

A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels
ed. by James Hastings
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Of Dr. Hastings' large encyclopedic program, embracing no less than four voluminous dictionaries, this is the second work to reach publication, the Dictionary of the Bible having preceded it, and the Dictionary of Religion and Ethics and the smaller Bible Dictionary (in one volume) still being in course of preparation. The present work professes to be something different from an enlargement of that portion of the Bible Dictionary which relates to Christ and the Gospels. Instead of being occupied mainly with things biographical, historical, geographical or antiquarian, it seeks to meet "the need of the preacher, to whom Christ is everything". The preface states that "it seeks to cover all that relates to Christ throughout the Bible and in the life, and literature of the world", and promises "articles on the Patristic estimate of Jesus, the Medieval estimate, the Reformation and Modern estimates"; further, "articles on Christ in the Jewish writings and in the Muslim literature", and goes on to say that "every aspect of modern life, in so far as it touches or is touched by Christ, is described under its proper title". We are told that, to suit the practical, homiletical purpose of the Dictionary, the writers of the articles have been carefully chosen from among those scholars who are, or have been, themselves preachers. In regard to the other half of the title, the Gospels, the scope of the work is not limited to what these writings tell about themselves; the extra-biblical testimony to their origin and their history is likewise dealt with, as articles like those on Aristion, Ebionism, Papias and others indicate. It is obvious that, unless the whole history of Gospel-criticism were included, a line had to be drawn somewhere. But the same necessity of limitation existed in regard to the Christological part. Satisfactorily to exhibit the significance of Christ as a factor in history would overtax the powers of the most encyclopedic mind. Even the editorial mapping out of a scheme for attempting this would appear a Herculean task, at least to the theologian who conceives of Christ in accordance with Col. 1:15-20. The question may be raised whether the thing can be properly done at all under the alphabetical plan, and whether some systematic treatment under broad religious and theological headings by a limited number of writers would not be preferable. In point of fact, the editor resorts to such a method in the Appendix, where a series of articles on "Christ in the Early Church", "Christ in the Middle Ages", "Christ in the Reformation Theology", "Christ in Modern Thought", "Christ in Jewish Literature", "Christ in Mohammedan Literature", and (strange to say) on "Paul" is added.

The juxtaposition of Christ and the Gospels in the title would seem to indicate that the Dictionary means to deal chiefly with the Gospel-Christ or the so-called historical Christ as in some sense distinguishable from the Christ of the Old Testament, the Apostolic Christ, the Christ of the Creeds, the Christ of Theology. But, while this to some extent is kept in view, more space being devoted to it than to anything else, it is by no means rigidly adhered to as a matter of principle. We learn something about Christ in all these other aspects, only not enough to satisfy us or to give us a proper sense of proportion. Nor is the manner in which the Christ of the Gospels is presented here purely objectively determined by the view-points which the Gospels themselves furnish, but to no small degree by the subjective appreciation and preference of the present age for certain sides and elements in the character of Christ. What we get is not always the historical, but sometimes the modern, Christ. Perhaps the homiletical purpose of the Dictionary made it difficult to avoid this. Still, we cannot help feeling that, like all theology, so a theological dictionary should set before itself as its ideal not so much the voicing, but rather the correction and perfecting, of the spirit of the times.

There is not a little within the covers of these two volumes that savors less of the dictionary than of the contemporary pulpit. We find a sermon where we might expect an exposition, and sometimes the sermon, as modern sermons are apt to do, one-sidedly exploits, if it does not outright distort, the biblical facts for its own specific purpose. This free play of subjectivity on the part of the several writers has also accentuated a feature that can never be entirely eliminated where many minds work together, viz., the cropping out of divergence of opinion on important subjects. Denio, who puts the sufferings of Christ and their necessity on a line with the sufferings of all God's servants in the establishment of the Kingdom of God (II, 268), is contradicted by Denney, who characterizes such a view as "less than the whole truth" (II, 398). Such differences even appear where the same topic is treated from two points of view by two writers in succession, as, e.g., the Lord's Supper by Falconer (sacrament = mere symbol) and Darwell Stone ("the consecrated elements are the spiritual body and blood of the risen and ascended Christ"). But, even where the contradiction is not so conspicuous by reason of proximity, it is none the less real in many cases where certain articles in their advocacy of liberalizing theological positions run contrary to the traditional faith of the Church as reflected, we are glad to say, in the majority of contributions. It seems to us, the editorial supervision might to advantage have been exercised somewhat more strictly. Also, apart from conflicting views, the cross-references might have been profitably multiplied. E.g., under the article Holy Spirit, where the phrase "Spirit of glory and of God" (1 Pet. 4:14) is commented upon, a cross-reference to the article "Shekinah", whose author proposes to understand Glory as a proper name of Christ, ought not to be wanting.

Special interest attaches to these conflicts of opinion where they touch the fundamentals of faith, such issues as supernaturalism, inspiration, the authority of Christ, the vicariousness of the atonement, the monergism of divine grace. As to supernaturalism it is gratifying to note that the bulk of the articles reflect an unqualified acceptance of the church's historic position on this question, and is in so far faithful to the spirit of the Gospels themselves. Still, statements of a different complexion are not entirely absent. The article on Miracles, under the head of modern conceptions of the order of nature, tells us that—

"The ancient antagonism between the natural and the supernatural has broken down, and the two spheres are seen to be one, regarded from opposite poles. Grave objections lie against the term 'supernatural,' which is entirely unscriptural, and many modern thinkers prefer the term 'spiritual' to express the animating and sustaining power which pervades all things."

To the same effect we read in the article on Revelation that the manifestation of the Eternal in the world

"may be either ordinary or extraordinary by which it is not intended to suggest any distinction between what is natural and what is supernatural. That distinction may not be tenable, for we do not know all the possibilities of nature, and so do not know what may be above it".

In fact, the trend of this whole article is to explain revelation, while upholding its necessity and reality, in terms of immanence.

More frequent are statements implying skepticism with regard to the strict historicity of the biblical

records in general and of the Gospels in particular. The Gospel according to Matthew fares worst in this respect. Its reliability as a historic witness to the sayings of Jesus is called in question on account of its principle of selection and artificial grouping, resulting in overemphasis of statement. The Jewish-Christians stood too near the life of Christ to form any adequate conception of the true meaning of His person and work. They labored under a mistake as to His teaching on the permanence of the law. This Gospel also distorts Jesus' eschatological teaching by selecting and producing sayings which emphasize the nearness of the parousia. It makes out that the preaching to the Gentiles is but "for a testimony", and ranks the Gentile converts as proselytes merely in the Jewish church. They were to be made "disciples" in the specific sense; the wedding-garment of the parable is the Jewish righteousness. (Article on Matthew's Gospel.) In another article we learn, to the discredit of the same Evangelist, that he gives a fantastic and allegorical interpretation of the sign of Jonah and that Chap. 23:2 shows traces of influence of later ideas, in that it represents Jesus as countenancing obedience to the legal teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees (article Old Testament). Over against this must be placed the ample recognition and able defense which the historicity of the Gospel-narrative, at least that of the Synoptics, receives in by far the greater number of articles which have occasion to touch on this question. This is the case even where the stress of recent criticism might have tempted to a less certain note, e.g., in connection with the gospel of the nativity in Matthew and Luke. The virgin-birth is admirably treated by Box in the article bearing that title. The only exception here that has come under our notice concerns the narrative of the visit of the magi, the positive evidence for the truth of which, we are told, is slender, so that we must content ourselves with the concession that there may possibly be a substratum of historical fact. (Article Magi.)

In a dictionary especially adapted for preachers "to whom Christ is everything" it might fairly be expected that the authority of Christ as a teacher would be recognized as absolute without reserve in any respect. To our regret, we have not found this to be so. While respected by the majority of the writers, in some instances it is called in question, restricted, or even denied. So conservative a man as Denney excludes from its field of application all science, on the ground that science constitutes a sphere in which there can be no authority, only facts. This seems a specious solution of an old and vexed problem. In the article on Plan we learn that our Lord made no definite provision for the establishment of an outward church, and its worldwide extension. He delivered His message to His own people and formed no clear design of a work that should embrace all people. This is in direct contradiction to the view so ably unfolded in the article on Foresight. Denney, in his articles on Authority of Christ and Preaching Christ, reveals a quite perceptible shrinking from the acceptance at its face-value of our Lord's eschatological teaching. In the latter of these articles he says:

"Account has been taken in art. 'Authority of Christ' of any considerations which go to qualify the certainty with which we ascribe to Jesus Himself the eschatological conception of the consummation of God's kingdom; but if we do connect it with Him, and regard it as part of what is meant when He represents Himself as the Christ, clearly history requires us to recognize the inadequacy of that conception to be the vehicle of the truth. . . . We may say that the spectacular representations of the judgment are a form which we may recognize to have only a relative value, while yet we do not dispute in the least the absolute truth that the standard of reality and of worth in the spiritual world is Jesus."

Here Jesus the judge becomes Jesus the standard, although in the Gospel-teaching the two are never

identified. The same point of view emerges a little later in the statement:

“It may be possible to strip from the gospel of St. Peter without detriment to its essence some of that vesture of eschatological Messianism which it necessarily wore at the time.”

Farthest in this direction, although it only carries to a logical conclusion the views already stated, goes the article on Accommodation, which represents our Lord as necessarily thinking and teaching in the forms of thought and belief of His time, not, however, in the sense of conscious adjustment, but in harmony with the kenosis-hypothesis. Here the inference, whether the church ought not perhaps to practice a conscious accommodation in teaching, is seriously considered.

Coming to the doctrinal positions represented in the Dictionary, we find an even greater degree of divergence. The anti-dogmatic and anti-metaphysical spirit with which Ritschlianism has inoculated the present-day theological mind is in evidence here and there. We read much of the “impression” made by Christ (e.g., I, 470). The most outspoken Ritschlianism is found in the article “Back to Christ”, which contains a formal indictment of the metaphysical Christology and soteriology of the early creeds. To be sure, the author of this article ostensibly simply relates after an objective fashion what the Ritschlian movement stands for, but he does it with such evident sympathy and with such entire abstinence from criticism, that one can scarcely help putting him down as an advocate rather than a disinterested historian. For, while Ritschlianism is not criticized with so much as a word, the Christocentric theology of Fairbairn is charged with half-heartedness because it continues to place the essence of the character of Christ in the miraculous elements of the Gospel-narrative, such as “His moral perfection and consciousness of sinlessness, His assertion of a unique knowledge of God and of a sonship different in kind from that possible to His disciples, His assertion of His Messiahship and preexistence, His demand for absolute devotion to His Person, His claim to a superhuman authority in forgiving sins and in dealing with Old Testament institutions and laws, His claim to be the Savior of the world, the arbiter of human destiny, the final judge. Similarly, His outer life receives its character from the virgin-birth, the miracles (interpreted in the strict sense), and, above all, from the bodily resurrection.” Fairbairn is criticized because the historical Christ is to him “the transcendent and miraculous Christ, the Christ who was conscious of superhuman dignity and who was declared by the resurrection from the dead to be the Son of God with power. And not only this, the Ritschlian assertion is here repeated that in the synoptical version of Jesus’ gospel-preaching there is no place for Jesus Himself as an object of religious faith. The Christ to whom we are called back is the Christ teaching the forgiveness of sins without the need of propitiation. Unfortunately, there is no assurance given that, having once retraced our steps to this “historical Jesus”, we shall be permitted to rest there permanently. The summons “Back to Christ” is only preparatory to the further demand: Back from the peripheral to the central Christ, for we are told by this same writer that “we must distinguish between central and peripheral elements, and between the enduring spirit and the passing form of manifestation. We cannot, for example, revive the primitive expectation of the world’s speedy end or the ideas about angels, Satan, unclean spirits as the agents in disease, which Jesus shared with His contemporaries. The gospel must be translated into the language of today, and its spirit applied to the relations of our modern life” (I, 165).

The two doctrines which constitute the heart of evangelical religion, that of the atonement and of justification by faith, come in for their share of criticism. The first volume, it is true, contains a good

article on Atonement from the pen of Principal Simpson. But whatever good it might accomplish is largely undone by the two articles on Sacrifice and Vicarious Sacrifice in Vol. II. In that on Sacrifice Matt. 20:28, the well-known ransom-passage is interpreted as follows:

“The idea clearly is that men are enslaved and that Christ gives His life to set them free; but the question still remains as to the nature of the bondage. ‘From death, from the guilt of sin and its punishment’, says the odd theology, or, as it is sometimes expressed, ‘from the wrath of God’. But there is not a single word upon the lips of Christ to justify this interpretation, and, as we shall see later, wherever in the N.T. the death of Christ is called a deliverance or a ransom, it is always a being purchased for God, a being delivered from the bondage of sin to serve God that is thought of.”

As if being purchased for the service of God excluded a being purchased from the curse of God, and as if not the latter, rather than bondage of sin, instituted for Paul the *terminus a quo* in the movement of redemption. A little later we read:

“To imagine that Christ in those words represents the Father as requiring a ransom at His hands before He can forgive mankind is to render His revelation of the Heavenly Father wholly inconsistent, is to give the lie to all His earlier words regarding the mercy and compassion of God. The parable of the Prodigal Son in the light of this later presentation becomes an impossibility.” . . . “Christ called His blood about to be shed the blood of the new covenant in the sense that His death of course would inspire His followers with new life, would be to them in the first place a means of breaking the power of sin in their lives.”

The hackneyed and, among reputable exegetes, thoroughly discredited arguments are here pressed into service again, such as that the Pauline formula is not “Christ reconciled God”, but “God reconciled us in Christ”, and that therefore the obstacle must have been in man, not in God, or that *λασκεσθαι* is not used by Scripture in the pagan sense of “appeasing God”, but has sin for its object, whence the unwarranted inference is straightway drawn, that therefore the whole transaction must lie in the subjective sphere. The article on “Mediator”, although on the whole more rotund, does not entirely steer clear of this same fault of subjectivizing the atonement when it states: “Christ is our propitiation, because He gives us inwardly that power, that communication of his own life, which cleanses us from sin.” Translated into the language of justification, the principle embodied in such statements amounts to the downright denial of the common Protestant position, of which the article on Righteousness furnishes a sad illustration. A more absolute travesty of the Pauline doctrine can scarcely be conceived than finds expression in these words: “The salvation of his life had come to him in the conviction that God takes the will for the deed, and that, in union with the risen Christ, the human will is kept constantly true.” But the climax of this sort of exegetical perverseness is reached in the article on Vicarious Sacrifice, the whole of which is nothing else but a deliberate attack on the substitutionary, penal interpretation of the atonement, and a special plea for putting the moral-influence theory in its place.

Where even common evangelicalism is not safe, it is not to be wondered at that specific Calvinism fares badly. In fact, it is scarcely deemed worthy of attack; the writers largely ignore it. And yet even a critic as Johannes Weiss has assured us that there is a predestinarian element in the Synoptical Gospels. Under the head of Necessity it is first conceded that the advocates of theological determinism

as taught by Calvin “can appeal plausibly to a considerable number of N. T. passages”. Next it is observed that these passages of deterministic tendency are balanced by others of opposite import. Then the following statement is offered by way of synthesis: “Since some reject God’s benevolent purposes and refuse to be saved, it follows that the human will is free, and that the apparently deterministic passages of Scripture must be so interpreted as to leave room for human freedom. We are led, therefore, to some such view as this, that only the main events of human history are absolutely determined beforehand. The persons by whom and the times when the Divine purposes are to be realized are not predetermined absolutely, but only conditionally.” According to the writer on Universalism, the Calvinistic limitation of the intent of salvation “is little heard of now in Great Britain, except among some of the Evangelicals in the Church of England and some of the Baptists. The controversy has gone to sleep, or judgment in the cause goes by default”. It is entirely in accord with this that no attempt is made to show the Calvinistic position exegetically untenable. We can only be thankful that the author of this article, notwithstanding a strong leaning in that direction, does not go the full length of advocating Universalism in the sense of universal ultimate salvation, but candidly confesses that there is “no ground for challenging the old doctrine on exegetical lines”. The article on “Elect, Election” well-nigh entirely ignores the sovereign character of the divine choice, and that on the following basis: “By and in the incarnation the human race and the separate individuals of the race have received those capacities and endowments which fit them for their work and for their divinely appointed destiny”.

The bibliographies appended to the several articles are, on the whole, discriminating, reasonably full and correct. Still, here and there important references have been omitted. As such we notice the following: art. Messiah, Wrede’s *Messiasgeheimnis*; art. Missions, Harnack’s *Mission and Expansion of Christianity*; art. Name, Heitmüller’s *Im Namen*; art. Propitiation, Deissmann’s various contributions on *ἰλαστήριον*; art. Sabbath, Zahn’s essay on the subject in his *Skizzen*, etc.

A serious error occurs in the article Resurrection, II, 508, where a sentence from Wellhausen’s commentary on Matthew is translated so as to make him say something quite different from the original. The statement accurately rendered should read: “It is assumed (*viz.*, by the Evangelist) that with the resurrection the body of Jesus also had vanished from the grave, and it is regarded as impossible (*viz.*, by the Evangelist) that this could be accounted for on natural grounds.” Instead of this the translation reads: “It is *admitted* that with the resurrection the body of Jesus also had vanished from the grave, and it *will* be impossible to account for this on natural grounds.”

In conclusion, we remark that, with few exceptions, the contributors to the Dictionary are British and American. Of continental scholars there occur in the first volume the names of Gautier, Nestle and Johannes Weiss only, in the second volume, besides the last mentioned, that of Kattenbusch.

The proof-reading of the work has been unusually good. In our extensive reading of the volumes, we have hardly discovered half a dozen typographical errors.