

REVIEWS

THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN HISTORY AND FAITH. By Douglas Edwards, C.R. (Faber; 12s. 6d.)

The author, an Anglican and a member of the Community of the Resurrection, has written this historical and critical work in a vigorous spirit of belief very different from the sceptical tone of an earlier book on the same subject by Dr. Vincent Taylor, with whose conclusions he utterly disagrees. Leaving the examination of the actual Birth Narratives to the last, an opening chapter shows that for the believer the Virgin Birth is no mere brute fact, but is intimately bound up with the whole economy of the Incarnation. Then reviewing the Apostolic tradition, especially the evidence of the Baptismal Creeds and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, the author passes on to his central theme, the exposition of the 'utterly delusive character' of the argument from silence and the loose assumption that, apart from Matthew and Luke, the New Testament is silent on the Virgin Birth. The idea that had the other sacred authors known of it they would have used it as a proof for the divinity of Christ, is shown to rest on a misinterpretation of the Apostolic viewpoint, while good use is made of St. Paul's single casual reference to the Eucharist as pointing the moral that in such a context one cannot argue from silence to ignorance. The close and cogent reasoning of this chapter is complicated by the refutation of Dr. Taylor's use of this argument from silence, though the discussion of St. Paul's use of *genomenos* and avoidance of *gennētos* when speaking of our Lord's birth which arises from it is full and interesting. The indirect witness of St. Paul as presupposing the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is revealed in his assumption of our Lord's sinless manhood though all in Adam sinned; moreover, his First and Last Adam teaching is otherwise unintelligible, while by a most convincing set of arguments the true reading of John i, 13, is urged as the singular 'who was born . . . of God' instead of the usual plural 'who were . . .', thus converting the Fourth Gospel into an explicit witness. Père Lagrange (*St. Jean*, p. 18) admits the force of the intrinsic reasons for the singular reading, but does not regard the witness of Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian, though so early, as a sufficient support for the weak manuscript evidence (only Verona b.). But Dr. Streeter's reasoning—used by the author—on the prime importance of the date to which a reading may be pushed back and on the Ephesian connections of Justin and Irenaeus (unmentioned by Lagrange) are very convincing on the other side.

In the next two chapters the author attacks the dry rot of sceptical criticism and makes clear how philosophical prejudice can warp

historical judgement making the belief in the Virgin Birth 'almost intellectually indecent.'

The author has been most successful in his presentation of the indirect evidence and in revealing the full weight of tradition in favour of the doctrine and the insufficient historical sense of the critics who belittle that tradition. Curiously enough, there is no treatment of the actual birth, nor of Mary's virginity *in partu* and afterwards, while the question of pagan parallels seems inadequately dealt with by an attack on Dr. Creed for his suggestion, however reprehensible, that the Christian narrative was influenced by Hellenic or Hellenistic ideas of the virgin birth, Indian 'avatar' and Persian 'saoshyant' being equally ignored. However, these are minor omissions in a very excellent work.

BRUNO DONOVAN, O.S.B.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT. By George Johnston, M.A., B.D., Ph.D. (Cambridge University Press; 10s. 6d.).

This book was originally the author's Thesis for his Cambridge Doctorate of Philosophy. He remarks that 'no subject in the New Testament theology needs a comprehensive treatment more than the doctrine of the Church.' The position is adopted that '*no* particular order is believed to belong to the nature of the Ecclesia [author's italics], so that controversial problems are not exhaustively treated.'

The author first examines how far it is possible to discover any idea of a Church in the cults of the Graeco-Roman world and in Judaism. One would have expected here an account of the relation between the New Testament Ecclesia and the Old Testament Kingdom of God, at least in the section entitled 'The Fullness of Time.' The word Ecclesia—its Hebrew and Aramaic originals—is then discussed and the importance of the Septuagint recognised.

In the all-important chapters five and six on Pre-Pauline Conceptions the question of Jesus and the Church is dealt with. The author sees 'no good reason to doubt that He believed Himself to stand in a unique relationship with God' but that, though concerned with the Kingdom of God, Jesus was not concerned to found a Church, nor does the Kingdom imply a Church. It is only Matthew in his versions of the parables of the Tares and the Drag-net who identifies Church and Kingdom. The 'Ecclesiastical' character of Matthew's Gospel is recognised but disposed of, the conclusion being reached that in Matthew Ecclesia is an anachronism. This arbitrary treatment of the sacred text is typical of the later chapters on the Pauline and Sub-Apostolic doctrine. The author has selected the conclusions he requires from modern scholarship, the grounds not always being set out. The whole method of treatment is too summary and the book hardly fulfills its promise of being comprehensive.

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