

Recent Foreign Theology.

Was Jesus Ekstatischer? ¹

PROFESSOR OSCAR HOLTZMANN has written a supplement to his *Leben Jesu* (noticed in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, vol. xiii. No. 11) under what most people will think a singularly ill-chosen title. It is a saying of Wellhausen that the transition from ecstasy to piety, begun by the prophets and continued by later believers, was made complete by Jesus; but this judgment is so absolute as to offend Professor Holtzmann's historical sense. Bernhard Weiss had also spoken some strong words to very much the same effect, but we are now told that Strauss and Renan are really far better guides to the understanding of Jesus' inner life, when they point to the rising tide of mistaken hopes and enthusiasm that gradually overflowed His mind. If our picture of Christ is to be complete, we must not forget the fanatical and all but frenzied strain that showed in Him again and again.

This is the tone in which the book opens, and we brace ourselves for the shock of extremely revolutionary opinions. Still let us inquire, what does Holtzmann mean by calling Jesus an ecstatic? It is significant that the term occurs but once in the Gospels, when His mother and brethren said, 'He is beside himself' (ἐλεγον γάρ, ὅτι ἐξέστη). Here, says our author, we may find the decisive marks of an ecstatic. 'He acts as the instrument of a spirit other than his own, as is shown by sudden or passionate deeds; he speaks what the spirit says or shows to him, as is evident when his language suddenly rises above its ordinary level, or exhibits a power and force out of keeping with its natural character.' Confusion is bound to result, no doubt, when such a definition is applied to Jesus Christ, but it is clear that already the conception 'ecstatic' promises to be something a good deal less hysterical and bizarre than at first seemed likely. And this impression is confirmed by the examples of ecstasy adduced in the pages that follow. Not only are the Baptism and the Temptation times of peculiar ecstasy, but Jesus' belief that He is the Messiah, and that the

kingdom of God is near, is also ecstatic; so are His praise of self-denial, His statement to Peter about building His Church 'on this rock,' His words to the woman who anointed Him 'for burial,' His general bearing at the Last Supper, and His saying 'this is my body.' It is obvious from all this that 'ecstasy,' vaguely as Holtzmann uses the word, need mean no more than inspiration or exalted feeling, and to say that at times Jesus rose to unwonted heights of spiritual emotion, is to say nothing that is not perfectly familiar to every careful reader of the Gospels. Once the word 'ecstasy,' in its technically theological sense however, is used of such feelings, we are implicitly asked to believe that there was something in Jesus essentially akin to the state of demented rapture and passionate excitement in which the early prophets lost their self-consciousness, and which was sometimes indistinguishable from madness.² To think that a phenomenon like this helps us to interpret Jesus is a pure mistake; and it is difficult to refrain from derision as Professor Holtzmann, with a perseverance from which a sense of humour would have saved him, proceeds to explain in the new light saying after saying about which no real difficulty need ever have been found. What confusion and blindness to real moral issues can thus be imported into the exegesis of simple gospel statements may be seen from the following specimen: 'It is not common for an ecstatic to tranquillise other men; he rather works infectiously on his surroundings; and thus we can understand how Jesus could say of Himself that He brought not peace on earth but a sword.'

But, of course, Holtzmann does not believe that Jesus was an ecstatic and no more. He possessed a quiet and steadfast inner character, which predominated over the other strain. Nay, He may justly be described as a foe to ecstasy; so that in the fifth chapter of this book the conclusions earlier arrived at are considerably toned down. It is shown very ably that, after all, Jesus' attitude to the state, civilization, work, and other elements in a complete human life was one of positive approval. But how Professor Holtzmann, in the light of his presuppositions, should accept these features in the

¹ *Eine Untersuchung zum Leben Jesu.* Von D. Oscar Holtzmann, a.o. Professor der Theologie zu Giessen. Williams & Norgate, 1903. Price 3s.

² Cf. Mr. Bruce Taylor's admirable remarks, *E.T.* xiii. No. 5, pp. 227-228.

historical portrait of Christ as authentic, is an unexplained mercy.

In conclusion, we are told that it was the force of ecstasy which moved Jesus to the preaching of the gospel and made Him the leader of an incipient Church. There are mutable ingredients in that gospel so far as its contents are ecstatic; but even here ecstasy may have brought gain as well as loss. It gave Christ His faith in His own Messiahship, without which Christianity could never have been. The chief gain to be expected from a work like his own, Professor Holtzmann thinks, is that it shows us a clearer and more living picture of Jesus, and presents that combination of antagonistic and conflicting elements which is often the most attractive vein in a great personality.

The theological defects of the book are hardly compensated for by its literary qualities, for it maintains only too well the reputation of Germany as 'the home of invertebrate prose.' The author has fallen a victim, we are afraid, to the idea that a problem has been solved when a new technical term has been invented to describe it. 'Ekstatiker' is a category which is not likely to have a great future in the interpretation of the person of Jesus, and in Holtzmann's hands it has neither the unity nor the clearness which we demand from conceptions that claim to modify our thoughts about Christ's inner life. Was it worth while, indeed, to write such a book? We can applaud it only on the principle that out of the violent clash of opinions, even the most extreme, there may now and then chance to be struck a spark of true fire, which, caught up by the wise, may one day come to burn with the light of higher and clearer knowledge.

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Professor von Dobschütz on the Resurrection History.¹

DR. VON DOBSCHÜTZ, whose valuable work in the *Primitive Christian Communities* is soon to appear in an English dress, has recently published a booklet entitled *Easter and Pentecost*, in which he discusses in a fresh and vital way the accounts of our Lord's Resurrection in the light of the oldest

¹ *Ostern und Pfingsten. Eine Studie zu 1 Kor. 15.* Von E. von Dobschütz. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung. Pp. 54.

apostolic formula, and of St. Paul's witness, as both are given in 1 Co 15. The little treatise, whose value is out of all proportion to its size, is dedicated to Dr. Ad. Hilgenfeld, 'the Nestor of our University' (Jena). In it we have a shining example of the freest historical criticism wedded to a profound faith in the fundamental facts of the Church's Confession. We are reminded of a serious lack in English apologetic literature, as we read the German theologian's paper. With all the strength and robustness which characterize the writings of such men as the late Bishop Westcott and Professor Milligan, one is conscious that they never came to terms with the *history* of the Resurrection as we have it in the Gospels, never tried to account for that history and to get at the realities which it imperfectly shadows forth. To leave the narratives as they stand, or to seek to harmonize them in a mechanical way, must always prove unsatisfying. On the other hand, it is hard to ask us to acquiesce in the agnostic despair of history to which Dr. Harnack feels himself driven, and which regards the problem of what happened on the first Easter morning as absolutely insoluble. Dr. von Dobschütz steers his way between these extremes.

His discussion falls into three parts: (1) the Empty Grave, (2) the Appearances of the Risen Lord, (3) Pentecost.

As to the Empty Grave, he finds that the common element in the collective tradition is the discovery of the grave open and empty, and the angelic message to the disciples, through the women, to go to Galilee, where the risen Lord would meet them. The appearances at Jerusalem must be set aside as owing partly to a confusion with the Galilean appearances, and partly to a later traditional growth. Is it objected that the angelic apparition must be deemed unhistorical—the creation of mythical fancy? Be it so. Nevertheless, the naked fact remains: the women on Easter morning found the grave open and empty. It is, indeed, said that St. Paul knows nothing of this alleged fact, and that his silence almost amounts to a disproof. Dr. von Dobschütz, on the contrary, maintains that not only the formula of 1 Co 15⁴, going back to a pre-Pauline tradition, but the apostle's dogmatic discussion in vv. 35-54 when compared with v. 20 and following, presuppose the idea of the empty grave. To those at Corinth who denied the possibility of a resurrection of the