

Speaking generally, I believe it is the tendency to monotony of the Morning and Evening Services that is accountable for the dwindling congregations in so many of the English churches. The same arrangements, the same man, and almost the same words, Sunday after Sunday throughout the year, cannot but be found depressing to the average person, unless he or she has the God-given gift of spiritual imagination that makes all things new, a gift which, unfortunately, few English people possess. For this reason more latitude should be given to the Sunday liturgies, more power within certain limits to vary the features of the services. In the hands of Church of England clergy, a certain liberty to diversify the liturgies could not possibly lead to any harm, but might be the means of bringing many wanderers back to the emptying fold.

To conclude I will take a quotation from the Rev. H. N. Bate's book "The Healthful Spirit" :

"The worshipping heart will never be convinced that the mind of the English Church was for ever expressed three and a half centuries ago, nor that what was included or excluded then was for ever barred or admitted. But a Church which really determines to build up the faithful, to be free in the progressive study of the art of worship, to learn from and with its pupils, will have not only the past behind it, but the present with it, and the future before it; and in satisfying with generosity the widely various needs of worshipping humanity will be as strong as it is broad."

In these words is ample justification for all I have now brought forward.



The Reality of the Christ of the New Testament.

BY THE REV. W. ST. CLAIR TISDALL, D.D.

IN our own days the question has often been asked in various forms, What proof have we of the actual existence of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth some one thousand nine hundred years ago? How far is the New Testament account of him historically correct, and how far is it ideal? Quite recently an attempt has been made to distinguish between "Jesus" and "Christ"—that is, to show that the picture of the man Jesus of Nazareth given in the Synoptic Gospels (though even that, these sages of Gotham tell us, is "largely ideal") differs almost *in toto* from the conception of the Divine

Christ depicted in St. John's Gospel and in the Apostolic Epistles. Of course, all this is in a sense a *réchauffé*, in a somewhat varied form, of the Gnostic heresy of Cerinthus, who—though in a less anti-Christian way—distinguished the man Jesus from the Æon Christ, who descended on Him at His baptism, according to Cerinthus. Even Tacitus knew better than this, for in his well-known mention of our Lord's crucifixion he speaks of the Sufferer as *Christ*,¹ just as does St. Paul in Rom. viii. 34. Neither in its ancient nor in its modern form is it logically possible to maintain the theory we have mentioned. Divesting the matter of philosophic language, the simple question remains to be answered, "Did Jesus Christ, as depicted in the New Testament, ever really exist?" It is in this form that the matter presents itself to straightforward, practical, honest people, who want a plain answer to a plain question.

Various attempts have been made in the past to avoid giving a definite answer. The theory that it is possible to evolve from the New Testament a non-miraculous Jesus has not proved a success. The definite negative given by the now exploded Solar-Myth theory was, if possible, still less satisfactory. Few, even of the most credulous, will now venture to affirm that the New Testament writers were deliberate deceivers. Nor can any illusion hypothesis less robust than the universal *Mâyā* of the Hindūs account for their being deceived. Attempts have been made to escape from the difficulty by getting rid of the New Testament documents. But even the efforts of the Tübingen school failed in this. These documents exist and refuse to be got rid of. Quite independently of all discussion of their date and authorship—though these matters have been in large measure settled after the most searching examination by men who differ in spirit as widely as Harnack and Zahn—the New Testament books present us with a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of Him a modern sceptical writer says: "It must be admitted that there are few characters of antiquity about whom we possess so much indubitably historical information."² It is not a Christian clergyman, but John Stuart Mill, who cogently argues against the credulity of unbelief in the following words: "Who among His disciples, or among their proselytes, was capable of inventing the sayings ascribed to Jesus, or of imagining the life and character revealed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fishermen of Galilee; as certainly not St. Paul, whose character and idiosyncrasies were of a totally different sort; still less the early Christian writers, in whom nothing is more evident than that the good which was in them was all derived, as they always professed that it was derived, from a higher Source."³ Mr. Lecky was not prejudiced in favour of orthodoxy, yet in the following well-known passage he clearly traces the good results produced in the world by Christianity to the actual reality upon which the Gospel portraiture of Christ is based: "It was reserved for Christianity to

¹ "Auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat" (Annal., Lib. XV., cap. 44; Cf. Suetonius, "Claudius," cap. 25; also the disputed passage in Josephus, "Ant. Iudæor." Lib. XVIII., iii., 3).

² Schweitzer's "Quest of the Historical Jesus," p. 6.

³ Quoted by Sir R. Anderson in "A Doubter's Doubts," p. 121.

present to the world an ideal character which, through all the changes of eighteen centuries, has inspired the hearts of men with an impassioned love, has shown itself capable of acting on all ages, nations, temperaments, and conditions, has been not only the highest pattern of virtue but the strongest incentive to its practice, and has exercised so deep an influence that it may be truly said that the simple record of three short years of active life has done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists."¹ And, in spite of the ambiguous supposition which they contain, Mr. A. C. Benson's words are worth quoting on the same subject: "The one thing that seems to defy the solvents of Rationalism is the personality of Christ. It may be surrounded by unhistorical legends, but nothing can take away the wonder and sublimity of His teaching and of His example. We may ransack the records of humanity in vain for such a figure, such a life, such a conception of moral virtue."²

Now, either the Jesus of the Gospels was really such as He is there described as being or He was still greater. He certainly could not have been *less* exalted, less spiritual, less perfect, less unique than there represented, On their own showing we learn from the Evangelists how unable they were to do Him justice, how far they were from fully comprehending their Master and Lord. To hold that they consciously or unconsciously idealized an imperfect and purely human character, and thus drew their portrait of Him, is, if we consider the matter, absolutely contrary to reason and common sense. They had no models to go by, no ideals at all even distantly resembling the character they have depicted so simply, so clearly, and so convincingly. Those to whom we owe the New Testament documents were not acquainted, as we now are, with all the lofty ideals ever imagined in all lands by poets and philosophers. They were not great authors, talented writers of romance and poetry and drama. It is hardly likely that they even knew the Roman ideal man, the "Pius Æneas" of Virgil. The Book of Ecclesiasticus, in its list of famous men, from Enoch to Simon the son of Onias (capp. xlv.-l.), tells us from what models Jewish imaginations could draw. It will not be contended that these would afford any help. Nor do the Messianic hopes expressed in the Apocryphal Book of Enoch and its like. Paul and Luke alone may perhaps have read Aristotle's fancy sketch of the Magnanimous Man (*μαγαλόψυχος*, "Eth.Nic.," Lib. IV., 3), who in our eyes is conceited and selfish. To them also Plato's ideas about the perfectly Just Man ("Repub.," Lib. II., 360E.-362A.) may have been known. From this, however, except the fact that Plato thought that such a man would be crucified, a romancer would hardly gain a single suggestion. Nor could such a man learn much from Achilles, Agamemnon, Ulysses, or even from the Prometheus of Æschylus, that would enable him to imagine the character of Christ. It is not probable that the disciples had read the description of the "True Man" written by Confucius's grandson about 388 B.C.; nor is the picture of the ideal "Princely Man" there drawn at all like their portraiture. It is safe to say that none of them was acquainted with the sketch of the Calm Man (*sihitaprajña*) of the Bhagavad Gitā, or the romances

¹ "History of Morals," vol. ii., p. 9.

² "The Gate of Death."

which tell of Rama and the infamous Kṛishṇa, or the late legends about Buddha contained in the *Lalita Vistara* and the *Buddha-carita*, for the very sufficient reason that these works were not then in existence, and would not have given them the very slightest assistance if they had been. Had any one of the New Testament writers wished to draw an ideal picture of his Master, all these works put together, if he had known them—nay, all the literature of the whole world *then and since*, apart from the New Testament itself—would have absolutely and utterly failed to supply him with a model, to provide one single colour to his palette, or an outline for his canvas. The disciples were “unlearned and ignorant men” for the most part, and had they attempted to depict the Perfect Man from their own imaginations, it is beyond the utmost bounds of credulity that they would have succeeded. In addition to this, had they been so far successful, it would have proved a hopeless task to persuade His followers at large that this fancy picture was the Jesus of Nazareth whom they had known and loved. Nor, again, would it have been easy for a number of romance writers to depict such an ideal Man that, even in this twentieth century, we have to admit that the highest and only possible conception of God for us now is that given in Christ’s own character as the manifestation of the Father. The mere mention of these matters is enough to show the absurdity of any theory intended to account for the character of Jesus Christ as depicted in the New Testament other than the hypothesis that it is an imperfect but honest attempt made by different men of deep earnestness and absolute sincerity, even though mostly of little culture, to tell, however incompletely, something of what they had seen and heard and knew of their Lord (1 John i. 1, 3).

Nor are we left with the slightest doubt on this point. The New Testament does not give us an *ideal* picture, because its portrait differs so much from the idealized Christ described in the Apocryphal Gospels. There we see what, in the opinion of that age, an ideal Messiah would be like. The Jesus of the Apocryphal Gospels is devoid of every one of the noble and tender attributes which won for the real historical Jesus the love and devotion of many men of His own time who were faithful unto death, and which have proved not less powerful all through the ages since in moving men to unselfishness and giving them the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is absolutely certain, then, that the idealizing process to which the Jesus of the Apocryphal Gospels owes His origin was not at work in the New Testament.

Unless we are prepared to admit that the New Testament writers, or at least six of them, were each possessed of a genius far superior to that of Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Virgil, Homer, or any other writer ancient or modern; that they each had a vigorous but unscrupulous imagination unparalleled for loftiness and beauty, an insight into the needs of humanity found nowhere else, a sympathy with men’s spiritual yearnings unequalled in all history, a courage, unselfishness and devotion to God and their fellow-men never approached before or since; an unrivalled love for and consciousness of every form of goodness and excellence, a power of inspiring these noble feelings into millions of men of every race and clime during some twenty centuries, and, at the same time, an audacity in lying and blasphemy without

its equal elsewhere in the whole long history of crime and ungodliness—then there is only one other conclusion possible. It is that the morally good did *not* come from the morally bad, that all the truth and goodness in the world has not its source in a lie; in short, that the writers of the New Testament do not place us in this intellectual and moral difficulty, because they were simple and honest men who endeavoured, however inadequately, to place on record what they had themselves witnessed, what they themselves knew of the Light of the World.



The Missionary World.

BY THE REV. A. J. SANTER,
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AN interesting "memory of the past" is given to us in an extract from a letter by the Rev. Gavin Smith in the *Chronicle*, London Missionary Society, for May. He writes: "After we left Sydney we made for the Cook Islands, where we spent three weeks. At Mitiaro I was taken to see a place where, ninety years ago, 200 men and women were killed and eaten at one time. That was the last great cannibal feast on the island, for, soon after, the Gospel was taken there. It is almost impossible to-day to realize that so recently the people were cannibal. Now they crowd into their churches at every service, and, although they have not yet reached a very high level, yet the Gospel of Christ has done wonders. If some people at home tell you that the old-fashioned Gospel cannot save, you can tell them how much it has already done."



From the *North India Gleaner* we learn an interesting story of the Bhil Mission, as given by the Rev. A. J. Birkett at the Central Provinces and Rajputana Conference. "The Christians there now number 430, and prove their faith by their liberality. He referred to a forward movement in Mori. The wife of a Bhagat (Bhil devotee) was ill, and possessed by a devil. An exorcist was called in, and a shrine erected in the corner of a room, all to no purpose. At last she was brought to the hospital under the charge of Mrs. Birkett, M.D. Here she rapidly recovered in answer to prayer. The devil was expelled. This so astonished the people of Mori that they all began to inquire, What 'Power' is this that has come into our midst? It is hoped that it may result in the people there coming out *en masse* for Christ."



In the *Lamp of Life*, the story of the work of the Baptist Missionary Society for 1909-10 is a report from Berhampore, Orissa, which reveals two significant facts concerning the enemy's tactics, and the progress of the forces of Christ against him. According to Mr. Macdonald's report there seems to be a revival of Hinduism, "whose doctrines and superstitions are being widely restated in modern scientific and philosophic explanations; hence a number of new societies and sects." "Hinduism," say the leaders of