

The Kingdom on Earth

CHRIST'S OBJECT IN LIFE. By John C. Lincoln. Published privately, 1948, 134 pp. \$1.50. Available from Henry George School.

Reviewed by WILLIAM E. O'CONNOR

"MY FATHER," recalls Mr. John C. Lincoln, "was a thoroughgoing fundamentalist. He believed that the penalty for sin was eternal damnation, to be inflicted at some future judgment day, that Christ suffered the penalty of man's sins on the cross; and that by faith we can take advantage of this suffering and avoid the penalty of damnation that would otherwise be inflicted on us, and only by such belief could the penalty be avoided." Content neither to accept this rigid theological pattern nor totally to reject the basic philosophy of which it was an outgrowth, the author has probed deeply at the recorded foundations of Christianity. His precise conclusions, based on analysis and synthesis of sources richly documented in this book, reflect the objectivity of the engineer and an integrity that brooks no equivocation.

He found authentic sources extremely meager. Christ, like Socrates, wrote nothing. His entire recorded biography contained in the four gospels, brief in span and consisting of frequently unrelated and often inconsistent episodes, has been discriminatingly surveyed against the background of history. The author's decisions, of necessity eclectic, are neither arbitrary nor esoteric, but bear the stamp of reasonableness and scholarly detachment. The Synoptics, the first three gospels—Mark, written about A. D. 65 and Matthew and Luke, written perhaps a decade or two later—are relied upon in preference to John, the fourth gospel, by an unknown author. The Synoptics, in the author's opinion, present the true picture of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and not as a divine being, and reveal that His real purpose was not to found a church or religion or make possible personal salvation, but to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth—a far greater task. He rejects as unfounded any injunction by Jesus that people should "believe on Him" or that one must be "born again" or be baptized or join a church. He did not preach the doctrine of atonement but constantly enjoined obedience to the commandments which, in essence, proclaimed and exalted the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

Jesus, engaged in a critical struggle with the Sanhedrin, recognized, he believes, the dangers which confronted Him on His entry into Jerusalem but there is decisive evidence that He went there not to sacrifice His life to atone for men's sins but to set up the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The Jews expected the Messiah to be the King of Kings and replace Herod by force. Jesus after meditating in the wilderness concluded that the new reign of righteousness could not effectively be established by force. It could be accomplished only by converting men's minds to accept the moral law, an essential part of natural law—the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man—or briefly the Golden Rule. Consistent with this conviction, argues the author, He urged His followers not to mention the miracles they had witnessed and He steadfastly refused to accept the challenge of His enemies to prove His power by performing a miracle.

In contrast to the contents of the first three gospels the fourth relates that Jesus relied on the miracles to prove His divinity and that Nathaniel recognized Jesus as the Son of God. Unfortunately, observes the author, Christendom has accepted the fourth gospel with resultant perpetuation of error. The teachings of Paul, who never knew Christ and who sought to reconcile the folk history of the Jews with his knowledge of the sacred philosophy of other eastern faiths, distorted the announced principles of Jesus into early Christian theology. The general belief of Jesus' followers after His crucifixion that He would reappear on earth and establish the Kingdom of God helped to create a mental atmosphere favorable to the acceptance of Paul's theories.

Christ's object in life, to establish the reign of moral law in the world, asserts Mr. Lincoln, has been sacrificed to the imposition of a theology unrelated to his proclaimed purpose and teachings. In the face of scientific knowledge of the antiquity of man and his environment, the churches continue to teach the story of creation occurring 6000 years ago, the fall of Adam, the doctrine of original sin, the vicarious sacrifice of Christ in atonement for men's sins, baptism, absolution, and postponed reward and punishment hereafter. A true interpretation of Christ's teachings, he contends, is that transgressions of moral law are not offenses against God but harmful to the sinner; that the greatest and universal moral law is "Love thy neighbor as thyself;" that "love God" means to do the right thing even if the hard thing; that the penalty for evasion by individuals or nations is inescapable and inflicted here and now; and that to those who make this their principle of living individual salvation is but a by-product. In these conclusions he has the acquiescence of one of the world's greatest philosophers, Emerson. "He (the preacher) assumed that judgment is not executed in this world; that the wicked are successful; that the good are miserable and then urged from reason and from Scripture a compensation to be made to both parties in the next life. . . The fallacy lay in the immense concession that the bad are successful; that justice is not done now. . . Justice is not postponed. . . This Law writes the laws of the cities and nations."

The reader may find certain observations or theories of the author, collateral to the main thesis, less clearly supported by the evidence submitted. The assumption, if such is intended, that individuals or groups can suffer the penalties for the transgressions of their forbears seems to be in conflict with the author's own argument that the fallacy in the theory of atonement lies in the impossibility of one other than the transgressor suffering the penalty. The challenge to Renan to account for the rise of Christianity without conceding the historical fact of the resurrection is tinged with the logic of *post hoc propter hoc*.

Religion has been a fruitful field of contention and numerous and irreconcilable theories have been espoused. *Christ's Object in Life* reveals a thorough and impartial examination of available sources of enlightenment. It is not only a constructive critique of religion; it offers as well an impregnable philosophy of living supported by sound and persuasive conclusions based upon painstaking research. It can be read—and reread—with interest and profit.

Chicago

A personalized campaign for promotion and financial support of fall classes was launched on August 17th. First in a series of loop session was a supper meeting of regional chairmen who are leading the drive for funds and students. Under the direction of Robert J. Kennedy, chairman for Greater Chicago, the campaign program was mapped in detail, to be presented on September 2nd at a second meeting that will be enlarged by the attendance of community area chairmen who will work with those making the personal calls. Activity will mushroom on September 8th into a blanket workshop of all chairmen and callers getting final instructions for the drive. After the 12-day period during which each one will personally talk with five graduates or other friends of the school, callers will return with community area chairmen for a report meeting on September 20th, two weeks before the term opening on October 4th.

In each area class promotion chairmen will supervise volunteer addressing of direct mail advertising and the placing of posters in trade centers. Capitalizing on the experiences of the Boston extension, Chicago will supplement this promotion with a series of advertisements in the Saturday editions of the Daily News and the Sunday editions of the Chicago Tribune for three week-ends preceding the opening of classes.

New York

If you have not received your copy of "The Georgists of New York," written and illustrated by Robert Clancy in commemoration of New York's Golden Jubilee, please let us know. This was mailed to all subscribers of The Henry George News.

The long awaited Teacher's Manual covering *Progress and Poverty* is being used for the first time in 11 New York summer classes which have an enrollment of over 300 students, many just out of high school. The manual is the monumental achievement of Domenic Della Volpe, Josephine Hansen and Isidore Platin, who gave three years of patient study to produce it. The enthusiasm with which it has been received is a tribute to their conscientious work.

The Schalkenbach Foundation reports very interesting results from the quarter-page advertisement for *Progress and Poverty* which appeared in Life magazine on July 26th.

Coming Next Month

"He is a great man—he understands interest."

This *cum laude* endorsement in Georgist circles indicates how few have mastered the complexities of the subject, interest. It is important to all readers of The Henry George News therefore, to know that next month several pages will be given over to an article on "Henry George and the Causation of Interest," by Harry Garrison Brown of Missouri University. This serious and searching work will prove invaluable to all earnest students of economics. Be sure to avail yourself of this opportunity through your school publication.