brought to its notice, to oppose even to the death every falsehood in teaching, every tyranny in action” (pp. 128, 129). It appears, then, that the book has been misjudged, and that its famous author is more of an optimist and seer than many have supposed. His remedy for all evils is socialism (p. 171).


The author is principal of Aria College, Portsmouth, England. He has produced a valuable treatise which will attract wide attention among those who are interested in this vital theme. It is increasingly admitted by Christian scholars that Judaism deserves a fairer estimate than the world has yet given it. But the author estops himself at the outset from overmuch blaming of Christians by saying that most Jews share the ignorance of the Gentiles with regard to the subject. He writes: “The average Jew, unable to read the originals for himself, is, through a shortage of textbooks, quite incompetent to pronounce an opinion of any worth upon the religion which has meant so much for his fathers and for the world” (p. v).

Dr. Abelson begins by asking how the Old Testament treats the subjects of God’s immanence and transcendence (chap. ii). He then considers post-biblical and rabbinic material bearing upon these matters (chaps. iii, iv). He shows that the rabbis and pious Jews have held to a practical mysticism which recognizes the communion of an immanent God with the individual soul; and he maintains that the Jewish religion, as interpreted by the rabbis, has all the merits of Christianity.

One of the first and most obvious criticisms upon the volume is, that the author does not grasp the development of Hebrew religion as explained by modern Old Testament criticism. This is a common failing of Jewish scholars, who approach the Old Testament too much from the standpoint of its final conceptions as embodied in the prophetic and post-exilic strata. The author is preoccupied by these higher conceptions and their Talmudic interpretation. He is candid enough, however, to place in a footnote the comment of another Jewish scholar, C. G. Montefiore, who has read the work in proof, and who knows a great deal more about the Old Testament than the author does: “It is not the case that the historic order of development was as you maintain (7) God far off (2) God near. As a matter of fact, Yahweh was very near in old days. He moved away from Sinai and lived with Israel in clouds and pillars, in the ark, etc. . . . God became far off rather late, and then by Immanence He had to be made ‘near’ again” (pp. 49, 50).

To admit that Dr. Abelson has given useful emphasis to rabbinic material bearing upon the divine immanence is not to concede that he has thereby shown Christianity to be a needless fact in the world’s history. The practical consideration which all “isms” (including Judaism) fail to explain is, that Jesus Christ brings all the spiritual heritage of Hebrew life to fruition within his own person in such a way as to give a new starting-point for the religious history of mankind. Our author is dimly conscious of this phase of the subject when he says, “Truly enough, it [Judaism] has no commanding, immortalized, semi-divine personality at its head such as Christianity has! But this does not vitally affect the question” (p. 12). We venture to assert that it does vitally affect the question. It is just because the Old Testament and Judaism put forward no single, imperial personality to whom the entire process of religion attaches itself, that Christianity was born. The personal relation of the soul to Jesus gives the key to all aspects of theology, including the question of sin, upon which, as Dr. Abelson is constrained to write, “no one can say that the Rabbins took up a decisive final attitude” (p. 77).

We are glad to commend this book at the point where it is confined to its own theme, the immanence of God in rabbinical literature. The author’s failure to understand the Old Testament as critically interpreted is part and parcel of his failure to understand the nature and meaning of Christianity. And it is no accident, but a sign of the times in which we live, that the Jewish scholar who corrects the author’s Old Testament views should have recently issued a remarkable three-volume commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, as well as a volume on the teaching of Jesus.


The author is a Presbyterian minister in active service; and he cannot, therefore, be criticized as an outsider engaged in finding fault with the church. The book is the outgrowth of a lecture which has been received with sympathy by churches, religious assemblies, Young Men’s Christian Associations, and Chautauqua audiences. In its present form, it ought to command still wider attention, for it deserves an extensive reading, whether all of its conclusions are true or not. There is truth enough in the volume to carry it far.

The bulk of the book is in Part II, entitled “The Discreditable Situation within the Church.” Under this general head the author takes up “the un-Christian divisions” which accompany denominationalism; “the appalling situation in the country church”; “the absurdities of creed-subscription”; and “the abuse of ecclesiastical authority.” Part II is concluded.