

CHRISTIANITY TODAY



||| A PRESBYTERIAN JOURNAL DEVOTED TO STATING, DEFENDING
AND FURTHERING THE GOSPEL IN THE MODERN WORLD |||

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The Outlook for Christianity

EVERY judgment as to the present status of Christianity is necessarily determined by the answer given to the question, What is Christianity? If everything called Christianity is really Christianity, it is safe to say that its status was never as favorable as at the present time. The statisticians tell us that there are more people in the world today who call themselves Christians than ever before. Moreover despite the situation in Russia and public opposition to Christianity in certain circles in Europe and America, there is relatively little professed antagonism to Christianity. Practically everybody, including those who are hostile to the Church in all its branches, claim that their views are "essentially" Christian. There is much criticism of this and that expression of Christianity but there is little professed criticism of Christianity as such. Surely if all that is called Christianity is rightly so called the outlook for Christianity is the most favorable that has been known since Pentecost.

If, then, we define Christianity (as many do in effect) as what is held in common by those who profess and call themselves Christians, we will judge that the outlook for Christianity is exceedingly optimistic. Suppose, however, that some of those who call themselves Christians are not Christians at all—as the Scriptures lead us to expect. Then what is held in common would contain nothing but what is held by non-Christians as well as Christians. But even if it be true (as of course it is not) that all who profess and call themselves

Christians are really Christians, the definition of Christianity that would result would express only the minimum of Christianity, the very least that a man can hold and still rightly call himself a Christian. Otherwise the least adequate forms of Christianity would be excluded. Suppose we ask the question, What is a man? Do we merely want to know what all men have in common? If so we are seeking for a definition of a man that will adequately describe only the poorest, meanest, least developed specimen of a man that exists. Surely, however, when we ask such a question we want to know what a normal or representative man is. It is not otherwise when we ask, What is Christianity? We want to know what normal Christianity is, not the most attenuated form of thought that can possibly be called Christianity. A definition of Christianity that gives expression only to what is held in common by those who call themselves Christian will at the most express only the minimum of Christianity, even if all those who call themselves Christians are

actually such. Inasmuch, however, as "they are not all Israel that are of Israel" it is obvious that it will not express even that. It will merely express what Christianity has in common with natural religion and so will lack everything that is distinctive of Christianity.

The mere fact, then, that so many people profess and call themselves Christians today affords no real warrant for supposing that the outlook for Christianity is highly favorable—true as it is that this fact is in itself fitted to justify the belief that the fortunes of Christianity are now at flood tide.

"Modernists" and "Fundamentalists," moreover, are at least agreed in maintaining that the number of those who profess and call themselves Christians warrants no definite conclusion as to the actual status of Christianity. According to the "Modernists," almost immediately after his death the "religion of Jesus" (i.e. the religion that Jesus is alleged to have taught and exemplified) was transformed, re-fashioned, radically altered by his earliest disciples, under the influence of their pre-Christian beliefs, a tendency that was continued under the influence of the theological notions of PAUL (largely pagan in origin according to the Modernists) and that reached its culmination in the historical creeds of the churches—with the result that the knowledge of real Christianity was almost completely lost until it was re-discovered by the Modernists, dug up as it were out of the debris under which it had been covered for some eighteen hundred years. When it is remembered that according to the

IN THIS ISSUE:

| | |
|---|----|
| Editorial Notes and Comments..... | 3 |
| The Truth About the Presbyterian Church..... | 4 |
| J. G. Machen | |
| The Confessional Statement of the United Presbyterian Church..... | 7 |
| John Murray | |
| Notes on Biblical Exposition..... | 9 |
| J. G. Machen | |
| Books of Religious Significance..... | 15 |
| Letters to the Editor..... | 17 |
| News of the Church..... | 19 |

could have a wide reading throughout the circles of American Presbyterianism. Many a crazier thing has been recorded than for some rich lover of the faith to buy up a whole edition of this book and put it in the hands of our younger ministers. It is invaluable as a source of sound information and as a tonic for an enfeebled allegiance. Many may say that the lecturer is extreme in his opposition to Modernism; there may, indeed, be more good in the *Zeit-geist* than he is able to see. [Were Dr. Minton writing today we do not think that he would even imply that Dr. Kuyper may have been extreme in his opposition to Modernism.] And yet, it is well to have all disguises torn away and the real core of anti-Christian Naturalism exposed. Certainly it is a great service that a man of such wide knowledge of the world, of such broad and vigorous grasp of thought, and of such robust faith in the life system which he essays to interpret and present, hailing from one of the early cradle-lands of Calvinism, should cross the Atlantic to deliver this wholesome message to his confreres in the Reformed Churches of America. And this message is timely just now. Many of those who, with small capital, slander Calvin and travesty Calvinism have the slenderest conception of who the one was or what the other has done. Calvinism is a world and life view which may challenge comparison, philosophically, scientifically, politically, historically, Scripturally, with any other which the mind of man has ever entertained. As well talk of revising the solar system as talk of de-Calvinizing free civilization or of revising its essential elements out of reflective Christianity. It is little to the point to inquire who is John Calvin that he should stand between us and God; it is much to the point to ask whether or not John Calvin caught and taught the truth of God. That he did, Dr. Kuyper firmly believes. The teaching of the intellectually organizing genius of the Reformation at Geneva was not simply a theological dogma; it was not simply a religious creed. It is a body of truth fitting perfectly into its place in the grand unity of all Truth, and so, in the organic evolution of historic processes; it has given an impulse and has left an impress in every sphere of human thought and in every department of human life, which the advancing ages only accentuate, and which the course of time can never erase."

S. G. C.

JOHN CALVIN: THE MAN AND HIS ETHICS, by Georgia Harkness. Henry Holt and Company. pp. 266. \$3.00.

ONE of the things that bears witness to the greatness of Calvin and the significance of Calvinism is the fact that their enemies do not find themselves able to ignore them. Consult the index to almost any outstanding modern book in the sphere

of religion, ethics, philosophy, science, politics, economics or what not and the chances are that you will find some reference to Calvin or Calvinism. Many of these allusions are misleading, even unintelligent, but they are rarely missing.

The author of this book is not only a woman but an ordained minister of the Methodist Church. She is confessedly opposed to Calvinism as a theological system. This does not mean, however, that she is blind to the greatness of Calvin or to the significance of Calvinism. While she thinks—mistakenly in our judgment—that such significance as attaches to Calvinism today is independent of its theological ideas, she can write as follows: "The thin, imperious theologian who taught predestination and ruled Geneva was one of the strongest personalities of all time. Frail in body, gigantic in intellect, and iron-clad in soul, he laid the stamp of his personality on future Calvinists, and others. He was a man of great faults and great virtues; and these faults and virtues were crystallized into a moral code which after four centuries is still effective in our social order." Again she writes: "The sixteenth century was a great century. It was the century of Raphael and Michelangelo, of Spenser and Shakespeare, of Erasmus and Rabelais, of Copernicus and Galileo, of Luther and Calvin. Of all these figures that gave greatness to this century, none left a more lasting heritage than Calvin."

While this book contains a chapter on the theology of Calvin—perhaps the least satisfactory in the book—its center of interest, as the title indicates, is the man and his moral ideals. Special significance attaches to what is said relative to Calvin's teachings as to the domestic relations, to economics and to politics. Considerable attention is given to Weber's theory that Capitalism is one of the fruits of Calvinism as well as to the claim that our political liberties are rooted in Calvinism.

It seems to us that this book is not inaccurately described by the phrase that its author uses to describe Calvin, i.e. it is a book of "great faults and great virtues." The author tries to be fair to Calvin and Calvinism and succeeds about as well as one can who is so little in sympathy with her subject of study. We have read it with interest and we trust not without profit and commend it to the attention of students of Calvin and Calvinism, especially to those who are accustomed to hear Calvin mentioned only that he may be condemned. While it exhibits evidence of wide study and research on the part of its author, we have discovered nothing to indicate that she is acquainted with the writings of present-day Calvinists. Apparently she has not so much as heard of Warfield and Kuyper, not to mention men like Barth and Brunner. That Dr. Harkness is poorly informed concerning the present-day status of Calvinism is indicated

by the fact that she can write: "Today, the adherents of Calvinistic churches number in their membership many thousands, and in churches indirectly influenced in form or doctrine by Calvin are many other thousands." Had she used the word "millions" instead of the word "thousands" her statement would have been much more accurate. While this book seems to us inadequate and somewhat misleading even as a study of Calvin's moral ideals and their application yet its treatment of Calvin is so fair and just as compared with that to which we are accustomed from non-Calvinistic sources that we are disposed to think that its influence will be decidedly wholesome—especially as we are of the opinion that it will appeal for the most part to non-Calvinists.

S. G. C.

PATHWAYS TO THE REALITY OF GOD.

By Rufus M. Jones, Litt.D., LL.D., Professor of Philosophy in Haverford College. Author of "Studies in Mystical Religion"; "New Studies in Mystical Religion"; "Spiritual Energies," etc. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1931. \$2.00.

AMONG the many things of interest that might be mentioned in connection with this book of Professor Jones we shall limit ourselves to two that seem to be of most importance. The title of the book leads us to ask what the pathways are that according to Jones lead to God, and to what sort of a God Professor Jones would lead us.

In a sense it may be said that Jones wishes to lead us along the beaten pathways that all the saints of God have trod. He speaks of such pathways as faith, revelation, inspiration, Christ and prayer. But there are different ways of traveling on these pathways. There is the old familiar way, the way of Augustine, Luther and Calvin. Then there is the way of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Kant and Hegel.

Jones has chosen the second of these two ways. He would have us think of the inspiration of the prophets and the apostles as at most a heightened form of the inspiration of the poets. In opposition to the "dogmatic bibliolotry" of orthodox theology he sets the position of Coleridge. "The ultimate test, now as in Coleridge's day, will be whether a passage, or a book, finds us, and finds us moreover at our deepest levels." (Cf. p. 162.) All revelation literature must be tested by this standard that Coleridge has set. (Cf. p. 150.) If there is to be any redemption it is not to be effected through the God-man Christ Jesus but through man as such. Christ Himself is one of the "peak-moments" that have appeared somehow on the long course of the "spiritual adventure" which we call the universe. (Cf. p. 145.)

By such ways as these Jones leads us to his God. That God we must now learn to find not so much beyond us as within us.