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THE CHURCHMAN

September, 1912.

The Month.

THE question of authority in religion is an ever-
Authority. recurring one, and whenever it recurs it is all-
important. It lies behind most of our controversies,
and its settlement—so far as we do settle it—controls our whole
religious life, our whole life. For us Christians part of the
settlement is easy—authority resides in Christ; but our know-
ledge of Christ comes to us in one or more of three ways: through
experience, through the records of His life and teaching,
through the society which bears His name, the Christian
Church. Through these avenues Christ speaks to us, and His
voice is authoritative. Ultimately our faith rests upon an
infallible person and an unmistakable experience, and not upon
either an infallible Church or an infallible Book. Dr. Forrest,
in his book on "The Authority of Christ," puts this point help-
fully and practically. Speaking of the Christian's apprehension
of Christ, he writes:

"What he sees, he must see with his own eyes in that definite concrete
shape which makes it the illumination of his individual life. The doctrine
of the Spirit is, therefore, the indispensable correlate of a historical Incarna-
tion; it simply means that He who at a consummative epoch of the world's
history gave His Son has not left subsequent ages of mankind without that
Divine guidance which would enable them to realize afresh for themselves
the imperative significance of Christ's mission. . . . There is an ever-
repeated demand in humanity for a formal instructor, whether person or
book; but history must have written itself in vain for us if it has not taught
us the futility of the desire. The measure in which we shall comprehend
the true authority of Christ will be in proportion as we keep life on all its
sides, intellectual as well as moral and spiritual, true to the highest."

With this Dr. Forrest's book ends, but it brings no end to the problem. We still have to ask, What is the function of the Church, and where is the place of the Book?

Half
Solutions.

There are three rough-and-ready answers to the question, Where shall men find guidance in the maze of life? We put them in their extremist form, because they thus disclose their inadequacy. Follow the inner light, says one, you need no other guidance. Trust yourself to the Church, says another; let the Church solve your problems, and accept its solution without question. While yet another bids us take the Written Word in our hands, and by its light and guidance find the way, paying no heed either to Church or private judgment. More than three centuries ago the fathers of the English Reformation had these three answers dinned into their ears as they set their hands to their great task. That which was true in each answer they accepted, and Articles VI. and XXI. were the result. They brushed aside the pretensions of a private judgment run mad, and the arrogant claims of a medieval ecclesiasticism; they recognized that the consentient voice of all Christian men, where it could be heard, spoke with an authority of its own, and so esteemed highly that which was Catholic and primitive; they accepted the New Testament as the revelation of Jesus Christ, full, final, and sufficient for this dispensation, and they brought all things to the touchstone of that revelation. Where the Reformers stood, we stand. But, it is urged, things have changed; science and archæology and higher criticism have made the Reformation position impossible. The Bible has been discredited, and at any rate it can only be used safely as a textbook in the hands of the Church.

If the Reformation position had depended upon a hard and fast literal and verbal inerrancy, the objection would hold. For English Churchmen, the Revised Version would have settled the question. The disappearance of the angel from the pool of Bethesda would have undermined Protestantism and Article VI. But Article VI. makes no such suggestion, and

Martin Luther, greatest Protestant of them all, was a higher critic. Few believing higher critics to-day are so revolutionary as the great monk who called the Epistle of St. James *Epistola straminea*.

“The Church to teach, the Bible to prove,” re-
The Present Position, presents for many Churchmen the present position and the true solution. They forget the difficulty that we have but one Bible and several dissentient Churches; they forget, also, that most epigrams are but half-truths. The Church is a teaching Church, and the Bible is a Book that proves; if this is all that is meant, we would hardly trouble to condemn the phrases. But the epigram is sometimes used to claim for the Church a prior and superior authority to that of Scripture; and, when this is so, we believe it becomes untrue to the position of the Church of England. The whole question has been recently dealt with in a book from the pen of the Rev. A. W. F. Blunt, the author of some very suggestive “Studies in Apostolic Christianity.” Mr. Blunt’s new book is called “Faith in the New Testament,”¹ and in it he discusses at length the new situation created by modern criticism. Probably few will agree with everything that he says, but most people, and we amongst them, will feel very grateful to him for showing that the effect of modern criticism upon the New Testament has in no real way weakened its authority. The book is an important contribution to the subject, and we hope it will be widely read. We must here content ourselves with one or two brief quotations from it.

**Faith in the
New
Testament.**

Discussing the relationship of the New Testament to the Church, Mr. Blunt writes:

“We must take, and we cannot help taking, the witness of the two together. They are, indeed, not two, but one. The New Testament is a standard of truth, but it is an accepted standard, and its acceptance by the Church is part of its voucher. Similarly, the teaching of the Church is the explanation of the New Testament; we cannot hope to understand the New

¹ Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark. Price 2s. net

Testament aright, except in relation to the history of the Church and the Church's creed. At the same time, it is hard to see how, with any respect for history, we can hold any other view than that for the Christian of to-day the New Testament furnishes us with the basis of belief."

And again :

"A Christian Church has no moral right to propound new doctrines, which cannot be supported out of the New Testament, as necessary articles of faith. In so doing, it is wholly deserting the idea of the early ages of the Church—that the New Testament gave the groundwork of the Christian faith, and that Church doctrine must be deducible from these records. . . . In short, the Church has no moral authority to establish any doctrine that it pleases as an article of faith ; it may only do so along the lines of the New Testament, for the New Testament is the standard which the Church itself has accepted as its record of revealed truth."

With regard to private judgment, Mr. Blunt is equally clear :

"The exercise of mere individual private judgment upon the New Testament records, without any respect for the Church's interpretation of these records as embodied in its Creed, is an abuse of individual liberty and a dangerous act of intellectual license. . . . It is surely right to plead that private judgment should recognize its own limitations, and should pay to the voice of the historic Church that respect which is deserved by the inspired experience of nineteen centuries."

Mr. Blunt and Evangelicalism, Mr. Blunt has a paragraph concerning Evangelicalism, with which we should agree if it were wholly true. It is not true of the Evangelicalism of this magazine, and we do not believe it is really true of Evangelicalism at large. He writes :

"One of the dominant needs of present religious life in England is that the Evangelical party should consent to reconsider their dislike of modern Biblical scholarship and their predilection—I speak of the rank and file more than of the leaders—for sneering and girding at 'the critics,' as if they were the *ne plus ultra* of infidelity. This party stands for such noble ideals and such a precious aspect of truth—especially precious in view of current perverseness and exaggeration of its other aspects—that it is melancholy to see how these ideals and this presentation fail to have the full influence which might and ought to be theirs, because they are accidentally combined with an exploded theory of inspiration."

This is sufficiently an appeal to Evangelicals to make them read his book in full, and we are convinced that none who read it will regret the time and thought.

Tendencies in Criticism. The CHURCHMAN, under its present editorship, has not stood committed either to "conservative" or to more "advanced" views in connection with the literary and historical criticism of the Old Testament. We agree with many of our warmest friends and supporters in thinking that either of these points of view is compatible not only with genuine Christianity, but with that particular construction of Christianity which is represented by the Evangelical School in the Church of England. At the same time, we have our own tastes, our own instincts; and we make no particular secret of the fact that they are, on the whole, conservative in character. Criticism, after all, is a good deal a matter of temperament. One scholar is anxious to establish the old, another is equally anxious to discover the new; and in each case the searcher is prone to find very much what he *wants* to find. For ourselves, having, as we have already said, conservative instincts, we hold that literary criticism of the Old Testament has been far too active in a disintegrating direction, and that the historical character of Old Testament narratives has been unduly minimized. Holding these convictions, we are inclined to welcome with avidity any evidence which seems to support their truth.

The Elephantine Papyri. Such evidence, we venture to think, is forthcoming in the recent discovery of papyri at Elephantine. These papyri contain records of the Jewish colony on that island during the fifth century B.C., with interesting sidelights on earlier periods. They have already been published under capable editorship, and now Dr. Eduard Meyer has attempted in a small book to show the relation of these documents to the history of Judaism. One interesting passage may here be given in his own words. We quote the translation given in the *Times Literary Supplement* of August 8. Speaking of several copies of decrees of the Persian Government found among these documents, Dr. Meyer says that they "agree minutely in their composition and wording with those contained in the Book of Ezra, so that no more doubt can now prevail as to the genuine-

ness of the latter. More than this: some of the personalities who appear in the papyri are identical with those who figure in the Biblical narratives, so that we now possess information about these narratives and their times which is absolutely authentic and completely independent of the Old Testament records, whose dates and their general picture of the period are confirmed in every particular, and supplemented by new information. At the same time, we obtain information about the ancient Jewish popular religion, as well as about the reforms introduced in the Persian period, which confirm the results of historical investigation, and further illuminate and complete them."

Feine on
Criticism in
Germany.

In matters of New Testament criticism our conservative instincts are equally dominant. It will not, therefore, be surprising that here, too, we are somewhat keen to scent out the first traces of a return to what we hold to be a wiser and truer point of view. We would recommend all who share this sentiment with us to read for their comfort and instruction Dr. Paul Feine's survey in the August number of the *Expository Times* of positive theological research in Germany. The article is profoundly interesting not only in the detailed account it gives of various series of books issued by the conservative scholars of Germany, but also in Dr. Feine's wise and illuminating comments on the general drift of critical thought. With regard to the books, it will probably be news to many in England that conservative theology and scholarship is so active in Germany. It is the destructive work in Germany, for the most part, that gets translated into English. It is our misfortune, and perhaps a good deal our fault, that larger works, such as the "New Testament Commentary" which Zahn is editing, and the forthcoming "Evangelisch-theologische Bibliothek" of Bess do not get translated also into English.

The Task of
Conservative
Scholarship.

We cannot here do more than indicate the outline of some of Dr. Feine's own comments. He depicts the two tendencies that have lately been in vogue. There has been, on the one hand, the attempt of "liberal" theology to extract, by processes of "historical" criticism, a purely human Christ from the pages of the

Gospels ; and there has been the tendency to treat the whole of the Gospel history as a myth, and so to deny that Christ ever existed. The polemic of these latter thinkers has been directed mainly against the "liberal" presentation of Christ. Their arguments were quite rightly directed against the worship of the ideal man Jesus. "We conservative theologians," says Dr. Feine, "held ourselves in reserve at first in this dispute. We have followed with great pleasure the many tendencies on the part of the critical school towards a deeper view of the Person of Jesus ; but we think that our particular task lies in penetrating with the means and methods of present-day scientific research with the fulness, the wealth, and the super-historicity of the Biblical evidence of Christ, and in so working at our part that our knowledge may also help to bear witness to the majesty of Christ as our Divine Saviour."

University Education in India. In our last issue we called attention to the significant words of the Chancellor of Hong-Kong University with reference to University problems in the East. Since then Mr. Montagu, the Under-Secretary of State for India, has made an important speech on the subject of education in India. He included in his survey the whole extent of the field—primary, secondary, and University. With regard to the last, we may soon expect to see far-reaching changes and developments. Hitherto, in India, Universities have in the main been examining bodies ; in future they are to be places of residence and personal instruction. The formation of residential hostels will be encouraged, in which students may live the collegiate life under care and supervision. Here will be an opportunity for Christianity—the opportunity to awaken, not only the head, but the heart ; not only to discipline the intellect, but to form and build up character in the name and in the power of Christ. Our friends of the C.M.S. will doubtless see to it that at Dacca, Benares, Rangoon, and wherever else these projected Universities may be founded, ample provision is made for undergraduates during their term of residence to live under Christian care and influence.

The Bishopsrics Bill. There is still a possibility that this Bill may become law during the present Session. We hope it may be so. Some Evangelicals seem to be opposed to it, and this opposition has found expression in a letter to the *Record*. The argument seems to be : Bishops have displeased us—and verily sometimes they have—let us therefore keep them as few in number as we can. Surely it is hardly fair to blame Bishops for not doing their duty, and then by restriction of their number to make that duty difficult—nay, wellnigh impossible—to be done. We believe true Churchmanship stands to gain by the increase of the Episcopate. If Bishops had dioceses of such convenient size as made it possible for them to be true fathers in God to the flock, they would know the feeling of the Church, especially of the laity, well enough to bring to an end some of the intolerable scandals from which we suffer. Both Sheffield and Chelmsford have waited too long for their Bishops, and Evangelicalism must not be so little-minded as to incur part of the blame for keeping them waiting.

The White Slave Traffic Bill. It is not to be expected that all readers of the *CHURCHMAN* will agree in their estimate of the different Bills which during the present Parliament have reached various stages of completion. On one of them, however, we do hope for a strong consensus of vigorous opinion—that is, the White Slave Traffic Bill, which has already been in the hands of the Parliamentary Standing Committee. Some warm supporters of the measure are inclined to think that the amendments which have already been introduced by the Committee go far to rob the Bill of any value it originally had. We trust, however, that in its modified form it will not be without use in helping to check the infamous traffic against which it is directed. The success of this measure must largely depend on the powerful demand of public opinion, and it would be indeed tragic if the opinion which abhors this iniquity should be inoperative simply through silence.