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978-1-107-43797-5 - The Rise of the Christian Church

L. Elliott Binns, J. W. Hunkin and J. F. Bethune-Baker

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THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION
ITS ORIGIN AND PROGRESS

General Editor:

J. F. BETHUNE-BAKER, D.D., F.B.A.

*Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity
in the University of Cambridge*

I

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GENERAL PREFACE

THE idea of this series of books originated with the Rev. P. Gardner-Smith, Fellow and Dean of Jesus College, Cambridge, who thought that many teachers of boys and girls would welcome a series of little books which severally might provide a term's work for their pupils, and taken all together, in sequence, supply them with the kind of knowledge of the Christian Religion and the Christian Church in the past that would explain to them the state of things by which they are confronted today.

We enlisted the help of Professor J. M. Creed and the Rev. J. W. Hunkin (now Archdeacon of Coventry), and the four of us together drafted the scheme and the syllabus of the different parts of it as a guide to the various writers, and have read each part. Each writer's treatment of the subject, of course, is his own, and some have not kept to the original scheme quite as closely as others have. But if we cannot hope that each part of the series will be found the most suitable book on its subject for use in Schools, we are confident that any one who reads through the three volumes will have acquired a true perspective of the whole subject and be able to form a sound judgement of the right and the wrong of many questions in dispute today. We hope, indeed, that what we have provided may be found of

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interest and value to many who have left their school years far behind them.

Even among those who profess and call themselves Christians and are members of Christian Churches there is widespread uncertainty and doubt as to much that has been believed in the past and been reckoned a necessary part of the faith of a Christian, and again as to the possibility of carrying on life in the world as it is without being false to the ideals of Jesus at every turn. Yet the appeal that those ideals make comes as strongly as ever to men and women of all kinds everywhere today, and more of them than ever before are convinced that the solution of our present problems—individual and social, economic and international—is only to be found on lines that run parallel at least with the idealism of Jesus—love of GOD and love of Man.

Is Christianity a failure? Is it a case of “the high that proved too high?” and though it has claimed men’s allegiance for nineteen hundred years, can it do so still? Is it still capable of being a guide to the right attitude to the world in which we find ourselves, the right way of thinking and feeling and living?

Everyone early in life ought to face these questions. But they cannot be answered by anyone who does not know what Christianity has been, how it came into being, what it had to contend with, and what it has achieved in the past.

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This series of books is intended to supply sufficient knowledge of these things to suggest a reasonable answer.

The first volume gives a picture of the new society of Christians already in being, with its beliefs and its way of life, twenty or thirty years after it came into existence:— as soon, that is, as we have detailed evidence about it. To that is prefixed an account of the religious history of the Hebrew people among whom the new religion had its origin; and it is followed by a survey of the traditions about the personality and life and teaching of its Founder which were current in the society He brought into being in the early years of its existence, and since at least the middle of the second century have been regarded as inspired accounts of the actual facts.

The second volume will shew how the new religion made its way in the old world and overcame its rivals; and then will trace its history in the West and particularly in England, giving attention especially to such institutions and movements as have proved to be of lasting influence.

In the third volume the attempt is made to set out in its main features the faith of the Church in comparison with some of its rivals of today; to sketch the history of its worship with special reference to the English Book of Common Prayer; and finally to answer the question What is the Church's task in the world today?

The writers of these books are not among those who

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think that *apologia* for Christianity is needed. Its chequered history shews great ideas and ideals fighting their way to a victory that has never yet been won, except for moments and by individuals. Always new conditions and new knowledge are setting would-be Christians new problems to solve. Christianity survives in the world because it has always been able to adapt itself to different conditions of knowledge and thought and life, assimilating much that was new and transfiguring it in turn. It is still a fighting Faith and a fighting Church, making converts all over the world, with which we have to deal. But it is to a quiet survey of its origins, its characteristics, and its history that readers of these volumes are invited.

J. F. BETHUNE-BAKER

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