

not *require* to have, a sense which, according to the progress of the Biblical history of salvation, it is impossible to give to it.

ED. KÖNIG.

THE INCARNATION AND DOGMA.

“Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God.”—1 *John* iv. 15.

Our subject is the Incarnation and Dogma. It has not a very attractive sound: one rather draws off from even the thought of thinking about Dogmatism and Dogma. But this very shrinking is proof that we, ourselves, are concerned in asking *why* there has grown up, almost within our own recollection, among people who are intelligent enough, this strong and rather scornful dislike of dogmatic truth. When you say that a man's habit of thought is dogmatic, why have you already condemned him with fashionable and modern thinkers?

After all, a dogma simply means a doctrine, announced as such, put to us as what we ought to believe. Dogmatic theology means positive truth in religion systematically stated; and the only sense in which a man may be too dogmatic is the sense in which he may be too positive. But assuredly there are things about which he cannot be too certain, nor speak too confidently; mischief only begins when one is positive in the wrong place, or in an unbecoming manner. And as one's over-readiness to lay down the law does not prove that there are no laws at all, nor even that I shall not be arrested if I break them, so too, and just in the same way, the over-readiness of some Christians to dogmatize neither proves that there is no dogma nor that I shall be safe in rejecting it.

If you think of it, the most dogmatic statement in the

world, going down to the roots of things, and penetrating all our concerns, is the Multiplication Table. There it stands, with neither an exception nor a "perhaps," nor a reason in the whole of it; nor does it confine itself to the little world we know; but announces flatly, without reserve or modesty or qualification, that throughout the universe twice two are four, and ten times ten a hundred. And you will do well to act accordingly, for whatever concerns you, from a dealing in the market to the calculating of a sidereal perturbation, you must accept these dogmas, or they will have their revenge upon you. The sincerity of your views will avail you nothing unless your views are sound. Well then, if we are to have any religion at all, why should we expect, and why should we wish, to find things otherwise here?

And yet there are reasons, which it will help us if we notice, that go far to explain this strange dislike to positive religious teaching. One is that modern fashionable thought is loose and inaccurate, and greatly resents being stopped before large and serious questions, and asked, Are these things certainly true or false? Do you positively say "Yes" to them or "No"? Much popular dislike to dogma is simply the unwillingness of people to make up their minds, especially when they must act on their decisions. Yes, but another reason, which it is only fair to confess, is that religious people too often dogmatize in wrong directions. For there are matters of profound religious interest upon which we can scarcely refrain from forming an opinion, and sometimes a strong one, yet an opinion is the most that we ought to form, because God has refrained from pronouncing positively. And yet we creatures of a day will not refrain from pronouncing positively: we must needs dogmatize on our own score. One such question is the future lot of the millions of heathenism; another is the nature and extent

of inspiration ; and elderly people can remember when any divergence from received views about them were denounced as dangerous and unsound.

Once more. There is a way of uttering priceless truth, such as the doctrine of the Atonement, which may well excite righteous indignation and repugnance. Just as it used to be said of the backwoods of America, that there a man would scarcely venture to do you a kindness without putting his revolver to your ear, so there have been theologians who could not teach the blessed gospel of the grace of God, without threatening damnation if you commit an error of judgment concerning the theory of redemption.

That is very pestilent nonsense.

The faith which saves a soul, and the unbelief which ruins it, are faith and unbelief in God, revealing Himself as our Saviour, making His greatest and most energetic appeal to our hearts in Jesus Christ. All else, however helpful, edifying and precious it may be (and much else is simply beyond price), all is helpful just as it helps us to this, to trust in the living God, made manifest in Jesus Christ.

And, therefore, in our text, St. John says that whosoever really confesses the dogma of the Incarnation—not of course with his lips only, but thoroughly, himself, the very man—whosoever shall thus confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in Him, and he in God. Everything is implicitly folded up in this ; and everything shall explicitly unfold itself out of this. It is a dogma. Yes, but this dogma is capable of propelling, like the pulses of the heart, life blood to the remotest extremities of our nature. Nor is it possible for two men to be really alike, of whom one has heartily embraced, while the other has rejected, this great gospel, this highly dogmatic gospel, that Eternal God has come in flesh to save us from our sins.

In a Christian country no reasonable man can evade the

absolute necessity of dogmatizing upon this great question. He must either say, *God has come in the flesh*, which is a dogma laden with consequences; or else, *No, that is a dream, God has not come in the flesh*, which assertion also is a dogma, not without consequences; or else he may say, but this is his last alternative, *Whether God has come in the flesh or not is a matter about which I am incapable of reaching a clear conviction*; and on this categorical assertion, this dogma, he stakes his soul.

From one or other of these alternatives there is no escape for a reasonable man, for surely it is unreasonable to say that possibly God has come in the flesh for my sake, and possibly I am capable of ascertaining the truth upon this subject, but I decline to take the trouble. As if one whom I have mortally offended and who can ruin me, had perhaps, perhaps, for my sake, entered the room where I lay sullen and despairing, and perhaps were holding out his hand in reconciliation, but I refuse to turn my head to see whether this were so or not. It is not only madness but guilty madness to say that perhaps God has come to us for our redemption, but we will not trouble ourselves to arrive at any certainty upon the subject.

Advancing one step further, we discover that our real choice lies not between the three dogmas above stated, but they really shrink up into two.

To say that man is incapable of ascertaining the truth about religion, that perhaps there is a God but I cannot discover Him, nor can He reveal Himself, that perhaps I am an immortal creature but I cannot feel sure of being more than a brute; to be an Agnostic, a hopelessly ignorant person, is surely not a proud position for a reasoning being to take up.

But the point at present is that as regards the Incarnation it is a quite impossible position. If we cannot in the nature of things be sure of anything about God and His

nature, then, oddly enough, we can be quite sure of this much, that He never has and never can become incarnate. If His nature and ours are such that neither can we reach up to Him, nor He down to us, then He never will take our nature in order to reveal Himself, for any such attempt must necessarily fail. And so the Agnostic, who is incapable of knowing anything, knows this, that even if God exists He cannot lay aside the clouds and darkness which envelop Him, nor approach His creatures, nor speak in the ear which He has framed. This the Agnostic knows and can affirm on the discredited *a priori* lines of argument. And yet he counts himself intellectually more modest than we, who think ourselves incapable of judging *a priori* what is possible to the Supreme Being, and therefore humbly examine the evidence which professes to attest a revelation. To us the Incarnation is God's answer to our bewildered and despairing cry, Can man by searching find out God? Can he find out the Almighty to perfection?

No, this great dogma replies, you never could find Him, and for that very reason He has found you. Because you never could have translated the language of the skies, therefore He has learned, at the knees of Mary, to speak our human tongue. He has taken manhood, that all men beholding our nature saturated with Divine qualities, should ask, Is this natural? Who is this? It bids us to discern the secret of a weakness that is stronger than man, and a foolishness (in the eyes of worldly wisdom) that is wiser than man; and a triumph rooted in overthrow, and a glory of anguish, and an empire of service, and such a new force leavening the race that old things have already passed away—for where is slavery? where is torture? what would you think if you found a group of crucified men outside the walls as you go home, and the clergy of the city shooting out their lips at one of them?—I say that already old things have passed away, and also already all things

have become new, so that neither sun nor earth, nor stars, nor life, nor death, mean what they used to mean, and the poorest sick creature in a hovel can have better medicine and nursing, and far warmer sympathy and sublimer consolations than Augustus Cæsar with the world grovelling at his feet.

Jesus Christ has been able to do this, and there are loving followers of His who know of so much nobler things which He has done, that they marvel at our lingering for a moment to think of these.

Say then, if He is not what we believe Him, who has been God enough to dream this dream? How came this conceit, this falsehood, which has renewed the world in righteousness, to fever with a restorative delirium the brains of Jews who had Annas and Caiaphas for the chiefs of their religion, and Gentiles who were burning incense to Nero as a god—an adorable god surely, in the act of murdering his mother or his teacher, or kicking his wife to death.

Did such a seed-plot find and fertilize the germ out of which Christianity overspread the world? and is not the spontaneous generation of such a religion, and its development by natural causes as the fittest to survive in such an environment, much harder to believe than our Dogma of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word?

A dogma, lastly, that has nothing of the repellent hardness which we began by observing in the thought of dogma. In it, religion itself, as well as our Master, takes flesh and blood; it grows warm and beautiful and kind; and we adore, not because lightnings are flashing from the skies, nor yet because our barns are empty and we needs must wring by importunity some respite from the hard fate which weighs upon us; but because from the topmost

heaven Love is gazing on us with human eyes, whispering with a human voice, Come unto Me, and I will give you rest; and when He breathes on us, as He did at the first upon His chosen, His human breath is the quickening Spirit of God the Eternal.

G. A. DERRY.

THE ARTICLES OF THE APOSTLES' CREED.

IV. "SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE."

Passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus, mortuus et sepultus. Suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead and buried.

Rom.: τὸν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου σταυρωθέντα καὶ ταφέντα. *Aqu.*: Crucifixus sub Pontio Pilato et sepultus. *Afr.*: The same (only with "qui . . . est"). *Jerus.*: (only according to Cyril) σταυρωθέντα καὶ ταφέντα. *Antioch.*: Et crucifixus sub Pontio Pilato et sepultus.

The strangest portion of this Article, and one which has therefore become a proverb, "Pontius Pilate in the Creed," is also that which can be traced furthest back in exactly the same form, and which reappears in nearly all Creeds without alteration. It seems, therefore, highly probable that this ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου already belonged to the baptismal confession, which can be traced back to the early days of missions to the heathen (see pp. 40-44, Germ. ed.). It is also very remarkable that in the oldest account which we possess by a heathen author of the historical event of the Crucifixion of Christ, the name of the Roman official who allowed the sentence of death to be carried out is given with the same completeness—we might also say incompleteness—as it is given by Christians when they reproduce, or appear to reproduce, their Creed.¹ People are not in the habit of bringing forward Tacitus among the witnesses for the Creed. Probably he never heard of

¹ Tacitus, *Annal.* xv. 44: "Auctor nominis ejus Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio affectus erat."