole religious life centering in it crumbles. Christianity can persist, therefore, only as the historicity of Jesus, its rallying-point, remains beyond question in Christian circles. The historicity of Jesus is not given in the persistence of Christianity; it is rather its presupposition and depends, like all other questions of historicity, on the results of historical research. But whenever—if ever—the results of historical research prove unfavorable to it, then the death-knell of Christianity is sounded. It is precisely here that Troeltsch separates himself with most decisiveness from what he calls that mediating type of thought represented by Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Herrmann and their followers; and in separating himself from them refuses to find in Christianity the ultimate religion and therefore to claim for Jesus the place of eternal redeemer of men. "If the central position of Jesus", he reasons, "is established by means of the miracle of a power and assurance which overcomes all weakness and incapacity to faith born of original sin, then the religion of humanity must always remain Christianity, and all religious communion in all eternity must turn about the center of the person of Christ. Then, with Schleiermacher, Christ will be designated the second Adam, or with Ritschl, He and His community are represented as the essential-purpose of God, identical with the world-purpose, and from the one as from the other a bridge can be thrown over to the old Christology of Nicaea and Chalcedon. But if it is to be established upon universal social psychological necessities, then there can be inferred from it only, that so long as the special Christian prophetic piety persists—bearing in itself the Stoa and Platonism and so much more besides—all possibility of a community and a cultus, and with them all real power and propagation of belief, is bound to the central position of Christ in faith" (p. 48). How long this specific Christian piety will persist, is no doubt, another question; and it is a question a prudent man will not be quick to give a response to. Enough for us that it is bound up with the culture of the Mediterranean basin, and for us who are the products and the vehicles of that culture another form of religion is meanwhile impossible. Christianity will abide as long as the culture of which we are the exponents abides; and so long as Christianity abides, Christ must hold the central place in faith, and that as a really existent and historical person. This is the last word of social-psychological research.

We shall not enter into any extended criticism of Troeltsch's position. The problem which he raises is a purely academic one. It amounts in effect to asking how small a place can be assigned to Christ in our religious life and His historicity yet remain indispensable. Troeltsch's contention is that though His role be reduced to that of a mere symbol, a symbol of the peculiar faith in and knowledge of God which constitutes our religion, for the fulfilment of even this

attenuated role He yet requires to have really existed. This may be true; if true, it may be interesting; but it is altogether without practical importance. For Troeltsch does not pretend that the Christianity—if it can justly be called Christianity,—which looks upon Jesus as a mere symbol is playing any large part in the religious life of the world. He does indeed tell us that “die Gegenwart” is turning with avidity to this reduced Christianity: that there are not a few to whom Jesus has become only “the historical starting-point of the Christian life-world, and His portrait only of pedagogical importance or a symbol of Christianity;” and that, if everything does not deceive us, such a point of view is destined to become very much more wide-spread in the circles of German culture than it now is (p. 17). But he also tells us that it is not manifesting any great productive power, and gives little promise of a great future: “that in fact almost all the religiousness of to-day draws its life from modifications of the strong religious treasures propagated in the churches and in them alone” (p. 23). So long as all the vital and productive religion in the world is manifested in connection with the historical (or, if you will, “traditional”) forms of Christianity, we need not concern ourselves greatly with the question whether the historicity of Jesus is indispensable also for the more advanced (or debased) forms of “Christianity” (if the word be allowed) which are without vitality or probable future. We only note, with whatever satisfaction the facts are fitted to give us, that in Troeltsch’s opinion religion cannot flourish or propagate itself, in the conditions of our Mediterranean culture at least, apart from the recognition of the historicity of Jesus, and that the historicity of Jesus is in any event an assured fact, and indeed that the fundamental character of His teaching is beyond question (pp. 4, 38). We have our own opinion here, which goes much further than Troeltsch would allow, and we believe our opinion is firmly grounded; but we are not without interest when we learn that even to an extremist like Troeltsch “the decisive importance of the personality of Jesus for the origin and formation of Christianity”, and “the religious-ethical ground character of the preaching of Jesus” are “established with certainty” (p. 38). We are pleased to hear such an extremist declare that the “allegation of the non-existence of Jesus is without doubt a monstrous thing, and also the allegation of the impossibility of knowing the fundamental traits of His preaching is a great exaggeration” (p. 4). We wish we could hear him go on and declare that doubt of the true deity of Jesus is also a monstrous thing, and denial of His great atoning act a gross absurdity. Were his opinions determined by purely historical considerations, he could so declare; and so declaring, would understand how nonsensical the raising of the question whether the historicity of Christ is indispensable to Christianity is; for he would understand that a Christianity which knows nothing of a Divine Christ or of an Atoning Death of Christ is just not Christianity at all. The question of the indispensableness of Christ to Christianity is in a word

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."

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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