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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.<sup>1</sup> The form of that creed which is now in use was produced in Gaul in the fifth or sixth cen-

<sup>1</sup> 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-*

Lausanne and Geneva, he finally settled in his native land and preached at Rysse, Doornik, Valenciennes, Sedan and Antwerp. From the latter place he returned to his original field of labor, in the three first mentioned cities. DeBres was a scholarly man, a fine stylist and a keen controversialist. His chief writings are, "*Baston de la Foi*" 1555; a practical controversial tract, written as a reply to Grenier's "*Le Bovelier de la Foi*", an attempted defense of Catholicism. His most voluminous work is his refutation of the claims of the Anabaptists, "*Source et Fondement des Anabaptistes ou rebaptisez de notre temps. Avec tresample refutation des arguments principaux, par lesquels ils ont accoustume de troubler l'Englise de notre Seigneur Jesus Christ et seduire les simples. Le tout reduict en trois liures par Guy de Bres 1565.*" This work indicates considerable insight in the Anabaptist situation, but is not free from mistakes and therefore a questionable historical source. Finally his, "*Confession de Foi. Faicte d'un commun accord par les fideles qui conversent espays bas, lesquels desirent vivre selon la purite de l'Evangile de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ, 1562.*" DeBres' authorship has been clearly established and in this confession the great martyr has done his best and most lasting work. For till this day this symbol is the uniting bond of faith of the Dutch Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, America, South Africa and the Indies. And it has never been revised. In 1561 deBres barely escaped the great persecution, which broke out at Doornik. A year later the house, where he had lived, was discovered and searched and all his personal papers were captured, which led to much suffering on the part of his relatives and friends. In 1566 we find him at Valenciennes, where Peregrin de la Grange is his colaborer. On the 24th of August of that year the storm of iconoclasm burst over the city. Three months later it was declared to be in a state of rebellion and the faithless and cruel governor of the province, De Noircarmes, laid siege to it. After a brief siege it capitulated. DeBres and de la Grange escaped, but through lack of food were forced to leave their hiding place. They were captured by the Inquisition and suffered a heroic martyrdom. Thus one of the great leaders of the Dutch Reformation died an untimely death.

These seventh and eighth volumes of the *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, like all those which precede, are replete with interest. They are veritable gold-mines for the student of church history. Drs. Cramer and Pyper are doing a noble work, which may not be fully appreciated to-day, but which will place the future student of the period of the Reformation under lasting obligation.

Louisville, Ky.

HENRY E. DOSKER.

DR. McLAREN OF MANCHESTER: A Sketch. By E. T. McLAREN, Author of "Dr. John Brown and his Sisters". Second edition. New York and London: Hodder and Stroughton. 1911. 8vo; pp. iv, 272. \$1.50 net.

The sketchy character of this life of McLaren is due to the desire of the author—a cousin and sister-in-law of the celebrated preacher—to respect what she had reason to believe were his wishes in this matter. His remarkable humility and diffidence, his sensitiveness in regard to any public interest in his personality, and his extraordinary self-effacement in all his work—traits that added immensely to his power as a messenger or, as he delighted to regard himself, “a voice” of the Lord—made him shrink from the idea of having an extended account of his life and work published. But brief as it is, the book gives many a revealing gleam concerning the character of this saintly man and his eminent services as a preacher and an expositor of the Word of God. His many friends and admirers the world over will be grateful for this sympathetic and well written biography.

In its external features, the long life here portrayed was rather uneventful. Born in 1826 in Glasgow and educated in the High School of that city, and at the Baptist College of Stepney-row, transferred to Regent's Park, pastor, before he had finished his twentieth year, of the Portland Chapel, Southampton, where he remained for twelve years, then for forty-five years, from 1858 till his resignation in 1903, the pastor of Union Chapel in Manchester—these, with a number of vacation trips to Scotland and the Continent, and one to Australia made in 1888 in behalf of the English Baptist Union, are the leading dates and the chief outward changes in the story of the eighty-four years that reached their period in May, 1910. But the personality of the famous preacher is a most fascinating theme, and the author in this miniature has focused for us a life-like picture of the man in his home, in his study, in the pulpit, in his hours of vacation, as well as in his relations to the city with which his name is inseparably linked and to the church at large which delighted to honor him with invitations for addresses on great occasions.

The book, as may be expected, has much that will be especially interesting and helpful to the preacher; for beyond all his contemporaries McLaren was a preacher for preachers. Nor can the spectacle of this servant of God, who in spite of great domestic sorrows and years of impaired health—after the year 1881 he could preach but once a Sunday—not only maintained but even advanced the quantity and the quality of his annual homiletic production, fail to impress upon every beholder the wholesome lessons of faith in God, devotion to Christ, and fidelity to duty which by voice and pen he has so well taught his hearers and readers.

Concerning the variations in the spelling of the name, we are informed that he himself, after his student days, always signed himself “McLaren”, though in his first book, *Sermons preached in Manchester*, he permitted it to appear as “Maclaren”. The forms “M'Laren” and “MacLaren” were, apparently, never used by him.

Princeton.

FREDERICK W. LOETSCHER.