

"The Shadow Christ"

By Gerald Stanley Lee. *The Century Co.*

THIS HAS BEEN announced as a study of Christ's precursors, and an introduction to Christ himself. To a certain extent it is a theological work, but to a greater extent it is a contribution to pure literature, and may be expected to find its audience among those who regard the Bible as the greatest of books, rather than among those to whom the Book is important only as a bible. While Christianity is its underlying theme, Isaiah is in a sense its hero—that "divinest prophet," whose conception not merely of a god incarnate, but of a despised and rejected one, was "the most beautiful and awful reach of insight the world has known." But Isaiah appears chiefly in the later chapters.

First we are asked to consider what the author terms "the pagan emphasis"—the appeal that Christianity makes to the soul born to an earlier faith than ours. "That which appeals to the converted Hindoo as a climax, is to us an uncompleted prophecy, still seeking for its higher self, in the day when our revelation shall be our civilization, and not the token of it, and belief shall be life." Next we have "the emphasis of life." "A bible lives because it strives—adapting, resisting, impelling. It lives by being lived. Renewed with each new childhood of the earth, forever in the heyday of its strength—men call it old because it has been young so long." Then comes "the emphasis of the ideal." "The actual is not the truth. It is the part of the truth that has been attained. The ideal is the truth—the whole truth." "Whether He who governs the disposition of forces blended the three actually into one manifold life Himself, or left it to the world and the action of events to do it—makes an interesting and important, but not fundamental, fact with regard to the content of his genius. The genius is here. It is a truth. How he came to be here is a question of fact."

The Hebrew race, as revealed in the Old Testament, is made the subject of a searching analysis. "In telling the Jews what not to be" (in the Ten Commandments), "Moses gave the most masterful synopsis of what they were—of what we would have been—that the world has ever seen. One of the great series of triumphant, godlike paradoxes which ended in a cross—it shall be remembered as part of the triumphant knowledge and the most strenuous hope of men, that the redeeming nation of the earth, laboring under its nine 'Thou shalt nots,' was a nation whose hymn-book was written by an adulterer, whose system of ethics was founded by a murderer, improved and given its most perfect expression by one of whom the world cannot forget that he had great riches, in his sayings about poverty; or that he had one mistress to every four proverbs, in his sayings about life."

Lest this and other passages bearing heavily upon the Jew, if allowed to go without special qualification, should give the impression that the author is unsympathetic in his judgment of the race, a chapter is prefixed to the subdivision in which they occur. This chapter is called "The Hagar Nation." It is exceedingly brief—occupying only three small pages,—yet we venture to say that no more powerful, profound and effective tribute to the Jewish faith and intellect has ever come from a Christian source. Without this disclaimer, the extreme causticity of many of the criticisms might arouse a

feeling of resentment in Hebrew breasts; with it, one cannot doubt that the book will be as cordially welcomed by the Chosen People, as it is sure to be by followers of the Christ.

In his treatment of Moses, David, Job, Isaiah and John the Baptist, Mr. Lee is incisive, suggestive and poetical to an extraordinary degree. He is fresh, audacious, even humorous, yet reverent in the highest sense. Few living writers could match, for eloquence and force, the pages in which he is at his best; at its worst, his style is marred by occasional obscurity, and an excess of sentiment. We believe these faults to be curable, and shall look to see them cured. "The Shadow Christ" is virtually a first book, though the author's name has already appeared on the title-page of a little brochure, "About an Old New England Church." It will be followed, we doubt not, by many others, for Mr. Lee is a young man and a full man. But it will make a place for itself, and hold it, no matter how many or how notable may be the books that follow it.