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THE PRESENT CRISIS IN ETHICS*

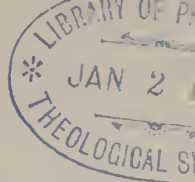
"It is a fact worth weighing," says one of the most learned and judicial of our present day writers on Christian ethics,—
"it is a fact worth weighing that for some two hundred years or more after the Reformation and the rise of modern philosophy no one ever questioned the supremacy of the Christian ethic, though from every other quarter inroads were being made upon the received traditions."¹

So recently, indeed, as 1873 Mr. John Stuart Mill, the ablest as well as the fairest of modern unbelievers, wrote as follows: "About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight, which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in his inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this preëminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion can not be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity."² Nor are such testimonies exceptional. Unbelievers in dogmatic Christianity from widely different standpoints have united in exalting its ethics. When the charge was brought by Christians that the bitter attacks on Christian dogma must issue in the overthrow of Christian morality, it was hotly resisted by scientists and by litera-

* An Address delivered in Miller Chapel on September 26, 1918, at the Opening of the One Hundred and Seventh Session of the Seminary.

¹ Thornton, *Conduct and the Supernatural*, p. 3.

² *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 253.



of the commentary. The book appears in very attractive form, and is enriched by interesting facsimiles of manuscripts and by photographs.
Princeton. J. GRESHAM MACHEN.

The Virgin Birth of Jesus. A Critical Examination of the Gospel-Narratives of the Nativity, and other New Testament and Early Christian Evidence, and the Alleged Influence of Heathen Ideas. By G. H. Box, M.A., Lecturer in Rabbinical Hebrew, King's College, London; Hon. Canon of St. Albans. With a Foreword by The Lord Bishop of London. Milwaukee: The Young Churchman Co. [London: Sir Isaac Pitman Sons, Ltd., 1 Amen Corner, E. C., and at Bath, New York and Melbourne, 1916].

In an interesting article published in the *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1905, pp. 80-101, Mr. Box sought to establish the thoroughly Jewish character of Matt. i, ii by comparing that narrative with the Jewish Midrashic literature.⁶ In the present volume a similar argument is extended to the whole New Testament account of the birth of Jesus, and is enriched by a comprehensive treatment of the historical questions involved. The author believes, with Dr. Briggs, that the basis of our canonical infancy narratives is to be found in certain Jewish Christian poems, which, however, he is inclined to believe were written in Hebrew rather than in Aramaic, a comparison with the Psalms of Solomon being adduced at this point (see especially pp. 43-48). The Midrashic character of Matt. i, ii is still strongly maintained. Despite the poetical form which is attributed to the infancy narratives, they are by no means regarded as mere legend; on the contrary, what we have in the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke, according to Mr. Box, is throughout a poetic and idealizing expansion of actual fact. Indeed, the factual element is found to include all the important details of the narratives, the journey to Egypt, for example (though with some slight hesitation), as well as the virgin birth itself. With regard to the census of Quirinius, Mr. Box defends the essential correctness of the Lucan narrative, though he is somewhat inclined to look with favor upon a suggestion of Professor Burton that Luke has "confused the names of Saturninus and Quirinius." In considering "the alleged heathen sources," our author passes over the Greek parallels rather lightly, believing that they are deprived of all possible significance by the Jewish character of the canonical infancy narratives; and devotes his attention chiefly to the views of Gunkel, Gressmann and Cheyne, who find the basis for the Christian idea of the virgin birth in certain mythical representations which they suppose had already been naturalized in Palestinian Judaism in the pre-Christian period. The baselessness of such hypotheses is ably demonstrated, there being no evidence whatever for any pre-Christian Jewish belief in a virgin birth of the Messiah.

Despite certain concessions with regard to the historicity of the Gospel narratives in detail, Mr. Box is firmly convinced of the central

fact, and appreciates the fundamental importance of the fact for our Christian faith. To the defence of his position he has made contributory a thorough acquaintance with Jewish literature and at least a fairly adequate acquaintance with recent discussion. In discussing the birth of Jesus in the apocryphal gospels, he has apparently made no use of the comprehensive work of Bauer, *Das Leben Jesu im Zeitalter der neutestamentlichen Apocryphen*, 1909.

Princeton.

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HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

A History of the Christian Church. By WILLISTON WALKER, Titus Street Professor of Ecclesiastical History in Yale University. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1918. Crown 8vo, 624 pages. \$3.00 net.

This is an excellent one-volume sketch of the history of the Christian Church. It is unusually comprehensive for a work of this sort. Not only is the whole period from the birth of Christ to the present decade covered by this narrative, but the vast variety of topics is presented with a breadth of treatment that is not commonly found in a compendium. Scholarship, good judgment, and sympathy with the most diverse types of character and achievement are everywhere apparent. Frequent references to available source-books, such as Ayer, Gee and Hardy, Kidd, Henderson, and Schaff, will encourage and facilitate further investigation by readers interested in special phases of the story. The style, admirable in its clearness and vigor, is altogether free from the kinds of blemish, due chiefly to the desire of crowding a maximum of material into a minimum of space, which make so many "Outlines" and "Guides" utterly unreadable. Indeed, the book before us, barring some minor paragraphs that could not well have been expanded without giving them a disproportionate size, has throughout the charm of an engaging narrative. Moreover, as might have been expected from an author of Prof. Walker's attainments in historic science, the divisions of the material, with the many cross-references from section to section within a given period, faithfully reflect the approved results of investigation concerning the interaction of the leading forces that shaped the character and career of the Church in the different epochs. And this, after all, is the chief justification for such a compendious treatment of the whole history of the Church: it gives us what no monograph, or encyclopedia, or series of biographies can offer—a picture of the progressive development of Christianity as an organic whole. Here and there, perhaps, as in the account of the early Church, the number of horizontal divisions might with advantage have been reduced; a broader topical treatment would have made the causal connections even clearer than they now are.

The value of the work is enhanced by four maps, some thirteen pages of "Bibliographical Suggestions," and an excellent index.