

THE THEOLOGY OF ALBRECHT RITSCHL :

A LECTURE.

RITSCHLIANISM, it is safe to say, is both the most characteristic and the most fascinating product of what we call, distinctively, "modern theology." The master himself exerted an influence unrivalled by that of any other contemporary divine, and the contributions which have been made by members of his school to the intellectual heritage of Christianity have been in many cases of the most brilliant and stimulating kind. Whatever criticisms have been passed on the Ritschlian Dogmatic, no one who cared for theology has been tempted to say that it was ever uninteresting. It evoked too keen and heart-felt approbation, too bitter and resolute dissent, for any one to say that. To-day, seventeen years after Ritschl's death, the dust of battle has for the most part subsided; yet discussions of the problems upon which it was his habit to dwell appear still in the magazines. The echoes of controversy linger on. Wherever you find a paper on "Value-judgments in Religion," or "Theology and Metaphysics," the chances are that the writer means to debate the question more or less as Ritschl threw it into shape.

In the brief hour at our disposal to-day I wish to consider four points: (1) Ritschl's theological method, (2) his conception of the source and norm of Dogmatic Theology, (3) his correction, in these matters, of the past, (4) his view of the essence of Christianity. Of these in order very briefly.

I. Ritschl's sober and impressive argument for *a new theological method* is probably, after all, his best and most permanent achievement. For plainly, if it has been given to him to strike out a new line, a principle rich in doctrinal possibilities, it is a minor question whether his own

application of the new idea was quite successful. We are free to essay any better application we can devise. So far from our being bound to accept merely the results it yielded in his hands, it lies with us to attempt a more fruitful interpretation of ideas which, as it is easy to imagine, he may have had too short time to work out fully. Now this new method is represented by his theory of religious knowledge as a system of value-judgments. It is because they unanimously fix upon the idea of value-judgments, as the feature by which religious is to be differentiated from scientific knowledge, that the members of the Ritschlian school, with all their free and even wide divergence, may justly be classed together as constituting a "movement." Adumbrations of this view are, no doubt, to be found in the works of Kant, Schleiermacher, and especially Lotze; but it is really to Ritschl and Herrmann that the prominence of the conception in modern thought is traceable. In a well known passage Ritschl divides the judgments we make into two classes—*theoretical* judgments, which predicate certain relations of an object, considered as it exists in its own nature; and *value-judgments*, in which its worth or interest for the Self is affirmed, according to the pleasure or pain it excites in the percipient. Theoretical judgments enter into science and philosophy; judgments of value are constitutive in ethics, aesthetics, religion. The distinction, of course, is one to which ethical literature has accustomed us; almost every writer upon moral philosophy speaks familiarly of the difference between a judgment *of* fact and a judgment *upon* fact, illustrating the point by the contrast between "judgment" in its logical sense of proposition and "judgment" in its judicial meaning of sentence. To take an example, "Abraham Lincoln died of a pistol wound" is a judgment of fact: "it was a cowardly assassination" is a judgment of worth, since it affirms the ethical quality or

character of the fact, and regards that quality not as something imposed upon the data by the mind, but as found in them, and objectively apprehended. Carry this distinction over to the domain of religious truth, and practically you have the Ritschlian theory. Thus "Jesus Christ died upon the Cross" is a judgment of fact only; it is a statement to which the pure historian may assent: "we have redemption through His blood" is a judgment of value or of personal conviction. It expresses what we find in the fact, the attitude we take up to it; our appreciation of it, in short, as bearing upon our personal life and affecting will and feeling. Now in Ritschl's view our theology ought to contain nothing but such statements of appreciation, issuing with conviction from the living faith of a Christian mind. "It is the duty of theology," he writes, "to conserve this special characteristic of the conception of God, that it can only be represented in value-judgments." Into the system of doctrine we must permit nothing to enter which we grasp solely by the intellect; truth, so far as it is genuinely religious truth, is apprehensible by faith alone; of which reason is certainly an element, but an element subdued to the medium it works in.

Every one sees immediately the objection which was certain to be made to all this. It was certain to be said, and it was said, with every variety of tone: Is this doctrine of value-judgments not simply a new and more elaborate way of saying that men, at all events if they are Christian men, may believe what they like? Is it not a roundabout fashion of proving that not only is the wish father to the thought, but in religion it ought to be? The answer given by Ritschl and his followers was quite clear. No, they said; value-judgments are just as objectively valid and trustworthy as those we put into the theoretical class; what we desire to insist on is simply that the mind reaches a persuasion of their

truth by a different avenue. A judgment of value is a judgment of fact as well. It elicits the spiritual meaning of a reality, but the reality must first be *given* in objective experience. As it has been admirably expressed, "there is a power of spiritual vision and there is a sense of spiritual value"; and the two act and react on each other. Science and faith appeal to different mental faculties and interests; and when Christ said, "every one that is of the truth heareth My voice," He taught the necessity of moral affinity to Him in will and desire, if not yet in settled character, ere men can appreciate Him, or perceive the decisive meaning of His advent and cross for their relation to God. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. The man who does not long to be good is inevitably blind to the existence of the Gospel; he cannot see what the New Testament is for. The truth that God is love, or that duty is supreme, or that Christ is Saviour, or that there is life after death is not equally transparent, or equally worth believing, to the profligate and the saint. These are things which only faith can grasp. Well, said Ritschl, let us take this principle—by which every preacher goes, by which we all go in private religion—and let us work it out consistently as a determinative principle of theology. Put into the doctrinal system nothing except that which we need faith to lay hold of.

The general truth of all this being granted, however, there remains behind the very fair question whether this new method of religious thought has yet attained to full command of itself. And on examination we have a right to say, I think, that it still requires to be so developed, and still waits to be so handled, as to do completer justice to the fundamental verities of New Testament teaching and the certainties of the Christian mind. Nevertheless, it marks a real gain, surely, that theology should frankly concede that the main question we have to ask in

regard to each point of doctrine is this : What does faith in Jesus Christ assure us of, what does it implicitly affirm, as to this topic ? This is the main question ; since dogmatic is properly the science of Christian faith. Hence Ritschl's principle is that faith ought to rely more upon itself ; it ought to concentrate the issues, and simply drop out what past experience has shown to be irrelevant. After all faith lives, moves, grows, not by the sufferance of philosophy and science, but by inner reasons and forces of its own.

Or, to express the same truth in different terms—and this will lead us on to the second point of the four—we must guard against the error of interpreting judgments of faith as if they were mere postulates. A postulate is a belief of a quite definite kind ; it is a belief whose truth we posit, or affirm, solely on account of its value. If a man says, I believe this or that dogma is true, because unless it were true, life would be intolerable, that man is making a postulate. Now Ritschl would insist upon it that Christian doctrines, although they may be (or at least be founded upon) value-judgments, are not postulates in that sense. In making judgments of faith, we are by no means reduced to the futile policy of arguing from the presence of a desire in the human heart to the reality of a corresponding object. The reality on which our trust is set exists in perfect objectivity apart from all our hopes and wishes ; it is given in historical revelation, as concentrated in, if not confined to, the Person of Jesus Christ. In Him is to be found a standard of truth to which the religious mind ought to conform. And this brings us to the second point.

II. *The source and norm of Christian doctrine.* I have already indicated what this is for Ritschl ; it is the Christian revelation, as authentically presented to the mind of the Church in the New Testament. The New Testament is com-

posed (roughly speaking) of original documents out of the first Christian generation ; it shows the common faith of the Church as it existed in its purity before influences of a confusing kind had made themselves felt—influences, for example, emanating from Greek Philosophy or the Oriental Mysteries, such as we perceive must have touched and affected the beliefs of the second century. Two mistakes should be avoided at this point, we are told. First, it is a mistake to confine ourselves to the Gospels, or to speak as though no doctrine could legitimate itself for the believer unless it were derivable from express statements of Christ. Inspiration apart, the gospel of the Apostles also is authoritative for us ; that is, you can judge accurately who Jesus was, and what He meant to achieve by His life and death, by inference from the impression He produced on His disciples. The cause may be studied in its effects, as well as in itself. And secondly, we are not bound to every doctrinal statement in the New Testament ; what we are bound to is the gospel in the New Testament. Scripture is to be regarded, not as a law, a rigid, external code of belief imposed from without on the Christian mind, but rather as a great confession of faith, which we discover experimentally to be capable of awakening in us a spontaneous echo of its message of Christ Jesus the Lord.

In other words, for Ritschl the revelation that is in Scripture, and pre-eminently in the New Testament, has its focus and living heart in the Person of Jesus Christ ; in Him the gospel dwells bodily. Christ, to use the technical language of philosophy, is the *ratio cognoscendi* of religious truth. What we see in Him—what we gather from the total impression which His Person, living and dying, makes upon us—ought to set the tone of all doctrinal belief. Nothing is to be tolerated in Dogmatic which does not square with that.

The principle is one which is to be applied even to the books of Scripture. Here Ritschl formed his theory upon the famous words of Luther : "The true touchstone by which to test all books is whether they are instinct with Christ or no ; for the whole of Scripture must witness to Christ, even as Paul would know nothing save Christ only. What does not teach Christ, is not apostolic, even though Peter or Paul had said it ; on the other hand, what does preach Christ is apostolic, even though we had it from Judas, Annas, Herod, or Pilate." Or, to view the subject on a different side, revelation, says Ritschl, just because it and faith—i.e. inward trust—answer closely to each other, is always a personal thing. It always comes to men through great personalities. Not through imposing institutions has God dealt with us for our redemption, but through men, and above all through the Man Christ Jesus. Dogmatic Theology, therefore, is simply the scientific and systematized interpretation of what God in Christ has revealed Himself to be. To this revelation, with the forgiveness of sins standing out in the foreground, the fit response on our part is faith—faith, not as belief in historical facts, not as the meek acceptance of dogma, but as confident trust in a God of grace. Ritschl fought all his life against the idea that saving faith is submission to a number of doctrines or acceptance of a series of propositions about the past. In this, of course, he was not singular ; but he was singular, many of his followers declare, not without justice, in the persistency and decisive force with which he urged that the historic fact of Christ is the revelation of God, indispensable and all-sufficient. Our idea of God, he kept on saying, must start from Christ, not from nature. A Person can only be made known through a person. In Christ a life was realized, and put within the reach of believers, which triumphantly overcomes the troubles of a refractory world, by making every

experience subsidiary to a divine faith and divine ends. No verse of Scripture was more habitually on Ritschl's lips than the great word of Romans viii. : "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God"; and he never wearied of insisting that its truth can be felt only by those who have believed in God as He comes to us in Christ. Only the Christian knows that he is inseparably one with God. Only the Christian has the right to trust absolutely in Providence, and to say, in the words of the old German hymn :

Now I know and believe,
And give praise without end,
That God the Almighty
Is Father and Friend.
And that in all troubles,
Whatever betide,
He hushes the tempest,
And stands by my side.¹

Two of the most characteristic features of Ritschl's thought are, I think, the direct result of this all but exclusive emphasis upon the Person of Christ. First, his distaste for anything that savours of natural theology. He has little love for the effort to lay a basis for Christianity in arguments which stand clear of the specifically Christian experience. To paraphrase an untranslatable German expression, you can't demonstrate Christianity into a man's mind. The famous proofs of the being of God start from outside the Christian faith, and therefore they can never bring you inside. They prove a Supreme Being, perhaps; but the idea of a Supreme Being is not enough for the man who wants to be forgiven, or to win mastery over life. For that the God we have in Christ is needful. Nor can this God be grasped in any other way than by personal surrender. No amount of purely logical evidence can pro-

¹ Cf. Harnack, *What is Christianity?* p. 271.

duce that faith, that childlike yet manly trust, out of which spring the energy and joy of Christian life. Here we see Ritschl's instinct for historical revelation coming out, hyperbolically, as an aversion to natural theology in every form. Christianity, he would plead, stands by itself; and only in Jesus Christ can you have the truth which makes it what it is.

The second example which I will adduce is Ritschl's dislike of mysticism, and of its sister phenomenon, pietism. His complaint against the mystic is, briefly, that in rising up to God, and holding fellowship with Him, he transcends, or ignores, the historical Mediator. He claims to enjoy an immediate contact of the soul with God, all intervening helps and succours being passed over in a kind of thankless neglect, as if once we have climbed to a height we did well to cast away the ladder which made the ascent possible. This, Ritschl finds, all genuine mystics do. Hence the gospel of the New Testament and the means of grace eventually mean little or nothing for them. They cut themselves loose from the fellowship of the Church which Jesus Christ made it the work of His life and death to found; or they indulge in an irreverent familiarity with the Saviour which has deplorable ethical consequences; and in both cases they act as if they were superior to revelation, had got beyond it, looked upon it as only milk for spiritual babes; in short, as if they were now in possession of a better and esoteric knowledge of Christ in His exaltation. But many of Ritschl's best friends would now concede that in his polemic against mysticism he went a great deal too far, indeed at times went very near to deny outright the immediate relation of the believer to the Risen Lord. The incident of "the thorn in the flesh," recorded in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, with its directness of converse between St. Paul and the living Christ, is enough to prove that

Ritschl had in this matter somewhat misconceived the view, or rather the certainty, of the apostles. And Herrmann's entire theology is a kind of implicit refutation of his master on the point. No one has spoken more worthily than he of the secret, the incommunicable, the genuinely mystical, factors which needs must be found in every Christian experience modelled upon New Testament religion.

The results, then, which we have reached under this head are these. The revelation with which the New Testament is charged is constitutive for Dogmatic. This revelation, in its essence, is the Person of Jesus Christ as it has impressed the mind of believers—above all, the mind of the original, and, so to say, classical believers of the primitive generation. Jesus' supreme design was to found the kingdom of God, and what He meant by that we see in the faith and life He evoked in the disciples. Revelation and trust are intrinsically relative to each other; hence the theologian's task is not to speculate freely, or at large, but to make explicit the contents of faith. As Ritschl puts it expressly: "We must not admit into Dogmatic anything which it is impossible to use in preaching, or in the fellowship of Christians with each other."

III. *His relation to the past.* Now that we have before us the new theological method associated with our author's name, as well as his conception of the source and norm of Dogmatic, we are better qualified to reach a true conclusion as to his place in the doctrinal history of the nineteenth century. At present, I can only speak of his relation first to Schleiermacher, next to Hegel. From Schleiermacher, he accepted the great principle that religion is a thing by itself, *sui generis*, not to be confused with morality, still less with science; but a genuinely independent force in human life, which calls out and combines in its service all the powers of

mind. As it has been put, by religion "feeling is stirred, the heart and thoughts are suffused, and a vehicle is found in the will." It is true, Ritschl declines to say with Schleiermacher that religion is feeling, the feeling of unconditional dependence. For him the chief stress, in the life of religion, is laid on the will ; for it springs from the practical necessities of the human situation. To quote words which come as near a definition as any : "The religious view of the world, in all its forms, rests on the fact that man in some degree distinguishes himself in worth from the phenomena which surround him, and from the influences of nature which press in upon him." That is to say, the absolute value of personality, as we are conscious of it in ourselves, craves and indeed postulates such a supernatural government of the universe as shall protect and develop personal life. Morality is doomed to defeat if there be no God. We must believe religiously if we are to live the good life with a sure and certain hope. Ritschl also took over from Schleiermacher the conviction that religion is essentially a social thing, propagating itself by human contact and example. Faith is the common possession of believers, making them one, constituting them a Church ; and the theologian, if he is to speak to any purpose, and with any prospect of being listened to, must speak as a convinced member of the Church. With the theologizing of the dilettante Ritschl had no patience at all.

Yet there was a strain in the theology of Schleiermacher by which the later thinker felt himself repelled ; I mean his imperfect sense of history, his sentimentality or subjectivism. We must never forget that Ritschl was a Church historian before he turned to Dogmatic ; and he always retained a profound and exacting feeling for the objectively real. To him the Christian religion was nothing unless it was a historical religion, with its roots deep in the facts of the past.

Schleiermacher, on the other hand, had laid it down that doctrinal propositions are not statements about what is objectively known, but merely descriptions of pious states of mind. They are the result of the contemplation of our feelings. Ritschl could not bear this: it seemed to him to cut us off from the trustworthy contents of history, and to deliver us up to the mystic, bound hand and foot. Hence, while completely at one with Schleiermacher in believing that the theologian must take his stand, frankly and unequivocally, upon the distinctively Christian experience, thus construing faith from the inside, he insists, as against his predecessor, that in the interpretation of our religion we must go back, at every successive point, to the fixed historical revelation given once for all in Christ. Not, of course, that Ritschl would have questioned that Dogmatic has to do with subjective experiences; for him, as for other people, it is the science of Christian faith. But what he insists upon—and modern theology has taken some pains to learn the lesson—is that these experiences, this faith and life, are evoked and developed by a particular object emergent in the past, viz., the Person of the historical Jesus, as presented in the believing witness of the New Testament. As he might have put it: Dogmatic has to express, to interpret and formulate, not merely the experiences which we actually have, but those which, in view of the salvation offered to us in Jesus, we *ought* to have. What ultimately concerns us is not the individual opinion of the average Christian; not even the official opinion of the Church to which we belong; but that which is urged upon the mind by the realities of history. We want to know who and what Jesus really is, and what He can be, or can give, to the soul that is surrendered to Him in faith. It is of relatively minor importance to inquire how much, in our lukewarmness and apathetic mistrust, we have as yet received from

God ; the point is rather what we might have received, and what the gift of God in Christ properly is. In a word, we are asked to respond to the gospel with *the obedience of faith*, recognizing that there are disclosures of God in Jesus to which our mind has submissively to adjust itself, and by which, as a standard from which there is no appeal, all the doctrines of tradition must be tested and corrected. In the Person of Christ this revelation has been adequately deposited in history. It was a clear recognition of this fact, Ritschl felt, carried uniformly into every part of the field of truth, which alone could give to the dogmatic system the organic unity it seemed to him, so far, to lack.

So again with Hegel. What offended Ritschl in the imposing construction of Christianity which we owe to Hegelianism, was that the greater portion of it had nothing particular to do with Jesus Christ. It was the Christian religion with the living soul of it left out. The simple fact that in his deduction of the Trinity Hegel took the Son as signifying, not Christ, but the finite world as such, must have been enough to excite the permanent suspicion of a mind like Ritschl's. Many more than he, indeed, were feeling, in these mid years of last century, that in Hegel's hands religion had become too much a matter of speculative thought, too little one of feeling and act. As in the days of the Gnostics, faith had been made the business of the school, rather than of the simple believer, wherever he is found. To the speculative philosopher, Christianity is only one religion among many—a species within a broader genus ; to Ritschl—and here, surely, he spoke for us all—it stands by itself. As it has been expressed : “ Instead of seeing in Christianity with Hegel the crown of a religion of nature more or less perfectly manifesting itself wherever the religious life exists at all, he calls attention to the uniqueness of Christianity as a phenomenon without parallel.” The truth is, whatever we may

think of Ritschl's treatment of particular miracles, there has been no theologian in the past more radically and unflinchingly convinced than he of the supernatural character of revelation as a whole, or less enamoured of the efforts made from time to time to deduce the Christian religion from the conditions of epoch and country out of which it rose. He believed that Hegel had obscured, or rather simply eliminated, the creative personality of Jesus Christ; thus blurring the great elemental facts of history by *a priori* speculation, and weaving garlands of dialectic about the specifically Christian doctrines, till their connexion with the faith of the New Testament was lost to sight. In taking this line he spoke out of what he later felt to be a somewhat bitter experience. His student years had closed, leaving him an ardent Hegelian; and it was only after long toil and pain, we learn, that he groped his way out of the labyrinth.

IV. *The essence of Christianity.* Ritschl's mind upon this subject is less clearly expressed than it might be; but on the whole our best plan is to start from the definition of Christianity we find stated with some care in the Introduction to vol. iii. of his *Justification and Reconciliation*. "Christianity," he writes, "is the monotheistic, completely spiritual and ethical religion, which, based on the life of its author as Redeemer and as Founder of the Kingdom of God, consists in the liberty of the children of God, is instinct with the impulse to love-prompted action aiming at the ethical organization of humanity, and founds blessedness on the relation of sonship to God as also on the Kingdom of God." No one would maintain that the sense of this complex form of words is immediately obvious; but we can do a good deal to elucidate the meaning by picking out three central ideas, and studying them a little more closely. We are the more encouraged to attempt this selection, that Ritschl always

declined to derive Christianity from a single germinative principle. For while he held that the Christian religion does indeed give us a rounded and consistent view of the world, this did not mean for him that you can spin Christianity—complete in all its parts and implicates—out of one pregnant idea. His respect for historical realities was too deep to permit *à priori* or purely logical constructions of that kind. Christian truth, he felt, is too many-sided to allow the totality to be packed into a single conception, however capacious or versatile; and the invariable result of making the experiment is that we do injustice to important elements of the whole. Thus he came habitually to look at Christianity from a variety of angles, lifting into relief now this one and now that of the vital principles which make it what it is. For example, a few sentences before the definition I have cited, we find the suggestive observation—one of the better known of Ritschl's dicta—that “Christianity resembles, not a circle described from a single centre, but an ellipse determined by two *foci*”; these *foci* being, he goes on to say, the ideas of redemption through Christ, which is a purely religious notion, and the Kingdom of God, which is construed as predominantly ethical. Again, there are not a few passages in which he urges that we understand Christianity best when we view it as a vital correlation, or perhaps rather a vital interaction, of revelation and faith. And once more, in still another passage, he recurs to illustrations from geometry, and this time argues that just as when three points of its circumference are given, a circle is given, so we may conceive of Christianity as being determined by the three ideas of God, Christ, and the Church. Hence I think we shall be in line with Ritschl's own modes of thought, and be likely to gain a fair view of his conclusions as to the essence of Christianity, if, from the definition already quoted, we single out these three ideas for scrutiny—Jesus

Christ, the Kingdom of God, and the liberty of God's children.

What is Ritschl's view of the Person of Christ? It is properly to be stated, as all religious doctrines, he holds, ought to be, in judgments of appreciation. Broadly, then, it may be said that he argues, by way of an impression of infinite spiritual value, from the divine character of the work Jesus Christ achieved to the divine character of His person. As it has been put, "to reach the worth of Christ he starts from the work of Christ," arriving ultimately at the conclusion that He is One who has for us the religious value of God. The movement of his thought, one gathers, is something like the following. Our redemption, by the common consent of believers, flows from the supreme act of Christ in establishing His Church on earth. The fact that with perfect fidelity He discharged the vocation which the Father had assigned Him, consenting to suffer all that unbelief and hatred could devise rather than prove unfaithful, and exercising consummate patience even unto death—this fact is the basis on which the society gathered round Him is declared righteous; Christ being its representative, it has imputed to it the position, the relation to God, which Jesus held for Himself inviolably to the end. By His obedience He kept Himself in the love of God from first to last, thereby securing access to God and the forgiveness of sins for the whole company of His followers. He unites in Himself absolute revelation and perfect religion; accordingly, His functions—the relation He sustains on the one hand to God and on the other hand to us—being divine, we are justified in predicating divinity of Himself. Just as the older dogmatists found the evidence for Christ's *humanity* in certain human qualities which characterized Him, so, in a parallel way, Ritschl would prove His *divinity* from certain Godlike qualities in His life, such as His love, His

patience, His inner freedom, His grace and truth. Jesus inaugurated a new relation between God and man, He realized it in His own life, He reproduces it in all believers ; hence, in Herrmann's memorable phrase, to call Him divine is "only to give Him His right name." The confession of His Godhead is born of experience of His grace. In the formula of Melancthon, which Ritschl can never quote too often : *Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia eius cognoscere.*

It is impossible to deny that this vein is full of valuable ideas. It is good that we should have Christ's work in view when we are shaping a conception of His Person ; to know what He does for us is certain to throw light on what He is. It is good that our theory of the Incarnation should, as Luther used to say, *fein, sanft von unten anheben*—start from below, that is, and make a modest beginning from the facts of His historical life and work. It ought to be said plainly, however, that Ritschl has no monopoly of these suggestive and rewarding ideas ; they are part of the general stock with which the majority of believing divines in the nineteenth century have worked. One's real doubt is whether, despite the unimpeachable form of argument he adopts, our author really lets it carry him as far as it ought to. The ratiocination is as follows : If Christ does all for men that God could do, that must go to shape our thoughts of His person ; since, if life, grace, forgiveness are ours in Him, what is left for us to call Him if we refuse Him the name of God ? Now does Ritschl follow this mode of inference out to its final issues ? There lies the crucial point. On the one hand we have Professor Garvie's weighty and decided verdict : "When Ritschl calls the application of the predicate of divinity to Christ a value-judgment he does not mean that Christ is not God in reality, but that we imagine or represent Him to be God, either to cheat ourselves or to flatter Him . . . When he says that Christ has the *worth* of God, he is neither so much the fool

or the knave as to mean that Christ *is not* God ; but as a sincere and intelligent thinker he means that Christ is God.”¹ Of course neither Ritschl’s sincerity nor his intelligence is in dispute ; the question, like a hundred others, is one simply of accurate exegesis. I do not feel, however, that the matter is so transparently simple as Dr. Garvie thinks it to be, or that it can be settled merely by appealing to a theologian’s good faith. Take some significant facts upon the other side. Take the fact, for instance, of Ritschl’s deliberate enunciation of the principle that the Godhead of Christ must be capable of imitation by us ; which is really equivalent to saying that perfect man is, *ipso facto*, Divine. Or take again his complaint that the dogma of His pre-existence confers upon our Lord a dignity all His own, in which His people cannot participate. Not that Ritschl dreams of questioning the real uniqueness of Christ : “ Christ,” he says, “ as the historical author of the fellowship of men with God and with one another is necessarily, in His own order, unique.” But he does not appear to me to have expressed this uniqueness of being in language which lifts it quite clear of the suggestion of a merely chronological, and hence fortuitous, priority. This harmonizes with his attitude to the kindred idea of pre-existence, of which his treatment is extremely characteristic ; for while not denying it, he declines to give it any attention, or to allow it any place in the doctrinal system, on the plea that we have no concern with the pre-existent Christ, but only with the life which began at Bethlehem. This seems to me eminently a case in which agnostic presuppositions pass easily into negative dogmatism. It is not difficult to agree that “ we must first be able to prove the Godhead that is revealed before we take account of the Godhead that is eternal ” ; the facts of revelation, as every one concedes, must be in the foreground from first to

¹ *The Ritschlian Theory*, p. 267.

last ; yet it turns out that Ritschl never really takes account of "the Godhead that is eternal," the discussion of which he here professes only to postpone. To any attempt to state Christ's pre-existence in positive terms he uniformly opposes the prohibitive idea of its "mystery" ; nevertheless I do not find that the "mystery" of it restrains him from *negative* conclusions. Like Schultz, in his valuable treatise *Die Gottheit Christi*, his finding is that value-judgments, although incapable of yielding a single metaphysical affirmation, may be so construed as to yield various metaphysical denials. I cannot but think that this patent inconsistency comes simply of an unfortunate prejudice. The mere refusal to embark upon speculations about our Lord's pre-existence, so far from being mistaken, may even be regarded as meritorious ; but what, personally, I feel to be chiefly lacking in the Ritschlian system is a frank recognition of the great New Testament certainty that in Christ's coming to earth at all, and not merely in the carrying out of His earthly vocation, a glorious and overwhelming proof has been given of the love—the self-sacrifice, if you will—alike of the Father and of the Son. In a word, Ritschl has no place in his Dogmatic for the truth of 2 Corinthians viii. 9 : "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor" ; and it will not do to speak as though the Christian religion remains exactly what it was when this soul-subduing conception has been dropped out.

Time forbids me to touch upon the other two points except in the briefest way. The Kingdom of God is for Ritschl an idea, or rather a reality, of the first religious magnitude, ranking in importance, indeed, above the individuals who compose it. It is to the community, not to the individual soul, that forgiveness, justification, access to God are given ; at all events in the first place. The Kingdom of

God is the Christian society in its rôle as a universal and cosmopolitan association, permeated by the spirit of love and service. Essentially it is not *either* religious or ethical ; it is both. As the Germans put it, it is both *Gabe* and *Aufgabe*, a gift of God, and therefore religious, and a task for man, and therefore ethical. No one has ever taught more unweariedly than Ritschl the social nature of Christianity. For him it was a community, a Church, that Jesus came to found ; and His relation to individuals is subordinate to that. It is scarcely doubtful that in this Ritschl departed from genuinely Reformation doctrine, yet his protest against a false individualism was both Christian and timely.

Finally, true freedom is to be found in Christ only. Liberty, action, obedience, the mastery of life—these are great words with Ritschl ; in Christ, he was perpetually saying, we are independent of the world as being one with God, and partakers of His supramundane life. It was one of his deepest convictions that we possess a faith which is worthy of the name only when we are living it out in the activities of the service of God. Perhaps his favourite text of Scripture was one to which F. W. Robertson of Brighton also turned with a peculiar instinct : “ If any man will eth to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.” Ritschl was a masculine theologian, if ever any one deserved to be called so ; sentiment he was perhaps too apt to disparage ; for his way, to borrow Herrmann’s descriptive words, was “ to speak sharply and exactly of what moved his heart.” Religion, he saw, is not a mere feeling. It is a force ; it is *power* ; it makes us in Christ masters of the world, because God’s freemen.

These then are, in brief outline, the central points of the system of Ritschl. It is little to say that they betray certain

marks of imperfection, and that some great things in Christianity have escaped him ; this is only to complain that he is human. It is far more important to note that he, and those who learnt from him, have wonderfully freshened the whole dogmatic field. This is the result probably of the rich suggestiveness of his two main ideas : first, that religious knowledge is the knowledge of a religious man—of a man who is experientially aware of the value of divine things—not the frigid inference of a disinterested looker-on ; secondly, that the centre of real Christianity is the historic Christ. If we learn from him to be resolute and thorough in the application of these conceptions for ourselves, it may be we shall succeed in deriving from them results more consonant with New Testament truth than he attained. In that case, like all great teachers, he will have educated us beyond himself.

H. R. MACKINTOSH.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

THE first " official " account of Jesus' life began with the ministry in Galilee " after the baptism which John preached " (Acts x. 37). The latter is the first point at which the four Gospels fall into line (Matt. iii. 11, 16 ; Mark i. 7, 8, 10 ; Luke iii. 16, 22 ; John i. 15, 26-7, 32-3 ; Acts xiii. 25). In St. Mark it is the actual " beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ " (Mark i. 1) ; but St. Matthew and St. Luke first give some account of Jesus' birth. St. John has instead the divine generation of the Word, and then gives much matter of his own touching the Baptist ; but the whole of chapters i.-v. seems practically to precede the opening of the Galilaean ministry as in the Synoptics.

The Synoptic narrative merely gives the vital facts : John's preaching, his heralding and baptizing of Jesus.