

The Transcendence of Jesus Christ.

FROM the beginning the Church has always made Christ the living centre of its faith. Again and again it repeats the Master's own word, "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" To every generation the question comes afresh as a challenge to thought. Nothing else, says the Church, is so deeply important. For it is on the view we take of Christ that everything turns—our view of God, of man, of the meaning of life, of, in fact, everything that relates to the meaning of things. Hence for the Church the crucial point in all theology is really Christology, because what we think of God is determined by what we think of Christ.

Any book, therefore, that calls us to face up once more to our doctrine of Christ is well worth our study, and when the book quite obviously shows a first-hand acquaintance with all the complexities of the problem we feel that our debt to the author is very real.

Such a book has recently been published by one of our own ministers. It is entitled, *The Transcendence of Jesus Christ—A Study of the unique features of His Person, with special reference to the Fourth Gospel*, and the author is the Rev. F. Cawley, B.A., B.D., Ph.D.

I.

Dr. Cawley has had an interesting career. He was trained at Spurgeon's College and went out to India for the B.M.S. in 1912, where he remained for ten years. In 1922 he went to Port of Spain in Trinidad, and in 1926 entered the home ministry, settling at Falkirk in Scotland. In 1935 he came to Denmark Place, and there he is now exercising a happy ministry.

It was during his pastorate at Falkirk that Dr. Cawley began his academic career. He took his B.A., B.D. from London and thereafter went on to post-graduate work at Edinburgh, receiving at the end of it his Ph.D. for a thesis which he has now made the basis of his book.

It is interesting to observe the marks of his Scottish residence on Dr. Cawley's work. Apart from the debt he expresses to the Theological Faculty at Edinburgh, there is the fact that he leans heavily on Mackintosh, Denney and Forsyth. And even more striking is the use of such Scotticisms as "a placed minister" (meaning a minister in regular charge), and "thirled" (meaning

bound or securely fastened). This is all the more remarkable in that Dr. Cawley is not himself a Scotsman. Clearly, he is able to adapt himself to his environment (an admirable quality in "a placed minister"), and he can make the most of his opportunities.

One other point of a personal kind is perhaps worth mentioning. Twice in his book Dr. Cawley refers to an experience of the "dark ways of doubt." He evidently knows what it means to fight his way through to the clear light of intelligent faith, and his book is all the richer for being the answer of an enquiring mind to the difficulties it has felt itself.

II.

Turning now to the book we observe that it is largely a product of the modern emphasis in theology.

Man to-day in his thinking has come to what is suspiciously like a dead end. H. G. Wells has recently been writing and speaking on the problem of what he calls "Frustration," the feeling that man, for some reason or other, has arrived at an impasse. Clearly he has been pursuing the wrong road, and he cannot see his way out. Does not this constitute a challenge to the Church? Is not the explanation of the present situation to be found in man's constant stress on the relativity of things, to the exclusion of that which is supreme and abiding and eternal? Hence the emphasis we get to-day in theology on transcendence. We can see this in Barth and Brunner, and more philosophically in Heim.

Dr. Cawley's first chapter puts him in line with all this. It is entitled "The Paradox of Jesus Christ." Here we have One who shared the life of man and lived within the bounds of human history. Yet, as we look at Him, we are conscious that He cannot be explained in space-time terms. He belongs to the eternal, and, "He reveals the hidden mystery of God, not as one approaching it with a view to its discovery, but as one who shared it, whose very life and home it has always been." Thus we get a Being who lives in two worlds at once; He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, while His nature at the same time is so interpenetrated by the Divine as to make it unique in the experience of our race. Christ is thus a paradox, and it is this that constitutes the problem of His Person.

In his second chapter Dr. Cawley develops these points more fully, discussing first what Christ shares with us, secondly, wherein He transcends us, and lastly, what He gives us.

This leads on to the third chapter, "The Solitariness of the Cross." Here we touch the heart of the Gospel, for the purpose of: Christ was essentially redemptive, and the Cross was the

inevitable climax of His whole experience. Once we admit that Christ stands in a special relation to God as well as to men, the Cross, we can see, becomes in itself a transcendent thing. It has thus a meaning for God as well as for man. Any merely "subjective" view of the Atonement becomes impossible, and the Cross is revealed as a fact in the eternal order. Dr. Cawley owes much to Forsyth, and Forsyth has left his mark not only on the substance of this chapter, but also on the style.

The fourth chapter of the book deals with the finality of Christ, which we see both in Himself and in the Church's faith—in Himself, as we examine the assumptions behind His message, miracles, and personality; and then in the Church's faith, as it thinks of Him as risen and ascended, and destined to come as King and Judge of all.

In a sense, the book is thus complete, but a final chapter is added on the Validity of the Fourth Gospel. So much has been said about this, particularly in the direction of depreciating its historicity, that Dr. Cawley thinks it well to examine the point. He gives us all the evidence, and though he does not explicitly say whether the author was John the Apostle or John the "Elder," he does make it clear that the Fourth Gospel has a supreme value in that it enables us to see the essential Christ, the Christ who is everywhere assumed by the Synoptics.

It must be clear from all this that Dr. Cawley has covered a wide field. He has read scores and scores of books (in fact, the references and quotations in the book are almost too numerous). Better than this, he has kept closely to his sources in the New Testament, and he well deserves the praise that Professor H. R. Mackintosh gives him in the Foreword.

Perhaps I ought to add that the book is published by T. & T. Clark, runs to over 300 pages, and costs 9s. net.

III.

It is interesting to observe in regard to the Person of Christ how the emphasis has steadily shifted.

For many years we have had books on "The Jesus of History," all attempting to show how Christ stands related to the environment from which He sprang and the conditions in which He worked. These books have done the Church an enormous service, in that they have put at the disposal of people to-day masses of information that have greatly illuminated the pages of the Gospels. Much misunderstanding has been cleared away, and the figure of Christ stands out against its background more livingly and attractively clear than perhaps at any time since the first century. No one now has any excuse for failing to see how real a person Jesus Christ was.

But one assumption has marred most of these books, and that is the assumption that in dealing with Christ we must ruthlessly eliminate the supernatural. He belongs to history or, as brainy people say, "the time process," and any factors that seem to take Him out of this we must absolutely exclude. They may have a mystical value for religion, but they must not be treated as essential fact.

Hence the distinction so often made between the Fourth and the Synoptic Gospels. The Fourth Gospel is the composition of a mystic who worked freely over his sources and produced a devotional classic which, however, cannot seriously be regarded as history. The same thing may be said of much of the other writing of the New Testament. Guignebert's *Jesus*, for example, is a very interesting book, and it displays a wide range of knowledge. But the actual "facts" about Jesus are said to be so few that we are left wondering why the world has made such a fuss about so mythical a figure.

Books like this rest on what is generally described as a critical examination of the sources. But the interesting point to-day is that criticism itself has exploded the older type of criticism, for it has made it plain that behind the sources even of the Synoptics there is everywhere the faith of the Church, and thus it is no longer really possible to draw a sound distinction between the "Jesus of history" and "The Christ of faith." The New Testament is essentially at one with itself, and we never go behind the mind of the Church to a Jesus who is so purely human as not to be divine.

Thus, assuming that Jesus was real—and if He was not, we cannot trust history anywhere—then we are brought by criticism once more face to face with the kind of Christ who all along has been the inspiration of His people's faith. He is the "Man from the other side," "the One sent from God" for our deliverance, and the emphasis on His transcendence which is so fundamental to the New Testament view of His work is one that we shall do well to make more and more real in our ministry. A merely human Jesus is not big enough for the work of salvation, and the "frustration" that H. G. Wells complains of in modern life can only be removed when we preach (as we to-day so confidently can) a Christ in whom God manifestly dwelt.

HENRY COOK.