

VIEWS FROM THE WATCH TOWER.

IS BELIEF IN MIRACLES ESSENTIAL TO CHRISTIANITY?

NO QUESTION in modern religious thought is weightier than this one which Professor Charles W. Pearson's much-discussed utterance has served to bring once more into prominence. The problem, of course, is far from being a new one. Indeed, it has been noted in several quarters that the Methodist professor used much the same arguments as those embodied in Hume's essay on miracles, published a hundred and fifty years ago. In none of the theological controversies of the past century was the conflict more earnest than in this one over miracles, Renan, Strauss, and Huxley ranging themselves actively on the one side, Bishop Lightfoot, Dean Farrar, and Mr. Gladstone on the other. The Rev. Dr. W. Robertson Nicoll, who is best known as a journalist, but who has also done considerable work in the field of theology as editor of the London *Expositor* and "The Expositor's Bible," goes over the ground again in his new book, "The Church's One Foundation." The first few sentences of the book show that this "foundation," according to Dr. Nicoll, is the miraculous Christ, and that, if there be no such Christ, "Christianity passes into the mist and goes down the wind." He declares: –

"The church cannot without disloyalty and cowardice, quarrel with criticism as such. It is not held absolutely to any theory of any book. It asks, and it is entitled to ask, the critic: Do you believe in the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ? If his reply is in the affirmative, his process and results are to be examined earnestly and calmly. If he replies in the negative, he has missed the way, and has put himself outside the church of Christ. If he refuses to answer, his silence has to be interpreted....No one argues against the right of philosophers to affirm that goodness is everything, that miracles are impossible, and that nothing in Jesus Christ has any importance except his moral teaching. But Christian believers in revelation are compelled

to say that these philosophers are not Christians. If they refuse to do so, they are declaring that in their opinion these beliefs have no supreme importance. To say this is to incur the penalty of extinction. For Christianity dies when it passes altogether into the philosophic region. To believe in the Incarnation and the Resurrection is to put these facts in the foreground. Either they are first or they are nowhere. The man who thinks he can hold them and keep them in the background deceives himself. They are, and they ever must be, first of all. So, then, the battle turns on their truth or falsehood. It does not turn even on the inerrancy of the Gospel narrative. It does not turn even on the authorship of the Gospels. Faith is not a belief in a book, but a belief in a living Christ."

Dr. Nichol holds that here is a discussion which every Christian believer must enter upon with the keenest zest, since "it is a controversy not for theologians merely, but for every man who has seen the face of Christ, and can bear personal testimony to his power and glory." He continues: –

"If we assume at the threshold of Gospel study that everything in the nature of miracle is impossible, then the specific questions are decided before the criticism begins to operate in earnest. The naturalistic critics approach the Christian records with an *a priori* theory, and impose it upon them, twisting the history into agreement with it, and cutting out what can not be twisted. For example, the earlier naturalistic critics, Paulus, Eichhorn, and the rest, insisted on giving a non-miraculous interpretation. Strauss perceived the unscientific character of this method, and set out with the mythical hypothesis. Baur set to work with a belief in the all-sufficiency of the Hegelian theory of development through antagonism. He saw tendency everywhere....Dr. Abbott sets out with the foregone conclusion of the impossibility of miracles. Matthew Arnold says: 'Our popular religion at present conceives the birth, ministry, and death of Christ as altogether steeped in prodigy, brimful of miracle, *and miracles do not happen.*'"

The trouble with all these and similar critics, declares Dr. Nicoll, lies in the fact that they start out with the assumption that "God can not visit and redeem his people" and that "His arm is chained and [R3106 : page 340] can not save." Is it not much more rational, he asks, to take the view that miracle is "the fit accompaniment of a religion that moves and satisfies the soul of men, and that asserts itself to be derived directly from God"? He goes on to say: –

"Miracle is part of the accompaniment, as well as part of the content, of a true revelation, its appropriate countersign. Of course, those who take this ground do not deny, but rather firmly assert, the steadfast and glorious order of nature. But they hold with equal firmness that God has made man for Himself, and that if He has sent His Son to die for them, the physical order can not set the rule for the way of grace. If God has relented, nature may relent. They believe that if there is a personal God miracles are possible, and revelation, which is a miracle, is also possible. They are not dismayed when they are told that the Gospel age was the age when legendary stories and superstitions and miraculous pretensions of the most fanciful and grotesque kind abounded. Nay, rather their faith is firmer, for they take these stories and compare them with the Gospel miracles, and they say, How is it that the stories of the New Testament are lofty and tender and beautiful and significant, while the rest are monstrosities?...Granting the entrance of the Son of God into human history, granting the miracle of the Incarnation of the Supreme, there is little to cause any difficulty. Without the Incarnation, without the Resurrection, we have no form of religion left to us that will control or serve or comfort mankind."

– *Literary Digest.*

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It is comforting to find some few of God's servants, tho still in "Babylon," keen enough to discern the real situation, and courageous enough to lift up voice and pen in defense of his cause. Very evidently,

however, the nominal "Christian ministry" has gone or is rapidly going so far into unbelief of the very fundamentals of Christianity as to forfeit all claim to the name Christian, – as Rev. Nicoll suggests. It is not *Christian faith* to acknowledge that Jesus lived a noble life, superior to that of other men, and that his teachings were superior to others of his day. It is not *Christian faith* to claim what the Bible denies respecting "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man;" nor to proceed on this basis to claim that Jesus was a son of God in common with all others of our race, and peculiarly acceptable in proportion as he was superior to others of his race.

No, this is not Christianity: will not, and do not Jews, Mohammedans, Confucians, Buddhists and many others, – admit all this respecting our Master, – and some of them more? Are these all Christians? And if not, are those ministers Christians who still wear the livery of Christ in colleges and pulpits, for valuable considerations, and who are still under solemn vows to a faith which they sometimes publicly, but more often semi-privately, disavow? Assuredly not. Let us get back to that honesty of thought and word which calls *disbelief* in the fundamentals of Christianity, "*unbelief*," i.e., "*infidelity*."

We are told that Infidelity has disappeared; – that Renan, Paine and Ingersoll have lost their place and power as opposers of Christianity. The very contrary is true: every college and seminary, secular and theological, has become a hotbed of infidelity, in which the leaders in world-politics, world-business, and world-religion are being taught, under the sanction of the "highest authorities," the very disbelief in the Bible which Infidelity has all along urged. The places of Renan, Paine and Ingersoll are more than filled by classical, scientific and theological doctors; – blind leaders of the blind.

Let no one be confused by these false shepherds, who are rapidly leading astray their confiding flocks; saying, peace and safety! All who follow them will soon find in their hearts an aching void, – a leanness of soul, – a Christlessness which will render miserable indeed

all who have once "tasted of the heavenly gift and been made partakers of the holy spirit."

Christ and the apostles were either right or wrong in their teachings; – their claims were either true or false. If false, everything built upon them must logically fall with them; – including the very name Christianity, their synonym. If they were true, all that they taught stands together; and the name Christian belongs to these doctrines, and its application to other teachings is a sin; and its appropriation by others is grand larceny – robbery.

The fundamental teachings of Christ and his apostles (true Christianity) are (1) The *fall* of man into sin and under its penalty – death. (Rom. 5:12,17-19; I Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:14; Rom. 6:23). (2) The *ransom* of the race from condemnation by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ "finished" at Calvary. (I Tim. 2:5,6; Rom. 5:18; Jno. 19:30.) (3) The salvation, or recovery of the race, or so many of the same as will accept the grace of God in Christ when brought to a knowledge of the same, by a judgment-trial and restitution, called *resurrection*. (Acts 3:19,23; Jno. 5:28,29.) (4) The previous and preparatory trial, testing, judgment of an "elect" class whose resurrection to "glory, honor and immortality" will be instantaneous at the second advent of the Redeemer for the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven in the earth. – Rom. 2:7; 8:17,28,29; 2 Tim. 2:11,12; I Pet. 4:12,13; I Cor. 15:51,52; I Thess. 4:15-17.

Upon these scriptural premises the entire fabric of Christianity was built, and in *proportion* as any one of them is either denied or omitted "the faith once delivered to the saints" is lost, and the door is opened to false beliefs, and ultimately to utter unbelief; – cutting the cables by which the anchor of faith serves [R3107 : page 341] securely to hold us to heavenly hopes. The cutting of these faith-cables means the temporary, if not the eternal loss of vital union with our Lord the Lifegiver. The growingly popular evolution theory is

diametrically opposed to all these fundamentals of Christianity, and that is warning enough to the wise, but for no others.

FORTY MILLION DOLLARS FOR RELIGION.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, an interdenominational movement was organized in England and this country for the purpose of raising \$50,000,000 as a special fund to be devoted to various projects for the furtherance of religion, such as the payment of church debts, home missionary work, the endowment of religious institutions, etc. *The Church Economist* (New York), which has been making an investigation into the present condition of this fund, finds that about \$40,000,000 has already been raised. "If it be true that money talks," comments the Chicago *Tribune*, "then it is talking in a most convincing way as to the great interest at present in the cause of religion and the fundamental prospect of the churches."

Fully half of this great total, declares *The Church Economist*, was raised in this country, the Methodists North alone claiming \$17,000,000. The Canadian Methodists and Presbyterians, each of which bodies set out to raise \$1,000,000, have collected respectively \$1,250,000 and \$1,430,000. The English Wesleyans have secured \$4,500,000; and the English Congregationalists \$3,312,000. Congregationalists in Wales have raised \$860,000; in Australia \$415,000.

– *Digest.*

RELIGION MIXING IN POLITICS.

The National Reform Bureau has established what corresponds to a mercantile agency concerning the leading people in every town in the United States, except that their religious status instead of their financial capital and resources is the subject of the work. Old telephone books have been secured of every town in the United States having a telephone system, and these books have a large share of the people of prominence on their rolls. This is the nucleus of the index.

Then, through trusted confidential helpers in each town, the names are checked off with signs showing what each individual can be depended on to do. Perhaps one man will be decidedly irreligious, and not interested in [political] reforms, but, for personal or family concerns may be greatly agitated over the question of temperance. The same may be true with divorce legislation, and with Sunday questions of all kinds. The bureau has twelve lines of work, but it does not limit its requests for assistance to persons who happen to sympathize with it in all of its lines. Of course, the records show a large number of names as in favor of everything.

The Congressman who is "shaky" on any vital measure finds himself deluged with communications. Perhaps the churches in his district adopt resolutions which are forwarded to him. Petitions from the Women's Christian Temperance Unions are hastily transmitted. And there is no overestimating the influence of such things on the congressional mind....Senator Blackburn, of Kentucky, once said to Dr. Crafts: "Why, you have put my whole state in a turmoil over this matter. I would wager that I have got as many as twenty letters about it." Since twenty votes would not be a large percentage in Kentucky, the impression which a few letters make can not be better illustrated.

A few years ago, during the congressional recess, all of the wise men of this latitude were habitually ridiculing the idea that Congress could take any action regarding the duly elected representatives from the State of Utah. These wise men went into discussions of the constitutional phases of the question, and of how impossible it would be to do anything consistent with our fundamental law and the rights under it of a sovereign State. Any man who ventured to dissent from this prediction had but one argument: "Do not forget the Southern Presbyterianism. Brigham H. Roberts must look to his Democratic associates of the South for support, if he is to have any, but they can not forget the rugged Presbyterianism of a large share of their constituents." The prediction was entirely sound. There was little constitutional ground for throwing Mr. Roberts out, but he had to go,

and this very Reform Bureau played no small part in bringing that result to pass.

Seven bills have been passed as drawn by the Bureau and introduced at its request, including the new and drastic divorce law of the District of Columbia, which will seemingly compel the establishment of a divorce colony at Chevy Chase, across the Maryland line. Others are the new divorce law in the Territories, the anti-canteen law, the resolution proposing a treaty to prevent the sale of intoxicants and opium to native races of the South Seas, and the Sunday-closing amendment to the St. Louis fair bill. The Bureau, by similar activities, doubtless prevents the passage of such legislation as might otherwise get through.

– N.Y. *Evening Post*.

AUSTRIA'S TROUBLES.

It is stated that the Austrian Government has grave reason to fear an agrarian rising in Galicia, where in the last rising nearly two thousand landlords were murdered. The landlords of Galicia are Poles, and, being doubtless pressed by the low prices, are reducing wages already too low for even tolerable existence. The peasantry, who are Ruthenians, and have a traditional quarrel of race with the gentry, are therefore rioting in all directions; and there is a demand from the nobles that the province shall be placed in a state of siege. The demand will probably be granted, and the peasantry cannot resist the troops; but unless its views have greatly altered of late, the Government of Vienna will be greatly annoyed and perplexed, the Ruthenians being far more loyal to the house of Hapsburg than the Polish aristocracy are. This question of tenure is becoming a very serious one throughout Eastern Europe. From the Ural to the Danube the actual cultivators of the soil hardly get enough to live on, and, partly from suffering, partly from a growing consciousness that others are happier, are beginning to demand proprietary rights. A **[R3107 : page 342]** wealthy Government could manage a compromise through large loans, but in

Eastern Europe there is no money to spare, and the policy adopted both in Russia and Austria is to enforce a nearly impossible *status quo*.

– London Spectator.

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The industrial boom of recent years, combined with the phenomenal crops of this favored land, have tended to close the eyes of the world to the fact that the conditions of the gold standard are unfavorable to the agriculturists. As already pointed out, from Scripture, these conditions ***will not be changed*** by any political party; but will eventuate in the cry of the reapers, the agriculturists; and be followed by anarchy, which shall cause "all faces to gather blackness" and "the mighty man shall weep there bitterly"; – the time described as the "time of trouble, such as was not since there was a nation," in view of which the Apostle says: "Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for the miseries which shall come upon you." – James 5:1-4; Joel 2:6-11; Zeph. 1:14-18; Dan. 12:1.

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