

AN ORTHODOX CRITIC.

BY THE EDITOR.

IN reviewing *The Pleroma*¹ in the *Princeton Theological Review* of April, 1911, a very courteous but hostile critic, the Rev. Gordon M. Russell of Crawford, New Jersey, makes the following comment:

"The works of the author of this essay, and many of the other publications of the Open Court Company are not, as they claim to be, and no doubt honestly strive to be, merely unprejudiced scientific investigations in the field of Comparative Religion. They are part of a great modern propaganda. They voice the demand that all religions are to be explained as evolutionary in origin, natural in development and similar in aim and authority. Of course, they take for granted at the outset that the peculiar activity of the Supernatural in history and revelation as it has been claimed to be manifested in the Bible does not exist and never was so manifested.

We do not deny making a propaganda, but it certainly is exactly our intention to be unprejudiced and scientific. As to the term "supernatural" we must say that it is a word which has been frequently misused. The question is, what is natural and what supernatural. If we understand by "natural," lower nature, the purely physical and material, we must grant that man's spirit develops from the natural and reaches from the physical into a spiritual sphere which is a kind of supernatural. The term "supernatural" is justified for all those conditions which range above purely physical existence. The mathematician knows that mathematical truths, the theorems of geometry, arithmetic and logic, are above material existence. They are literally supernatural, for they apply equally to any kind of nature. In this sense we have pleaded that mathematical truths have a just title to be called supernatural. This supernatural element pervades all nature in the same way that God is believed to be omnipresent. In fact we go one step farther and

¹ Paul Carus, *The Pleroma*. Chicago, The Open Court Publishing Co., 1909.

claim that the mathematical truths, including logic and arithmetic, are part and parcel of God.

We make this statement to indicate that in our propaganda we do not take a onesided view but incorporate traditional conceptions into the world-conception of modern science. We see that the old contains many truths, but what dogmatism formulates in allegories and symbols condensed in the symbolical books as confessions of faith, we trace in the laws of nature as formulated by science.

Our kind critic continues, and here lies the main difference between his views and ours:

“Before considering in detail this essay we must therefore remember the fundamental position which underlies the author's work when he begins by denying as impossible one of the chief claims of Christianity, the immediate supernatural personal revelation of God to men chosen to receive this, and then adds to it the denial of another doctrine also everywhere insisted upon in the Scriptures, that the inspiration of the Bible is peculiar to itself and that therefore Christianity and Christianity *alone* is a true statement of the relation of God and man and of the unseen world as well. When these denials are postulated it no longer becomes possible to have a really scientific investigation to determine the truth of the religion of Christ. Should such an investigation be commenced, it should take note of these claims; and instead of utterly disregarding them or considering them as no longer anywhere believed, it should carefully investigate them, weighing the evidence pro and con. In this way it would be necessary to consider not only the origin of each religion and its similarity to others but also its effects and to judge whether, in the light of the influence of Christianity upon the individual and the race, there was not required a sharp distinction between it and all others, between its sacred writings and the sacred books of all the other race religions.”

Although we do not deny an immediate and constant revelation of the world power above and within us that makes for righteousness, although we recognize its spirit in Christianity, although we concede that “God” is an appropriate name for it, we do not see that it reveals itself in Christianity *alone*. We see its dispensation anywhere, and we affirm that it is broader and wider and higher than the traditional Christian conception of God. In recognizing the truth that is in others, I do not see that the adherents of any one religion suffer thereby in any way. When Christians broaden by comparing their own spiritual treasures with the noblest thoughts of pagan sages they shall certainly not lose the divineness of their own.

All further criticisms raised by Mr. Russell are in questions of detail which ought to be decided by historical investigation. For instance in denying that Christianity owes more to paganism than to the Jews and that many ceremonies, and among them the idea

of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Saviour, are directly opposed to Judaism, he says:

“The Communion Service or the Last Supper is strictly parallel to a Jewish feast, in complete harmony with the Passover ritual and not heathen in origin. Even the symbolism is connected with that of the paschal lamb. Also the difficulties raised here did not seem to trouble either the Christians or the Jews of the first century and therefore it is not reasonable to suppose that they are real.”

And yet we do not eat for the Lord's Supper a paschal lamb, but partake of bread and wine, using the same kind of wafers and a eucharist cup as the Mithraists.

We need not enter into the several points on which we agree with this representative of dogmatic theology. It is natural that he would find the idea of a God-man in the Old Testament while we regard it as typically a pagan and anti-Jewish idea. The idea of a dying God who rises to life again is common to almost all pagan religions while the Jews have no trace of it and scorn the ceremony of women lamenting for Tammuz in the temple of Jerusalem. The Jews object to this doctrine just as Mohammed disclaims that God is a father, saying in apparent reproach of the Christians, that Allah is neither begetter nor begotten.

Our critic claims that the name Nazarenes originated in the meaning of followers of a man born in Nazareth, but this is scarcely tenable, and we need not here repeat our arguments. The same is true of the Ebionites or “the poor” and there is little need to discuss the passage on Mark xii. 35-37. Here Christ declares that the Messiah need not be the son of David because David himself calls the Messiah “Lord,” and Jesus argues, How can a father call his son, Lord? thus implying that the Christ need not come from the family of David. It is true that later redactions of New Testament scriptures insert a genealogy of Jesus which presents some impossible family trees for the purpose of proving his Davidian origin and we also find that in the mouth of the poor people Jesus is called “Son of David,” but the passage in question is clear enough: Jesus proves from the standpoint of his age that the Messiah need not claim descent from David.

Mr. Russell insists on a thorough study of the Bible and it goes without saying that we agree with him in this. He says:

“This essay makes increasingly manifest the need of thorough Bible study. Its form is so attractive, its material so well chosen and its conclusions, on their face, so natural and plausible that it can only harm those who will not investigate for themselves. Truth is ever good and ever necessary, but half truths are exceedingly dangerous to those who are either too lazy to study and

think for themselves or are too ignorant to be able to distinguish and to understand. The only real antidote for this propaganda is a thorough knowledge of what the Bible really is and what it really teaches, and this can come only through study. A church or a body of Christians ignorant of doctrine and the Bible must be ever at the mercy of the latest plausible and tempting theory."

We are not surprised to find objections to the interpretation of Christianity as the fulfilment of the times in the sense of being the result of a long preparation in the history of mankind, and Mr. Russell insists that in addition to the natural conditions there was also present the supernatural element of Christ. He concludes his views as follows:

"The fulness of time came but it did not of itself produce the needed religion. Some of the elements were present, some of the outward emblems, in their form at least, were in readiness; but there was no life, no power, no incarnation of truth. The world was skeptical, tired, and hopeless. Then God sent forth His Son, and hope became reality; and the Power of the Spirit of God has ever since proved the uniqueness and exclusive right of the good news of Jesus Christ."

In conclusion we will say that our position is not anti-Christian nor anti-religious in any sense. It is true we have dropped many dogmas of traditional Christianity, but we have done so under the stress of their untenability before the tribunal of science and have after all retained their spirit, thus creating a new conception of religion which in spite of its radical conclusions is conservative in attitude; and we would save all that is true and good in the old while boldly accepting the truth of the new scientific world-conception.

Liberals are commonly vague. They only know that the old has become untenable and they mean to tear it down. The policy of *The Open Court* has been different. We unhesitatingly accept new truths without throwing away the old. We believe that science can find out what is true and what is untrue and we need not discard the old because it comes to us in the form of a wrong interpretation. In this sense we believe in, and we propose, a new orthodoxy which states the truth in positive terms so far as all explanations of philosophical and scientific truths as well as statements of historical facts are concerned.