

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Books that have influenced our Epoch.

Glover's 'Jesus of History.'

BY PROFESSOR J. A. ROBERTSON, D.D., ABERDEEN.

WHEN away back about the years 1908-1909 there began to appear in *The Nation* certain articles on the Gospels by an unknown pen, some readers thought a new world of exposition had opened out before them. A penetrating ray of light seemed suddenly to have been flung upon the gospel pages. Rumours by and by emerged concerning the writer's name, for more articles were appearing, of the same type and quality, in *The Constructive Quarterly* and *The Expositor*, and these articles were signed by T. R. Glover. Then there appeared *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, containing, among other remarkable sketches, a chapter, vivid and striking, on Jesus of Nazareth. By and by we heard that the writer was lecturing on the subject in India. The reading public was prepared for the book that was to follow, and *The Jesus of History* became 'a best seller' soon after its appearance. In particular it captured the student world, and had a widespread influence on university circles.

Here was a book which spoke in a new language to multitudes. It was the work of a mind that had approached the Gospels without preconceptions: the work of one who had come to his task, we felt, from a phase of scepticism, and who looked at the narrative with fresh eyes, making what had failed to be noticed by the over-familiarity of other minds stand out in a new way. In a series of graphic pictures he lit up corner after corner of the narratives, and made them glow with a new, a restored radiance. A fresh breath of reality blows about the story as it is unfolded in these pages. This, indeed, is one of the main achievements of the book. It has, for many, swept away the haunting suggestions of myth and legend with which some theorists would fain invest the gospel narratives. There had been promulgated in this country and in Germany the view that there never was any Jesus, but here was a clear light shining upon the gospel page, making plain to unbiassed eyes the solid fact that lies behind the records. In dealing with the insistence of the modern world upon fact, Dr. Glover says, 'The cynical view that delusion and error in a real world have peculiar power in human affairs may be dismissed. No serious student of history could hold it.' And he makes

clear in this book that the gospel has not lived by reason of the delusion and error involved in the records, but that behind them there is the heart-beat of a great reality. The book has helped to slay the theory that there never was any Jesus.

The other great gain of the book is that it has given us a living and moving picture of the human Jesus. We had long been labouring under the burden of a dogmatic representation of Jesus, laden with conceptions from alien philosophies. The Christ of the Church was far from being Jesus as He actually is. And there was abroad over the land a hunger and thirst for something more human, more accessible. The success of this book is largely due to the fact that it was a timely answer to that demand. We see Jesus in His youth, growing as other children, and in His contact with the world of men, learning obedience by the things which He suffered. And there emerges a Figure sincere, simple, and attractive, intensely real and urgent and pressing in His demands upon men. The great 'Son of Fact,' Dr. Glover finely calls Him, adopting a phrase which Carlyle coined about Luther.

The book itself is built on very simple lines. It opens with a chapter on the 'Study of the Gospels,' in which the author points out that when Paul and Luther and Wesley gave Christ a new emphasis in human affairs, a new era followed the new emphasis. This, he says—and we have to remember that it is as a historian rather than as a theologian that he speaks—is the most striking and outstanding fact in history. There is, he continues, no figure in human history that signifies more. And the reason is that human nature is deeply and intensely spiritual, and Jesus satisfies it at its most spiritual point. Dr. Glover lays down three canons for the study of the Gospels or of Jesus' words. 'First, give the man's words his own meaning; second, make sure of the experience behind the thought; third, ask what type and of what dimensions must the nature be that is capable of that experience and that language.' And he goes on to ask, 'When we make our picture of Christ, does it suggest the Man who has stirred mankind to its depths, and set the world on fire?'

The chapter on 'The Childhood and Youth of

Jesus' is one of the freshest and most interesting in the book. By using the experience of Jesus as it can be gleaned from the Parables he lights up, by many a vivid little sketch, the story of those early days of our Saviour's life.

The chief point in the chapter on 'The Man and His Mind' is the emphasis laid on the instinct which Jesus manifested for reality. Glover calls Him, as we have said, 'the great Son of Fact.'

In the chapter on 'The Teacher and His Disciples,' the author suggests that Christ's method as a Teacher was based on the contagion of personality. 'One loving heart sets another on fire,' he quotes again and again.

The chapters which follow manifest a well-beaten plan. The teaching of Jesus upon God is analysed, and the relation of Jesus to man, His teaching upon man, and upon sin.

The chapter on 'The Choice of the Cross' is one of the least satisfactory in the book. Glover does not make it very clear what was the goal which Jesus set before Himself. But to this we shall return presently.

Then follows a chapter on 'The Christian Church in the Roman Empire,' in which the writer describes the tremendous hold which pagan religions had on the life of the time, and then goes on to demonstrate how this little insignificant sect of the Nazarenes, by their refusal to compromise, ultimately broke down and dissipated a world glutted with pagan deities.

The concluding chapter on 'Jesus in Christian Thought,' is, like 'The Choice of the Cross,' in some respects unsatisfactory. 'The first thing we need to learn,' says Dr. Glover, 'if our criticism of Jesus is to be sound, is that we are not at all so near to Him as we have imagined.' And yet he does little to show the immense distance that lies between Jesus and us. Moreover, he has admitted, earlier in the book, that 'behind the Gospels, simple and objective as they are, is the larger experience of the ever-working Christ.'

The two main defects of the book are these. First, Dr. Glover does not show us the Christ in action, pursuing the line of His supreme purpose, except to an inadequate extent in his chapter on 'The Choice of the Cross.' After all, these are largely impressionistic sketches, and they are most successful when there is some larger background on which to throw the picture, as in the case of his studies of 'The Childhood and Youth of Jesus.' Throughout the book we have only been catching isolated glimpses of Jesus, reacting to His environment, indeed, and not like a statue, fixed and in

cold repose. But no picture of the Christ can be a living unity for us to-day unless we see Him in action, and action dominated by one abiding purpose. Unless we see all the elements in the character of Jesus fused into a whole by His will, by the concentrated passion by which He directed His life to its goal, we have not seen Him aright. We may depict His moral characteristics so as to bring out their flawless perfection, a perfection in which humanity touches, and is one with, the Divine, we may prove beyond any cavil of words the clearness and the constancy of His communion with God, His sense of the presence of God in His life, yet at no point would we be satisfied that we had captured and defined that something about Him which makes Him unique, sets Him over against our life somehow, and constrains us to worship and to adore. We are convinced that the point where we do come face to face with that something is His will, His conviction of a Divine vocation, His passionate and flawless fulfilment of that vocation. His life, in the highest and truest view of it, was the fulfilment of a Divine programme. But more, it was the fulfilment of a programme than which we can conceive of no higher occurring to the mind of God Himself for our world of humanity. It was the fulfilment of the supreme and eternal purpose of God for men. But more still. It was the conscious acceptance and *loyal* fulfilment of that programme. It is in that sense that He is still to us 'the Word,' the highest thought ever conceived in the mind of God, uttered forth at length in time.

And this leads us to the second main defect of the book. It is weak on the side of Christology. Just because Glover does not show us Jesus' life rising on the wings of this mighty purpose he does not show us wherein He partakes of the Divine. If ever the Divine meaning of life leapt out in earthly fields, if ever there was a moment in human history when men, sick for certainty, and tired of the dusty answers of the schools, were able to say, 'the truth about existence, the unveiled heart of the Eternal, is there, and it is too good to be false, God must be like that or there is no God,' it was when they saw this life, 'holiest among the mighty, mightiest among the holy.' If ever men confess faith in God with unflinching conviction to-day, it is in presence of this Life which still haunts the world and refuses to be done with it.

He is still everywhere in the world, a strange, persistent visitor, knocking at the doors of the human conscience and the human heart. And until He brings God into our material age again.

until we let Him bring the God He believed in, the God He dwelled in completely, the God who dwelled in Him, the God for whom He staked His existence in the grand adventure of an unwearied Love, the God to whom He pledged His unclouded soul, and with whom He kept His word to the end,

the God who never was more manifest among men than on the Cross in the hour of darkness and dereliction and forsaking—we say until our age becomes accessible to that persistent knocking it will find no end to its restlessness nor any healing for its sin and its despair.

The Peace of Jesus.

BY THE REVEREND ALEXANDER SMALL, B.D., BOREHAM WOOD, HERTS.

THE world is war-weary; the peoples desire peace. The hopes of men rise each time a fresh peace pact is signed. We must be grateful for every endeavour on the part of men to make war a thing of the past, and to bring about a universal peace; yet there is a real danger if we pin our faith to peace pacts, or, indeed, if we rely on any machinery to bring that permanent peace for which our hearts long. World-wide peace will be secured only as men more and more enter into the peace of which Jesus speaks, which is not of this world. Jesus, in the words of the text, contrasts the peace of the world with the peace that He is able to give. Let us try to discover wherein the difference lies.

1. *The Peace of the World.*—The peace of the world rests on financial security. That is a peace for which to some extent we all long. There is no gainsaying the fact that the possession of money and what money can buy does bring a certain peace of mind. If we know that all the money that we may require to meet our material needs will assuredly be forthcoming, we are saved from many an anxious moment, from many a sleepless night. If we can look forward to old age knowing that it is provided for, or be certain that in the event of sickness or accident we shall have sufficient for our needs, we enjoy a sense of security that brings with it quietness of mind. It is the knowledge that men seek this peace of mind that has brought insurance and assurance companies into being, and that in recent days has made some daily newspapers provide opportunities for their purchasers to insure against all kinds of contingencies. Yet there is a danger, however wise certain forms of insurance may be, that this endeavour after financial security may make it difficult for us to cultivate a healthy reliance upon God.

There are many who have not had this financial

security in life. They have often wondered how provision was to be made for the future. They have known anxiety. Yet many such, for lack of the peace which the world gives, have sought that deeper and more lasting peace that the world cannot give but which Jesus offers.

Then, again, the peace of the world rests upon force. The presence and show of force do make for a certain kind of peace, whether it be in the form of armies and navies to inspire fear into the hearts of would-be aggressors, or in the form of a police force to preserve law and order in the homeland. The demonstration of force and the consequent fear that it inspires do tend to prevent the outbreak of war or of violence of other kinds. This, however, is true only to a limited extent; and we have all sufficiently long memories to know how inadequate the show of force was in 1914 to ensure even outward peace; and how futile it is to secure a true peace is evident when we realize that a real peace is dependent upon a renewal of the heart of man.

Then, further, the peace that the world offers is the peace of the sheltered life. The world says, 'Look after number one,' 'Don't undertake unnecessary responsibilities,' 'Don't worry about other people, for you will have plenty of worries of your own.' The world urges us to take the path of least resistance, the way of comfort and ease, if we would have peace. It is true we do find a certain kind of peace in this way, but it is a false peace; and carried to the extreme, it leads to an utterly selfish life.

This is the peace that the world offers, the peace of financial security, the peace based on the show of force, and the peace of the sheltered life. Now, says Jesus, as He is about to leave His disciples, 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto