

"The Quest of the Historical Jesus."¹

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

OUR Lord's words, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me," are being fulfilled to-day more than ever. Men cannot get away from the attraction. They cannot, apparently, turn their eyes away from the Crucified: and, if they do not gaze at Him with faith and love, at least they join in the taunt "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." This book is a good illustration of the fact. The writer and most of those whom he quotes with approval hardly disguise the fact that they are haters of Christ. Herr Schweitzer tells us that there are two ways of writing a "Life of Jesus"—with love or with hatred for Him; and he adds that the most successful modern "lives" of Him have been written "with hate" (pp. 4 and 15). Among these he instances those of Reimarus and Strauss. From the former's arguments Herr Schweitzer informs us that he himself differs in only one single point of any consequence (p. 23), while he can hardly find words strong enough to express his admiration for Reimarus himself and his work, published by Lessing after the writer's death.

Herr Schweitzer expresses the greatest contempt for all attempts made on the Christian, and even on the Rationalistic, side to counteract the effect of Strauss's "Leben Jesu." Strauss himself comes in for reproof only once, and then it is for having, in the third edition of his book, recanted some of his extreme theories in consequence of De Wette's and Neander's arguments. However, as the author joyfully points out, these admissions of error were retracted in the fourth edition (pp. 119, 120).

Herr Schweitzer has devoted an immense amount of toil to the task of condensing into his work all the infidel attacks on the Jesus of the Evangelists "from Reimarus to Wrede." The result is a book which will prove a perfect armoury of shallow arguments for the use of half-educated unbelievers in this country and wherever English and German are read. Yet this work is warmly commended by our Cambridge Norrisian Professor of Divinity! It is of little consequence that its arguments have been refuted over and over again, for those likely to be affected by the book are precisely the people who are quite unaware that such answers have been given.

In a brief review of the book it is, of course, impossible to refer to the voluminous mistatements of Scriptural facts to be found in the books which Herr Schweitzer quotes. We must content ourselves with pointing out that the author and most of those whom he praises are throughout complacently guilty of *petitio principii* in case after case. *E.g.*, he is himself well aware that every attempt to disprove the possibility of the miraculous has failed, as even J. S. Mill proved from the logical point of view. His book shows that he knows how completely all the anti-Christian writers whom he quotes have failed to convince one another, or perhaps even themselves, of the plausibility

¹ "The Quest of the Historical Jesus," by Albert Schweitzer, Privatdozent; with Preface by Professor Burkitt. London: A. and C. Black. 10s. 6d. net.

of their efforts to explain away the resurrection of our Lord, or even a single one of the minor New Testament miracles. Yet he coolly denies the occurrence of these miracles (p. 51), though compelled to admit the *bona fides* of the Gospel writers and the fact that it has proved impossible to eliminate the miraculous element from the narrative. Regarding our Lord, he tells us that "there are few characters of antiquity about whom we possess so much indubitable historical information" (p. 6). Yet a careful study of Herr Schweitzer's work leaves us absolutely unable to say what facts regarding Him he holds to be historical, and by what criteria he professes to distinguish the "historical" from the "mythical" elements in the Gospel narratives. Herr Schweitzer would evidently like to regard our Lord as merely a great Jew of that century, though more enlightened in some respects than most Jews of that time; yet his studies show him that this is absolutely impossible. Such a man would never have been heard of by the world at large, and would assuredly have been unable to change the world as Christ has undoubtedly done. The cause of this change must be adequate to the effect, but no adequate explanation of it has even yet been given except the Christian one—that Divine power was and is at work, that our Lord was what He claimed to be, and that the Gospel narrative is true. From this dilemma Strauss, Renan, Reimarus, and even Herr Schweitzer, have all failed to find an escape.

Our author quotes the attempts made by Seydel, Ghillany and Robertson, to trace certain elements in the Gospels back to Buddhistic, Mithraic, and Krishnaic influence respectively, but he lets it be seen that he rightly regards these efforts as unsuccessful (p. 290). Some not inconsiderable study of this question has convinced us of the absolute absurdity of such theories, regarded merely from the standpoint of scholarship. Not only these but all the other hypotheses quoted in the book smack of the professorial—or Privatdozentic—chair, and show an almost complete ignorance of real life and of things Eastern, as well as of man's spiritual needs and of the limits of human credulity. Renan had spent some time in Palestine, yet his description of the "docile" Eastern mule (p. 184), and, indeed, the whole of his romance, manifests a total inability to represent to himself the facts of the case and the circumstances of our Lord's life on earth. The want of reality is as conspicuous in his book as is its lack of moral earnestness.

The effect of Herr Schweitzer's book on the thoughtful and earnest reader is twofold. In the first place it fills him with sorrow that such an effort should be made to influence for evil those who are not really determined to find the truth in order to *do* God's will (John vii. 17). In the second it shows him how completely the efforts of unbelief during the last century and a half have failed to account for the Gospel portraiture of our Lord except on the supposition that it is historically correct. When we consider the author's admission that all the authors on the anti-Christian side in their "Quest of the Historical Jesus" (so called because it has really been an attempt to avoid being found by Him) have reached merely "negative" results (p. 396), and that, when He is found, "the historical Jesus will be to our time a stranger and an enigma," we are not surprised that he should say this. Men who start with the assumption that it is axiomatic that those who

knew the Lord Jesus best and loved Him most have given an entirely erroneous and unhistorical view of Him can hardly be expected to be successful in their "Quest," or at least in finding out the truth. Hence the rational (?) conclusion of our author that "the real, unmovable, historical foundation" of the kind of Christianity which he is trying to establish "*is independent of any historical confirmation or justification*" (p. 397). In the much-abused name of criticism, therefore, we are expected to accept as *historical* certain theories and assertions which their own latest advocate admits to be devoid of any historical justification! And yet this blind credulity is by some thought to be more intellectual than a living Christian faith.

We must speak out plainly on the subject dealt with in this book. This "Liberal Theology," or whatever it may be miscalled, is only a repetition of the old inquiry addressed to the world by those who write "with an eloquent hate" (p. 15): "What will ye give us, and we will deliver Him unto you?" Something more than thirty pieces of silver is now offered, and the scholar's fame too often takes the place of the traitor's shame. Yet still to-day, as before the Resurrection, the words of the betrayed, the Crucified, are true: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." From the day these words were uttered to this, there has never been any real doubt as to the winning side in this great war.



The Missionary World.

BY THE REV. A. J. SANTER.

FROM the private circular letter of a lady missionary at Mankar, Bengal, we are able to give a short account of the funeral service in memory of our late King, Edward VII., held in the small, mud-built church of that station, which is both interesting and significant. Miss Harding writes: "It was a most impressive sight—a sea of earnest faces, deeply reverent. The Bengali Padre gave an address in the compound, so that all might have a chance of hearing. As I stood close to the Pastor and saw that huge assembly, Mohammedans, Hindus, Brahmans, and low-caste, all standing shoulder to shoulder, I thought how marvellous the power that can draw men together whatever be their caste. And strangely enough, too, instead of having their own demonstration separately, as they might have done, the Christian place of worship was chosen as a centre to show their last respect to our King. . . . I recalled a similar crowd, only not so large, which gathered in the month of May, thirteen years ago, a hostile crowd, bent on doing me harm, because I had fed a famine-child, and because the effects of Christians living in the place were being felt. How different now, on May 20, 1910—a friendly crowd come to join with Christians to show respect to England's King and their Emperor! In that crowd I recognized some who were armed that memorable day with clubs, and now they stood side by side with me in the precincts of God's house. We can only say, What hath God wrought?"