THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DR. MOXOM'S ARTICLE.

BY THE EDITOR.

It is astonishing how little the Bible is known, and how much it is neglected at the present time even among Church-affiliated Christians. But it is also astonishing how little among liberal circles it is known that the work of investigation and the close scrutiny of every word of the Bible has been done by scholars who so far as I know without exception come from the ranks of the orthodox. All the first stars of that brilliant galaxy of higher critics so-called, especially in Germany but also those of England, come from pious and orthodox Protestant families. Their contingent is increased by Professor Réville of France who also is himself a theologian and the son of the leading orthodox Huguenot of French-speaking Protestants. The impression that freethinkers have contributed anything toward the attainment of the results of higher criticism is a mistake which is amply proved by a comparison of Ingersoll's *Mistakes of Moses* with any of the accurate compendia of the several biblical books. In addition to these facts so little appreciated we ought to add the statement that among the very orthodox there are men who boldly progress with the times and accept unflinchingly the results of higher criticism. Our present number contains an article by the Rev. Philip Stafford Moxom, well known for the liberal attitude which he maintains even though he be rightly classed among the conservatives. And he does not stand alone but may be regarded as an exponent of the spirit which has touched a certain group of leaders who are willing to accept the truth that science teaches.

The problem which Dr. Moxom treats is the personality of Jesus as represented in the Fourth Gospel, and we feel like joining the discussion and propounding our own views on the subject, but
a detailed exposition would lead us too far as the problem is very complicated and every statement needs clearly defined limitations. But we would say that the Fourth Gospel is the one which has instilled into Christianity the philosophy of the eternal "Word made flesh" which is an echo of the Logos-conception of neo-platonism. This in turn is an application of Plato's doctrine of ideas to the religious field, concentrated in a worship of the "idea of ideas" called the Logos.

The origin of the Fourth Gospel cannot be attributed to one man. It is apparently the product of a slow growth matured in the minds of several successors. The author of the Fourth Gospel was saturated with neo-platonic ideas, but strange to say he nowhere uses the term Logos throughout the narration in the bulk of the Gospel. The word Logos as a term occurs only in a short introduction which therefore may rightly be suspected of coming from the hand of another author, who in these few sentences concerning the word that became "flesh," and the "Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," impressed the philosophical stamp upon the whole book, and has thereby opened a new vista for the philosophical development of Christianity.

While the Fourth Gospel, philosophically considered, is the deepest, the grandest, and most beautiful presentation of the Christian doctrine, it is at the same time the most unhistorical, and we must never read it with any attempt at translating it into a realistic and pragmatically clear conception of fact. The poet of the Oberammergau passion play has done this, and we cannot help thinking that he makes a mistake. He introduces Jesus on the stage and makes him repeat the words attributed to him in the Fourth Gospel echoing an incredibly forceful egotism and an unbounded vanity. There the hero of the play constantly repeats the words, "I am the Light of the World," "I am the Bread of Life," etc. Fortunately for the drama itself the audience is so accustomed to the words, and so associates theological doctrines with them, that scarcely any one feels the impropriety and improbability of the situation, and so the mistake passes unnoticed by the average hearer. But suppose we met a man in actual life who in the same style would constantly harp on the significance of his own personality, what would the world think of him, and would even his admirers stand such self-glorification for any length of time?

If the Fourth Gospel is interpreted as history it must be considered a failure, but if we see in it a hymn in praise of the Logos
and the incarnation of divinity in man, it is one of the noblest expressions of religious thought.

It is true that the passages in the Gospel are still read in the old way and in the old prayerful style in many churches, but for that reason we must not be blind to the fact that thinking Christians and especially the thinkers among the clergy have become more and more awakened to the significance of the Scriptures. The Bible is perhaps the most remarkable book, being a collection of literary products from the earliest dawn of the history of religion down to comparatively modern times. It is not the word of God in the traditional sense, nor does it anywhere make this claim. It is a collection of documents which are milestones in the way of progress. Its several scriptures incorporate antiquated views, folk-lore tradition, and legends, and should be regarded as exponents of the religious spirit of the age in which they were written. As such they are genuine, and if they did not incorporate the errors of their times they could not be genuine. Dogmatic Christianity has for a long time held sway in the churches, but a reformation is now dawning which is due to the influence of the scientific spirit and the result of it is felt almost more in the ranks of conservative thinkers than among the liberals—a fact which is mostly overlooked in the camp of the radicals and so-called freethinkers.