

# The Princeton Theological Review

OCTOBER, 1919

---

## ALBRECHT RITSCHL AND HIS DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

### I. RITSCHL THE RATIONALIST

The historical source from which the main streams of Perfectionist doctrine that have invaded modern Protestantism take their origin, is the teaching of John Wesley. But John Wesley did not first introduce Perfectionism into Protestantism, nor can all the Perfectionist tendencies which have shown themselves in Protestantism since his day be traced to him. Such tendencies appear constantly along the courses of two fundamental streams of thought. Wherever Mysticism intrudes, it carries a tendency to Perfectionism with it. On Mystical ground—as for example among the Quakers—a Perfectionism has been developed to which that taught by Wesley shows such similarity, even in details and modes of expression, that a mistaken attempt has been made to discover an immediate genetic connection between them. Wherever again men lapse into an essentially Pelagian mode of thinking concerning the endowments of human nature and the conditions of human action, a Perfectionism similar to that taught by Pelagius himself tends to repeat itself. That is to say, history verifies the correlation of Perfectionism and Libertarianism, and wherever Libertarianism rules the thoughts of men, Perfectionism persistently makes its appearance. It is to this stream of influence that Wesleyan Perfectionism owes its own origin. Its roots are set historically in the Semi-Pelagian Perfectionism of the Dutch Remonstrants, although its rise was not unaffected by influences of a very similar character and ultimate source which came to it through the channels of Anglo-Catholicism. Its particular differentiation is de-

For example, when he says at the beginning of the discussion (p. 2) that "we know that the first gospel was composed roughly about the same time" (i.e. about A.D. 70), some of his readers may be inclined to ask how we know it; and the same class of readers may perhaps be surprised to learn that the author of the third Gospel is "universally assumed to be Saint Luke" (p. 6). But this occasional failure to consider the main drift of modern negative criticism of the New Testament in general does not invalidate the results of Mr. Prestige's careful examination of the birth narratives themselves.

The most distinctive part of the book, perhaps, is chapter viii, "The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth." Here, however, in the perfectly legitimate endeavor to show the necessity of the virgin birth as the mode of the incarnation, the author may be thought to have ventured, in part, upon rather doubtful ground.

In agreement with nearly all recent writers and nearly all editors of Justin Martyr, Mr. Prestige accepts the erroneous reading "our race" (i.e. Christians) instead of "your race" (i.e. Jews) in the Dialogue with Trypho, c. 48, where Justin refers to those who, while they accept the Messiahship of Jesus, deny the virgin birth. See Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, i<sup>4</sup>, 1909, p. 320, and compare the discussion of the passage in this REVIEW, vol. x, 1912, pp. 547-550.

Princeton.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN.

*By an Unknown Disciple.* New York: George H. Doran Company. 1919. Pp. 246. \$1.50 net.

This is an attempt to present the life of Jesus in interesting narrative form as it might have appeared to a disciple with modern powers of observation. Peter, according to our "unknown disciple," was easily deceived. "You never could make Peter believe that even when people describe a thing as they think they saw it they may still speak falsehood." Luke "was an educated man; but he was a physician, and he seldom saw beyond the things of the body." "Peter and Luke and Mark and John—they are all dead now, and I can speak my mind" (pp. 7, 8). So the unknown disciple proceeds to rationalize the miracle of "the swine and the madman" and the rest of the Gospel history. The materials for his romance are provided by all the Gospels, and he uses the Gospels without any critical principle of selection except hostility to miracle, indifference to any profound sense of sin, and supposed suitability to the narrative.

The book makes sad reading. But it shows at least (along with countless other failures of the same kind) that no matter what freedom of selection be allowed, the material of the Gospels can never be used to form a believable picture of a purely human Jesus. The impress of divinity extends everywhere throughout the Gospel story. The only real Jesus discoverable anywhere in the Gospels is the wondrous Lord and Saviour of Matthew and Mark and Luke and John.

Princeton.

J. GRESHAM MACHEN.