

Criticisms and Reviews

THE University Magazine for February gives its readers some conclusions of one wing of Biblical critics concerning the origin of the gospels, although the caption is "The Person of Jesus." Professor McNaughton, who subscribes the article, almost stampedes us with the slogan of "all not fools are with us." Since the professor desires to be understood as standing for scientific methods in Biblical inquiry and since he regards numbers as negligible when they are ranged on the side of organized christianity or of Biblical Inspiration or again of Biblical primacy in matters of faith, it does seem like human weakness to invoke them in support of the conclusions which he throws almost raw to Canadian readers. *Difficile est exuere hominem.*

The professor—and I suppose those "worth considering" are with him—goes on the assumption that all who wrote of Our Lord in the early times were obscurantists. Moses and the Jewish apocaliptics were obscurants, confusing the issue by anticipation in so far as they approach towards a definite notion of the Messias to come. St. Paul is an obscurantist in as much as his Jewish exegetical bias led him to develop the foreshadowings of the earlier writers into concrete predicates. The Evangelists are obscurantists in as much as under the influence of St. Paul they mingle their own impressions with the observed facts. The apostolic and the sub-apostolic Fathers are obscurantists, in as much as, meditating on the data which they fondly thought Tradition and the Scriptures furnished—this vice infects the others as well—they set down further conclusions about Our Lord. In short, all the labor of the early Christians who thought they lay under some obligation

to make Him better and better known, which labor we have been used to look upon as a development of the central Christian thought, is, to Professor McNaughton a developement of obscuratation, He does not indeed use that ugly word. Perhaps even, considering their good faith and earnest endeavor, he might, in the license of his metaphors, characterize their results as "a shadow cast by a sun-like diadem" But a shadow it is to him, and through it we must grope or tunnel according to its density After that such obscurantists as Sir William Ramsey and Dr. James Orr have small ground of complaint if the one is regarded as a hydrocephalous Archeologist and the other as a mixed farmer, marring both piety and learning in the attempt to combine them.

Just how the professor and "those who know" avoid the humiliation of using certain portions of this shadow for illumination purposes while tunnelling through the rest, has not been made clear. He does indeed say if a man begins "where Mark and John begin, with the Baptist and the Baptism—he will find his foot as an historian upon his native heath," which we'll allow to be next door neighbor to rock bottom. But why they feel so secure in accepting some portions of these tainted sources, while rejecting others does not appear, unless indeed, the reason is betrayed in what immediately follows "in a world where things go on as they do in the world we know, not in the enchanted realm of faiery."

If I am correct in regarding this as his touchstone then the working principle of those Biblical Critics "who really know and are to be taken seriously" is this :—Reject all known means of forming a concept of the Man of Nazareth, then form your own concept. After that, read the New Testament and reject all that does not agree with the concept so formed. In the spirit

of these same critics I may add, as a foot-note, that this method belongs to our own age since no one ever read the Bible with taste or feeling till now

As I am not of the number of those who know, I have contented myself with vulgarizing Professor McNaughton so that we may see what higher criticism means alongside the old Faith. For my own part I confess that my sympathies are rather with the men like E. J. Bidwell who, in the same February number has a word with a sometime professor of Biology of McGill University who, a few years ago, fluttered his entourage by a schoolboy excursion through the scientific banalities. Whether Mr. Bidwell has achieved the gnosis or otherwise he seems to me to have the temper of those who are daily doing something to hold men under such civic and domestic restraint as secures to others the right to life and happiness and saves the world from rapine and lust. This I know sounds shockingly re-actionary and ultramontane to one who sees "manifold signs that a brighter day is dawning for the long-starved imaginative, poetic and religious sensibilities of man." Nevertheless and in spite of all declamation here I must take my stand, awaiting the development of that selective faculty which enables the professor to be sure that the scriptural records are historic when they say Our Lord ate good dinners, that he led in Homeric cheerfulness, that he disregarded the rigor of the Jewish Sabbath, that he manifested the limitations of human intelligence, that he died upon the cross; and fantastic when they tell us that He fasted forty days, that He said "My soul is sorrowful even unto death," that he assisted at the worship of the synagogue, that He said "Before Abraham was I am" and that he rose from the dead of his own power. I rather suspect that St. Jerome and some others who did not know and who

did not see good fellowship merely in Our Lord's life, as they did not see all lugubriousness in the lives of those who strove to follow His councils, have yet a truer sense of historic perspective than those to whom Archeolgy is negligible in reconstructing antiquity, and who laugh at piety as a companion of criticism, even while engaged in exploring sources all tainted as they say with religious preoccupations.

